

Summary of Research Findings on English Language Learners Working Document

This document highlights key research findings related to young English Language Learners. Please note that it is not meant to reflect an exhaustive review of the research literature, but rather to provide a sampling of studies across a range of topics related to English Language Learners. Given the scope of the literature, a separate review could be conducted for each of these topics (e.g., achievement, second language acquisition, preschool benefits for ELLs, family involvement, etc.).

Demographics

- Currently, Hispanic/Latino children are the largest group of three to five year olds (46 percent) in California, followed by White children (34 percent) then Asian and Pacific Islander children (nine percent), then African American children (six percent) (Lopez & de Cos, 2004).
- Of the estimated 1.1 million children in California who are 3- to 5-years-old and not yet in kindergarten, about 39 percent would most likely be designated as English Language Learners (Children Now, 2004).
- Approximately one in two has at least one parent who is non-native to this county (Children Now, 2004).

Achievement Gap

- Analyzing a sub-sample of California students from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study of the Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K) dataset, researchers found that “Latino students begin kindergarten at a considerable educational disadvantage [as measured by differences in average test scores in reading and in math] relative to White students and the disadvantage increases during the first two years of school. (Rumberger & Anguiano, 2004).
- “Throughout the U.S., the academic achievement levels, high school completion rates, and college attendance rates of English Language Learners remain markedly below that of their White, English-speaking peers. There is a growing and convincing body of research that well-designed and carefully implemented early intervention programs that are culturally and linguistically responsive can improve the educational achievement of children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and help to reduce this achievement gap before kindergarten (Barnett, 1995; Gormley & Phillips, 2003; Winsler, Diaz, Espinosa, & Rodriguez, 1999).” (as cited by Espinosa, 2006, Draft).
- The loss of home language has been associated with poor long-term academic outcomes. (Slavin & Cheung, 2003; Oller & Eilers, 2002).

- “Children [who] were made to feel that it was necessary to reject the home culture in order to belong to the majority culture often ended up unable to identify fully with either cultural group.” (Cummins, 1981).

Second Language Acquisition

- It is typical for children acquiring two languages simultaneously to mix the languages while speaking (McLaughlin, Blanchard, & Osanai, 1995)
- The process of acquiring two languages promotes higher cognitive and social levels of understanding (Cummins, 1979; Hakuta & Garcia, 1989; and McLaughlin, 1984).
- Supporting children’s first language and culture helps them gain self-confidence and positive attitudes towards school (Freeman & Freeman, 1994). When schools value children’s home language and culture, second-language learners more often succeed in school (Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990)
- As children acquire a second language, one language may dominate because they are using that language more than the other at a particular point in time. Frequently children demonstrate a language imbalance as they progress toward bilingualism. During this time, children may not perform as well as native speakers in either language. This is a normal and most often temporary phase of emergent bilingualism (Genesse, Raradis, & Crago, 2004).

ELLs and Preschool Benefits

- Preschool can help English Language Learners increase their English and first language proficiency, and enhance their cognitive, social and emotional development, all of which foster school success (Collins & Ribeiro, 2004).
- “Young children who have regular and rich exposure to two languages during the early childhood years can successfully become bilingual. Most research concludes that there are no negative effects of bilingualism on the linguistic, cognitive or social development of children, and there may even be some general advantages in these areas of development (Genesse et al., 2004)” (Espinosa, 2006, Draft).
- In a study of 100 Spanish-speaking Head Start children learning English, researchers found that “results suggest strengthening the language and metalinguistic skills of these children in their first language as a tool for later acquiring English literacy skills.” (López & Greenfield, 2004).

Family Involvement

As cited in The Importance of Family Engagement, A Preschool Issue Brief, Children Now, December 2004:

- Research shows the value of a family-centered approach in which families' needs and strengths form the basis for strategies that families co-create with programs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Child Care Bureau, 2004).
- Analysis of the 2000 cohort of the Head Start FACES study indicated that children with parents who were more involved in the preschool program scored higher on vocabulary, book knowledge, early writing, early math, and letter identification tasks. (Zill, Resnick, Kim, O'Donnell, & Sorongon, 2003).
- Benefits of family involvement for English Language Learner children include maintenance of native language and culture, and high expectations. (Nieto, 1992).

