

From Theory to Practice



Region XIV Comprehensive Center at ETS

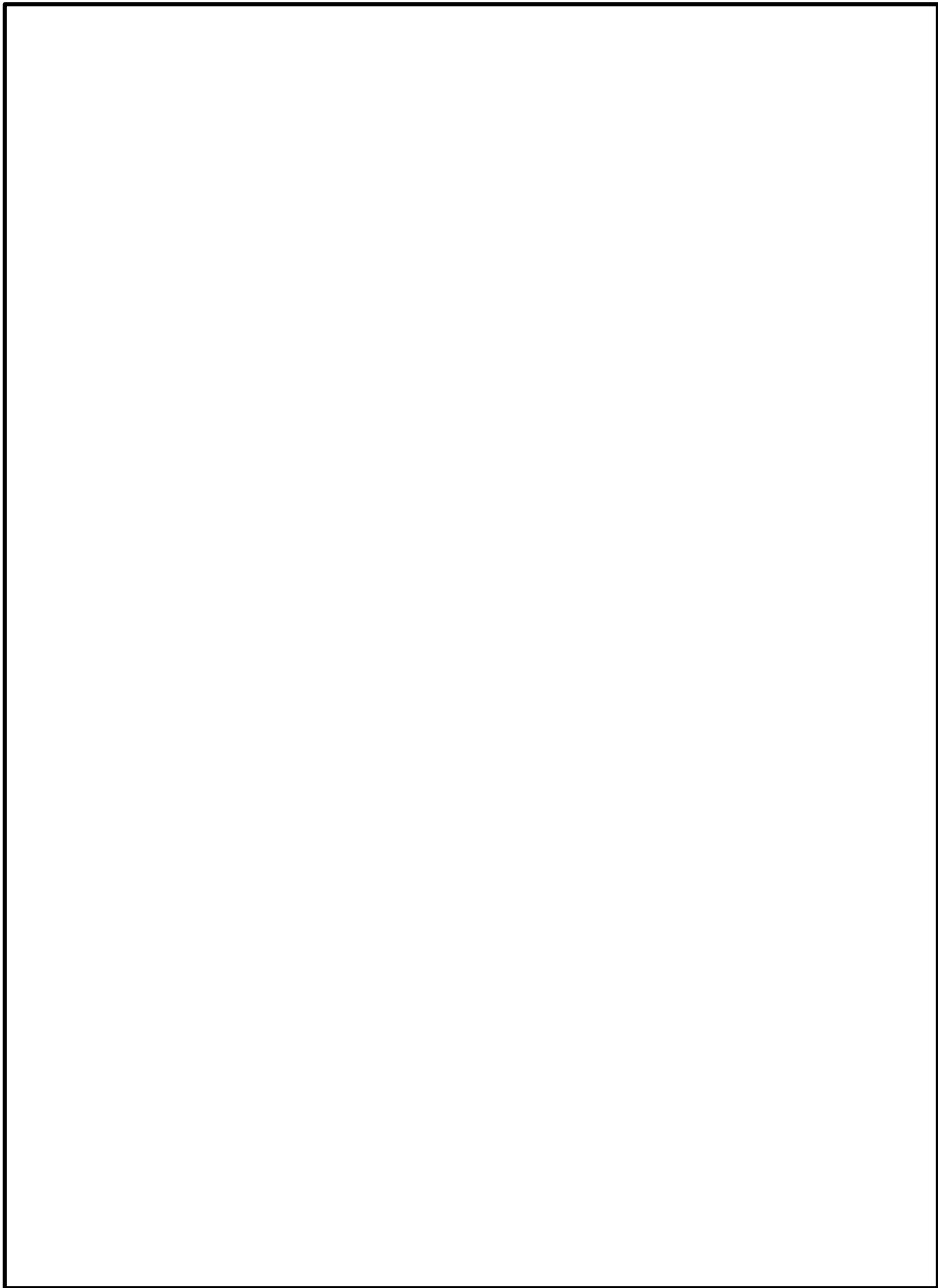
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From Theory to Practice



Introduction

This booklet contains ten issues of *From Theory to Practice*, a set of discussions addressing important issues for classroom teachers and educators who work with students learning English as a new language. Each discussion focuses on a particular topic relevant to the education of students whose first language is not English, discusses pertinent information from current professional literature, and describes how these theories and approaches can be applied in the classroom.

We have designed this booklet so that each discussion can be photocopied, double-sided, on a single piece of paper for easy distribution. The materials are not copyrighted and may be reproduced for educational use.

