Teaching a Second Language to “Newcomers”

In a Mainstream Classroom

B.A. Essay

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May 2016
Abstract

Today, many teachers get newcomers in their classes, but many of them might not have the experience to teach newcomers. This paper examines some methods for teaching a second language to newcomers in a mainstream classroom. The paper is based on my experience of learning a second language and supported with views of a teacher of Icelandic as a second language. The teachers’ role is important in the lives of newcomers and consequently, teachers need special training in working with them. In many cases, teachers are unable to communicate with the newcomers because of the language. It is important that the teacher build a supportive learning environment for the newcomers. The teacher can help making instruction in the mainstream classroom more comprehensible by using visual material and many other aids. In addition, when teachers have acquired knowledge about the stages of learning a second language they are better able to assist newcomers at their various stages of language learning. Teachers need to help newcomers develop both their social and academic language proficiencies. Lastly, teachers need to use assessment methods that are helpful and fair to newcomers. Teachers who are aware of the special needs and circumstances of newcomers are better prepared to help them successfully learn the second language.
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1 Introduction

Considering the amount of immigration throughout the world today, any teacher might have the chance to teach newcomers. However, a critical question is whether these teachers are well prepared to meet the needs of newcomers. In the classroom, the newcomers have to learn the new language at the same time as learning the content that teachers teach in a mainstream classroom. Newcomers have to acclimate to live in a new country, environment, school, and class. In addition, they are supposed to succeed with both learning the new language and reaching their peers’ level. Thereby, to help teachers who might not have trained to teach newcomers, this paper will discuss strategies for teaching newcomers in a mainstream classroom.

The paper will explore three important terms that relate to newcomers and how to teach them. Firstly, it will look at the different kinds of newcomers as well as variety of school-based programs used to teach them after their arrival. Moreover, the paper will examine learning and acquisition, terms that are necessary to understand children’s process of language learning. In addition, this paper will explore the idea of second language acquisition and some main elements of second language learning. This paper will also examine teachers’ role and if there is a need for specific education to teach newcomers as well as parents’ role in teaching their children and it will present some communication strategies to help teachers to communicate with their newcomers.

The paper will focus after that on teaching newcomers a second language in compulsory school education. It will discuss some ways for the teachers to welcome, help and assess the newcomers after their arrival. Then, it will explore some theories that relate to second language acquisition. Some strategies and ways teachers can use to teach newcomers with limited or no second language knowledge in a mainstream classroom then will be presented. Lastly, the paper will look at the assessment of newcomers, by highlighting the importance of assessment and its influence on them, and with viewing some points teachers can consider when assessing newcomers. The paper will also discuss some ways for teachers to modify their assessments to help newcomers.

In this paper I will use the experience of a second language teacher to give an additional perspective. The teacher has experience in teaching both a second language
classroom as well as a mainstream classroom. I interviewed the teacher and asked some questions that relate to my topic in order to give an actual teacher’s opinion on teaching newcomers a second language. In addition, I will use my own experience of learning a second language because I came to Iceland as a refugee, and learned Icelandic as a second language in compulsory school. Although languages differ, the process of learning a second language is similar across languages. Many of the sources I used for this paper dealt with the teaching of English as a second language. However, in my experience the process was similar to the way I was taught Icelandic as a second language.

Learning a second language can be a difficult process for children. A newly arrived child has to go through many difficult periods in order to reach the level of his new peers. In order to improve the newcomers’ process of learning a second language, it is important that they get help and support from teachers and others.
2 My Experience

In this paper, I will use my own experience of learning a second language. The reason for this is that I came to Iceland at the age of 15 in 2008. I came as a refugee, and I started my learning of Icelandic as a second language in the 10th grade. In the beginning, an Icelandic private teacher was teaching me with a support from an interpreter in my mother tongue, which is Arabic. After a few months, I started to visit my mainstream classroom. Although I did not understand anything, the teacher told me to sit in the class and focus on how the teachers pronounce the words. Thus, little by little and with the help from my Icelandic teacher, I started to understand and speak more. In the mainstream classroom, the mainstream teacher assigned two classmates to help me with the language and to accompany me while at school. With them I was able to practice my Icelandic. In the beginning, I was sent to my mainstream classroom for sport, English, mathematics, and Icelandic lessons. Participating in sport lessons made my relationship with my classmates better. No language was required then, but I was learning vocabulary.

I had some previous knowledge of English when I came to Iceland, but it was not at the same level of my peers. In English lessons the teacher told me to do the things that I was able to do. However, in mathematics lessons I was given a book that was at a lower grade to my level of knowledge to consolidate my mathematics with learning the Icelandic mathematical terminology. In Icelandic lessons I was told to listen and focus on the Icelandic spoken in the class. Later, I was sent to other classes such as history, science and geography. In these classes I was told to focus on listening and understanding the content of the class. The teachers sometimes asked me if I knew what they were teaching to help me participate. After one year at school, I was not yet able to take a test alongside my peers. Therefore, I was tested in Icelandic as a second language, sports and a modified English and mathematics test.

When I entered upper-secondary school I no longer received support in my mother tongue. Instead I began take classes in Icelandic as a second language. In my first year of upper-secondary school I went through a program called a preparatory course or section (Almenn námsbraut – undirbúningsnám). The program is for those students who have finished the elementary school but are not qualified to enter any of the major programs at upper-secondary school. It provides Icelandic, English, Mathematic and sports lessons (Almenn námsbraut – undirbúningsnám, 2014).
Therefore, I was able to continue studying similar subjects as I was studying at compulsory school. Later, I chose a major program in languages (Málabraut). The first year gave me the basic language skills that I needed prior to learning the more difficult subjects such as history, geography and science. In addition, I was able to learn other languages such as German and French through the Icelandic language.

