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Teaching English in the United States: Looking Back and Moving Forward towards a Brighter Future

Tammy Oberg De La Garza[1*] & Erin Mackinney[1]

[1] Roosevelt University College of Education, Chicago, USA

[*] Tammy Oberg De La Garza, Roosevelt University College of Education, Chicago, USA

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Abstract

This article provides a historical overview of English language instruction in the United States as well as a spectrum of the current models used in schools. From subtractive methods to additive approaches, the benefits of each are explored. This work highlights the rapidly expanding movement towards Dual Language instruction for English language learners, and the advantages it brings to students, schools and the community. The authors examine future considerations for Dual Language programming and the escalating need for these qualified and specialized educators.

Keywords

ELLs, dual language, additive, bilingual, language education, ESL

1. Introduction

Since our founding fathers arrived, the United States has been a monolingual nation, valuing English language and European-American culture above all others. A recent U.S. Census reported that 79% of the population is unable to speak a language other than English (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), the highest concentration of monolinguals in the world. This type of exclusionary thinking has limited our access to the global economy, spiriting a shift in thinking from monolingualism to bilingualism and biculturalism. Likewise, appreciation for effective bilingual education programs is gaining momentum, not only for English Language Learners (ELLs) but native English speakers as well. In this paper, we provide an overview of English language instruction in the U.S. and highlight a more recent trend towards dual language mastery for ELLs, the fastest growing population of students in U.S. K-12 public schools (Migration Policy Institute, 2016).

2. History of the Teaching and Learning of ELLs

2.1 English Teaching as a Colonizing Tool

English teaching in the United States has been used as a tool to colonize indigenous peoples. In early 1607, the English settled and established the first colony on the East Coast. As English-speaking foreigners settled in this land and swept westward, they encountered resistance from the Native Americans, whose beliefs and traditions clashed with the autocratic invaders. Seen as a way to advance religious, economic, and cultural values, mission groups formed English education programs to convert the 'heathen' populations. A missionary would arrive at a specific region, learn the native tongue, translate the Bible, and then teach English using Biblical content (Martin, Nicholas, & Pesantubbee, 2010). These efforts proved to be highly unsuccessful. By the 19th century, the U.S. government funded missionaries with a new model of residential schooling that was shaped by the mantra, "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man" (Higham, 2016). Though the missionaries themselves were aiming to convert the Indians, the government demanded results—civilizing Indians to see "wisdom" in giving up their land to the white man.

In 1848, the Mexican-American war-ending Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded more than half of Mexico to the United States—now New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Texas, California, and western Colorado. These lands had linguistic influences from not only Mexico, but also three centuries of Spain's colonization (1521-1810). As English-speaking Americans settled in the southwest, they used governance to establish their language and culture as dominant. Throughout the second half of the 1800's English steadily and officially replaced Spanish in public proceedings, legislature, religion, business, and education.

2.2 English Teaching in the Political Arena: 60's-Present

In the early 1960's a political shift laid the foundation for bilingual education—a wave of Cuban refugees, the civil rights movement, anti-poverty initiatives, and the Cold War which emphasized the growing need for more science education programming. By 1967, Congress considered 37 different bilingual education bills. President Johnson signed the Bilingual Education Act in 1968, which pronounced that children should be educated in their native tongue while learning English. The law provided one transitional year whereupon students should transfer to an English-only classroom as quickly as possible. Rather than unifying English language education across the nation, this was the beginning of a debate that waged for half a century.

Policy makers and educators were undecided on which method would produce better student achievement, resulting in heated controversy. There are two schools of thought: one that espouses a direct path to English engagement though submersion, neglecting a student's native language and often leading to the loss of students' native tongue (subtractive methods), and the other that leads to English achievement through connections and extensions of the native language (additive methods). What follows is the spectrum of instructional philosophies separated by one defining characteristic—whether it adds or subtracts native language mastery.

3. Models of English Language Instruction in the U.S.

Currently there are seven different models of English Language Instruction: Sheltered English Instruction, Structured English Immersion (SEI), English as a Second Language (ESL) Pull-out, ESL Push-in, and three models of Transitional Bilingual Instruction: Early-exit, Late-exit, and Dual Language (one-way or two-way).