The ten issues addressed in this booklet are:

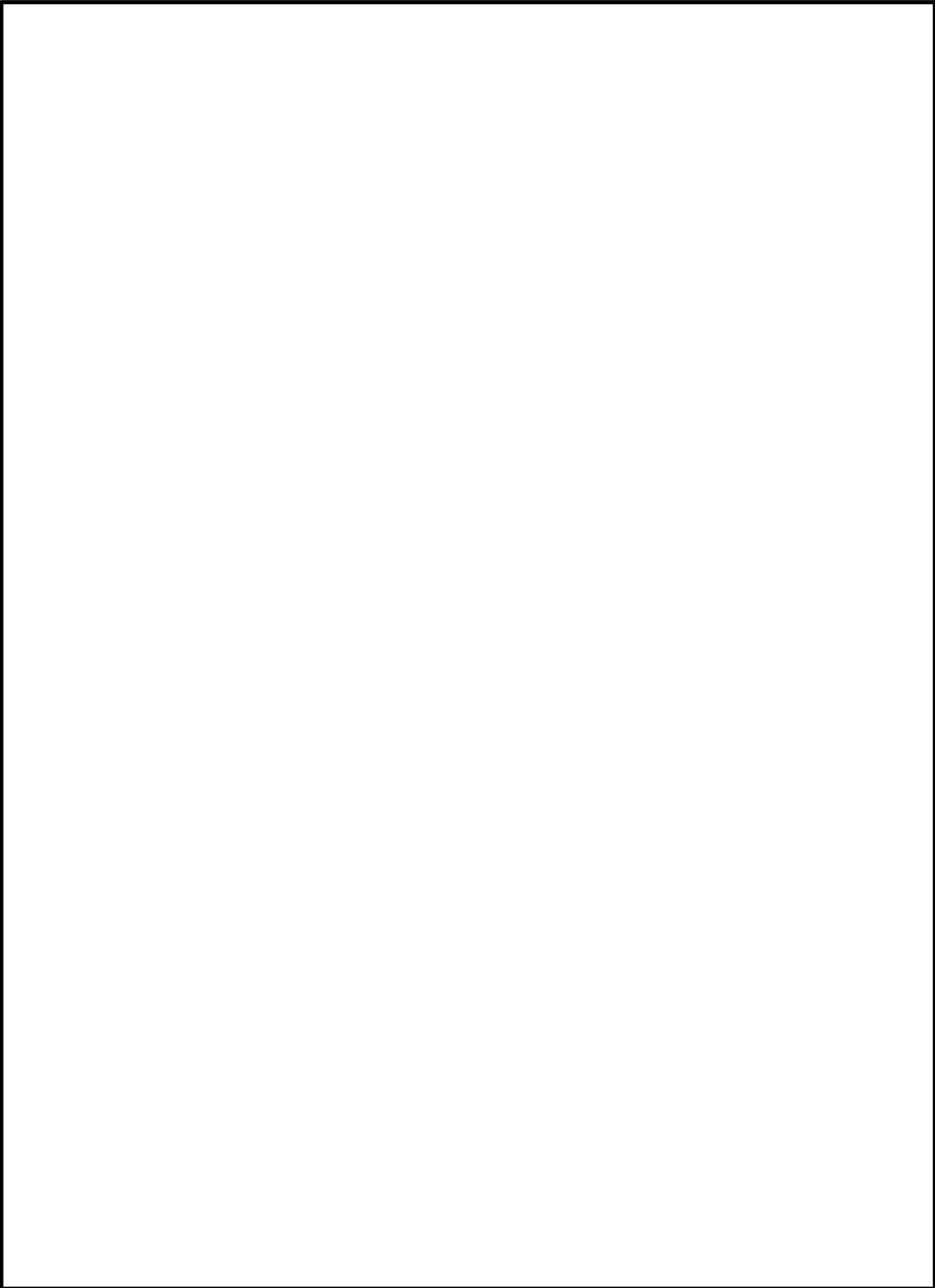
1. Language Minority Student Achievement and Program Effectiveness
2. Using Reading Strategies as a Route to Making Meaning for Secondary English Language Learners
3. Assessment To Support Academic Success for English Language Learners
4. Two-Way Language Learning
5. Establishing a Writing Workshop Classroom for English Language Learners
6. Three Principles for Success: English Language Learners in Mainstream Content Classes
7. Teach the Text Backwards: A Practical Framework That Helps English Language Learners Understand Textbooks
8. Tailoring a Portfolio for the Limited English Proficient Student
9. Issues in Grading Limited English Proficient Students
10. Working with Families

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Number 1



Language Minority Student Achievement and Program Effectiveness

Educators and school district administrators of linguistically and culturally diverse students are forever searching for research to support decisions regarding the types of programs that they believe are most appropriate for the academic success of their students. But years of collecting informal data and reflective analysis of student performance and program effectiveness have failed to provide sufficient evidence to support the implementation of one specific program mode over another.

Wayne Thomas, Ph.D., and Virginia Collier, Ph.D., recently completed a series of studies that identify three predictors of academic success for English Language Learners (ELLs), along with specific program characteristics that can enhance the academic achievement of secondary ELL students. Their research focused on the following questions:

1. How much English language instruction do ELL students need to be academically successful in school?
2. What student, program, and instructional variables influence academic achievement in these students?