One thing that helped me a lot in my school life was my good relationships with my teachers. They were keen to give their time to support me when I needed them. Whenever I needed them to explain something for me, they were there. They understood my situation, my language needs and guided me to learn in a better way. They supported me to learn the language through encouragement and positive feedback. This positive feedback worked and stimulated me to do better and persist in my learning. My teachers were open-minded and willing to take an extra step beyond their role as teachers. They helped me many times and I am very grateful for their effort.
3 Main principles

3.1 Newcomers

To ensure clarity it is important to distinguish between different kinds of newcomers. There are different kinds of newcomers and they come for various reasons, for example as refugees. According to Cummins (2012), refugees are those people who flee their country for imperative reasons such as disasters. Therefore, students who are refugees may not have had the chance to be in school for a long period and have usually experienced physical or emotional trauma. Another example of a newcomer is what Cummins calls “voluntary immigrants”. They come to a new country by their own choice and they bring their children with them. If the children are six years or older, they might have had the chance to be in a school. Therefore, they could enter the new school with strong academic skills in their first language. A third example of a newcomer might be asylum seekers who flee their home country because of persecution or other reasons. Because of their different backgrounds, all these kinds of newcomers might receive a different kind of education when they arrive in a new country. However, this paper will take a broader look and focus on how to teach children who suddenly find themselves in a country where they have to learn a new language while being in school. Therefore, this paper will address the second language learning of newcomers in mainstream schools.

When newcomers enter schools, they are put in various kinds of learning programs. The learning programs depend on the newcomer, the school policy and funding. McKay (2006), pointed out that second language learners might start by learning the language through intensive language programs, also called sheltered programs. This style of learning brings a group of second language learners together for a short period after their arrival to teach them the second language. The school might use this way with refugees because they have support from the government, usually delivered in their mother tongue. Since the government has accepted the refugees, they take responsibility for their teaching. Alternatively, a school might use a sheltered instruction program with voluntary immigrants. Having support in the mother tongue will be dependent on a number of reasons such as the number of students in the school. Unfortunately, many newcomers go directly to a mainstream classroom, which is a classroom with native speakers of the new country. In that case, the newcomers have to learn the new language at the same time as learning what the teacher teaches in a
mainstream classroom. The school might use this way with immigrants in schools that cannot afford the cost of having a special or private class for teaching the second language. The refugees, in most cases, are taught the second language through a special class in the beginning, and later they are sent to their mainstream classrooms.

In addition to the programs mentioned previously, there are many other programs that are used when teaching newcomers. Some of these programs, according to Crawford (As cited in García & Kleifgen, 2010, p. 26&27) include:

1. Submersion / Sink and swim program:
   - No supported learning in the mother tongue.
   - The mainstream teacher is the one who teaches the class.
   - The teacher might not be a qualified second language teacher.
   - The program goal is only to help the student shift to the second (school) language.

2. Pull-out program:
   - Might provide support in the newcomer’s mother tongue.
   - The student is pulled out of the mainstream classroom for 30-45 minutes to learn in a private class with a qualified second language teacher.
   - The goal here is to support the second language.

3. Push-in program:
   - Might use a little of the student’s mother tongue when teaching.
   - Second language teacher works with the subject teacher, here both teachers might be qualified to teach the second language.
   - Remedial second language education within the mainstream classroom is the program goal.

4. Structured immersion program:
   - Provides subject matter instruction for the newcomer depending on his or her level of second language proficiency.
   - Newcomers are grouped together for instructions.
   - There might be a little use of newcomers’ mother tongue.

Carrasquillo & Rodríguez (2002) discuss other types of programs that maybe offered in schools, these include:

5. Transitional or early exit program:
- The newcomer’s mother tongue is used in teaching the second language until the newcomer has reached a level where he or she can move to their mainstream classroom.
- Emphasis is on developing newcomers’ language skills in order to send them to a mainstream classroom when they are ready.

6. Maintenance/development or late-exit program:
- Provides instructions that are made to improve language skills in the mother tongue and the second language.
- The goal is to reach a level of proficiency and literacy in both the mother tongue and the second language.

7. Two-way or dual program:
- Two kinds of learners are brought together to learn each other’s language.
- The first type of students can be native speakers of English and the second kind can be native speakers of another language.
- While learning, the two types of learners learn each other languages together at the same time, and one group acts as a linguistic model for the other.
- The emphasis is that all the students master the school curriculum.

However, it is important to mention that this paper will use the term newcomers to refer to those children who come suddenly into a new country where they have to learn a second language in a mainstream classroom without help from second language private lessons.

3.2 Learning Vs Acquisition

The terms learning and acquisition are always mentioned when talking about children learning languages. Similarly, these are also very important terms in second language learning. Although the two terms are different from each other they both share the same goal, which is making a learner gain a language.

Acquisition as Krashen (2009) stated, is a way of gaining a knowledge of a language without knowing. It is similar to the way children learn their first or mother tongue (L1). When children acquire their mother tongue they are unaware of the process, but they are aware that they use the language for communication. This process of acquiring is known as a subconscious process. When people acquire a language instead of thinking about the rules of the language they tend to have a “feel” for
correctness. When people hear an ungrammatical sentence they feel that there is something wrong with the sentence although they do not know the rules or the right grammar “In non-technical language, acquisition is ‘picking up’ a language” (Krashen, 2009, p. 10).

