Family Treasures: A Dual-Language Book Project for Negotiating Language, Literacy, Culture, and Identity

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Abstract: This article advances a framework for early language and literacy development among young English language learners (ELLs). A dual-language book project undertaken in partnership with a local elementary school provides a context within which to address children’s need to negotiate language, culture, and identity as they transition and make meaning from their home language (L1) to English and the language of school (L2) and back. Using objects of cultural and personal relevance that the children brought from home, stories of ‘Family Treasures’ were generated from the original telling in the L1 into English in small-group contexts, transcribed, illustrated, and uploaded to a Website for permanent sharing, rereading, and exchange. These booklets also provided an opportunity for identity formation, pride of family and culture, and the acquisition of rudimentary technology skills, which all work to motivate and engage young learners in the development of early literacy.

Keywords: English language learners, early literacy, dual-language books, vocabulary development, identity

Résumé : Nous proposons dans cet article un cadre théorique pour comprendre le développement précoce du langage et de la littératie chez les jeunes enfants apprenant l’anglais.Un projet de livre en deux langues, entrepris conjointement avec une école primaire, a fourni le contexte qui nous a permis d’examiner le besoin qu’ont les enfants de négocier, du point de vue de la langue, de la culture et de l’identité, le passage entre la langue parlée à la maison (L1) et l’anglais, langue d’enseignement (L2). À partir d’objets ayant une valeur culturelle et personnelle apportés de la maison par les enfants, des histoires de « trésors de famille » ont été produites en anglais, inspirées des récits faits en L1 en petits groupes; elles ont ensuite été transcrites, illustrées et téléchargées sur un site Web afin de demeurer accessibles pour le partage, la relecture et les échanges.La création des petits livres a également servi à cultiver le sentiment identitaire et la fierté à l’égard de la famille et de la culture, et à favoriser l’acquisition de compétences technologiques rudimentaires, ce qui
dans l’ensemble a motivé les jeunes apprenants et a enclenché chez eux le développement précoce de la littératie.

**Mots clés**: apprenants en anglais, littératie précoce, livres bilingues, enrichissement du vocabulaire, identité

**Introduction**

Young, newly arrived immigrant children and the Canadian-born children of immigrants who are only in the beginning stages of developing communicative skills in English face multiple challenges in developing emergent and early literacy concepts and skills. In short, they must learn to listen, speak, read, and write synchronously. In addition, as young arrivals and members of language minority communities growing up in Canada, they must find their place in the larger context of the English speaking milieu of school where they may not easily find themselves meaningfully included. A growing body of research suggests that this is an enormous and yet little understood undertaking for youngsters who, described by Harklau (2003) as ‘generation 1.5,’ manifest some of the characteristics of both first- and second-generation immigrant students and thus produce a unique learner profile.

The goal of this paper is to advance a framework for early language and literacy development that takes into account the multiple and complex learning needs of these children, who are usually referred to as English language learners (ELLs) in current research literature. A dual-language book project, Family Treasures, undertaken over the past two years in partnership with a local school, illustrates how the framework can be applied in negotiating language, culture, and identity in what Kramsch (1993) has termed ‘the third space’ (p. 235). This shared space, between the first language and culture and the second language and culture, can represent a site in which children can negotiate meaning – both a challenge and an opportunity for them – if learning experiences are intentionally structured and scaffolded.

This paper begins with some background information to offer a context for the work at hand. A brief review of the relevant literature is provided, which leads to an emergent framework for early language and literacy development that considers the ‘third space’ as the locus for curriculum design. The dual-language book project is described next. Examples of learning tasks that promote language and literacy development are included. Interested readers are invited to come
and enjoy our dual-language books that are posted online along with other information about the project.¹

Background and context for our work

Canada’s demographic profile is changing rapidly as our national immigration policy seeks to respond to our human resource needs of the foreseeable future. In short, Canada is recruiting increasing numbers of young, professional, and skilled immigrants who arrive with young children or begin their families in Canada. The majority of these immigrants do not speak English, and by extension their young children will require support to develop English language proficiency and early literacy and to ultimately transition to cognitive, academic language proficiency.