The sample reviewed for this study is most impressive: the records of approximately 42,000 language minority students per school year, with from 8 to 12 years of data, from five school districts located in various regions of the U.S., both urban and rural. The data included background variables and student achievement as measured by standardized tests, performance measures, grade point average, and the content of the high school courses in which the students were enrolled. In addition to analyzing these records, the researchers interviewed school staff to obtain information regarding the types of programs being implemented for these students.

A variety of statistical analyses of the collected data revealed general patterns in program differences and student achievement across the five school districts. The analyses found three key predictors of academic success that are more important than any other variables, including specific program type or student background factors:

1. Students receive cognitively complex academic instruction in their *first language* for as long as possible, and through the second language (English) for part of the school day.
2. The academic curriculum is taught through active discovery and other cognitively complex instructional methods in both the first and the second languages.
3. Meaningful changes are implemented in the school's sociocultural context. For example, ELL students are integrated with English-speaking peers in an environment that is supportive and affirming for all students; a bilingual program is added that treats bilingual education as a "gifted and talented" program for all students; majority and minority relations in the school improve, enabling a positive school climate for all students *regardless* of language and cultural background.

The Thomas and Collier research found little difference in the test scores of language minority students and native speakers of English during K-3, no matter what program was used. Their research found significant differences as students reach middle school, where instruction becomes more cognitively demanding and there is a decrease in the level of contextual support, which helps learners understand the instruction they receive in their second language.

The research also identified numerous program characteristics that can make a significant difference in academic achievement of secondary ELL students. Many language minority students arrive academically prepared to enter school at the secondary level, where first-language support is not available. The research concluded that the most important predictor of success in the second language is literacy and schooling in the *first language*, which may have taken place in the home country or in the U.S. Students with no schooling in the first language need up to seven years of instruction in the new language (English) to reach the 50th percentile on standardized tests in English, their second language. The more time the second-language minority students spend receiving instruction in their native language the sooner they are able to reach the 50th percentile on second-language standardized tests. The research also identified three instructional approaches that can have a positive impact on the academic success of these students: (1) teaching learning strategies, in English, that are needed for developing thinking skills and problem-solving abilities; (2) implementing approaches that emphasize prior knowledge; and (3) maintaining respect for the students' home language and culture.

Dr. Cheryl J. Serrano, Center for Applied Linguistics

From Theory to Practice

Number 2



Using Reading Strategies as a Route to Making Meaning for Secondary English Language Learners

The educational system in the United States is facing incredible challenges as it attempts to educate a highly diverse population of immigrant adolescents. Since many of these young adults arrive with little or no literacy skills in their first language, they often have difficulty adjusting to a new school environment and have difficulty comprehending and deriving meaning from print.

In an effort to increase students' level of reading comprehension, educators have focused attention on developing students' reading strategy awareness. Pat Rigg suggested that reading ability is determined by the reader's background knowledge, level of literacy in the first language, and the purpose of the reading.

C. R. Wilson stated that reading comprehension is less a set of isolated subskills than an interaction between text and the reader's background knowledge. Wilson stated that reading comprehension is affected by the reader's word-attack skills, knowledge of vocabulary, awareness of text cohesion, and the reader's understanding of the cultural context of the text.

In order for these students to learn how to derive meaning from print, it is imperative that educators consider the impact that the students' background knowledge, vocabulary and word-attack skills have on comprehension and how these skills may be facilitated through initiating, core and culminating activities.

Initiating Activities

Comprehension: As teachers attempt to engage students in reading, it is important that they select age appropriate texts such as young adult fiction. These texts give young adults access to colloquial language, important information about the target culture and the opportunity to relate the reading to their own background knowledge. Teachers need to discuss the text with the class *before* having the students begin the reading assignment. In this way, each student's understanding of the text as reflected by his or her personal experiences, may be discussed, and any discrepancy between the student's understanding and what the text actually represents may be bridged. It is important that teachers accept and validate *students'* personal experiences as they relate to the topic. For example, the teacher may say, "It is true that in your country only poor people would borrow a wedding dress, but in the United States it is a common custom." This statement will lead students to understand that their own worldview is just as valid as the view presented in the text.

Vocabulary: Teachers need to initiate brainstorming activities with the students about words that may be found in the text. For example, the teacher writes the students' suggestions on the board or sentence strip. Definitions should be discussed and how they are related to the context of the text.

Word Attack: After writing the word on the board or sentence strips, the teacher may read the sentences aloud and have students reread them while the teacher points to the words.

Core Activities

Comprehension: The teacher should define the purpose for the reading assignment (such as having students verify predictions) before the students read. Students should be allowed to read the text silently at first, in order to facilitate comprehension. The teacher should have the students stop at strategic points to discuss the text.

Vocabulary: Students who are unfamiliar with the meaning of a word are encouraged to guess and write it down. Later, students can find the definition in a bilingual or monolingual English dictionary.

Word Attack: If students do not know a word, they should be encouraged to skip the word and read to the end of the sentence. Afterwards, they should return to the word and look at the initial, final, and middle parts of the word, and ask themselves what word would make sense there.

