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Authors

Husbye, Nicholas
Dorner, Lisa M.

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Teaching Strategies to Develop Inquiry and Literacy Skills: *Languaging* in Foreign Language Immersion Education

NICHOLAS E. HUSBYE

University of Missouri, St. Louis

E-mail: busbyen@umsl.edu

LISA M. DORNER

University of Missouri

E-mail: dornerl@missouri.edu

One-way, or foreign language, immersion schools face unique challenges as they seek to support the literacy development of their students. This manuscript draws on sociocultural theories of literacy development and the concept of *languaging*, the process of using language to make meaning. Working with two classrooms over one semester, we asked: *How were fifth-grade students using language to make meaning and develop new skills during literacy activities? Where and when did students apply their learning?* Teaching the strategies in English, the authors posit, provided students with moments of languaging, or talk about language, that allowed them to transfer certain strategies to target language instruction. Examples from our work demonstrate how explicit languaging about literacy strategies in English helped students to develop new research skills, which they later applied to inquiry projects completed in their school's immersion language. However, while we witnessed students' languaging in reference to literacy strategies, we rarely observed translanguaging, or students drawing upon their range of linguistic repertoires (English, Spanish, Bosnian, African American vernacular, and so on) to make meaning. We conclude by highlighting the potential of languaging to develop new literacy skills in language immersion education, as well as the need for future research on translanguaging in such contexts.

INTRODUCTION

While “English-only” discourses remain strong in the United States, innovative multilingual education programs are appearing across the country, even in rather monolingual areas with small foreign-born populations (Dorner, 2015). For one year, we worked in such a context: in two new language immersion elementary schools, one French (FIES) and the other Spanish (SIES). Both were part of a network that we call the Language Immersion Charter Schools (LICS) (all names are pseudonyms). LICS ran one-way, or foreign language, immersion schools in an urban area with fewer than five percent immigrants. In FIES and SIES, diverse groups of mostly African-American and White English-speaking students were spending the majority of their elementary years learning math, science, social studies, and how to read and write in French or Spanish. In the fifth grade, students had to develop a culminating “inquiry-based” research project focused on a community issue or need, which

they would then present using their school's language of instruction. As the two schools prepared this project for the first time, their teachers (and many of the students) did not feel ready. They wondered: *Did students have the advanced literacy skills that they needed? What strategies could be taught in class to help students as they worked on their research projects?*

When teachers at LICS expressed these concerns, we (two professors of education) offered our support. Professor Nick (as the students called him) brought his expertise as a literacy professor and former elementary teacher, while Professor Lisa brought her knowledge of language development, bilingual education, and community partnerships to the project. Over ten weeks, we led a series of lessons that guided students in the development of their literacy and research skills (specifically, the practices of formulating research questions, locating and making sense of an informational text, and considering how to present findings). All of these lessons were conducted in English during their "library" class, the time period set aside for additional practice with inquiry and literacy. We documented our work through field notes and video data collection, and met regularly with teachers to detail our activities with the students and observations. Together, we explored whether and how students in these two language immersion classrooms applied the strategies that we had taught them. We asked: *How were they making meaning and developing skills introduced through our literacy activities?* In other words, informed by Vygotsky's (1938/1978) claim that language (i.e., speaking and writing) represents a fundamental tool that mediates cognition, we explored the concept of *languaging*—the "dynamic, never-ending process of using language to make meaning" (Swain, 2006, p. 96). We questioned where and when students applied their learning to new contexts.

In this article, we analyze one of our literacy lessons in detail, namely, how to identify new information in texts in order to develop a summary statement. We have two goals in mind: (1) to showcase how we employed one strategy with students, specifically how we used "anchor charts" to help them identify and summarize new information in texts; and (2) to demonstrate what we learned about languaging and other meaning-making processes in foreign language immersion education. We begin with a description of our pedagogical frameworks and the context of our work. We then present two vignettes and conclude with considerations for educators who find themselves in similar circumstances.

PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

Our work with schools and our pedagogical choices are grounded in sociocultural theories of literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Heath, 1983) and bilingual education/biliteracy (Hornberger & Link, 2012; Reyes & Azuara, 2008). Such theories highlight the connections among social interactions, cultural practices, and students' identities in the production of academic texts.