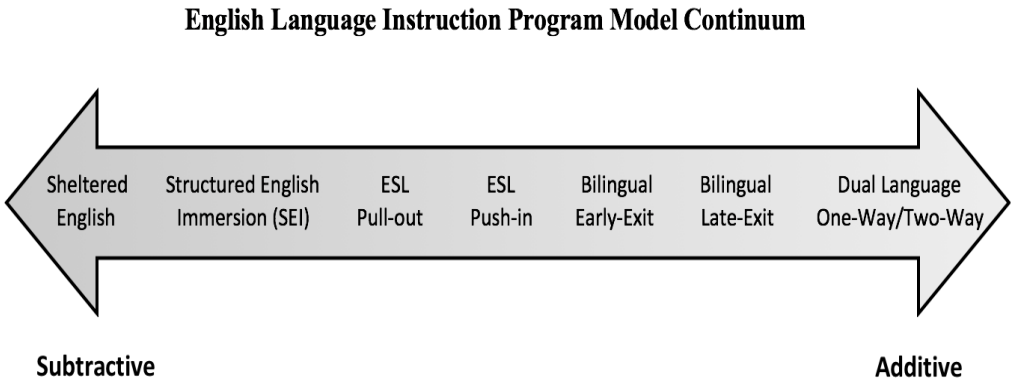

Figure 1. English Language Instruction Program Model Continuum

3.1 Subtractive

Sheltered English Instruction and Structured English Immersion (SEI) programs emphasize a rapid increase of a child's exposure to English (Adams & Jones, 2006). The medium is content rather than explicit English language instruction. Sheltered English Instruction teachers rely entirely on English, using gestures and visual aids to aid understanding, while Structured English Immersion teachers can sparingly use a student's native language to explain or clarify English instruction (López & McEneaney, 2012).

ESL models accommodate students from different language backgrounds in the same class. English is the only language used in the ESL model, and the teachers do not have to speak any language other than English. The goal of ESL instruction is to increase English proficiency and mainstream students into American culture. In ESL pull-out programs, students are pulled out of mainstream classrooms for a specific portion of each day to receive ESL instruction. In ESL push-in, students are served in the mainstream classroom by an ESL teacher or an instructional aide who provides translation or clarification when needed.

One shortcoming of these English-only approaches is that ELLs often feel inferior to their mainstream, English-proficient peers due to substantial differences in their reading and writing skills (Chang et al., 2007). Longitudinal studies on the academic achievement of ELLs demonstrate that students educated in English-only programs rarely attained the same level of academic achievement as their native English-speaking peers. ELLs fall into the lowest performing academic group and have the highest

drop-out and grade retention rates across the nation (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

3.2 Additive

Unlike the models that only use English in second language instruction, all transitional bilingual programs incorporate students' native language during students' participation in the program. Students are grouped according to their home language and teachers must be certified to teach in both English and the students' native language. The goal of bilingual education includes language, content, and culture outcomes. Students are taught academic language and content in their native language in order to keep up with the students in mainstream classrooms.

There is a different emphasis on English instruction depending on the type of bilingual education program. The goal of the early-exit transitional bilingual model is to accelerate the second language acquisition so students can be assimilated into English-only classrooms. More emphasis is placed on English instruction than content, so that students can be transferred to mainstream classes after 1-3 years. This model places less importance on the continued development of students' native language. In the late-exit transitional bilingual model, there is more emphasis placed on developing and extending students' native linguistic skills. This requires a longer transitional phase to the mainstream classroom, typically 5-7 years.

At the far end of the continuum is a developmental bilingual program, most recently and for the purposes of this paper, identified as Dual Language (DL) education. This model uses 5-12 years of native and English language instruction to foster academic language fluency in both languages, helping students to integrate into mainstream American culture while maintaining and appreciating their home culture. In this model classes are made up of at least one-third non-native English speakers and at least one-third native English speakers (two-way), or students from the same language or heritage language background (one-way). In the primary grades, 50%-90% of the students' day is conducted in the minority (or partner) language. Thomas and Collier (2012) note that "the rationale for [ELLs and native English speakers] initially receiving large amounts of curricular time in the minority language is that society provides a great deal of access to academic English outside of school, and much less for the minority language" (p. 14). Instruction in intermediate grades gradually shifts to a 50% split, expanding academic mastery in both languages. This balanced language instruction continues throughout middle and high school.