Culminating Activities

Comprehension: Once the reading activities have been completed, the teacher may ask students to participate in a group retelling. Information is accepted even if it is out of sequence. Once the retellings are completed the students and teacher can review the story and develop a sequence of events. Students may also generate their own questions for their peers to answer. Initially, this activity will have to be modeled by the teacher.

Vocabulary: Students can do a semantic features analysis. This may be done by making a list of people or objects on the left side of the board or handout and a list of adjectives at the top. Students then check the adjective that fits the appropriate word.

Word Attack: When a student comes to an unknown word, he or she reads to the end of the sentence. The student then returns to the unknown word and asks, “What word that begins with _____ would make sense here?” If the student is unable to determine an answer, the end of the word should be examined next. The student then asks, “What word that begins with _____ and ends with _____ would make sense here?” If the student is still unsuccessful, the middle of the word should be examined. Each time the student makes an educated guess about the word, he or she should ask, “Does the unknown word look like the word I guessed?” If the student is still unsuccessful, he or she should make a note of the word and move on, since fluency in reading is important.

These strategies can be recycled and adapted to any grade level (6-12), and can continue to be useful for helping students develop reading strategy skills. Students who feel comfortable using these skills will improve their reading comprehension.

Dr. Susanne I. Lapp, Florida Atlantic University
Dr. Timothy Rodriguez, Palm Beach County School District

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Number 3



Assessment To Support Academic Success for English Language Learners

When we instruct English Language Learners (ELLs) in English as a Second Language or mainstream classrooms, we should remember that ELL students face challenges different from those faced by English-speaking students. All students, both language majority and language minority, should be challenged by cognitively complex instruction, that is, instruction that encourages students to use academic skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. However, unlike their English-speaking peers, ELL students face two additional learning challenges: mastering academic content through the medium of a second language, English, and communicating in a new educational environment, the American school.

These learning challenges can be met by three key features of instructional programs shown to lead to academic success for ELL students:

1. learning in which students actively acquire academic concepts (meeting the challenge of rigorous content)
2. cognitively complex academic instruction in the student's native language (L1) and in English (L2) (meeting the challenge of learning academic language)
3. a positive and affirming school environment that promotes the integration of ELL students with their English-speaking peers (meeting the challenge of learning new ways to communicate)

The progress of ELL students in this type of rich and varied instructional environment should be measured by equally rich and varied types of assessment, and this assessment must demonstrate "progress over time in a variety of contexts." Thus, assessment procedures must show how ELL students are progressing in academic content, academic language, and the sociolinguistic conventions of educational communication in American schools. In *Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners*, J. Michael O'Malley and Lorraine Valdez Pierce present a number of practical approaches to assessment. They describe how teachers can create assessments so integrated with instruction that in many cases instruction and assessment are virtually indistinguishable.

O'Malley and Valdez Pierce discuss how to create and implement a variety of authentic assessments, including oral interviews, story or text retelling, writing samples, projects, experiments and demonstrations, written responses to open-ended questions, teacher observations, and portfolios.

Results from these assessments may be combined with results from standardized tests or language proficiency tests to profile a student's competency in language, content, and academic communication skills. In addition, such assessment provides teachers with frequent feedback on their instruction, allowing teachers to adjust to meet the varied needs of all their students in a timely way.

O'Malley and Valdez Pierce present seven vignettes of assessments created by classroom teachers. One of these, called "Reading Response Time," illustrates the combining of assessment with instruction. Adaptable to mainstream classrooms as well as ELL classes for intermediate or advanced students, this approach integrates reading, writing, and speaking, and combines the assessment of language, academic content, and academic communication skills.

In this assessment, several students write individual responses to books or current events. During reading response time, students gather together in the reading area that has one chair in front of the class for the reader and a seat for a classmate who volunteers to be Manager. Students take turns reading their book or current event responses to the entire class, guided by the classmate in the role of Manager. The Manager responds to the reading, remembering to "say something positive," "be specific about something the student said or wrote," "speak clearly so the student can understand," and "say something that will help the student to do better the next time." The Manager then asks the class for other comments, while the teacher takes notes of classmates' comments and gives his or her own reactions to the reading.

After the reading response time, each presenter receives a summary of comments and responds in writing to those comments. This summary is included in the student's portfolio together with the original written response. Each student in the class has one or more opportunities to present during reading response time within a grading period.

During the year, the teacher has prepared students for their roles as writers, presenters and managers. The teacher has shown students how to prepare their reading responses by personally responding to a book or event. Students become familiar with the rubrics used to evaluate writing for the statewide competency test by considering them as they prepare written drafts of their reports. The teacher has also created a classroom community of learners, who have learned how to respond sensitively and specifically to their classmates' oral and written presentations and who are prepared to be managers during the activity.

Building assessment into instruction lets teachers receive immediate feedback on their students' understanding and use of what they are learning. It also supplements the results of formal testing, which may occur infrequently during the school year. Finally, it gives teachers an opportunity to assess whether students can creatively apply complex knowledge and procedures.