Over the last five years, large urban school districts have noted the presence of considerable numbers of kindergarten-aged ELLs (e.g., Calgary Board of Education, 2006),² and provincial ministries of education have responded with funding initiatives aimed at providing support for these youngsters beginning at the age of 3.5 (Alberta Education, 2007). While the presence and the learning needs of ELLs in our classrooms is unmistakable and the funding to support them is available, the research community is only in its beginning stages of undertaking the work that can inform curriculum and materials development for them (August & Shanahan, 2006).

We have developed a professional learning community that includes me, Roessingh – a professor in the Faculty of Education, University of Calgary – along with the pre-service teachers enrolled in the BEd program at the University of Calgary and five kindergarten teachers as well as the administrative team at Almadina Language Charter Academy, a local charter school that caters to the learning needs of some 500 children, all of whom are recognized by our Ministry of Education for English as a second language funding (i.e., Alberta Education continues to use ESL as the term to describe these learners). Arabic is the predominant first language (L1) represented among the children at the school. Kurdish and Urdu are spoken by a significant number of the children. The school has several bilingual teachers as well as teacher aides on staff. Alberta Education requires a second language (L2) to be offered in elementary school for a minimum of two 45-minute blocks weekly. At Almadina, the language that is offered is Arabic.

Students from two classes in my pre-service education course (Winter 2008, Winter 2009), which prepares teachers to work with ELLs in
mainstream settings, volunteered to participate in the dual-language book project as an opportunity to glean first-hand experience with kindergarten children, to undertake embedded informal research into the needs of young ELLs, to do some daily lesson planning and long-term planning, and to apply our creative and technological skills to the making of dual-language books. Throughout the winter terms (2008 and 2009) we held 45-minute lessons twice weekly with the kindergarten children. Our pre-service education class met every Friday morning, 9:00–11:45, to engage in several project-related activities: collaborative planning, the identification of learning resources and preparation of materials, and critical reflection on ways to best link theory to practice.

Baseline measures of emergent English literacy concepts and skills as well as lexical diversity taken as a larger research project at this school (Roessingh & Elgie, 2009) indicated that while traditional early literacy concepts and skills (e.g., phonemic awareness, letter recognition, print knowledge, phonics) represent areas of relative strength, vocabulary development is a crucial and central learning need for young ELLs. In short, they must develop cognitive or knowledge frameworks for making meaning, a process that is mediated by language, especially by the acquisition of vocabulary. Vocabulary knowledge is the underlying variable that contributes to reading comprehension and, in turn, to successful engagement with the academic tasks required in upper elementary school and high school. The following section surveys the available research to identify principles for the development of a framework that can inform instructional decision making in the early literacy program.

Toward a framework for early literacy development among ELLs: Working in the ‘third space’

‘Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I learn.’—Benjamin Franklin 1706–1790

This work is located at the nexus of several broad fields of research. I draw from literature on first and second language acquisition (SLA), emergent literacy, general learning, and curriculum theory. Relevant features from each field are briefly discussed here, and they are then synthesized to advance a framework within which to think about the language and literacy needs of this newly emerging profile of young learners prevalent in many large, urban school jurisdictions.

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Hart and Risley’s (2003) landmark study documents the vocabulary development of native English speaking (NS) children up to the age of 3, recording a vocabulary size of about 1,200 words for 3-year-olds from families of high socio-economic status (SES). The input to realize this accomplishment is staggering: Mothers, the primary agents for language input, spoke some 45,000,000 words as they went about their daily business of elaborating, explaining, encouraging, engaging, and humouring their young children. Children must hear single words thousands and thousands of times in various contexts to discern the sounds, the word boundaries, and to assign meaning to them. It is generally accepted that, by the age of 5, children have a vocabulary of about 5,000 words (or 2,500 root words; go, goes, going all count as one word) which grows by some 3,000 words (or 1,000 root words) each year (Moe, Hopkins, & Rush, 1982; Murphy et al., 1957; Stahl, 1999). Developmental trends in the sequence and rates of early language acquisition appear to be remarkably consistent and stable across languages as youngsters attempt to name, describe, control, organize, and make meaning of their early and immediate life needs, wants, and curiosities — beginning with single words when they are about 12 months of age. Differences in rates of acquisition are largely attributable to SES (Hart & Risley, 2003), while sequence of vocabulary acquisition nevertheless remains stable (Bienmiller & Slonim, 2001).

