

Effective Instruction for English Language Learners

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Introduction

Effective Instruction for English Language Learners

In California today, one out of four students does not have English as his/her first language. They may know some English, but they are not proficient enough to understand what is going on in a regular classroom without assistance. The challenge posed by these 1.5 million students is immense and cannot be ignored. Today's students have the best opportunity to become tomorrow's productive citizens when they have the ability to function in a society and economy that requires accurate and clear communication in English.

Unfortunately, the best approaches to meeting the needs of English learners are rarely considered in a pure atmosphere of cause and effect, input and outcome, and theory and reality. Instead, ideology, politics and emotions often take the place of reasoned dialogue about what works best.

Learning English and becoming proficient enough to communicate successfully in a demanding world is a complex undertaking. Figuring out how to help students achieve that state is no less complex. But it is a necessary assignment that should be approached with the same dispassionate, academic rigor that any other educational challenge requires. When we start from the question "what is effective," then we have the best opportunity to build strategies and programs that will work.

November 16, 1998 Seminar

On November 16, 1998, the California Education Policy Seminar and the California State University Institute for Education Reform sponsored a seminar on "Effective Instruction for English Language Learners." Attending the session were 43 educators, state policy makers, school officials, education researchers and others, including the chair of the Senate Education Committee.

The seminar included four presentations from experts representing both research and classroom perspectives. One focused on experiences in Canada with a highly structured approach to learning English. Another covered a university perspective of what happens when English learners who are products of California's K-12 system enter higher levels of education. Two others emphasized the diverse needs of English learners and the importance of improving teacher preparation so those needs can be adequately addressed in the classroom. Throughout the seminar, presenters were asked questions and voiced their opinions about what constitutes effective instruction for English learners and how California can achieve effective instruction.

This report documents the proceedings at the seminar. Throughout this report, comments made by individuals are summarized without quotation. All text should be regarded as paraphrasing and/or synthesizing what was actually said, and not as direct quotes attributable to the presenters or other participants.

Presentation of Linda Siegel

Dr. Linda Siegel is a professor of educational psychology and special education at the University of British Columbia. She does research on reading, learning disabilities, early detection of learning disabilities and learning English as a second language.

The Canadian Experience

The first thing a California audience may ask is why is another country's experience with teaching non-English-speaking children relevant? The answer lies in the similar challenges that Canada and California face. In Toronto and Vancouver school systems, almost 60 percent of the children do not speak English as their first language. About half of those children are born in Canada, but they have grown up speaking another language at home and they enter kindergarten at age 5 with no or very little English.

In Vancouver, the children come to school with one of more than 140 languages. The predominant is Chinese – mainly Cantonese. The second is Punjabi and other languages from the Indian subcontinent, and the third is Vietnamese. The fourth most common language is Spanish.

These children come to school knowing virtually no English – and at age 5 they are immersed in English. All instruction is in English. Many of their classmates speak English. Their teachers teach in English. All of the school materials are in English.

To give an idea of the objective of the Canadian approach, we can look at two separate lists of words (see Chart 1). Learners can memorize a list of words like “the” and “sit,” learn how to say them and know what they stand for. But if the list has words like anacampersote, mithridatism, qualtagh, ucalegon and groak, they are unlikely to know how to pronounce them unless they have been taught to decode. With decoding skills, they can begin to break the words into pieces, using sounds that they know are connected with letters and groups of letters.