Dr. Maria Derrick-Mescua, Center for Applied Linguistics

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Number 4



Two-Way Language Learning

Two-way Language (TWL) programs (also known as two-way bilingual immersion, dual immersion, and bilingual immersion) are becoming an increasingly attractive option for schools and districts looking for ways to strengthen and develop the language resources of their students. The TWL model provides integrated instruction for native English speakers and native speakers of another language, with the goal of promoting high academic achievement, first and second language development, and cross-cultural understanding for *all* students. In TWL programs, language learning takes place primarily through content instruction. Academic subjects are taught to all students through both English and the non-English language, which is usually Spanish. As students and teachers work together to perform academic tasks, the students' language abilities are developed along with their knowledge of content-area subject matter.

In most programs, students are introduced to the TWL program in first or second grade, and remain in the program as they progress through school. While TWL programs vary, they also have some core similarities. First, the student populations are balanced, with approximately 50 percent native English speakers and 50 percent native speakers of a non-English language. Second, academic instruction takes place through both languages, with the non-English language being used at least 50 percent of the time. In this way, all students have the opportunity to be both first-language models and second-language learners. Furthermore, TWL creates an additive bilingual environment for all students, since the first language is maintained while the second language is acquired.

Theoretical Rationale

A number of principles from both bilingual education research and foreign language immersion research provide the theoretical rationale for two-way language learning. First, bilingual education research indicates that content knowledge learned through one language paves the way for knowledge acquisition in the second language. When native language instruction is provided to language minority students along with balanced second language support, these students can attain higher levels of academic achievement in the second language than if they had been taught in the second language only.

Second, researchers in bilingual education assert that a second language is best acquired by language minority students after their first language is firmly established. Specifically, language minority students with strong oral language and literacy skills in their first language tend to achieve greater levels of second language proficiency than students with limited native language ability.

Third, immersion programs enable language majority children (those who are native speakers of the high-status language of the society, e.g., English in the U.S.) to develop second-language proficiency without compromising their academic achievement. Finally, for all students, language is learned best when it is the medium of instruction rather than the exclusive goal of instruction. In two-way language learning settings, students learn language while learning content because there is a real need to communicate while engaged in content-related tasks.

More generally, the rationale for two-way language education grows out of sociocultural theory, which maintains that learning occurs through social interaction. Specifically with regard to language learning, the integration of native English speakers and non-native speakers is crucial, since research indicates that second-language acquisition is facilitated when native and non-native speakers interact. Because the student populations in TWL programs are balanced with regard to language dominance, native language models are always available in the classroom. In this way, TWL programs provide an ideal sociocultural context for language learning.

- Teaching Strategies for Language and Content Two-way language education teachers tend to use cooperative learning, thematic units, hands-on materials, and visual/graphic displays to teach content-area material. Most classrooms have language-rich environments. Strategies such as repetition and rephrasing are used to make language comprehensible. In addition to language modeling from the teacher, students are afforded many opportunities to read, write, and speak in both languages in order to facilitate their language development.
- Separation of Languages by Teachers and Students Teachers in TWL programs teach for extended periods in one designated language, and encourage both native speakers and second language learners to communicate in the language of instruction to the best of their ability.
- Integration of Students Students from both language backgrounds learn together for significant portions of the day. Some programs separate students by language background for language arts instruction in the native and/or second language, while others maintain student integration for the entire day.
- Duration of Program Programs provide bilingual instruction for at least four to six years, and parents are advised that continuous student enrollment for the duration of the program is advisable.
- Parental Involvement The most successful TWL programs recognize the importance of support from the families and the community at large. Serious efforts are made to ensure that both cultures are valued equally, and that all parents are included in school decision-making processes.
- Availability of Resources Because bilingualism is a goal for all students in TWL programs, it is important that the school have not only classroom materials in both languages, but also school-wide materials such as library resources and computer software in both languages.

Elizabeth Howard and Chris Montone, Center for Applied Linguistics

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Number 5



Establishing a Writing Workshop Classroom for English Language Learners

Creating a favorable atmosphere for an effective writing classroom is actually creating a social place. In such a classroom, the students are responsible for their own growth as writers. However, they are equally responsible for the learning and development of others.

The teacher's approach to writing can have a tremendous impact on the classroom. The following attitudes should be evident in each day's activities.

Writing is a meaningful activity. To help students realize that writing has a purpose, they should be encouraged to read as much as possible and to become aware of the power of the written word. Magazine excerpts, speeches, scripts, and newspaper articles are all excellent tools for making this point.

Everyone can write. The basic assumption that underlies an effective writing classroom is that everyone has something to say and the basic tools with which to say it. The teacher can reinforce this expectation by emphasizing (and evaluating) not only each student's final written product, but also his or her individual writing process.

Writing involves sharing and responding. The purpose of almost all writing is communication. Students should be encouraged to share their writing at every stage of the writing process and to solicit the types of responses that they need from their peers.