Age on arrival (and, by relation, level of L1 achievement and educational attainment) and length of residence have long been recognized as key variables in determining the eventual level of language achievement in the L2 (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000; Klesmer, 1994; Thomas & Collier, 2002; Twyford, 1987). Later arrivals who have crossed critical linguistic and cognitive thresholds can more efficiently and effectively transfer prior knowledge encoded in the L1. It becomes clear that younger arriving children and the children of immigrants (i.e., generation 1.5) are linguistically vulnerable as a consequence of the rapid code switching that occurs upon first exposure to English (Wong Filmore, 1991). The loss of the L1 before the L2 has the chance to stabilize leaves a window of time during which these children are in linguistic limbo. The vast majority of these youngsters become subtractive bilinguals, meaning that English must overtake their L1 for the purposes of thinking, academic reading and writing, and school tasks. Harklau (2003) writes,

One of the most common traits among generation 1.5 students is limited or no literacy in the first language. . . . Many of these students have lost or are in
the process of losing their home languages without having learned their writing systems or academic registers. Unlike international students, generation 1.5 students lack a basis of comparison in fully developed oral, written, or both systems of a first language. (para. 3)

For many of these children, the L1 is reserved only for basic communication purposes with close and extended family and friends. Many of them completely lose any and all developed language proficiency in the L1. The world of home may be disconnected from the world of school, and it may even be a source of embarrassment for young ELLs who, for their part, may be anxious to leave their first language and culture behind (Cummins, 1996, p. 73). Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco write, ‘Among the children of immigrants, English emerged as an unequivocal winner in the struggle for their linguistic souls’ (2001, p. 136). Instructional strategies must be made, therefore, to preserve and enhance a child’s first language and culture, and then to press these resources into the service of making meaning in the L2.

Young arrivals do have an advantage over their older arriving counterparts on at least one score: They acquire native-like pronunciation in the L2 with apparent ease (Krashen, Long, &Scarcella, 1979). Young arrivals may acquire communicative proficiency in a relatively short time (the accepted length of time is generally about two years [Garcia, 2000]). In addition, on measures of emergent literacy concepts and skills, such as the ability to recognize initial sounds in words and to recognize letters, ELLs are able to compete on par with their NS counterparts (Lesaux & Siegel, 2003; Roessingh & Elgie, 2009). Kelly, Gomez-Bellenge, Chen, and Schulz (2008) noted that with minimal intervention the micro-skills of emergent reading readiness can be acquired by ELLs. Both NSs and ELLs develop early, English literacy concepts and skills with a relatively small literate vocabulary, perhaps of one hundred words. However, long-term success in reading is dependent on a large vocabulary, and it is in the crucial area of vocabulary knowledge that these ELLs lag for many years (Appel & Vermeer, 1998; August, Calderón, Carlo, & Snow, 2005). This factor influences their longer term reading comprehension – long after, that is, the benefits of their strengths in decoding skills and ‘sounding good’ wash out. The uninformed observer easily underestimates the enormity of the challenge faced by young ELLs. The early-to-make and easy-to-get gains, which seem natural to young ELLs (McLaughlin, 1992, 1995), merely mask the underlying vocabulary deficit that emerges only around grade 3 when it is often too late to intervene and do the catch-up work. Research consistently
finds that direct and explicit vocabulary instruction is overlooked in grades k–3 (Biemiller, 2004; Blachowicz, Fisher, & Ogle, 2006). The early literacy program for ELLs, therefore, must not only emphasize the traditional literacy concepts and skills associated with decoding, but must also include a strong emphasis on vocabulary acquisition, teaching vocabulary that NSs have likely already acquired but that represents a key learning need for ELLs. This information needs to be taught in contexts that are personally relevant and meaningful to young ELLs – hence the attention to the ‘third space.’