Chart 1

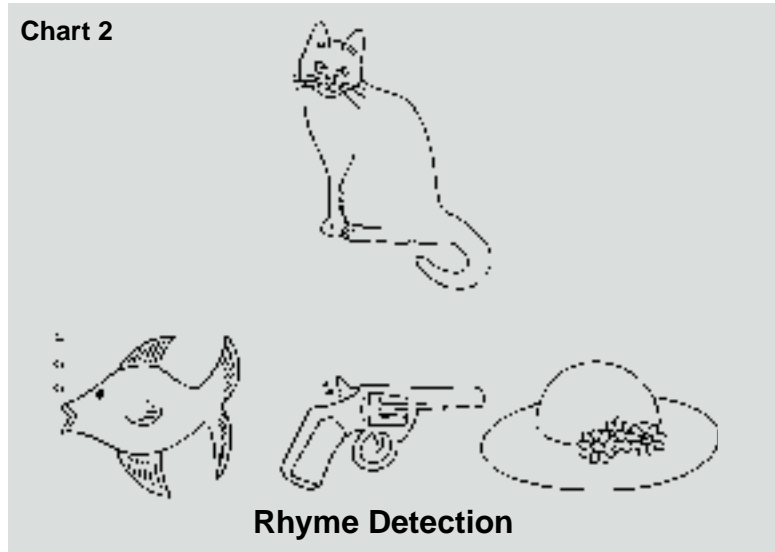
the	anacampersote
and	mithridatism
sit	qualtagh
when	ucalegon
book	groak

Phonological Awareness

The approach you use when you encounter words that are new to you is a phonological approach. This set of skills develops gradually in young children and it must be taught systematically. It is not the only skill that needs to be taught, but it is the solid foundation for language and reading development. The Phonological Awareness Training used in some Vancouver schools prescribes a sequence of skills that children need to develop to learn how to read. These include:

- ✓ **Units of Sound:** hearing the different sounds that make up a word
- ✓ **Tapping:** using rhythm to determine how many sounds are in a word
- ✓ **Rhyme:** finding words with similar ending sounds
- ✓ **Segmentation into Syllables:** breaking words into different parts
- ✓ **Onset and Rime:** focusing on initial sounds (onset) and ending sounds (rime)
- ✓ **Segmentation into Phonemes:** dividing words into different sounds
- ✓ **Discrimination:** learning to distinguish among similar sounds, like “da” and “ba”
- ✓ **Blending Phonemes:** combining individual sounds smoothly to make words
- ✓ **Pronunciation:** letters are attached to sounds; begin reading

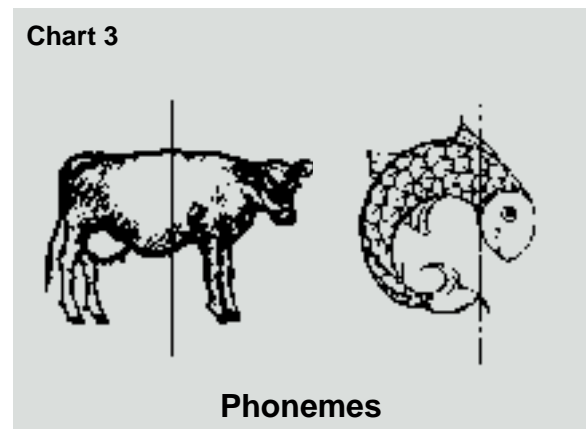
Charts 2 and 3 show some of the activities that are built around these concepts. For instance to work on rhyme detection, children may be shown a picture of a cat and be asked to look at a fish, gun and hat to determine what word cat rhymes with (Chart 2). If they select fish, the teacher may respond, “No, a cat may eat a fish, but cat does not rhyme with fish. Try again.” The segmentation activity divides words into the number of sounds they contain: k-ow or two for cow, f-i-sh or three for fish (Chart 3).



A Variety of Tools

Phonological skills are not all that we emphasize in the classroom.

The children learn phonics, they develop reading and grammar skills, and they work on building vocabulary. They learn the association between words and pictures, and we discuss different categories of words, like the connections between bus, car and train. To reinforce skills, they play matching games and read stories that have a combination of words and pictures. Literacy teaching, syntax – there are many activities in which the teachers engage the children. But after the age of 6 or 7, most of the new words we learn, we learn by reading – so being able to sound out words with phonological skills is very important.