On the other hand when learning a second language (L2), people are aware of the process, learning the grammar and rules (Krashen, 2009, p. 10). This process of learning is referred to as learning “In non-technical terms, learning is ‘knowing about’ a language, known to most people as ‘grammar’, or ‘rules’” (Krashen, 2009, p. 10). Thereby, acquiring relates to the mother tongue and hence we acquire our first language. While learning relates to the second language that is, we learn a second language.

These comparisons between learning and acquisition have given a general overview of how children learn a language. This paper will subsequently present a general look at the concept of second language acquisition and some of its main principles, specific to learning and teaching a second language to newcomers.

### 3.3 Second Language Acquisition

As there is a difference between first and second language acquisition, there is also a difference between second and foreign language learning. Firstly, when talking about first or mother tongue it self-explanatory, it is the first language we acquire, the first language we speak after we are born. On the other hand, the second language is “the term ‘second’ is generally used to refer to any language other than the first language” (Ellis, 2003, p. 11). The second language is the language learned by foreigners in countries that have that second language as a mother tongue. An example of this can be a Spanish-speaking immigrant learning English in the United States. However, foreign language learning refers to a foreign language that is being learned in the person’s own country. An example of this can be a French person learning English in France. In this case, learning a foreign language will mostly be in a classroom (Ellis, 2003, p. 12).

In second language acquisition there are two major kinds of learning. According to Saville-Troike (2005), informal second language learning is the kind of learning that happens and takes place in a natural way. An example of this can be when a child from Japan comes to the United States and learns English by playing and
attending school with native speakers of English but without any specific language learning. Then this child picks up the English language while being with native speakers. The process here is similar to the process of the second language acquisition when the learner is acquiring the language instead of learning. On the other hand, the second kind of learning is the formal second language learning which is the kind of learning that happens in classrooms. An example of this can be a student from the United States learning Chinese in a classroom in China. However, a person can combine these two kinds of learning and use them to learn. An example of this can be when the student from the United States learns Chinese in a classroom in China, as well as using the Chinese language outside school to interact with people and using it for daily life.

3.4 Main Principles of Second Language Learning for Children

In order to help the newcomers’ learning process of a second language it is important to look at some principles of second language acquisition. Firstly, according to Krashen and Terrell, (As cited in Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002, p. 60) it is important to know that the newcomers might enter a silent period after their arrival. In this period, the children might not speak, but might begin to comprehend. Instead of speaking the children might focus on listening or reading for comprehension. Thereby, teachers do not need to push the newcomers to speak immediately.

Secondly, motivation is an important factor for learning a second language. Gardner and Lambert, stated that (As cited in Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002, p. 61) “positive attitudes toward the target language encourage comprehensible input for language acquisition”. The teachers need to find ways to motivate the newcomers to learn; by doing that the newcomers might learn in a better way.

Thirdly, it is important to know the importance of meaning for the newcomers. According to Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, (2002), the key to second language linguistic development is the meaning. The language that children remember and use is the language that is meaningful. Therefore, the teachers have to make a meaningful language for the newcomers in order for them to learn.

Fourthly, Carrasquillo & Rodríguez (2002) mentioned that when newcomers learn a second language errors might occur. The teachers need to know that and consider the errors as indicators of learners’ language development. They are a part of the process of learning the language.
Fifthly, the learner’s goals to learn are very important in stimulating the process of learning. Thereby, the learners need to be allowed to learn the language for their own personal reasons of achieving competence and autonomy (Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002, p. 62).

Lastly, Carrasquillo, London, Nieto, Sleeter & Grant, (As cited in Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002, p. 62) discussed that it is important to value the culture and the mother tongue of the a newcomer. Doing that might have a positive effect on the learner. Thereby, it is important for the teacher to consider the principles of learning a second language from the perspective of the child. This may assist the teacher to understand better the child and his or her process of learning a second language.

To conclude, newcomers come for different reasons and they learn in schools in various programs. It is important that teachers know the difference between learning and acquisition as well as recognizing the main principles of second language learning for children which are: the silent period, motivation, importance of meaning, errors in learning, the learner’s goal, and the value of culture and mother tongue. Doing this will help teachers to improve their understanding of how to teach newcomers.

However, it is worth mentioning that this paper will look at learning and teaching of second language to newcomers in an English context, although what this paper applies to English can be used in any second language learning and teaching not only English. The next chapters in this paper will further examine both the teachers and parents’ role and the teaching of newcomers in a mainstream classroom.
4 The Importance of the Teacher, Parents and the Mother Tongue

4.1 Teachers’ Role

Teachers normally go through a long period of studying in order to become teachers. Unfortunately, in most cases teachers do not get training in working with newcomers. Therefore, it is very important that teachers get a special education to teach newcomers in their classes. It is important because according to Carrasquillo and Rodríguez (2002), most of the time when general teachers have a newcomer in their class they will start thinking about how to teach and reach this newcomer. Most of the time these teachers do not have the training to teach the newcomer and do not understand his or her needs. Therefore, there is a need for teachers to be educated in the field of teaching newcomers. Samson & Collins (2012) argued that when the special needs of newcomers or second language learners are included in the different stages of teacher training, not only the schools might get higher quality teachers who can teach the second language to the newcomers but the outcomes of second language learners might also improve considerably. Considering the high amount of immigration in today’s world any teacher is likely to have a newcomer in his or her classroom. It would therefore be very helpful for the teachers if they knew the needs of the newcomers and appropriate teaching methods. However, according to (Teacher, personal communication, March 7, 2016), similar to what has been said, the teacher stated that a course on teaching newcomers would be very helpful in understanding the needs of newcomers.