Broad principles of learning aligned with communicative language teaching (CLT) and constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) are particularly salient to the instructional needs of young ELLs. These emphasize the importance of activating background knowledge, experiential learning, providing scaffolds for learning, actively engaging learners through adult input and talk in small group settings, negotiating meaning, and co-constructing knowledge. Kramsch (1993, 2004) takes a social semiotic perspective in defining the ‘third space’ in which meaning, identity, and culture are negotiated at the intersection of L1 and L2. Transcendental truths may be discovered on, to borrow Eva Hoffman’s words, the journey to ‘inventing another me’ (as cited in Kramsch, 2004, para. 14). And it is not only the ELL population that is charged with this task. The Canadian mainstream will also collectively and individually be reshaped and transformed into new ways of being.

The intersection of L1 and L2 contains universalities that can be contextualized and particularized on either side of the border. Brown (1991) catalogues these human universal that transcend language, space, and time. For example, the concept of child’s play and the use of toys or objects for building are universal to all cultures, but these may be manifest as Lego pieces in one culture or as wooden or stone pieces in another. When children see them, they know what they are and what to do with them. These universalities offer a rich, concrete starting point for the development of narrative that we were eager to exploit.

Most importantly, teachers and the school culture must make room to affirm ELLs’ identity and to support their transitioning back and forth, ‘betwixt and between,’ as they struggle to but cannot find their place in either the first language and culture or the second (Cummins, 1996); instead, they discover something richer, stronger, and more inclusive in its diversity and its potential to reshape the collective conscience and the Canadian social fabric as we continue to evolve as a pluralistic culture. Language mediates this process.
The third space: Negotiating language, culture, and identity

FIGURE 1
The third space: Negotiating language, culture, and identity

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Figure 1 illustrates how this can be applied to a framework for thinking about instruction.

Notwithstanding the emphasis on constructivist principles of learning, it is important to note that no single curriculum ideology responds to all of the learning needs of ELLs all of the time. Rather, what is necessary is a principled and eclectic approach that judiciously selects instructional strategies from across the spectrum that suit the particular daily learning and teaching goals of the classroom. These must, at the same time, address the curricular requirements from the provincial Program of Studies (Alberta Education, 2000). Among instructional strategies, audio-lingual techniques for patterned practice (e.g., singing ‘My Grandfather’s Clock’) and flash cards, both of which are associated with behaviourist principles, are useful for automatizing sight-word vocabulary; discovery and experiential learning fall in the epistemological mid-zone; and empowering children to make their own meaning is aligned with critical pedagogy. All of these strategies have been used throughout the development of the Family Treasures dual-language book project.

Studies on effective instructional practice with young ELLs are sparse (Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, Polland-Durodola, Mathes, & Hagan, 2006, p. 185). It is often assumed that effective instruction with young NSs will be equally effective for ELLs. It must be remembered, however, that the linguistic resources that NSs bring to bear on their school activities have been acquired just as ELLs’ L1 was acquired through immersion in language and culture as well as through mediated experiences with adult caregivers. ELLs must now duplicate this entire process in the L2, only this time mere acquisition will not be sufficient to reach the linguistic threshold required for educational success. Young ELLs have no time to spare if they are to close the gap between themselves and their NS counterparts. English must be learned now, and teachers must be prepared to offer direct, explicit instruction in the features of second language and culture that are foundational to educational success. Such instruction includes attention to form, function, and vocabulary as well as attention to information about concepts (i.e., the deep, enduring, transcendent ideas – in this case, ideas of belonging, legacy, prized possessions, memories – that form our semantic networks for understanding and making sense of the world) that needs to be particularized in the context of the L2 learning milieu and according to the content mandates of the Alberta provincial curriculum.