The Canadian approach is different if the children are older when they enter the school system. For instance, eighth and ninth graders spend as many months as necessary in an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom to reach a level of English fluency to move into the main classrooms.

The problem in ESL classes is that the students don't have the rich modeling that is present in the mainstream classroom. They don't speak English and they are surrounded by other students who don't speak English, with only the teacher as a model. It makes it very difficult to learn the language, so we try to move them out of ESL as soon as possible. They may get some ESL help, but they are taught in English in all subjects once they leave the ESL environment.

We find that in a mainstream classroom, where children may come from backgrounds with 15 different languages, English very quickly becomes the means of social interaction. Most classes are no more than 50 percent non-English speakers. Even after just a few weeks, there is a surprising amount of interaction – English simply takes over.

The Results

What we find when we test entering kindergartners is not surprising. For example, the children who speak English are much better at rhyme detection than those who do not speak English (see Chart 4).

However, by the beginning of first grade, second-language children catch up – and this is true of virtually all of the skills we teach. The non-English speakers start at a disadvantage, but they catch up by the end of the school year.

To look at comprehension, we test language processing and memory, among other aspects of reading ability. In these areas, we find that it takes about 18 months to catch up.

Discussion: Canadian Experience

Q Are there aides in the classroom who assist the teacher, using the children's native language?

A No, everything is done in English. It wouldn't really be possible to have aides in all the needed languages when classes often have a dozen or more languages represented. And if you start at this young age, it doesn't seem to be necessary. We train teachers to be aware of the distinctive features of different language structures – such as Chinese languages having no articles, no verb tenses and no plurals. But the teaching and the classroom interaction are entirely in English.

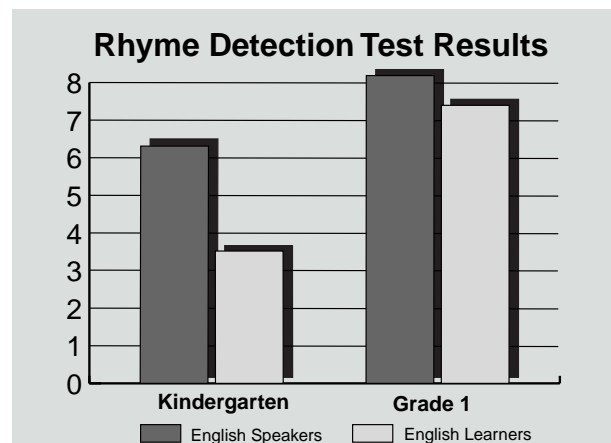
Q Does Canada require special teaching credentials for teachers who are assigned to classrooms with non-English speakers?

A No. Some of these teachers are trained as ESL teachers. Teacher preparation does include some ESL competencies. However, special credentials are not required.

Q Once children turn 12 or 13, don't they have difficulty learning a language?

A Yes, younger children learn by sound but older children lose the ability to quickly absorb a new language. But older children have better analytical skills for absorbing grammar and building vocabulary. So we have to use different materials and a different approach. The phonological approach is really for children up to second or third grade.

Chart 4



So by the middle of first grade, the children who began as non-English speakers are performing on level with their English-speaking peers across the board on both skills and comprehension – and that level is at about the 50-60th percentile based on U.S. norms. This is true for 90 percent of the children.

Whenever possible, we evaluate children in both their native language and English to determine where any difficulties may lie. When we look at the 10 percent who are not performing as well and we test them in their native languages, we find that the problems they are having are also apparent in their native languages. In other words, their problem is not related to the fact that they are learning English.

Conclusion

Just as in California, non-English-speaking students are a large and growing population. In 1988, schools in Richmond, a part of the greater Vancouver area, had about 120 non-English-speaking children. By 1997-98, the number had grown to 11,000. In most cases, these are children in low socio-economic situations. They may be living in small crowded apartments, they don't have cars, they don't understand what they see on television and they may be fairly isolated.