Broadly, sociocultural scholars, influenced by Vygotsky, "create an account of human mental processes that recognizes the essential relationship between these processes and their cultural, historical, and institutional settings" (Wertsch, 1991, p. 6). Within the field of bilingual education, sociocultural perspectives suggest that literacy experiences must extend the various language resources and cultural funds of knowledge that students bring with them to classrooms (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992). When educators are able to create cohesive educational narratives that bridge cultural spaces of the home with the institutional spaces of school, students adapt to school more successfully, better maintain

their home language(s), and transfer literacy skills and strategies from one language/space to another. Cummins' (1986) influential interdependence and threshold hypotheses have led to studies that generally support this perspective; students who have well-developed literacy strategies and skills in their home or first language usually have greater academic success in the long run (Dixon et al., 2012).

A number of studies have explored whether and how teachers activate students' cultural/home funds of knowledge in the classroom. However, we rarely encounter studies in language immersion schooling that provide examples of how students learn strategies in class, which then support their work beyond that classroom. In our case, we wanted to help students develop skills from the strategies that we taught them in our literacy lessons (in English), and then have them apply these skills in the inquiry-based projects that they were required to complete (in Spanish or French) before graduating fifth grade.

The concepts "strategies" and "skills" are often used interchangeably, but we differentiated between them in this work. Specifically, following Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008), we defined strategies as "deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader's efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meanings of text" (p. 368). Meanwhile, skills are the "automatic actions that result in decoding and comprehension with speed, efficiency, and fluency" (p. 368). Put another way, we argue that literacy instruction needs to focus on the development of reading *strategies* that students actively practice in the classroom using a variety of texts, toward the development of *skills* that they can use beyond the initial lesson.

In our interactions with students, we aimed to transform literacy strategies into skills by having them work through particularly structured discursive activities (Pennycook & Makoni, 2006, which were shaped by theories of languaging. Viewing language as a tool that mediates cognition, languaging is the process by which we develop our thinking—how "speaking and writing complete and transform thought" (Swain, 2006, p. 97). In other words, language is not only a conduit to convey a thought, but further develops thinking itself. As Vygotsky (1987) noted, "Thought is not merely expressed in words: it comes into existence through them" (p. 219). In turn, "[t]his shaping and reshaping of cognition is an aspect of learning, and is made visible as learners talk through with themselves or others the meanings that they have, and make sense of them. This means that the capacity for thinking is linked to our capacity for languaging—the two are united in a dialectical relationship" (Swain, 2006, p. 95).

Thus, according to Swain, explicit talk and writing about a concept (such as talking about language itself in a second language learning context) is one of the ways in which this idea of *languaging* can be applied to education. Studies have found that students who talk (to themselves or others) about concepts develop a more accurate and complete understanding of those concepts than those learners who only read (or think) silently about them (Swain, 2006). Moreover, theories of languaging suggest that developing an artifact can "crystallize" a thought or learning (Smagorinsky & O'Donnell, 1998), from which one can continue to do more languaging and learning (Swain, 2006).

As illustrated by the examples of classroom practice below, teachers can help students recognize languaging, thereby making the process of meaning-making with and through language explicit. In addition, the recognition of languaging suggests that we should provide specific frameworks (to create artifacts) for thinking and talking about cognitive processes

involved in literacy across one's languages. We argue that this can then lead to continued languaging and the development of new thoughts/concepts/skills.

CONTEXT

Our work with SIES and FIES developed out of Professor Lisa's on-going partnership and series of "engaged scholarship" (Van de Ven, 2007) activities that ranged from professional development to research studies of parents' perspectives and students' language use within the LICS network (e.g., Dorner, 2015; Dorner & Layton, 2014). As foreign language immersion programs (Tedick, Christian, & Fortune, 2011), these two elementary schools aimed to provide nearly all content instruction in French or Spanish from kindergarten through the middle of second grade. At that point, students engaged in an English language arts (ELA) class for 50 minutes per day. These ELA classes generally followed a readers/writers workshop protocol (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1994), where students read and wrote about material related to the inquiry units being implemented in their classrooms. The LICS program combined this focus on developing bilingual fluency with a constructivist-based curriculum drawn from the International Baccalaureate (IB) Organization (www.ibo.org). In this way, both schools aimed to prepare students to be lifelong learners, who would take action in their worlds as "inquirer[s], both within and beyond the classrooms" (www.ibo.org/en/programmes/primary-years-programme). We helped to prepare fifth graders for their culminating inquiry project, an individual or collaborative study in which students were to identify, research, and offer solutions to real-life issues (see Appendix, Figure 1).