The importance of repeated story telling in the L1 and L2, modified guided reading, and dialogic reading is highlighted in many studies.
(Avalos, Plasencia, Chavez, & Rascon, 2007; Fuller Collins, 2005; Hickman, Pollard-Durodola, & Vaughn, 2004; Suits, 2003; Ulanoff & Pucci, 1999). A striking finding in a recent study (Uccelli & Páez, 2007), which was undertaken with Spanish-English bilingual children, suggests that ‘if children hear, engage and tell stories in Spanish with friends, family, or at school, the learned set of skills required to structure a story in Spanish could positively contribute to children’s English narrative quality’ (p. 234). Fuhler, Farris, and Nelson (2006) make a compelling case for the use of cultural artefacts as a strategy for grounding conceptual and cultural information within a constructivist approach to learning. They stress the role of talk in scaffolding and negotiating meaning in the classroom. Many researchers emphasize the importance of first language and culture and family literacy practices in learning the second. Wong Fillmore (2000), Leseman and van Tuil (2006), and Peterson and Haywood (2007, p. 530) note the importance of developing social capital by sharing past experiences and telling true stories to the child (i.e., social memories, family stories), while at the same time introducing increasingly more challenging vocabulary in the L1. Sadly, they also report that many immigrant parents do not understand the value that these first language and culture experiences have on their children’s L2 learning. Many parents think that they cannot do much to help advance their children’s L2 acquisition, believing instead that the use of the L1 at home or that of mispronounced English will only impede their children’s progress. Teachers and principals, on the other hand, found that valuing the home language and culture led to greater parental support of children’s reading and writing. Dual-language books were seen as very useful in this regard. Various dual-language book projects have been described in the research literature in the Canadian context and have been helpful in shaping the dual-language book project undertaken in Calgary (Cummins et al., 2005; Lotherington, Holland, Sotoudeh, & Zentena, 2008).

**Family Treasures: A dual-language book project**

‘To forget one’s ancestors is to be a brook without a source, a tree without a root.’ —Chinese proverb

The following discussion brings together many recognized principles for ELLs’ effective learning and the effective teaching of ELLs. These
need to be operationalized by way of an organizational framework for instructional planning. In short, theory needs to be made practical. The conceptual ‘glue’ that links principle and practice together is the idea of the Family Treasures dual-language book project. The topic was chosen for its potential to engage families by transcending language differences and focusing instead on the universal territory of the ‘third space.’ ‘Family,’ ‘treasures,’ and ‘story telling’ are all situated in this space, and it is here that we wished to invite children and their families to be our partners in the learning endeavours that, as we are well aware, are challenging for them.

This section describes the steps of implementing an integrated, principled approach that we believe will have tangible impact on young ELLs’ language learning and literacy outcomes. We began by inviting the children’s parents to participate in the project.

**Step 1: An invitation to our parent community**

In early January 2008 and again in 2009 the idea for the Family Treasures project was introduced to parents in a letter (Appendix A) that asked them to select a ‘Family Treasure’ that lent itself to a good story and to tell their children the story of this Family Treasure (i.e., What is it? What is it called? How does it work? Whose was it? What memories does it evoke?). The letter was translated into the major languages used in the school by teacher aides, community volunteers, and students in the BEd program who were fluent in various languages. Our intentions at this stage were to promote more speaking in the L1; to help children develop a sense of ancestral connection, cultural pride, and identity; and to develop proficiency in story telling in the L1 so that it can be transferred to the classroom at a later time.

**Step 2: Curriculum design**

In broad strokes, curriculum design involves all the decisions related to the learning and teaching goals of the classroom. We adopted a five-piece framework, Learning By Design that I developed over several decades as a classroom practitioner in ESL. The framework serves as a common planning tool both in my classes at the university and in many local schools, including Almadina Language Charter Academy. This interactive tool for curriculum design allows practitioners to use a template in order to create an instructional plan that takes into account three categories of core learning objectives.
(i.e., learning strategies, language objectives, and concept objectives, the last of which are usually connected to curriculum mandates in the mainstream classroom setting); materials and learning resources; lesson sequence; task design; and, lastly, assessment strategies. The plan for Family Treasures can be found in Appendix B.

Notably, the planning process behind Learning By Design is not linear. Rather, planning is seen as a dynamic, generative, and transformative endeavour that is always carried out with our students’ needs and interests in mind and always reflects the notion of deep pedagogical intent. While planning ensures that an instructional road map is in place, it can remain flexible as teachers track individual outcomes by day and by lesson and as they adjust the instructional sequence and pace accordingly. For pre-service teachers, this planning is important to their confidence in and preparedness for the classroom. A template for lesson planning, which forces teachers to think about language learning objectives in their instructional planning, is included in Appendix C.

Step 3: Implementing our instructional plan and creating the dual-language books

This section provides further details about our work in the kindergarten classrooms, especially in relation to our interactions with the students and the development of their dual-language books.