Studies of ELL Instructional Models

- **Prop 227.** The American Institutes for Research and WestEd conducted a five-year study of the effects of the implementation of Proposition 227 on the education of English language learners, K-12 (Parrish et al., 2006):
 - Since the passage of Proposition 227, students across all language classifications in all grades have experienced performance gains on the SAT-9 and CST. However, since Proposition 227 was implemented alongside other reforms in a climate of increased accountability, it is not possible to attribute these gains to any one factor. While there has been a slight decrease in the performance gap between ELs and native English speakers, it has remained virtually constant in most subject areas for most grades." (p. viii)
 - Several analyses of differences in EL performance by instructional model were conducted using available data. Across all analyses, little to no evidence of differences in EL performance by model of instruction was found." (p. ix).
 - While findings suggest that there is no one path to academic excellence among ELs, administrators tended to pinpoint a few key features leading to success. School principals identified the following as most critical:
 - 1) staff capacity to address EL needs;
 - 2) schoolwide focus on English Language Development and standards-based instruction;
 - 3) shared priorities and expectations in regard to educating ELs; and
 - 4) systematic, ongoing assessment and data-driven decision-making.

- **Comparison of a dual language preschool program and monolingual English immersion preschool program.** The National Institute for Early Education Research conducted an experimental study of two preschool programs (Barnett, Yaroaz, Thomas, & Blanco, 2006, p. 2).
 - “An experimental study was conducted comparing the effects of a dual language or two-way immersion (TWI) and monolingual English immersion (EI) preschool program on children’s learning. Three and four-year-old children were randomly assigned by lottery to either a newly established TWI Spanish/English (n=85) program or a monolingual English (n=65) program in the same district. Children in the study were from both Spanish and English home language backgrounds. All classrooms in the study used the High/Scope curriculum. The TWI program alternated between English and Spanish weekly by rotating children between two classrooms (and teachers) each week. Programs were compared on measures of children’s growth in language, emergent literacy, and mathematics.”
 - “Among the native Spanish speakers, the TWI program produced large and significantly significant gains in Spanish vocabulary compared to the EI program. Results were somewhat more mixed on measures of literacy skills. Children in the TWI program made greater phonological awareness gains in both English (all children) and Spanish (comparison included native Spanish speakers only), while in the EI program native Spanish speakers made greater gains on letter recognition in Spanish (although the difference was modest – 11 versus 8 letters). The TWI program did not require additional expenditures.”
 - “On balance, preschool TWI appears to be a promising and a cost-effective approach to improving the education of both English Language Learners and native English speaking children.”

- **Bilingual Development in Low-Income, Spanish-Speaking Children Attending Bilingual Preschool** (Winsler et al., 1999). This article discusses two investigations of comparable groups of low-income, Spanish-speaking Mexican American children who either did or did not attend a bilingual preschool.
 - The results “offered no evidence of Spanish proficiency loss for children attending bilingual preschool. Children who attended bilingual preschool, compared to those who remained at home, showed significant and parallel gains in Spanish language development as well as significant and greater increases in English language proficiency over time.” (p. 340).

- **Review of Elementary Reading Instruction Programs.** Slavin and Cheung (2003) reviewed the research to “resolve conflicting claims [regarding] bilingual education.” Based on a review of 17 studies of elementary reading instruction which compared bilingual instruction to English-only instruction with English Language Learners, “the results were surprisingly favorable to bilingual approaches. Most studies found significant positive effects of bilingual education on reading performance, and other studies found no differences—but in no case did positive results from an English-only strategy exceed those from a bilingual strategy.”