4. Discussion—Dual Language Instruction for Efficacy

Dual Language education is the most powerful school reform for ELLs (Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2006). When DL programs are sustained for at least 6 years during the elementary years, ELLs experience greater academic and linguistic success than in other English language instruction programs (Thomas & Collier, 2012). In fact, after the 6th year in DL programs, ELLs and native English speakers attain significantly higher levels of academic achievement than their counterparts in English-only classrooms. The following figure portrays longitudinal data from Thomas and Collier's 2012

noteworthy findings. This chart clearly outlines the achievement benefits of additive English language instruction models over subtractive approaches.

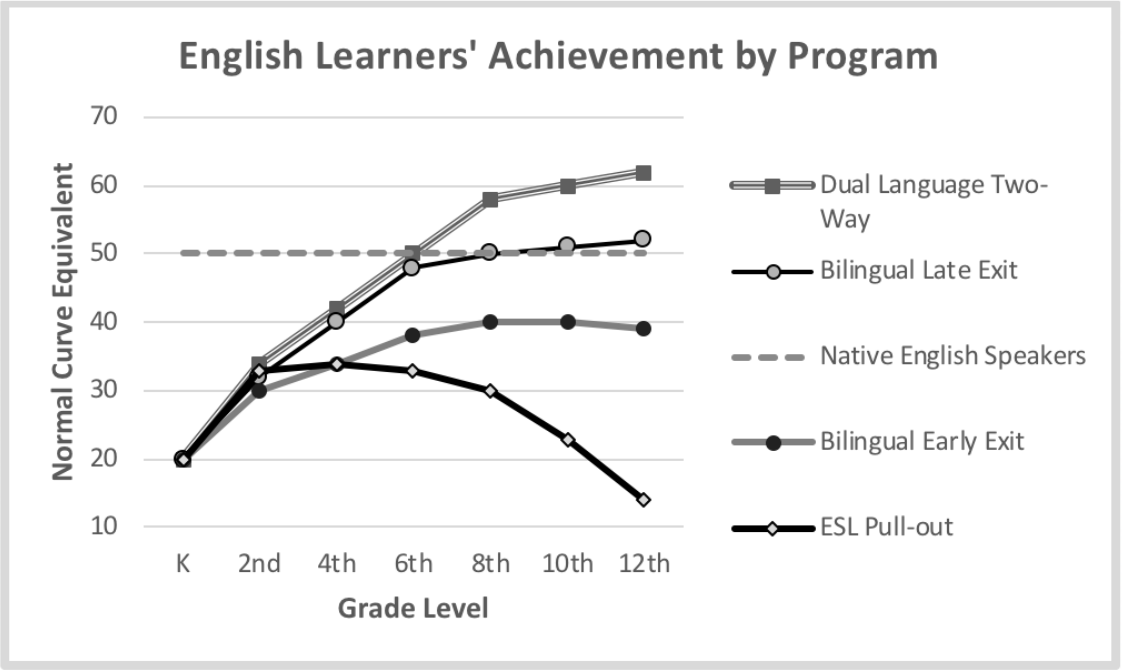

Figure 2. English Learners' Achievement by Program (Thomas & Collier, 2012)

In addition to bolstering the academic achievement of ELLs and native English speakers, two-way DL programming also benefits schools (Anberg-Espinosa, 2008; Thomas & Collier, 2012). As students achieve academically, their overall interest in school and learning increases. Behavioral issues decrease while self-esteem, bilingual pride, and cross-cultural attitudes blossom. These positive changes impact attendance rates, student completion rates, and parental involvement (Ram ŕez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991).

Because of the astounding long-term benefits of DL instruction for all students, schools and districts across the nation are moving from "English-Only" to "English-And". Momentum behind the DL movement is picking up speed, as native-English speaking parents are enrolling their children to develop proficient academic fluency in two or more languages. The future for ELLs who have historically performed at the lowest academic levels is looking brighter. The nation as a whole is beginning to recognize the value of speaking more than one language.