The lesson planning sequence reflects the need for children to have objects and direct experiences at the onset of the dual-language book project as well as direct and explicit instruction from time to time on form-focused learning objectives (e.g., possessive forms, past tense verb forms). The initial teaching activities involved looking at and handling cultural and familial artefacts that we had brought to share on an ‘ancestor’s table.’ Among the artefacts we presented were an ornate jewelry box, an antique perfume bottle with a gold stopper accompanied by a note from the original owner to take good care of the bottle and to treasure it forever, a piece of lace, some old coins, silverware, Dinky toys, a small bundle of photographs and hand-written letters, and a beloved teddy bear. Children were invited to ask questions about the items (i.e., they were asking wh-questions), and targeted vocabulary and key concepts were reinforced during this phase. Collaboratively we pieced together the stories of these Family Treasures, modelling the story-telling process we hoped the children would emulate in describing the artefacts they would bring from home.
We engaged the students in the modified guided reading and rereading of two books we had selected that we felt were relevant for this project: Krishnaswami and Sitaraman’s *Chachaji’s Cup* (2003) and *Something from Nothing*, an award winning children’s story by Canadian writer Phoebe Gilman (1992). These stories enabled the reinforcement and recycling of the vocabulary and key concepts that we had targeted for our work, and they allowed the children to draw personal connections to their own family stories of immigrating and leaving family and belongings behind. Related concepts for this project include memories, traditions, legacy, and ancestral connection. The children also repeatedly enjoyed the pattern, rhythm, and predictability of *Something from Nothing*.

Reading these stories led to further vocabulary work and to the manipulation of concept information. The Frayer model (Frayer, Frederick, & Klausmeier, 1969, see Figure 2) is a graphic organizer used for word analysis and vocabulary building. This four-square model prompts children to think about and describe the meaning of

![Frayer model diagram](image)
a word or concept by defining the term, describing its essential characteristics, providing examples of the idea, and offering non-examples of the idea. This strategy places importance on the students’ understanding of words within the larger context of a reading selection by requiring students to first analyze the items (i.e., provide a definition and characteristics) and to then synthesize and apply this information by thinking of examples and non-examples.

We adapted the Frayer model by focusing on examples and non-examples first. Picture cards of everyday objects were spread out for the children to look at, name, describe, and categorize as Treasure/Not a treasure. Dual-word sorts serve as an excellent platform for noticing similarities and differences, leading to a discussion about the children’s choices. A tea cup, for example, might or might not be a treasure. The children decided that the answer varies by case.

The final two steps of the Frayer model exercise involved asking the children to describe the characteristics that make these objects ‘Treasures’ and generating a definition of the term treasure. The results of this discussion were recorded, and the completed Frayer model was later inserted into the dual-language books.

A game using flash cards was employed to recycle the vocabulary introduced in the Frayer model exercise and to make the connections from the spoken to the written words. The children were often observed using their knowledge of the initial sounds and letters of words to make matches (e.g., cup, computer).

The children then presented their artefacts and the stories behind their Family Treasures in small groups. All of the children had their pictures taken with their treasures, and their stories were written down in English. The students brought an enormous array of cultural objects in each of the kindergarten classes, objects such as containers of various kinds (a red vase, a container for drinking water, a pot used for drinking tea, a cup), jewelry (cuff links, an earring, bracelets, necklace), clothing (an old silk tie, a hat with pieces of mirror and glitter glass for adornment, a dress), and religious objects (prayer beads–Mashbaha or Sibha).

Semantic (or concept) webbing is identified as a strategy especially effective for children with low initial vocabulary (Stahl, 1999, p. 41). Semantic webbing emphasizes how words are categorized and connected, and it aids in the storage of this information. We adopted this strategy as well, as Figure 3 illustrates.

Writing diamante poems – poems in the shape of diamonds – has numerous word study applications. We adapted this activity for the purposes of our Family Treasures project, reducing the format from
the usual seven lines to five lines and using the activity to highlight words with similar meanings (e.g., *priceless*, *treasure*) and adjectives that describe these objects (e.g., *unique*, *fragile*, *delicate*). We individualized the poems, and the children were very anxious to practise writing them and drawing on card stock in order to take home the finished products. Their attentiveness to this task was impressive (for examples, see our Web site).