For ten weeks from January to March of one school year, we worked with each school's fifth-grade classroom during their weekly library time. While it may have made sense to incorporate our lessons into the ELA classes, the schools requested that we work during library time, which already aimed to develop research and inquiry skills (such as those that we were aiming to develop). The administrators did not want our lessons to detract from the time students needed to prepare for their state standardized tests (see Dorner & Layton, 2013 for a discussion of the challenges facing language immersion schools in the era of English-focused testing and accountability systems).

In total, we worked with 13 students in FIES and 19 in SIES. These were the only fifth-grade students in the network at the time; they were also the first group of students to reach the fifth grade and attempt to complete their own inquiry projects. The students in these two classrooms were representative of the network as a whole; they were identified by state data as Black (~60%), White (~30%), and Hispanic (~10%). About 50% qualified for free/reduced lunch. This demographic portrait, however, glosses over the youths' rich identities and language experiences, as they each existed more fluidly along a continuum of biliteracy (Hornberger, 2003), with varied ethnic, racial, and international backgrounds. Specifically, in the FIES classroom, there were seven students who were identified as Black and came from a variety of income backgrounds. Six students identified as White, one who spoke French at home and another, Mercedes, who spoke Spanish, as her mother was from Colombia. Meanwhile, the SIES fifth-grade classroom included 12 students identified as Black, four White, and three Hispanic. These students also brought multiple linguistic varieties and capacities to school: Zara's Black father was from Great Britain; Aaron's father was a refugee from Bosnia; Darron's father was a U.S.-born Black and his mother was Bosnian; Axel's mother was from Peru and his White father from the U.S.; Holly was

multiracial, with both U.S.-born Black and White family heritage; and Lucas, who was a White native English speaker, had attended a Spanish immersion preschool before coming to the school under study here, SIES.

As readers imagine how these approaches might work in their own contexts, it is also important to provide additional information on the authors' backgrounds. Professor Lisa is a White native English speaker who speaks Spanish at an advanced, though not native, level and who spent time teaching English as a foreign language in Japan. Professor Nick, also a White native English speaker, studied German and taught in multilingual, diverse elementary schools for ten years before teaching at the university level.

In 2013, following our engaged scholarship approach, we worked with the two fifth-grade teachers and the curriculum coordinator to determine student needs. Professor Nick then created a series of lessons to develop students' literacy and inquiry skills, which we implemented in 2014. The following vignettes and analyses were developed from 20 sets of field notes, classrooms artifacts, photographs, and transcripts of 24 hours of purposefully-sampled video recordings.

ANCHORING LITERACY SKILLS THROUGH INTERACTIVE MODELING

In preparing their inquiry projects, students were expected to draw from primary resources. However, the fifth-grade teachers were concerned about their students' ability to read informational texts, identify important points, and summarize the information presented. They were also concerned that students had to do this work in English (since studying a community-centered issue required using the language of the community, English, for the reading and data collection stages) and then develop their project in the school's respective language of French or Spanish. The following describes one activity that we employed to address the first issue, and our subsequent discussion will provide an account of what we learned about the second challenge.

To address the first issue of working effectively with primary sources, Professor Nick adapted a lesson from Hoyt (2003), seeking to provide students with a schema or internal dialogue that they could use when they encountered texts on their own. Specifically, we presented a paragraph of text and asked students to find the "most important word" in each sentence. Professor Nick instructed students to then use these words to write a summary of the whole text (see Appendix, Figure 2). One particular sentence, "The power of a crocodile is like that of a monstrous machine," elicited much discussion at SIES¹:

"So I think the most important word is monstrous. The author is trying to say that the crocodile is a monster," Janelle declared to the class.

"Okay," Professor Nick responded. "Tell me about why that is the most important word in that sentence."

At this prompt, Janelle paused, her eyes scanning the anchor chart². Several students glanced to the anchor chart and back to her as she considered the question. "Well," she finally said, "the author is trying to tell us that the animal isn't just any kind of animal. It's, you know, a monster."