This is a challenge many teachers feel they have not been prepared to address. So we have really emphasized teacher preparation that focuses on how children learn to read. We haven't done everything that we would like to, but we are making progress.

The results demonstrate that multiple techniques that emphasize both phonological exercises and comprehension is very successful. With 90 percent of young children performing equally with their English-speaking peers within 18 months, the approach clearly works.

More Discussion

Q With the English immersion approach, do children lose their primary language?

A In Canada, we believe that what we call the heritage language should be preserved and there is an explicit government policy of multi-culturalism. The government funds after-school and Saturday classes that cover language and culture. About 50 or 60 percent of the English learners participate in these classes. And what we find is that their English proficiency is not affected when their first language is preserved. In fact, testing shows that children who have two languages at their command score higher on some standardized testing.

Q What about your dropout rates for students who enter school as non-English speakers?

A We don't have good statistics on the dropout rates in general. But it appears to be between 8 and 12 percent – and that applies to both English-speaking and non-English-speaking students. The major problem appears to be adolescents with learning disabilities who do not get enough help. English being a second language is not a major factor.

Q What are the long-term results for children who are immersed in English?

A As far as we can tell, their progression is at the same rate as their native-English-speaking peers and there is no difference in dropout rates. The children that we have studied have now been tracked through the fourth grade. Ninety percent are doing just as well as their peers, and many are maintaining their first languages.

Presentation of Robin Scarcella

Dr. Robin Scarcella is an associate professor in the School of Humanities at the University of California, Irvine, where she teaches courses in applied linguistics and directs the English as a Second Language program. She has published widely in international and national journals. In addition, she has taught English language learners in California elementary schools, junior high schools and high schools. Her research interests include age differences in second language development, academic English language development and the role of error correction in second language instruction.

A University Perspective

Sixty-five percent of the students at the University of California, Irvine, are born outside of the United States and speak a language other than English. They come to UC Irvine as students graduating in the top 12 percent of all high school students. Many have lived in the United States for years and are products of K-12 schools' approach to addressing the needs of English language learners. By and large, their English is troubling.

A letter from a student who we will call Van indicates the level of problems (see Chart 5). She graduated from high school with a 3.8 grade point average – and she is not an anomaly at UC Irvine. The English language learners at UC Irvine have lived in the United States an average of 11 years. Almost all are Asian: 35% speak Chinese, 30% Vietnamese and 25% Korean, with only 2% Spanish and 8% other. Many need remedial English.

UC Irvine attracts science students, highly analytical people who are eager to do well. They arrive at the university level with A's in Advanced Placement English courses and verbal scores of 400 to 500 on their SATs. They are very bright and very accomplished test takers – but their English is not good. It takes a lot of persistence to teach grammar – and many say they have never received any corrections from their teachers on their writing.

Common Errors

There are several kinds of errors that are common throughout the work of these university students:

Chart 5

Letter from a Student

Dear Mrs. Robbin

I really not need humanity 20 writing class because since time I come to United State all my friend speak english. Until now everyone understand me and I dont' need study english. I don't know vietnam language. I speak only english. I have no communication problem with my friend in dorm. My english teacher in high school key person to teach me. My teacher explain to me that how important the book was for the student and persuaded me read many book. I get A in English through out high school and I never take ESL. I gree that some student need class but you has not made a correct decision put me in english class. Please do not makes me lose the face. I have confident in english.

Van

- **Verb forms** – often the correct word but confusion about time reference. “I study English since 1986.”
- **Prepositions** – often absent or used incorrectly. “He discriminate me.”
- **Articles** – often absent or used incorrectly. “On first day school, I get loss.”
- **Non-count nouns** – often used as count nouns. “I read the informa-tions.”
- **Modal auxiliaries** – sometimes used incorrectly. “He can studies with me tonight.”
- **Causative structures** – sometimes used incorrectly or avoided. “She make me to study hard.”
- **Inappropriate word choices** – Mixing of idioms, slang, etc., with formal language. “This guy was on a machine like 10 or 13 years with no consciousness before he died.”
- **Acoustic approximations** – “Firstable, this essay talk about leaders.”
- **Inappropriate use of sophisticated (SAT) words** – Many of these students memorize words for the SAT tests – and then use them where no one else would. “Her ubiquitous perfume smell rancid.”
- **Analysis of fixed expressions** – If they know one idiom (on the one hand), they may presume they know one that parallels it. “On another hand, he like her a lot.”