Further activities included telling stories found in newspapers about lost and found valuables and brainstorming answers to the following questions: ‘What would/could/should you do if you find/lose a Family Treasure on the bus?’ We co-constructed stories from picture strips of a lost item, using the opportunity to recycle the core vocabulary and concepts as well as to promote thinking skills such as predicting and making inferences. We returned from time to time to reread the two anchor books for our project, *Chachaji’s Cup* and *Something from Nothing*.

During these extension activities, Faculty of Education students assembled and illustrated the books and, in collaboration with staff from Almadina, created the Website. Sometimes the children wanted to illustrate their own stories, and these illustrations were then scanned into their individual books.
Step 4: Book launch

A book-launch event serves many purposes. It showcases work to parents, informing them of the value of the first language and culture in the development of the second. It provides an opportunity for children to demonstrate their newly acquired skills and knowledge, and it thus helps them build confidence and pride in themselves as learners. It introduces technology applications and impresses on parents and children alike that these tools can support early literacy development, engage and motivate children, and keep them learning from a distance after school hours and over the summer. We did not want the children to read only their own books, but rather to read all of the books in the class collection that are available on the Website. And, we wanted to celebrate together!
Children sometimes illustrated their own books. The stories were translated into Arabic and Urdu. We made plans for our book launch event, which included inviting family, friends, and members of the community.

Roessingh reading with one of the kindergarten children.
On the day of the book-launch party all of the books were displayed on a SMART board. At the same time, all of the children received hard copies of their Family Treasure dual-language books. They were able to see the entire class set of books displayed on the SMART board, and they were eager to take their turn, touching their individual books on the screen to read and share them with the audience. Our electronic book box is available on our Web site.

Our Website further contains resources for teachers, sample lesson plans, and the curriculum overview of the Family Treasures project. We have been able to track the activity on our Website and recorded nearly 1,200 visitors to our site in the first few weeks after our April 25, 2009 book-launch party and over 2,870 visitors in total.

Conclusion

The Family Treasures Project used the ‘third space’ in an attempt to create a context for vocabulary development in the L1 and L2 that was interesting, culturally sensitive, and responsive; that would encourage parental involvement; and that was grounded in something concrete (an object), something which had personal meaning and would inspire narrative construction. Our activities included getting a sense of the children’s baseline English vocabulary, identifying children’s stories that would
connect to the project, modelling the process and teaching the core vocabulary necessary for the project, eliciting the children’s stories and writing them down, reinforcing and extending activities, and ultimately drawing the connection between these activities and print and reading. The Family Treasures dual-language book project is an excellent strategy for realizing multiple goals of early literacy development for young ELLs in a principled way. A balanced approach to the early literacy curriculum can permit the acquisition of basic literacy concepts and skills while developing vocabulary at the same time. As children move back and forth between the L1 and L2, the ‘third space’ becomes the locus for the creation of meaning, offering children a context in which to negotiate language, culture, and identity.

Future work would include a more formal research component to ascertain whether the children were indeed able to accelerate their vocabulary development through this collaborative work between the university students and faculty and the kindergarten teachers. Levelled vocabulary tests (e.g., Expressive One Word Picture Vocabulary Test) and narrative sample analysis using profiling tools available online would be useful in answering this question. In addition, it would be interesting to explore the many uses of technology, especially the SMART board, in creating and editing the children’s books. Most importantly, perhaps, we have come to understand the multiplicity of factors that contribute to a child’s learning of English.

It is a multifaceted endeavour that unfolds gradually over time. One small-scale intervention will in and of itself be inadequate to sustain momentum in vocabulary growth without further, ongoing support, particularly at the crucial turning point in grades 3 and 4. Our commitment as caring practitioners is to find creative, innovative, and interesting interventions that will provide tangible impact on the learning outcomes of children who cannot afford not to make the most of every single learning opportunity starting at a young age.

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Notes

2 The Calgary Board of Education [CBE] organized this presentation that has been offered on more than one occasion since 2006. I first saw the presentation on April 17, 2007 at a Board of Trustees Meeting of the CBE.
3 The five-piece framework is available online: http://www.learningbydesign.ucalgary.ca.