"Okay," Professor Nick paused. "That is definitely one possibility. Does anyone else have any thoughts about the most important word in this sentence? Any other

alternatives?” The fifth graders were silent, their eyes scanning the anchor chart. “What about this word?” Professor Nick asked, pointing to the word ‘power.’ “When I read this sentence, power sticks out to me. Why might that be?”

“That’s what I was thinking too!” Antoinette gushed, after which Professor Nick asked her to explain her thinking.

“Well, I was thinking that the paragraph is about alligators”—“Crocodiles!” someone in the class corrected her—“crocodiles. The author probably doesn’t care as much that we know alligators, I mean crocodiles, are like monsters. I think they want us to know they are powerful, like monsters. Both crocodiles and monsters are powerful. That’s what I think.” She directed this last bit toward Janelle, twisting in her seat. Janelle looked to the anchor chart and nodded her head.

At this point, Antoinette had successfully delineated the kind of thinking that we were hoping to scaffold through this modeling activity: the complex dependence of words upon one another at the sentence level and the judgments involved in determining their importance. Professor Nick was careful to provide just enough scaffolding to elicit student thinking, as the important element was the attempt at—and explanation of—this strategy in use. It is important to note Professor Nick’s willingness to follow students’ thinking, even when it initially seemed incorrect. For instance, when Janelle offered up ‘monster’ as the most important word, it would have been easy to correct her seeing as the word in the sentence is ‘monstrous,’ an adjective. Professor Nick, however, thought that such a correction would shut down a potentially productive discussion and close avenues for exploring Janelle’s sense-making. In his rephrasing of Antoinette’s thinking, he drew attention to this construction, seeking to provide a space for discussion about language without reinforcing false understandings.

The interactive modeling of this cognitive strategy is an example of languaging, of a process whereby the classroom discussion becomes “a vehicle through which thinking is articulated and transformed into an artifactual form” (Swain, 2006, p. 97). Professor Nick and the students were invested in talking about how language comes together to make meaning and how the links between words can help us understand the importance of information as presented in texts. Additionally, the anchor chart itself became a valuable classroom artifact, referenced continually through our work together, even outside of the sessions with Professors Nick and Lisa.

If languaging is one pathway for mediating cognition, the anchor chart created with the students provided an ‘audit trail’ (Harste & Vasquez, 1998) of that very cognition. As the class discussed the paragraph, the anchor chart was marked to reflect the group’s thinking. For instance, our thoughts on that tricky sentence, “The power of a crocodile is like that of a monstrous machine,” is well represented, as we charted out how power is related both to the crocodile as well as the monstrous machine through the use of the word ‘like.’ The ability to see a physical reminder of this conversation anchored these kinds of conversations throughout the semester.

Significantly, in our dual-language context, students were first offered this opportunity to try out new ways of thinking about a text in English, rather than working through texts in the programs’ respective immersion languages. If we had completed this lesson in the immersion language initially, some students might have needed more time to decode what we were saying, as well as to make sense of the strategy that we were teaching them. By anchoring this strategy in the home language of most of the students, it is possible that they

were able to think more deeply about how to do the activity and, in turn, use the strategy more quickly on their own in English or the school immersion language. However, one-time exposure was not enough. That is, in this first example, although we see how students begin to understand textual meaning-making, we do not yet observe students developing this strategy into a skill, within a new context.

EXTENDING PRACTICE THROUGH COLLABORATIVE TENSION

One day, the classroom was filled with the sounds of talk as the fifth graders worked through an article about the potential shuttering of a local, independently owned grocery store. Since we knew that students' inquiry project was supposed to focus on some need or interest that they saw within their community, we specifically chose this local story. Like the assignment described earlier, we asked students to identify a single word in each sentence that contributed new knowledge to their understanding of the larger topic of the article. Having already worked through the whole-group example, this was the first opportunity for FIES students to try out this strategy on their own. In the following example, Mercedes, Daria, and Beth worked through the most important word in this sentence: "Last Monday Mr. H. and co-owner M. had made an unusual appeal to customers asking them for help to bail out the business from \$120,000 in debts resulting from a failed venture."