Displaying illustrative materials. Writing by the students, the teacher, and other professional writers should be abundantly displayed and changed as the teacher discovers new models.

Reference sources. An effective writing classroom should include a reference area stocked with various dictionaries, including bilingual dictionaries, thesauruses, handbooks, and other reference books.

Working with ELL Students

The more experience a writer has with the concepts and terms associated with a writing topic, the easier it will be for that writer to write about that topic. Often ELL students do not have the background knowledge needed to adequately discuss the topic under consideration. Holding class discussions is an effective strategy and can help clarify cultural references and provide general information to the entire class. Teachers should encourage English language learners to comment on similarities to and differences from their own cultures.

Another effective strategy is the use of visual aids and hands-on learning experiences for building on prior knowledge and developing student confidence. Second language learners may best retain information that provides contextual support in the form of graphs, charts, diagrams, and other visual images.

Mastering English vocabulary and patterns of discourse is essential to writing proficiency among English Language Learners. Students who are asked to write about a school or government election, for example, must be familiar with the terms and concepts relevant to the subject, such as parties, platform, campaign, run-off, running mate, and so on. Ideally, vocabulary would be taught before each assignment.

Finally, there is strong research evidence showing that English Language Learners in U.S. schools can make significant progress in written English by reading and writing in their primary language, making the transition to writing exclusively in English as they acquire English fluency. Allowing students to write in their primary language during their early stage of English acquisition offers the following advantages:

- It establishes a firm basis for acquiring universal literacy skills that are easily transferred from one language to another.
- It promotes success, enhances self-esteem, and builds students' confidence in their abilities as readers and writers.
- It enables students to function at the highest levels of cognitive abilities, unhampered by their proficiency in English.

Establishing a writing environment for English Language Learners reinforces the notion that writing for communication is an ongoing process. Whether it be in English or the native language, setting clear roles and expectations for students and for teachers is essential. Process writing also makes students realize that their first draft is just that, a draft, and that comments from peers can enhance their spelling, grammar, mechanics or word choice. The more students write, the more they read; and the more they read, the more they want to write and comment about the world.

Mary Barret, Palm Beach County School District

From Theory to Practice

Number 6



Three Principles for Success: English Language Learners in Mainstream Content Classes

In Florida and elsewhere, content teachers – teachers of math, science, social studies, and computer literacy – receive training in strategies to modify instruction so that English Language Learners (ELLs) in their classrooms can learn the content of the curriculum while they are learning English. Inservice materials and district checklists propose many strategies such as role-play, graphic organizers, cooperative learning, songs and games, and multiculturalism. Unfortunately, sometimes the *principles* behind the strategies get lost in the details of the laundry list. Teachers who understand these principles, however, will use strategies purposefully and adapt their instruction in ways that are especially effective with their curriculum content and teaching styles. This issue of *From Theory to Practice* presents three principles that aid language learning in content classrooms, and gives an example of how these principles could be used in a lesson. The next issue will suggest a simple, practical framework for applying these principles to student learning from textbooks.

Three principles that facilitate language learning in content classrooms have been identified from current theory and approaches. They are: increase comprehensibility, increase interaction, and increase thinking and study skills.

1. Increase Comprehensibility

Krashen revolutionized second language learning by identifying the crucial role of *comprehensible input*, that is, linking language that is new to the learner with clues to its meaning that make the language “input” understandable (comprehensible). Especially with beginning and intermediate language learners, many clues should be nonverbal, such as pictures, objects, demonstrations, gestures, intonation, and manipulatives. Later, as language proficiency develops, clues may also include language that is already understood, for example, writing key words on the blackboard, using a graphic organizer, or diagramming. Content teachers increase comprehensibility by increasing the number and types of clues to the meaning of the language used in class (both oral and written). Practical strategies for increasing comprehensibility include using visuals, demonstrations, hands-on learning, graphic organizers, and students explaining to students.

2. Increase Interaction

Other researchers (Swain, Long, and Porter, among others) point out that language is also learned through communicating with others and *negotiating meaning* to accomplish real-life purposes. Negotiating meaning takes place when a speaker tries to communicate his or her thoughts and a listener tries to understand them. Both persons restate, question, explain, and clarify in order to come to a common understanding. This process helps students learn language as well as content. Practical strategies that teachers can use to increase interaction for ELL students in content classrooms include cooperative learning, study buddies, projects, and one-on-one teacher student time.

3. Increase Thinking/Study Skills

Many ELL students need explicit teaching to develop thinking skills and “thinking language.” Chamot and O’Malley developed the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) to assist teachers in applying the research of Jim Cummins on the academic needs of ELL students. Teachers can assist ELL students by focusing instruction on higher order thinking tasks (discovery, synthesis, evaluation), asking ELL students higher order thinking questions (e.g., What would happen if...?), modeling “thinking language” by thinking aloud, assessing learning in a manner/language consistent with instruction, explicitly teaching and reinforcing study skills and test-taking skills, and holding high expectations for learning for ELL students.