References


Garcia, G.N. (2000, September). *Lessons from research: What is the length of time it takes limited English proficient students to acquire English and succeed in an all-English classroom?* (NCBE Issue Brief No. 5). Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED450585)


Appendix A

Letter to parents

January 15, 2009
Dear Parents,

In February and March, the kindergarten class is learning about Family and Friends. We will do a Family Treasures project and we want you to join us.

Over the next two weeks, we would like you to choose something of family value that you can share with your child. It needs to hold a good story. For example, it can be a piece of old lace, a piece of pottery, an old article of clothing (a tie, a hat), an old letter or photograph, a tool, an instrument, a recipe and a cooking utensil or baking form. We would like you to spend time with your child explaining how this object came to be in your family, who it belonged to, why it is important to you and what memories it contains. At school we will photograph your child with the object, and ask your child to share the story behind the object.

In March, we will ask you to send the object to school with your child. Please do not send an object that can be easily broken or damaged, or that is the only object you have. Instead, consider replacing the object with an inexpensive copy (e.g., a tea cup, a piece of jewelry) that you can find in the Thrift Store, or make a photocopy. Try to make the experience as real, or close to real as your child needs and can learn from.

Please do not hesitate to call your child’s teacher if you have any questions, or you need more information or ideas to make this project a success.

Thank you
The kindergarten team,
Almadina Language Charter Academy and
The Faculty of Education, University of Calgary
Hetty Roessingh
E-mail: hroessin@ucalgary.ca
Tel.: 403–220–6442
### Appendix B

**Thematic overview**

**Theme title:** Family Treasures: A Dual-Language Book  
**Target group:** Kindergarten ECS  
**Level:** High beginner–Middleyear  
**Broad goals:** To develop vocabulary in a personally and culturally meaningful context

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<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Core objectives</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
<th>Material content</th>
<th>Lesson name and overview</th>
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<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td><strong>Memory</strong></td>
<td><strong>Something from Nothing. Phoebe Gillman, 1992</strong></td>
<td>1. Treasure chest/ancestor/tribal... cultural/family artifacts</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Noticing similarities and differences</strong></td>
<td><strong>Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td><strong>Identity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Chechu’s Cup, Krishna Dikshitar, 2003</strong></td>
<td>2. Chechu’s Cup: dialogic reading</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Predicting/guessing outcomes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Colours, size, and shape words</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pretense</strong></td>
<td><strong>Treasures/not a treasure word sorting</strong></td>
<td>3. Treasures/not a treasure word sorting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Using pictures to make story and print connections</strong></td>
<td><strong>Fragile, breakable, delicate</strong></td>
<td><strong>Unimaginable</strong></td>
<td><strong>What’s your treasure?—Photo, storytelling, sorting</strong></td>
<td>4. What’s your treasure?—Photo, storytelling, sorting</td>
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<td><strong>Forms</strong></td>
<td><strong>Traceable, implausible</strong></td>
<td><strong>Unusual</strong></td>
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<td>5. Recycling vocabulary—reusing the anchor books</td>
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<td><strong>Adjectives</strong></td>
<td><strong>Culture/family connection</strong></td>
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<td>6. Leaving home: What will you pack? What money cannot buy?</td>
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<td><strong>Models—should, would</strong></td>
<td><strong>Heritage</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Poetry frames</strong></td>
<td>7. Poetry frames</td>
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<td><strong>Possessives</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Unique</strong></td>
<td><strong>Stories from the newspaper... happy ending, sad ending</strong></td>
<td>8. Stories from the newspaper... happy ending, sad ending</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Past tense, verbs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Curricular connections: family and friends</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lyrics for ‘My Grandfather’s Clock’</strong></td>
<td><strong>Story strips... make a story together</strong></td>
<td>9. Story strips... make a story together</td>
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<tr>
<td>Functions</td>
<td>Describing</td>
<td>Asking wh questions</td>
<td><strong>‘My Grandfather’s Clock’</strong></td>
<td>10. ‘My Grandfather’s Clock’</td>
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<th>Assessment strategies</th>
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<td>Informal levelled vocabulary measure (game)</td>
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<td><strong>Dialogic reading</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sight-word acquisition</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Storytelling, scripted by adult partner</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Semantic webbing</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Poems, printing</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Story strips</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Word awareness tasks</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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Appendix C

Lesson planning template