"No, no, listen," Beth argued, "if the customer wasn't in this sentence, it wouldn't matter if they [the owners of the grocery store] appealed. The word customers is most important!"

"Right," Daria responded, "but what's important is that there is an appeal. It doesn't really matter who it's to. Plus, we already had the word customers earlier in the article. It wasn't the important word there, so I don't think it's the important word now. It doesn't add anything new."

"I thought that, too," Beth replied, "but then I thought that they do have customers a second time. I think the writer is trying to tell us that it is important."

Mercedes paused, considering Beth's point before commenting, "But I think it's like the crocodile, when we didn't say that machine was the most important word because machines are powerful. It's like the appeal needs customers; they are just there."

"Professor Nick!" Beth waved her hand above her head. "So we can't agree on the most important word. Which is right?"

"Can you both argue for the reasons why the word you have chosen is the most important?" All three heads nod. "Then I think you are okay. You may find that you will want to revisit your keywords when you go to write your summary."

Within this lesson, students referred to their earlier work with the anchor chart. Mercedes' comment that the word 'customers' was like the word 'machine' in the crocodile text shows how she was transferring and developing literacy skills from one context to another: the act of languaging (talking explicitly about literacy strategies and then creating an artifact to record and further develop that thinking) supported her learning. Video of the classroom session shows Mercedes scanning the anchor chart just prior to making her declaration. The chart, as an artifact of learning, allowed Mercedes to access the previous discussion and transfer that learning to the present situation. Again, students worked in English, which may have helped them to develop habits of mind in using this strategy. One even commented,

“This is much easier in English,” though similar patterns of thought were evident in her final presentation, when she used the target language of the school.

FROM PRACTICE TO PRÁCTICA/PRATIQUÉ?

The overarching goal of our lessons was to support students’ abilities to pursue individual inquiries in English, and develop skills that would prove useful as they developed their projects in their school’s immersion language of French or Spanish. In other words, we helped them to develop research and inquiry *skills* through languaging about literacy *strategies* in English. It is important to note that we did not use Spanish or French as we practiced the strategies, a tension present during our time with the students, and one that is present in many foreign language immersion schools since they often separate languages. It is perhaps because of that strict separation—which students had experienced since they entered these schools—that we did not observe students drawing on their range of linguistic and cultural knowledge, to the extent that we saw how languaging supported students’ transfer of literacy strategies learned in one school context to skills applied in other contexts.

LANGUAGING

Through languaging, FIES and SIES students developed skills and applied them in a new context, sometimes in a different language. Specifically, in the weeks following the onset of our project, we received reports that our lessons had found their way into regular classroom practices. The Spanish and French classroom teachers utilized our techniques as students developed their inquiry projects. They asked for and referred to the anchor charts that we left with them. Students had moved toward automatically engaging in new literacy practices after explicit strategy instruction within a model of gradual release. Having developed their skills in English, students may have been able to dedicate more mental energy to language acquisition, meaning-making, and the creation of their inquiry project in Spanish or French. Future research in language immersion education will need to explore exactly when and how it’s useful to introduce topics in one language or the other, and how to reinforce new strategies across languages.

TRANSLANGUAGING?

While we saw students transferring literacy strategies and developing skills across contexts, we have few records of students making meaning using their entire linguistic repertoire, something we expected to witness in multilingual schools with multilingual students. In other words, we did not document spontaneous instances of what has been called *translanguaging* or *translingualism*. Following Gort and Sembiante (2015), translanguaging at school involves the “dynamic discursive exchanges in which teachers and students engage as they draw on and choose from multiple languages and language varieties” (p. 9), whereas translingualism has been defined as “the ability to merge different language resources in situated interactions for new meaning construction” (Canagarajah, 2013, pp. 1–2). We wondered if we did not witness the merging of different language resources because it was not a regular practice at the school to employ languaging about language (Swain, 2006)—e.g., drawing comparisons across languages or providing flexible opportunities to perform

activities in whatever language(s) a student preferred—given the strict separation of English from Spanish and French.