Teachers can keep these principles in mind when planning and adapting lessons and units. Each principle can be addressed in several ways within a topic. For example, to begin a unit on understanding similarities and differences in nature, the first topic could be trees (adapted from Hainer et al.). To increase comprehensibility for ELL students, early activities could include a nature walk in which different types of trees are pointed out; having students choose and draw a tree; teacher and students labeling and describing the parts of trees and leaves. To increase interaction and thinking/study skills, groups of students could collect leaves, work to classify them using textbooks and reference materials, and display their knowledge on a bulletin board.

The three principles – increase comprehensibility, increase interaction, and increase thinking/study skills – provide a concise guide to adapting instruction for English Language Learners.

Judy Jameson, Center for Applied Linguistics



Teach the Text Backwards: A Practical Framework That Helps English Language Learners Understand Textbooks

The previous issue of *From Theory to Practice* presented three principles that facilitate language learning in content classrooms, and gave an example of how these principles could be used in a lesson. This issue suggests a simple, practical framework for applying these principles to student learning from textbooks.

The three principles, identified from current theory and approaches are: increase comprehensibility (e.g., Krashen), increase interaction (e.g., Swain, Long, and Porter), and increase thinking and study skills (e.g., Cummins, Chamot, and O'Malley).

How can content teachers implement these principles in mainstream classrooms, especially in upper-elementary, middle, and high school grades, where much of the learning occurs through textbooks and other reading and writing activities? One way is to reverse the traditional sequence for teaching textbook-based material, which we will call, *teach the text backwards*. The traditional teaching sequence is:

1. Read the text.
2. Answer the study questions at the end of the chapter.
3. Discuss the material in class.
4. Do selected applications based on the material.

This sequence is very difficult for many Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, who read English with difficulty and who may not have cultural or background knowledge similar to the mainstream U.S. students that most textbooks were written for. These students may find a reverse sequence of teaching steps more accessible. The sequence for teaching the textbook backwards is:

1. Do selected applications based on the material.
 2. Discuss the material in class.
 3. Answer the study questions at the end of the chapter.
 4. Read the text.
1. Start by *doing* something that applies the material to be learned in a concrete, real-life way. The “applications and extensions” at the end of the chapter or in the teacher’s guide are a good source of ideas. For LEP students, this hands-on application puts the new material in context and increases comprehensibility. For example, in science, the class might take a field trip to a planetarium *early* in the unit, not at the end; in social studies, students might interview families about what countries their ancestors came from *before* starting units on geography or immigration; in math, the teacher could have students read opposing articles that cite similar statistics *before* having the class study formulas; in computer literacy, the teacher might struggle with preparing a simple document *before* learning relevant terminology or practicing keyboarding skills.

2. *Discuss* the application and the related concepts in class. Ask students what happened, why, what would happen if ... and so on. Use the key vocabulary in the discussion, pointing to objects or demonstrating relationships to connect the new words and sentences to their meaning. Oral language is usually easier than textbook language for LEP students to understand, and the discussion of a concrete activity teaches key vocabulary and concepts, activates prior knowledge, provides cultural context (the big picture), models thinking skills, and applies all three principles.
3. Ask students to review the *study questions* at the end of the chapter to identify main ideas and to set a purpose for the reading assignment. Preview the chapter by looking at pictures and diagrams. Read the subheadings to show students how the chapter is organized and where they can expect to find specific information. These strategies increase comprehensibility and teach thinking and study skills.
4. Have students *read* the text to find the answers to the most important study questions. Teachers can break up the chapter to reduce the amount of text each student reads and to increase understanding for key sections and to model study skills; graphic organizers and visuals can be used to demonstrate key relationships in the content and increase comprehensibility and thinking skills.

The Teach the Text Backwards sequence incorporates the three principles that aid LEP students in learning language through content, and it also aids other students who are less skilled in reading or who learn best through less traditional learning styles. It is a practical, consistent framework for teaching and learning into which additional ELL strategies can be integrated.

Judy Jameson, Center for Applied Linguistics

From Theory to Practice

Number 8



Tailoring a Portfolio for the Limited English Proficient Student

Since students learn, progress, and achieve differently, alternative assessments are proving effective in evaluating their progress. The development of a student portfolio has become one of many increasingly popular and useful alternative tools for assessment. With careful planning and deliberate goal setting, a portfolio system can be tailored to reflect the kinds of academic and linguistic progress specific to Limited English Proficient (LEP) students.

Choosing the Developmental Portfolio Plan: Of the three basic systems for portfolio, the developmental portfolio plan more easily demonstrates the growth and progress of the LEP student. It builds an overall picture of a student's abilities through a collection of representative samples of a student's work based on goals and objectives set with the student. This plan stimulates regular feedback on progress, encourages student-teacher collaboration, reflects individual learning experiences, and cultivates the ability to self-assess.