Discussion: University Perspective

Q What can be done to better prepare teachers to meet the challenge of English learners?

A Not enough effort is being put into preparing teachers linguistically. In the 80s there was a shift to serving the psychological needs of students rather than the linguistic needs – and we need to bring that back into better balance. Teachers need to know that if they are going to use collaborative learning methods, then students like Van need to be in groups with English speakers so they can get good feedback – not feedback that reinforces their errors. It’s not enough for students to write in interactive journals unless they get critical input from someone who knows more about English than they do. We’ve seen the misapplication of whole language, of process writing and other techniques. We have to reassure teachers that correction is extremely important – students need to understand what they have done wrong so they can change.

Q Aren’t English-speaking students having many of the same problems because of an across-the-board failure to teach English well?

A Yes, in many cases native speakers are faring just as poorly and the rate of remedial courses for them is also high. Whether it is a good use of university resources to teach students topics they should have learned in elementary school is a policy issue. But the fact is that these students are arriving at the university level needing this kind of help – so we have a responsibility to see that they get it.

The cost to the university system of addressing these kinds of problems is enormous. For Van to acquire the university-level, standard English that she needs, she will need to take three ESL writing courses, an ESL grammar course, a remedial freshman composition course, two additional lower-division writing courses and

one upper-division writing course. In addition, she will need monthly tutorials. These courses and extra assistance will emphasize intensive reading, where she is taught to read analytically and not just guess at meaning. She will also be required to write extensively and will receive corrective feedback in small-group sessions and one-on-one tutorials. She will be instructed in grammar, receive counseling to help her adjust to the need for improving her English and will be assured of consistent, ongoing feedback on how she is doing.

Looking at Solutions

While the cost is high, we can address the problems at the university level. But if these are the common errors being made by bright students who are entering our universities, it is frightening to think how much worse it must be for the many students who drop out or just barely complete high school. Why is this happening and what do we need to do about it? Chart 6 highlights the emphases during the 80s and what we need to do today to change the balance of how we teach children to speak English.

Chart 6

Improving English Instruction		
Area	1980s Emphasis	Emphasis Needed
Instruction on English features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • de-emphasizing linguistic features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focusing on features of the English language
Input (hearing English)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing exposure to conversational English • exposing students to simplified input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing students with exposure to academic English • exposing students to challenging academic input
Output (using English)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not having students use input received • Involving students in interactions with other English learners (cooperative learning) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assuring that students use the input in their speech and writing • providing interactions with native English speakers
Instructional Techniques and Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extensive reading (quantity) • reading for gist instead of language forms • encouraging guessing • using fluency-building writing activities • using interactive activities that focus on group work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intensive reading (quality) • getting students to pay attention to language forms • encouraging dictionary use • using accuracy-building writing activities • using activities that focus on individual work
Corrective Feedback and Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hands-off approach to correction • assessing informally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • correcting student errors • assessing students objectively
Consistency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tailoring programs to specific needs of particular schools and students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing increased consistency across English language programs

As the chart on the previous page indicates, during the 1980s linguistic features were de-emphasized, students were exposed mostly to conversational English, they had a lot of interaction with other non-English-speaking students and they were encouraged to read for meaning rather than for use of language. Error correction was avoided as too discouraging. And programs were tailored for specific students and schools – so as this highly transient population moved from school to school, students were shuttled from one programmatic approach to another.