As the recognition of benefits stemming from DL instruction models increases, so too does the need for qualified dual language teachers and school leaders, such as teacher leaders, principals and superintendents.

4.1 Future DL Trends/Needs in the U.S.-Teachers

Especially as the demand for qualified, credentialed bilingual educators to teach in DL classrooms is rising, it is proving difficult for schools and districts to sufficiently staff open positions (Oberg De La

Garza, Mackinney, & Lavigne, 2015). With a long history of enforcing English-only language instructional practices on students, the large pool of native Spanish-speakers (or other minority languages) who can communicate professionally in their native language is significantly diminished. Though a native Spanish-speaker may be able to have a conversation, he/she may not be academically fluent enough to teach a lesson or write a letter in Spanish.

One reason there is such a shortage of qualified bilingual educators to teach in DL classrooms, is that DL education requires a specialized subset of teaching that is "over and above the over and above" (Met, 1989, p. 181) including: a) fluency in two or more languages, b) educational theory and methodology, c) content in two languages, d) second language instruction, and e) co-construction of language and content (Fortune, Tedick, & Walker, 2008; Oberg De La Garza et al., 2015). Institutions of higher education must begin to equip and prepare bilingual teachers to meet the growing need for DL specialization.

4.2 Future DL Trends/Needs in the U.S.-School Leaders

School leadership literature on the teaching and learning of ELLs has largely focused on principal beliefs and practices. The following are effective practices of principals gleaned from the literature.

4.2.1 Determining ELL Programming

Principals consider various factors in establishing ELL programming, such as students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the degree to which programming can be properly implemented, and the vision and mission of the school community (Scanlan & López, 2012). Schools in which there is no clear majority of students from a particular language background may adopt subtractive programming as previously discussed. With this approach, students of a similar language background should be placed in the same classroom for peer support. Schools in which the majority of students come from a particular language background may adopt additive programming to develop students' bilingualism and biliteracy. With any programming, a key consideration is the creation of an inclusive learning community, one in which all educators should feel responsible for the academic achievement of ELLs (Brooks, Adams, & Morita-Mullaney, 2010; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). Furthermore, regular interaction among ELLs and native English speakers is essential for all students' academic, linguistic, and socio-emotional development.

4.2.2 Staffing and Professional Development

A pivotal factor in the academic achievement of ELLs is the principal's decision to hire properly credentialed teachers and staff proficient in the languages of the students in the school (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). When lead teachers have limited knowledge of the teaching and learning of ELLs, principals can establish co-teaching with a bilingual teacher as well as the effective use of paraprofessionals in the classroom who are proficient in the languages of ELLs. Principals can also seek partnerships with local universities to provide teachers with the coursework needed to receive state recognition for teaching ELLs (e.g., ESL/Bilingual Endorsement, ESL/Bilingual Certification). Effective principals recognize that the education of ELLs is the responsibility of all educators.

Therefore, principals must ensure that staff receives ongoing professional development. Suggested topics include theories of second language acquisition, teaching language through content, culturally responsive pedagogy, acquisition of academic English, differentiated instruction, formal and informal assessments, testing accommodations, and family and community involvement. Educators should also be versed in the appropriate identification, instructional services and support, and assessment of ELLs with disabilities (Liu & Barrera, 2013).

4.2.3 Parent and Community Involvement

Creating an inclusive learning community for ELLs involves valuing the knowledge students bring from their homes and communities and integrating families into the daily life of the school. Principals set the tone for providing opportunities for parents of ELLs to have an active role in their child's education. Parents can share their expertise as visiting teachers in the classroom, serve on the school leadership team (Wiemelt & Welton, 2015), create a parent center within the school (Reyes & Garcia, 2014), and start parent empowerment groups for families from particular linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). In addition to providing opportunities for parent involvement, ensuring parents of ELLs have access to information concerning the education of their child is essential. Examples include sending newsletters and information home in parent's native language, providing interpreters during school meetings, and offering workshops that inform parents on school programming, school and community resources, and their rights as parents and residents. Within an inclusive learning community, the dissemination of information is not a passive process between educator and parent but an active one where educators and parents engage in dialogue regarding how to best serve ELLs.