The teachers’ role does not only include teaching. There are things teachers do to help their mainstream learners. When getting a newcomer, a teacher can do many things to help besides teaching. A teacher can motivate the newcomers by giving compliments and helping them find their strength and overcome their weakness (Teacher, personal communication, March 7, 2016). It is important to motivate your new learners to learn. By doing that, it might stimulate the process of learning and improvement. The teacher could try to influence learners’ motivation by making a supportive classroom environment where the learners are stimulated and engaged in learning with activities that are suitable for their age, interest and culture (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 88). Moreover, according to Tripsa (2012), “Give lots of encouragement and praise for what the students can do. Don’t dwell on all that they can’t yet do” (p. 21). In school, the newcomer might only know the teacher, so it is
important to have positive affirmation between the teacher and student. By helping the new learner, the teacher might be able to gain the new learner’s trust, and therefore facilitate improved learning outcomes.

4.2 Parents’ Role

Parents and the mother tongue are two important factors, which can help the newcomers learn the new language. The parents, especially those who have knowledge of the new language are able to help their children who have no help from their mother tongue in school. Unfortunately, the case is not always so, as there are many parents who also start to learn the new language at the same time. Therefore, they cannot help their children. I myself experienced this when I came to Iceland and was learning Icelandic as a second language. My parent was starting to learn Icelandic as well and she was not able to help me with my homework. When I was supposed to read to someone at home my parent was not able to recognize whether I was reading correctly and could not identify or correct mistakes. Therefore, I had no other way of learning the new language other than at the school relying on myself. Although my parent was not able to help me with learning Icelandic, still she gave me lots of encouragement to study. However, my case was a special one as I was a refugee and I had support in my mother tongue at school. Nevertheless, this brings us to the use of the mother tongue when learning a second language at school. Taking into consideration the amount of diverse backgrounds in the schools today there are not many schools/countries that can afford to use support in the newcomer’s mother tongue. Although the mother tongue can help many students to learn in a better way, it cannot be assumed that teachers are bilingual, and even if they are, how many languages does the teacher need to know in order to use the newcomer’s mother tongue. There are, therefore, many ways the teacher can integrate the newcomer’s mother tongue into learning a second language such as drawing, body language, and Google Translate (Teacher, personal communication, March 7, 2016).

4.3 Communication Strategies

In the absence of the newcomer’s mother tongue while learning a new language it is very hard for the teacher to communicate with the newcomer. Instead of using the language, teachers can use many other things to transfer the meaning. Tripsa (2012) mentioned that, in the case where the newcomer does not have any knowledge of the second language the new learner might need visual and kinesthetic support to be
able to understand the academic material. The teacher can use things such as drawings, chalkboard sketches, photographs, and visual material to connect between clues and meaning. The teacher can also use mime, gestures and act out what he or she wants to say. The teacher can also teach his or her other students to try these kinds of methods. Furthermore, by using drawing or things in the beginning, the teacher can illustrate and connect the object or the thing with the word in the target language. For example, when a teacher wants to teach the word book to the new learner then the teacher can show the learner a book and say a book. Then, there is no need for the newcomer’s mother tongue to explain what is a book. The drawing also can help very much to explain. Genessee, (As cited in Herrell and Jordan, 2008, p. 22) stated that when combining visuals with the lesson plan it increases the effectiveness of the lesson for second language learners. Teachers can also use body language while teaching, by using the movement of the body teachers can illustrate many things. An example could be teaching pronouns, a teacher can point to himself and say I, and then point to the learner and say you. This can be similar when a teacher is reading a story to children. The teacher is kind of using the body language to imitate what is happening in the story. It is an effective way of transferring meaning between the teacher and learner and even other students. Moreover, today in the era of technology there are many websites that provide a direct translation between many languages and they are very helpful in the classroom. The newcomer might be able to use this service to communicate with the teacher or to learn. Yet, there might be problems with using websites such as Google Translate since they might not provide an accurate translation, and sometimes the translation might be wrong. Still, this is a great free service that any teacher can use and benefit from in his or her classroom.

After all, the teacher plays a very important role in helping newcomers, not only by teaching them the new language but also in helping them acclimate to the new environment. After exploring these important aspects which can help the newcomer to learn, the next chapter will examine the teaching of a newcomer in a mainstream classroom.
5 Teaching Newcomers in a mainstream classroom

5.1 Where to Start

The teacher can do many things to help the newcomer to acclimate to the new class, environment and even to the new country. Before the new learner comes the teacher can do things such as according to Correll, Fisher-Burton, Mullins, Peterson, Servoss & Xiong (2006) preparing his mainstream students to welcome the newcomer by explaining to his students about the newcomer’s background, country and providing them with some ideas to help the newcomer, this will facilitate the newcomer to learn.

The newcomer might need to feel secure in the new classroom Tripsa (2012) stated, “The more comfortable newcomers feel in your classroom, the quicker they will be able to learn. The more anxiety students experience, the less language they will comprehend” (p. 21). Furthermore, Krashen (As cited in Haynes & Zacarian, 2010, p. 13) mentioned that one out of three core elements of learning a second language is an environment which is comfortable for learning with a low threshold for anxiety. Therefore, teachers can try from the first meeting with their newcomers to relieve the newcomers’ anxiety by being caring, supportive and using simple language that includes gestures when speaking to them.

Moreover, it is helpful for the new learner to have someone who can assist him or her inside and outside the classroom. When I was sent to my Icelandic mainstream classroom, the teacher assigned two students to help me with learning Icelandic. They were very kind and by talking to them, I learned to speak much better. In my case, there was a private Icelandic class to learn Icelandic. However, when the teacher sent me to my mainstream classroom I was putting what I was learning into action. The teacher can thus arrange peer support, two or more peers from the class to help the newcomer. This can help the newcomer to have a connection in the class with his or her peers as well as someone to play with outside the class. It helps the newcomer to practice the new language. In addition, when interacting with his or her peers, the newcomer can learn about the school system and rules. Therefore, the teacher has to be very careful when choosing these peer supports.