Today it is becoming clearer that we must focus on the features of the English language. Students need to be exposed to academic English and they need to have frequent interaction with native English speakers who they can use as models. They should be encouraged to observe the use of language as they read and be required to be accurate in their writing. Errors should be corrected, so they can learn and improve. And consistency should be established across programs so that when an English learner leaves one school and enters another, it does not disrupt their progress.

Conclusion

To summarize, during the 80s we thought these children just needed input and that they would learn English naturally – they didn't need rules. But we have had to re-examine this instructional practice in the light of the results. Today, we know that they need grammar, they need to know how to use dictionaries, they need explicit instruction on idioms and they need correction.

The resources necessary to change how we address English learners at the elementary and secondary level are great. If we demand excellence, we need to pay for it. Teachers cannot address the needs with enough intensity (corrective feedback) when they have 160 students, as many high school teachers do. The teachers need more training and they need more preparation time. Just because they speak English doesn't mean they know how to teach it. They have to know when to correct, how to correct and what they can expect from students of different proficiency levels with different language backgrounds.

In the end, the goal we are striving for is preparing students for a productive life. The English learners who enter UC Irvine are brilliant. But in today's workplace, it is not enough to be brilliant. People have to be able to convey their ideas clearly and with accuracy. They have to balance analytical thinking skills with accurate communication skills. What we see at the university level today tells us that we are falling short of our goal.

Presentation of Terrence Wiley

Dr. Terrence G. Wiley is Distinguished Professor of Education and Linguistics at California State University, Long Beach, where he is also an invited faculty affiliate for the Center for Language Minority Education & Research, the Department of Asian & Asian American Studies, and the Department of Chicano & Latino Studies. Wiley has published widely and currently serves on the editorial boards of several major journals.

Literacy: No One-Size-Fits-All Solution

The range of issues that are being raised in this seminar demonstrates how complex the issue of literacy is. One can look at these problems from many directions, as we are doing today, but two very important points are that 1) we need to understand the language diversity in California and 2) we need to understand what the education system has to do to address the needs of all students.

For example, the University of California, Irvine, is atypical of California's English learner population, with its disproportionate Asian population and high socio-economic level. But the fact that there is a mix of languages and ethnicity there is not surprising. California is actually more reflective of the world as a whole than the rest of the nation.

Furthermore, it should not be surprising that students are having trouble with English – it's a problem with long, historical roots. In 1890, a national commission was formed to examine the "crisis" in English among students admitted to universities. The concern then was chiefly centered on English-speaking students. And today many of the problems cited at UC Irvine for English learners also occur in many freshman composition classes that are full of native-English speakers – such as inappropriate use of language, writing that reflects informal, oral usage and other non-standard usages.

Natural vs. Structured

It is clear, however, that the growing numbers of English learners pose a challenge in California that needs to be addressed. The argument about how best to do that comes down to a natural approach versus a structured approach – and the primary difference is on how much attention is paid to grammar. The important conclusion that we should be reaching is that different approaches for teaching English learners have different purposes. There is an inclination for people to jump on the bandwagon of an approach that works to meet a specific need – but then the approach is misapplied or used in situations for which it was never suited.

For example, communicative approaches – such as communicative language teaching and the natural approach – focus on interpersonal communicative language proficiency for social interaction, not for grammatical accuracy. They stress functional abilities (that is, what we can do with a language, not what we know about a language). And they are designed for functional literacy in basic, real-world contexts.

These approaches are appropriate for students who need to use the language for social communication where communicative competence is more important than grammatical accuracy. They are less appropriate when students need to demonstrate explicit mastery of grammar, as in the case of academic writing.

Barriers

The barriers that California faces in building an effective system to help English learners are multiple, and they are not just a matter of different philosophies:

- Teachers don't have enough background on the students and about their specific language needs. Teachers simply aren't trained intensively enough to be able to coach English learners adequately. They are trained well enough to help these students function, but not enough to teach them accuracy.
- Teachers don't have enough time and have too many students to do an adequate job of teaching English, reading and literacy.
- Most teachers don't see themselves as teachers of writing. We need to send a more consistent message to teachers of all subjects that everyone should be teaching writing, whether their subject is English, math or science.