4.2.4 Creative Budgeting

The 2007-2009 national recession sharply reduced states' revenues, resulting in a "punishing decade of school funding" for K-12 schools (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2017). Furthermore, falling property values impacted local school districts' abilities to raise revenue through local property taxes. As state and local revenue comprise 92% of K-12 funding, district and school leaders are faced with the reality of limited funding per student. Principals must seek out creative ways to fund teaching and learning. For example, as part of efforts to turnaround a low-performing urban elementary school serving predominantly low-income, Latin@ students, including 63% ELLs, one principal converted a campus position into program funding for a fine arts program featuring violin, mariachi, baile folklorico, and modern dance (Reyes & Garcia, 2014). In another case, the principal of an urban elementary school serving 16% ELLs from Latin@ and Hmong backgrounds, sought permission from the school district to use discretionary gifted and talented allocations in new ways, as well as permission from the state ESL coordinator to use ESL resources differently (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). These funds were used to eliminate the school's ESL pull-out model, reduce class sizes, and provide ESL services within the mainstream classroom for ELLs. In addition to re-purposing school funding, principals should seek partnerships with outside sources, such as cultural centers, libraries,

minority-owned businesses, local politicians, and foreign educational and governmental entities.

4.2.5 Advocacy

Principals and district officials are the first line of defense for negotiating policy—both state educational language policy and national reforms such as Common Core (Menken & Solorza, 2013). School leaders who are advocates for ELLs interpret and enact policies in ways that center the sociocultural and linguistic knowledge that students bring to school. Establishing additive bilingual programming, such as dual language, reflects school leaders' beliefs in multilingualism and multiculturalism. It also demonstrates their advocacy for the needs of the students who are often the most marginalized. As Anderson (2009) notes, advocacy leadership considers the populations with the least political power and resources and builds alliances across groups (e.g., teachers, parents, unions, community leaders, civil rights groups) to achieve desired outcomes. For example, the superintendent of a large urban district along the U.S. Mexico border leveraged the power of middle and upper class native English-speaking families who were interested in DL education to advocate for this model across the district (DeMatthews, Izquierdo, & Knight, 2017). Additive goals become part of the vision and mission of schools and districts and serve as tenets for developing and sustaining equitable educational opportunities.

4.3 Further Considerations

While the school leadership literature on educating ELLs has provided valuable insights into the beliefs, effective practices, and core responsibilities of principals, more research is needed on the multiple leaders who greatly impact the teaching and learning of ELLs. These include educators in roles such as ESL coordinator, dual language coordinator, ESL push-in teacher, and curriculum specialist, as well as district-level administrators in departments centered on language and culture. How can we better understand their perspectives on the various activities in which they lead: mentoring, modeling and scaffolding lessons, providing school and district-wide professional development, facilitating professional learning communities, and encouraging professional growth of teachers and staff? Both larger studies (e.g., surveys) and case studies are welcome, and as a result, will help illuminate the beliefs and practices of these key leaders.

In addition to a wider body of school leadership literature, there is a need for more preparation of school leaders to effectively serve the growing population of ELLs. In their understanding of bilingual programming across 16 schools in New York, Menken and Solorza (2013) found that school leaders who had pre-service preparation on the education of ELLs were more prone to sustain their bilingual programs rather than eliminate them in favor of English-only programs. Educational leadership degree programs must include coursework on educational language policy and programming, second language acquisition, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Also paramount in the professional and personal growth of school leaders is seeking ongoing professional development and continuously examining one's own biases. With advocacy leaders of ELLs within our schools and districts, a holistic, inclusive, and collaborative approach to teaching and learning will ensue.

5. Conclusion

The goals of the teaching and learning of ELLs have evolved from colonizing, to assimilating, and now to a dual mastery of language, culture and literacy. ELLs fortunate enough to learn in dual language classrooms will have the very real opportunity to not only close the achievement gap between ELLs and English-only speakers, but to flip it by academically outperforming them. Our nation is moving steadily forward towards this inclusive model of instruction, but as with any new advancement, there are still a few infrastructure issues that need to be addressed. Once accomplished, the possibilities for ELLs are limitless.

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