Another way of making the newcomers feel secure is by learning about them, their culture and language. When learning about their new learners, the teachers might be able to strengthen the teacher-learner relationship. According to Hill and Flynn
(2006), when the teacher knows about the mother tongue and culture of the newcomer it assists teacher to understand how the newcomer was taught in his or her country. Moreover, by knowing about the newcomer’s prior education in his or her mother tongue the teacher might be able to understand the difficulties the newcomer will be facing. Learning about your new learner can help a lot in your teaching process. An example could be if a newcomer from a country or a school where the teacher uses the class/school only to teach and the school is very restricted with many rules therefore the teacher plays no games inside the classroom, a newcomer from such a background might find it very hard at the beginning to learn by playing games. The different style, methods and ways of teaching can be culturally challenging to the newcomers. It might look enjoyable, but his or her ideas of learning are different, and they might think this a waste of time. Therefore, the teacher has to try to explain these things to the newcomer by explaining that playing is a way of learning. However, if the teacher does not have this kind of information, then there might be a problem of misunderstanding between the teacher and the new learner. In addition, this idea of playing games to learn might have a negative side, which is, the new learner will want to play games all the time and he or she will not want to learn. I am not saying that learning by playing is a bad idea. The teacher, by knowing about his new learner’s background can avoid this problem. One way to learn about the newcomer is by testing his or her knowledge, and the way the student had been taught before.

In order to find out what the newcomer knows, the teacher needs to assess the new learner, but the assessment should only take place when the newcomer is ready. The assessment here is more as an observation to evaluate the newcomer’s knowledge after his or her arrival. Finding out what the newcomer knows might give the teacher a general idea of where to start the teaching process. According to Simpson & Berridge (2006), it might not be a good idea to test the learner’s knowledge directly in the beginning for reasons such as they might be afraid, be experiencing culture shock and not able to communicate effectively. It might be very difficult for a newcomer to join a new class with new learners and new environment. In addition, the new learner might have little or no previous formal education. Therefore, it might be difficult to find out what the learner knows. The newcomer might know the answer but without realizing he or she can do mathematics as an example. But because there is a different educational system the learner might not recognize what the teacher is teaching. To find out what
the newcomer knows the teacher can use checklists and/or an interview to find the newcomer’s level of knowledge. In addition, it might be useful to learn from the newcomer how he or she was taught before, if they had any previous education.

5.2 Theories of Second Language Acquisition

The stages of learning a second language are different. Each stage has a different kind of characteristics. Knowing at what stage the newcomer is can help the teacher. Therefore, the teacher needs to know each stage and try to assist the newcomer depending on his or her level. When children learn their first language they go through several stages, which start from speaking one word until they can speak fluently and use complex grammar. A similar thing happens when newcomers learn a second language. There are stages, which they go through. It starts from the silent period until learners have a near-native level of speech (Hill & Flynn, 2006, p. 14).

According to Krashen & Terrell (As cited in Hill & Flynn, 2006, p. 15) the stages of second language acquisition are:

The first stage: Preproduction stage / the silent period
- Occurs in the period from zero to six months after newcomer’s arrival.
- The learner does not speak at all and understands very little.

The second stage: Early production stage
- Commonly takes place after six months to one year from arrival.
- Learner starts to speak by using one or two words, answers with yes and no.
- The learner mentions names and uses language patterns, which are repetitive such as “How are you?”.

The Third stage: Speech emergence stage
- Takes place between one to three years after arrival.
- The learner uses simple sentences and has a good comprehension.
- The learner makes grammar and pronunciation mistakes.

The fourth stage: Intermediate fluency stage
- Takes place between three to five years after arrival.
- The learner has a high level of comprehension.
- He or she can use sentences that are long and complex.
- He or she might have few grammatical mistakes.

The fifth stage: Advanced fluency stage

- Takes place between five to seven years after arrival.
- The learner shows a near-native language ability.

The time period for each stage will vary depending on the learner and how long it will take him or her in each stage (Hill and Flynn, 2006, p. 15). Thereby, when knowing the needs of each stage and identifying at what stage the newcomer is, the teacher is more equipped to assess and teach the newcomer.

Another important theory that teachers need to be aware of is Krashen, comprehensible input hypothesis. Teachers need to provide for the newcomers a comprehensible and challengeable language. Lightbown & Spada (2013) stated, “Acquisition occurs when one is exposed to language that is comprehensible and contains i+1” (p. 106). Regarding “i” it is the language knowledge that we already have acquired. When “+1” is a metaphor for things such as words, grammatical forms, aspects of pronunciation, which are one level higher from what we have already acquired (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 106). In other words comprehensible input means that the learner has to understand the message that is being transferred. While teaching a newcomer, the teacher needs to try to build on the newcomer prior knowledge. An example of this can be a newcomer who learned the meaning of a sentence such as “Put the paper in your desk”. That learner might be able to understand the meaning of a sentence such as “Put the paper in the garbage”. In this way the learner will build on his or her previous knowledge and understanding of the sentence by association and therefore acquire the new information. However, it is important for the newcomer to receive comprehensible input while being in the classroom. If the teacher ignores the newcomer, and just teaches in the way he or she normally teaches a mainstream classroom the newcomer might not get this comprehensible input because there is no consideration for the newcomer’s needs. An example of this can be if a foreigner went to learn Japanese in Japan, the person would not be able to learn Japanese just by sitting in the class and listening with no additional help from the teacher. Yet this person could learn Japanese if the teacher makes the Japanese comprehensible to him (Haynes, n.d.). The teacher should not separate the newcomer
from the class by giving him or her many written assignments, but instead try to include the newcomer in the class, by making the language for the newcomer more accessible.