Dr. Spiegel said that phonics is important. But simply using and knowing phonics are not enough to assure literacy. The Learning First Alliance, a coalition of national education organizations, has concluded that you need both phonics and exposure to rich literature. The National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences says that because reading is such a complex and multifaceted activity, no single method of teaching it is the answer. And Catherine Snow, Harvard professor and chair of the National Academy of Sciences reading research team, has named three factors as the most important opportunities that children should be given when they are learning to read:

- Learn the alphabetic principle
- Read for meaning
- Practice reading often to develop fluency

The Dispute Over Time

Q One dispute in this field is how long it takes students to become proficient in English. One speaker says a year to 18 months; another says five to seven years. Is the difference attributable to the degree of proficiency? If you are measuring the performance of kindergartners and first graders, does "academic" proficiency vs. oral fluency have any real meaning?

A Dr. Linda Siegel: We don't see the data to back up Jim Cummins' estimates of five to seven years. Certainly we are measuring oral proficiency since we are testing syntax, memory and other aspects. But we are also measuring academic proficiency when we test on reading skills, comprehension, spelling skills and vocabulary definitions.

It is not enough to teach students to crack the alphabetic code. And in many cases, teaching phonetics becomes a lesson in pronunciation (often accented with the teacher's dialect) rather than a lesson in comprehension or fluency. We also should remember that an English-speaking child who is learning to read has only one task: decoding letters and sounds, usually with familiar words. English learners have two tasks: decoding letters and sounds, and learning a word and meaning that they have never heard before.

One of the important questions that divide people in this field is how long it takes to reach English proficiency. While Dr. Spiegel indicates a short time span is sufficient, the work of Jim Cummins and others indicates that it takes two years to reach grade-level, conversational proficiency and five to seven years – or longer – to reach academic proficiency.

Conclusion

As we design programs, we need to look at a variety of factors that can make them more effective. Cummins has said that access to interaction with English speakers has substantial impact on the ability of students to acquire English and build a sense of belonging to the English-speaking society. So the proportionate balance of English speakers and English learners at a school should be considered, as well as the relative status of the students and the nature and quality of interaction opportunities.

There are some key concepts that classroom teachers need to know and use to improve instruction for English learners. They include understanding the student's abilities and background, building on a student's prior knowledge, encouraging frequent and wide-ranging reading, and engaging both students and parents in the evaluation process.

It is important to keep several cautionary suggestions in mind whenever we evaluate what works:

- We can't compare California to Idaho. We need to compare our schools with those who face similar challenges and we need to examine student profiles to try to determine where success or failure is coming from.
- We should be wary of generalizing too much from one small study of one group to all groups.
- We also should be wary of labels applied to students until we know a lot about the student's background.
- We should not assume that what goes on in any given classroom corresponds to any identifiable method of literacy instruction. The corollary is that we should not assume that a practitioner's stated literacy philosophy necessarily corresponds to the actual instructional practice used.
- And we should not decide that a method of instruction has failed when test scores are low. It may never have been fully or properly implemented. Or there may be many factors working against the prescribed method, such as the quality and training of the teachers.

Presentation of Magaly Lavadenz

Dr. Magaly Lavadenz is professor of Education and Coordinator of Bilingual/Bicultural and TESL/Multicultural Education at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Her current research activities include bilingual teacher preparation, teacher action research and biliteracy, public policy affecting language use and education for language minority students, and equitable assessment practices for language minority students.