- Singapore Study.** A 2002 study of a new preschool curriculum framework implemented in Singapore found that a developmentally appropriate curriculum had significant impact on children's problem-solving and social skills. There was also evidence of impact on some aspects of English Language skills. The findings highlighted that, in general, home language and socio-economic status (SES) had a bearing on pupil gains. There is evidence that pupils from low SES and non-English speaking backgrounds benefited more from the new curriculum than the existing curriculum in terms of their listening and language processing skills, problem solving skills and social skills. Teachers must be trained to deliver a model curriculum for it to be fully effective. The findings of this study indicate that teachers well trained in the educational principles as well as pedagogical approaches of a model curriculum would add value to children's learning (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2003).

School Profile from the Study of Proposition 227 on the Education of English Language Learners, K-12 (Parrish et al., 2006). The AIR/WestEd study of the implementation of 227 included six exemplar school profiles, including Valley High School in Elk Grove Unified School District.

Excerpted from the AIR/WestEd Final Report on the Study of Prop 227

In order to highlight some of the exemplar schools included in our phone interview sample, this section profiles six schools offering a range of EL instructional approaches. These profiles, which with the permission of each school include identifying information, may be valuable for others seeking models of successful instructional programs for English learners.

<p>School: Valley High School District: Elk Grove Unified School District</p>
<p>“Students do not fall through the cracks,” exclaimed EL Coordinator Linda Gonzalez when probed about what makes Valley High School successful. Because Valley High, an urban high school in Sacramento, boasts such a diverse English learner population, they employ bilingual Spanish, Hmong, Chinese, Punjabi and Hindi paraprofessionals to assist students with content area. This type of dedication in meeting the needs of each individual student has resulted in an extremely low overall dropout rate (3 percent) – a noteworthy accomplishment considering that 62 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch and 26 percent are designated as English learners.</p> <p>Part of what makes Valley High unique is the combination of systematic use of data and personalized attention that starts the moment students enter through its doors. Through analysis of CELDT and CST scores, as well as feedback from teachers and feeder middle schools, careful consideration is given to individually place every EL student in an instructional program that best meets their needs. Valley High offers a tiered “EL partnership” program with three levels of instruction: one for newcomer students; another set of “transitional” core courses for those ELs who have not yet attained the level of English fluency necessary to access college-level textbooks; and “SDAIE” core classes, all of which are approved by the University of California system as meeting college entrance requirements. Critical to ensuring the quality of instruction offered at Valley High, according to Vice Principal Chris Evans, is that teachers instructing classes at any of the three levels participate in a year-round professional learning program to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the needs of ELs. Evans further emphasized that Valley High ELs would not be able to attain the results they have without Principal Roger Stock’s concerted effort to allocate the fiscal and human resources necessary to make sure that EL partnership classes are funded and that the administration makes serving ELs a priority.</p>

In addition, the entire staff is extremely dedicated to giving credit where it is due and “any student who comes to Valley High School immediately sees a counselor [and] has a parent meeting” to determine what state standards they have already met so that students’ schedules can be tailored to meet graduation requirements. Often, this is easier said than done, but staff members at Valley High report going so far as to regularly communicate across continents to track down students’ prior transcripts in order to place them in the appropriate classes. “I’ve called Japan, I’ve called China, and I’ve called Mexico to have a relative to go to the school [and] get a transcript,” says Gonzalez. Ultimately students are provided with a schedule that minimizes repetitiveness and aids in English acquisition—ELs with relatively low English fluency trade one elective for a second hour of ELD class.

Once the students are placed, the teachers are given the freedom and support to implement curricula to meet the needs of their diverse student population. Recently, a task force was formed to look at data and research on materials related to EL instruction and textbooks focusing on the needs of ELs. Eventually, these materials, including Shining Star and Globe textbooks as well as software programs, were adopted to help students reach the overall goal of proficiency in both English and core content. Constant tracking by the bilingual paraprofessionals, teachers, and administration ensures all students’ progress is carefully monitored. This tracking and support for English learners is what makes Valley High, according to the three administrators interviewed, “a model program.”

Finally, like most exemplary schools, the students and staff at Valley High hold themselves to extremely high expectations and are dedicated to student achievement. As Principal Stock states, “You’ve got to start with commitment and belief that all students can learn. And that commitment can help them meet that goal.” This belief, along with strategic placement and relevant curricula, is what promotes high student achievement at Valley High.

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