As there are different kinds of language proficiency, teachers need to be aware of them in order to help the newcomers develop both their social and academic language. Wright et al., (2006) discussed, that knowing the different kinds of language proficiency is important in helping teachers understand newcomers’ challenges. Jim Cummins pointed out this theory which distinguishes between social and academic language proficiency. The first language proficiency is basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS). According to Cummins, (As cited in Wright et al., 2006, p. 7; As cited in Samúel Lefever & Inga Karlsdóttir. 2010, P. 117&118) BICS is the social language. Within two years of learning a second language, learners will develop conversational fluency. This happens when a person knows basic vocabulary, grammar and has a good pronunciation of the target language. That person is able to use the target language he or she is learning in daily life to communicate. The second, language proficiency is cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), which is the academic language. It can take five to seven years depending on the students’ age and level of mother tongue literacy to develop fluency in more technical grade-appropriate academic language. Therefore, in order for the students to succeed in school, the students have to be able to read and understand the class materials, write assignments, solve a mathematical exercise, take tests, apply critical reasoning and understand abstract concepts. Moreover, Cummins pointed out (As cited in Wright et al., 2006, p. 7) that failing to understand the difference between these two-language proficiencies might lead to a wrong judgment on the language ability of the learners. Thereby, by being aware of the different kinds of language proficiencies, teachers can help the newcomers develop both their social and academic language.

5.3 Teaching Strategies in a Mainstream Classroom

When teachers get newcomers with no or little knowledge of the second language in their classes, they might feel that they are unable to teach them successfully. Some strategies will be presented below to assist in the teaching of newcomers. Firstly, the newcomers’ mother tongue might have a different alphabet. Therefore, it is good to start with teaching them the Roman alphabet. If possible, the teachers can use books that teach the lower grades such as handwriting books. Such books aim to teach the main principles of the language such as letters, words, and easy sentences formations.
Moreover, in order for newcomers to succeed in learning and developing the necessary academic proficiency that is required to succeed in the school, teachers should connect the second language learning to each of the subjects taught at the school (“ESL/Bilingual Resources guide for mainstream teachers,” 2000, p. 4). If possible, teachers can use many books that are generally used to teach lower grades. Those books have an easy vocabulary, they teach writing, and they often include a lot of visual aids such as pictures to clarify the meaning. In addition, teachers can let the newcomers have a general idea of what is being taught in the lesson by using books that have a lower level of vocabulary than the one that is used in the class. Moreover, if the newcomers are able to do mathematics depending on their levels, the teacher can perhaps try and let the newcomers solve some mathematical problems. Depending on the new learners’ levels, teachers can use a book from a suitable grade for the learners. There might be many resources available for the teachers that they can use to teach the newcomer.

In their book Fifty Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners Herrell & Jordan (2008), have 50 different strategies to teach second language learners. The book has a variety of strategies that can help to enhance instruction through planning, support of the student involvement, build the student’s vocabulary and fluency as well as building comprehension. In order to help the newcomer learn other subjects in the classroom, the teacher can use an academic language scaffolding strategy. It is one out of many strategies that was included in the book to assist the teacher in the classroom. In order for the student to participate in the class in a successful way, the teacher has to model the academic language and make it comprehensible by using visuals, gestures and demonstrations. The steps of the lesson will be as follows: The teacher has first to identify the academic vocabulary and language structures, the vocabulary that is used in assignments and explanations during the lesson that can be useful for the student to understand how he or she can participate verbally. Charmot and O’Malley, (As cited in Herrell and Jordan, 2008, p. 51) used the term “compare” as an example to explain this idea. The word, compare means to describe how objects are alike and different from each other. However, to facilitate the newcomer’s participation the teacher may simplify the meaning of compare into its two basic forms such as, can you explain how the objects or ideas are the same and how they can be different. Secondly, the teacher has to design and teach an introductory activity in a non-stressful way. If the teacher starts with explaining, then he or she can use visuals for the main academic terms that can
help the student to understand. In addition, the teacher needs to model the use of language depending on the way he or she wants his or her learner to participate. For example, the teacher needs to tell the learner if the words are complex and the spelling is more important. Thirdly, in order to make the learner interact verbally and use academic language in an authentic way, an activity that makes students work in pairs or small groups might help. Fourthly, the teacher needs to move around the class, help, monitor and encourage the use of students’ academic language. Fifthly, the lesson can be concluded by reviewing the vocabulary and language structure. Lastly, incorporating the use of technology. Using photocopiers, microscopes and overhead transparencies can help by making the material for the students more comprehensible (Herrell and Jordan, 2008, p. 50&52). Another idea for the newcomer, which he or she can benefit from in later stages is letting the newcomer create word banks which include general vocabulary used in math, social studies, science and other subjects (Correll et al., 2006, p. 12).

Another strategy to use with newcomers with little second language knowledge is the total physical response strategy. According to Herrell & Jordan (2008), this strategy’s goal is to use the second language to communicate in social settings. The teacher gives commands and acts them out, the students then respond by performing the action that the teacher has demonstrated. The lesson steps can be as follows:

1. The teacher has to choose a vocabulary to physicalize, terms such as verbal directions and colors. Then, he or she needs to use simple commands that include the vocabulary taught in the lesson and a movement response such as “Stand up”.
2. The teacher has to introduce two or three commands at first while demonstrating physically.
3. After seeing that the students are able to follow the commands the teacher has to drop the physical modeling and encourage students to respond to the verbal commands only.
4. The teacher adds new commands. It is recommended to use three commands at a time. The teacher has to act out the new commands until he or she sees that the learners are able to respond without their help.
5. In order to add practice and variety to the activity, the teacher can make students use different ways such as drawing and pointing to pictures, to show that they understood the commands.