Focus on Teacher Preparation

To improve the success rate in helping language minority students learn English, we need to focus on teacher preparation and what teachers need to know to be effective in addressing the challenges involved with these students. There are several key elements of high-quality literacy instruction for English learners:

- **Initial assessment.** Teachers need to know who the students are, what their background is and what their level of literacy is. Teachers need to perform an initial assessment of the students' current English language proficiency level.
- **Targeted instruction.** Instruction needs to be designed around the specific proficiency level of the student and knowledge about how English language development is achieved. Teachers need to know the indicators of literacy content and performance achievement.
- **Repertoire of methods.** Teachers need strategic knowledge about the vast repertoire of literacy instructional methods and approaches – and knowledge about which of those are appropriate for students from different backgrounds and with different levels of proficiency.
- **Language-specific strategies.** Teachers need skills that will allow them to identify the potential interference between the first language and English – and then to address those problems systematically.
- **Importance of context.** Literacy instruction can proceed in parallel with oral English instruction. High levels of literacy in the first language is an excellent predictor of literacy success in English. Prior research that called for developing oral proficiency first, then reading and writing, was conducted with adults. We now know that literacy instruction for children can begin at the same time as instruction in language proficiency, given appropriate and parallel development of oral/verbal English.
- **Language proximity to English.** Learning to read in English is related to the linguistic proximity between the first language and English. For example, non-Romance or non-alphabetic languages are far removed from English. Effective literacy instruction requires accounting for the differences.

Teacher preparation should be designed to cover these areas – and not just preparation for teachers who specialize in helping English learners. In California, all teachers are likely to have some English learners in their classroom at some point in time. To help all teachers meet the needs of these students, both pre-service and in-service programs should include the competencies identified in the CLAD and BCLAD credential and certification programs.

Elementary and Secondary Levels

In particular, elementary teacher preparation should include a balanced, research-based approach to literacy instruction. Teachers need to learn how to help English learners apply specific reading strategies that are suitable for a variety of texts. In addition, secondary, single-subject teacher preparation should include knowledge about the development of English for academic purposes. High school teachers need to know how to help students in content area classes improve their English writing skills.

In addition, all teachers need to understand the importance of the cultural, socio-economic and linguistic diversity (including diversity in the exposure to English language varieties) that is present in communities where they are teaching. This contextualized knowledge will assist them in designing appropriate instructional activities that address grouping, curriculum and assessment practices in ways that are more aligned with the specific needs of the students in their classrooms.

Accountability

Finally, in addition to better preparing teachers, we need to do a better job of measuring the outcomes. There is a need for the systematic collection of reliable and disaggregated data. This will help us understand what types of instructional programs students are participating in and relate those programs to academic achievement levels. We need to systematically evaluate teacher preparation programs to determine the extent to which strategies and competencies are integrated into teaching methodology courses, rather than solely relegated to self-standing, pre-requisite courses. A major focus must be the allocation of sufficient resources based on community and school needs to equalize access to literacy resources across all California communities.

Perhaps most importantly, we need to examine the convergence of language policies and education policies in California. Population projections tell us that the future of the state is multilingual. We need to merge our language and education policies to reflect that reality.

Conclusion

Today's seminar speakers come to the challenge of addressing the needs of English learners from different philosophies. Those different approaches echo the political debate and ballot initiatives that California has seen in recent years on this issue. At the far extremes of the debate are those who argue for a highly structured, systematic approach and those who favor a natural, rich-input approach.

What we have heard today, however, indicates several areas of agreement despite the different approaches:

- Building phonological and other basic alphabetic decoding skills are an important component of teaching English, reading and literacy. However, they are not the sole answer, especially for older ESL students. We need to understand the difference between younger and older students and provide instructional approaches that align with the developmental stages of the students.
- Adequate resources are essential. Teachers need better training and more time to work with English language learners.
- Teachers need solid instruction in linguistics and literacy so they will have all the tools necessary to teach children to read.
- Looking at the experience of those facing similar problems outside of California is important. While we have much to learn from Canada's use of a structured approach in classroom settings, we also can gain insight from that country's policy of supporting heritage languages as a way of recognizing the richness gained from a multicultural society.

Effective Instruction for English Language Learners

November 16, 1998 • Attendees

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