Similar to languaging, according to many authors (e.g., García & Sylvan, 2011; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Zapata & Laman, 2016), translanguaging is both something people do and a pedagogy. However, one main difference is that translanguaging is a practice whereby *bilinguals/multilinguals* draw from multiple linguistic and cultural resources to make meaning or express ideas. In addition, it has been proposed as a pedagogy mostly for use with students from minoritized groups (e.g., emerging bilingual children from immigrant families) to support their development in a political context in which English predominates (García & Sylvan, 2011). While individuals have applied the term in myriad ways, for our students, translanguaging and translanguaging could have included code-switching, translating, or brokering instances where they used their home language (for most of them, English), their school language (French or Spanish), and/or their other linguistic resources (e.g., British English, Bosnian) as we worked on the development of literacy strategies and, ultimately, their inquiry projects.

Despite the variety of linguistic resources in the classrooms, however, we rarely observed students demonstrating use of their multilingual abilities, even when asked to do so. For instance, during one lesson on using the Internet to search for information in English, Professor Lisa and the students at the FIES ran across the word ‘apprentice.’ Students did not know what it meant. Professor Lisa—knowing the Spanish word for ‘learn’ was ‘aprender’ and guessing that French had a similar word (which it does: ‘apprendre’)—asked them to think about a word in French that sounded or looked like apprentice, in order to help them make sense of the website that they were viewing. She waited. They did not make any connections until Professor Lisa gave them the Spanish word, ‘aprender’, and until she explicitly asked how to say ‘learn’ in French.

As we analyzed the experiences of languaging in these two fifth-grade one-way immersion classrooms, it struck us that our work with the students—only in English—as well as the network’s strict separation of languages, were not providing students with explicit translanguaging or translanguaging skills. In other words, while we introduced languaging about literacy strategies, we were rarely languaging about their multiple languages, or drawing upon them to make meaning. Little research, in fact, has examined whether and how translanguaging can be applied to one-way language immersion contexts like the SIES and FIES. Some have argued that while discussing new or complex ideas in English—as we did here—can be helpful, focusing too much on the dominant cultural language may detract from students’ development of the school language, such as French or Spanish (Ballinger, Lyster, Sterzuk, & Genesee, in press; Lyster, 2016). In future work, we plan to more explicitly examine spontaneous as well as structured translanguaging in the way that we documented and applied theories of languaging here. In so doing, we may further add to the field’s current conversations about whether and how to draw upon, and even *mix*, students’ languages to develop their understandings of text (Sayer, 2013).

CONCLUSION

To support the kinds of intellectual moves that FIES and SIES teachers wanted their students to do with text in the process of inquiry, we recognized how critical it was to apply theories of languaging and to build active entry points for students to make sense of the ways in which words work. We would argue that teachers in similar contexts should consider

how to systematically engage with students across contexts, and to support careful and thoughtful implementation of particular strategies, thus providing new skills for inquiry and literacy through language.

NOTES

¹ Given our intent to speak to a wide audience of teachers and researchers, and given that we are not completing micro-level discourse analyses, we do not use technical or traditional modes of transcription here (i.e., as recommended by Ochs, 1979). Instead, we work with a tradition accepted in journals like *Language Arts* and transcribe the experience using a more narrative, “engaging and accessible” format.

² Anchor charts are an instructional tool utilized to make thinking visible during the learning process. Collaboratively, teacher and students work through content, strategies, cues, and guidelines involved in new learning, creating a physical artifact or anchor that can be referred back to as students refine, expand, and adapt ways of thinking.

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APPENDIX



Figure 1. SIES student explains his inquiry project to younger students.

Summarizing

When doing research, researchers need to identify the main points of a resource in a brief statement.

Resource	Key Words
<p>The <u>power</u> of a crocodile is like that of a monstrous machine. With one <u>lunge</u> it can <u>destroy</u> its prey and <u>protect</u> the kill from other predators. Its powerful tail propels it forward at an enormous <u>speed</u>, allowing it to surprise the animal it is stalking. As the huge jaws clamp down and snare the animal, the crocodile buries its head <u>underwater</u>. This action drowns the prey and removes the kill from the view of other <u>predators</u>. In one swift, powerful lunge, the crocodile both <u>kills</u> and <u>protects</u> its dinner.</p>	<p>power ✓ (destroy, protect) speed ✓ underwater ✓ predators ✓ (kills, protects)</p>
<p>Summary: A crocodile's power and speed allow them to kill and protect their prey underwater and protect it prey from predators.</p>	

Figure 2. Lesson on summarizing key points from an informational text.