6. When students gain confidence, they can begin to and act the commands. The teacher should not push them to participate but gently encouraging them if they choose.

To see students’ progress, the teacher can use checklists of the commands that were taught, and those that still require modeling. This strategy is very helpful because the teacher can use it at any level, and it can also be used to teach vocabulary that relates to other subjects.

When games are used in teaching, the teacher can perhaps modify the games to include the newcomer. Such an action will help the newcomer in interacting with other students, by using what he or she is learning and having fun at the same time (Correll et., 2006, p. 12). Songs can also be useful to teach vocabulary to young newcomers, the teacher can use the songs in the mainstream classroom, such as “The alphabet,” and “Old McDonald Had a Farm”. Other game can include “Simon Says,” and “Chutes and Ladders,”. All the students in the class can participate and even help teach the new learner how to play and sing the lyrics (“What if they don’t speak English,” n.d., p. 11).

Another effective way of teaching today is through the use of technology. As I previously mentioned the site Google Translate is one free tool, which the teacher can use. Although it might not be accurate it still provides a support for both the teacher and newcomer in the absence of a way of communicating. However, not all newcomers can afford to have smartphones or laptops, but in the school, there might be a computer, which the newcomer can use. YouTube is one site, which can be very useful for teaching if it is used in a right way. In order to make the learner understand more about the lesson that was taught a teacher can tell the newcomer to watch something related to the lesson in the mother tongue.

This is an example of visual scaffolding strategy using technology. This strategy gives language support by using visual images. When displaying drawings and photographs, the teacher can help the newcomer to hear words and connect their meaning with the visual image. This strategy needs preparation before the class by building a file of visual resource material. The file of resources can include things such
as photographs or drawings that the teacher can access easily. The visuals can be internet images, photos of students, illustrations in old books, even videos such as commercials. In order to use this strategy, first the teacher needs to find the vocabulary that he or she will be using in the classroom that they can explain by using visual support. Then, the teacher needs to find or make photos or drawings that can give visual support to the chosen vocabulary. In the classroom, the teacher can encourage the students to use the pictures as a support tool while presenting, or asking and answering questions. This strategy might require planning, but it is very helpful to explain a word by using visual support. In addition, a teacher can use this strategy in all grade levels and with teaching different curriculum areas (Herrell and Jordan, 2008, p. 20-22). However, there are many ways for teachers to use technology in teaching. An advantage of technology is that the newcomers, if possible, can use it outside the school. Students can listen to online materials when they choose and it provides many activities for learning in general not only for newcomers. Therefore, teachers should consider using technology in their teaching of newcomers if it is possible.

5.4 Assessment

Teachers cannot assess the newcomers who are learning a second language in the same way as the native speakers of the language. Instead, teachers can use many other ways to assess the newcomers depending on their level. When assessing general students, the teacher assesses their knowledge as well as what they are learning through their mother tongue. However, the case is not the same with the newcomers. Newcomers still struggling with learning the new language might be difficult to assess in other subjects due to the language barrier.

Assessments can have a large influence on a newcomer’s life as it might decide what he or she may do in the future. McKay (2006) discussed that, assessment might have positive or negative effects on a student’s life. These effects depend on many factors that can be from the way the test is made and structured to the way it is used by the teachers. The assessments are used in many ways because they provide information for the teachers, school, and parents as well as for the learner on how he or she is progressing. The problem is that, in general, children are usually sensitive about failing in an exam. Failing an exam might have a negative effect on the child’s progress and the same thing can happen with the newcomer. Teachers have to be aware of this when testing newcomers.
In addition, it is important for the newcomer to have a chance to prove his or her abilities. A newcomer might have previous knowledge of a question the teacher asks, but lacks the language knowledge needed to be able to answer. The lack of the language to understand and also to explain what they know makes it difficult to assess the newcomer. In my situation, when I was in school learning in my mainstream classroom, sometimes I understood and knew the answer to a question that was asked by the teacher to the class, however, I was unable to answer or explain myself due to a lack of language knowledge. Nevertheless, when newcomers come to their classes, they might bring with them a large range of information which they gained through their first language. While learning in school, the newcomers have to learn a second language and at the same time, they have to acquire content knowledge. If the assessments are only in the second language, they might not be useful because the newcomers lack the ability to understand and answer the tests (Lenski, Ehlers-Zavala, Daniel & Sun-Irminger, 2006, p. 24).

In order to assess the newcomers in a successful way, the teachers have first to decide how to assess them. According to Lenski et al., (2006), there are many ways which the teacher can use to assess. Ways such as using multiple forms to evaluate, and using a mixture of authentic assessment tools. An example of the assessment tools could be using anecdotal records, checklists, range scales, and portfolios. These kinds of assessments help by giving a close look at the newcomer’s progress and needs. Moreover, instead of testing the learner with one test over a long period, it might be better to have many different tests. In addition, while assessments test the progress of the learner, they can also take into account how active the newcomer is to learn in the classroom (Teacher, personal communication, March 7, 2016).

Some points which can be useful for teachers to think about when assessing newcomers are as follows: it will be good to know the curriculum and work with other teachers when it is possible. Decide what, who, why, how, and when to assess, and make sure that your learners understand your assessments. Moreover, reflect and think of the assessment results and modify the teaching plan depending on the results (Lenski et al., 2006, p. 30).

While newcomers are learning the second language, teachers can try to modify the assessment in order to help the newcomers answer in the best way. According to the
United States Department of Education, (As cited in Lenski et al., 2006, p. 30) a teacher can do that by allowing the learner to answer orally. Another method is to allow the learner to get help from a qualified bilingual professional. Consider offering to the newcomers a group assessment allowing the learners to demonstrate the reading progress and making students use multiple formats to provide responses. Allow the use of mother tongue if translation support is acceptable in the school. Lastly, accept the use of a bilingual dictionary in the beginning stages. In my experience, strategies that assisted when taking a test were firstly, extending the test time so I did not need to think much about time and secondly, receiving language help from the teacher while taking a test. For example, although I knew how to do mathematics, I was not able to solve the problem in a math exam because it included a written question. I needed language support, and when the teacher explained it, I figured out that it was a very easy question, which I was able to answer. By using these and other available assessment options that take into account the newcomers’ needs, the teacher can do his or her best to help them in the process of learning. As a final point, Lenski et al., (2006) stated, “Only when measurement, assessment, evaluation, and excellent teaching are present in classrooms will ELLs (English language learners) make real progress toward literacy” (p. 33).

The teacher therefore plays a very important role in the newcomer learning within the mainstream classroom and if facilitated correctly, as explained above can greatly benefit the newcomers learning journey.
6 Conclusion

When I came to Iceland I had to learn Icelandic as a second language and it was not an easy process especially considering that, I had to learn a new language and other subjects in the classroom at the same time. This was all whilst learning to live in a new country, attending a new school and class. In my case, what made me learn Icelandic as a second language and succeed in school is that I had a strong will and determination to learn. I was motivated to learn because I wanted to communicate with my peers, engage in my community and succeed in school. Another important factor was the teachers, when I saw that my teachers were willing to help me and they cared about my learning process, I wanted to learn more from them and I did not want to disappoint them. Thereby, when a newcomer sees that he or she has a teacher who cares about their teaching and who is willing to help when needed, then the newcomer will be stimulated and motivated to learn.

This paper examined the different kinds of newcomers and some programs schools can use to teach them. After exploring the terms learning and acquisition as well as the idea of second language acquisition and some of its main elements. The paper suggests that teachers should recognize these terms as they gave the teachers a better understanding of how to teach newcomers.

Moreover, the paper highlighted the importance of teachers, The teacher’s role is important in the life of a newcomer, as Carrasquillo and Rodríguez (2002) stated, a mainstream teacher needs to be trained to work with newcomers in order to meet their needs. If a teacher does not consider the needs of a newcomer, then that will have an effect on the newcomer’s life. These effects can be seen in outcomes of a study entitled “Aðstæður Íslenskra Skólanema af Erlendum Uppruna” which was conducted in Icelandic schools in 2006. The study finds out that the number of newcomers in Icelandic schools is increasing. Many students who are foreigners and who lack the knowledge of Icelandic and specially those who speak another language than Icelandic in their homes have difficult times in schools (Þóroddur Bjarnason, 2006, p. 398). The study used questionnaire to collect data and students in 6, 8 and 10 grades were the participants. The study provided three explanations for children risky action which are: the difference between Iceland and the country were the newcomer comes from, failing to be part of the Icelandic society, and when the newcomer does not get support. (Þóroddur Bjarnason, 2006, p. 399). However, From my experience with this problem
when those students come to the new country they might sort of feel that they are lost and because they might not be able to connect socially and communicate with other students and teachers they might feel that they do not belong to the new country which they have to live in. This might demotivate foreigners and lead them to quit school, also it has a negative effect on them and their lives. Thus, this paper emphasized that the teacher’s role is very important here as he or she may be the only one who can play the role of connecting the student to the new society.

The paper also explored the role of parents and mother tongue, parents can help their children with learning the new language if not they can encourage and support them. Using the mother tongue in teaching the second language might benefit the newcomers, but schools might not be able to provide support in the mother tongue. Therefore, in this paper some communication strategies that can incorporate the newcomers’ mother tongue in learning the second language as well as some methods to communicate in the absence of the mother tongue were presented.

Examining Krashen and Terrell’s stages of second language acquisition, Krashen’s comprehensible input, and Cummins’s theory of different language proficiency have provided a large amount of information on how to teach children. Thereby, teachers need to recognize the stages of second language acquisition as well as finding at what stage their newcomer is. Moreover, teachers need to make the class more comprehensible for the newcomer and try to build on what the newcomer already knows. Teachers also need to be aware of the different kinds of language proficiencies in order to help the newcomer develop the social and academic language.

After exploring how to teach newcomers in the mainstream classroom the paper suggests that the teacher needs to create a safe and secure classroom, be caring and supportive, use simple language as well as body language, use kinesthetic support and visual material to enhance understanding, arrange peer support, learn about the newcomers and try fairly to evaluate them. To find out the newcomers’ knowledge level, the teacher can use checklists and many other tools. To help the newcomers to learn other school subjects the teacher can connect second language learning to other subjects and use books which suits the newcomers’ language level. The teacher can also use games, songs and technology. Lastly, the teacher needs to assess the newcomer depending on their level using many kinds of assessments.
The paper has explored issues related to teaching newcomers a second language in a mainstream classroom. In order to ease the transition and learning process of a newcomer it is important that teachers are well-trained and capable of dealing with students’ various needs. This calls for more emphasis on providing teachers with opportunities to expand their knowledge about second language learning and ways to enhance newcomers’ education and well-being.
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