Setting the Plan: The steps of the plan will vary just as teachers and classes themselves vary. Consider the following suggestions to guide in the creation of a portfolio plan for LEP students:

Step One – Establish the work folder routine. Teachers and students work together to designate a location in the classroom where work folders will be kept. Work folders can take many forms – they can be cereal boxes decorated to reflect each student's self-image, individual cubbies, pigeon holes; or they can be folders hung in a crate on a file drawer. The key is that the location should be easily accessible for students. All completed and corrected assignments are placed in the work folder on a daily basis.

Step Two – Meet with each student to set goals and purge the work folder. Student self-assessment and goal setting are essential components of the developmental portfolio plan for LEP students. Students routinely reflect on their part in the educational process and are given the opportunity to more fully grasp expectations set *with* them rather than *for* them. The teacher and student meet briefly once or twice a week. These meetings are imperative, and considerations for meeting times must be built into the initial plan. Purging is also an essential part of the plan for portfolio management. During these meetings:

- The teacher and student discuss the contents of the work folder. The student's strengths and areas in need of improvement are outlined. Previous goals are reviewed and areas are targeted for continued development. New individual goals (academic and linguistic) are set for the upcoming weeks.

- The student chooses two or three items from the work folder (referred to as “artifacts”) to become part of the portfolio. Teachers should provide guided suggestions to encourage students to choose a variety of work that reflects growth and achievement. The student should be encouraged to choose work that most closely meets the goals set in previous weeks, work the student enjoyed doing most, work the student found the most challenging, work the student learned the most from, or work containing information the student found the most interesting. Notes or draft copies should be included as part of the completed artifacts. These artifacts are coded “student choice” and the student should write a line or two describing the reasons these artifacts were chosen. This can be done on a card or page that is attached to the artifact. This step is important because it is a dated record of the meeting, it provides another writing sample, it is a demonstration of the student’s attitude toward his/her education, and it requires self-assessment.
- The teacher chooses one or two artifacts. Teachers should refer to the student choices made in step two and consider goals set for the student along with areas of strength or need for improvement that were not reflected by the student’s choices. These artifacts are coded “teacher’s choice.” As a demonstration of the collaborative educational process, teachers should also write a line or two describing the reasons for these choices, discuss those reasons with the student, and attach the card or paper to the artifact.
- The remaining contents of the work folder should be sent home with the student. This leaves the work folder empty.

Step Three – Put artifacts in the portfolio. How the portfolios themselves are housed is up to the individual teacher. As a few suggestions, a file drawer can be designated, a crate with hanging folders can be used, or a binder can be used. Whatever the choice, the portfolio should be kept within access of the students, but within the supervision of the teacher. Since each portfolio belongs to each individual student, it is worthwhile to discuss privacy issues with the class during the creation of the initial plan and to set consequences of breaching of another’s portfolio.

Step Four – Purge the portfolio. Purging is necessary for managing the accumulated work samples in the portfolio. Toward the end of a grading period, the artifacts collected in the portfolio should be evaluated in relation to individual student goals in order to select a smaller sample of work. The number of final choices will vary but should represent a comprehensive view of the student’s overall achievements and growth. Purged items can be sent home with the student, while the portfolio remains in the classroom. Including the student in this process is highly recommended since it is a meaningful time to review the growth process.

Since the portfolio contains an overview of the student’s development over time, it can be a helpful time saver for others teachers and beneficial for the continuation of the student’s education. Plans should include a system to pass the portfolio from teacher to teacher or from school to school if the student relocates.

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From Theory to Practice

Number 9



Issues in Grading Limited English Proficient Students

When I begin a session working with teachers on grading and assessment issues, I often put this quote on the overhead and ask the teachers what it means to them in the context of assessment: “You don’t fatten your lambs by weighing them.” (Vermont farmer)

To me, this quote is a reminder that measuring and assigning scores to student work often does not, in itself, add to student learning. Sometimes, in fact, this weighing process discourages students from learning because it does not adequately use their strengths or recognize what they have accomplished.

Some grading and assessment issues apply to all students, but teachers of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students are faced with additional issues as well.

Below are some issues teachers face concerning grading LEP students:

- The LEP student’s limited English affects the student’s ability to communicate his or her content knowledge.
- The LEP student works hard, but the student’s achievement falls short in comparison to others in the class because of the LEP student’s limited proficiency in English.
- The teacher worries that recognizing the LEP student’s effort and progress will be setting two standards of achievement: LEP and non-LEP.
- The teacher and the LEP student have different expectations and interpretations of the grade.

There is no easy answer to these issues. The following suggestions are offered to help teachers develop a grading and assessment plan:

1. Focus on the LEP student’s *meaning*, instead of language errors such as grammar mistakes or awkward phrasing. Ask yourself: Did the student understand the question? Did he/she answer the question? How well did the student develop his or her thoughts?
2. Grade a combination of process and product for all students. Thomas Guskey, a well-known educator, illustrates with a hypothetical gym class situation. Imagine assessing two students: One is a brilliant athlete; the other has poor movement skills but always tries his or her hardest and is unfailingly a good sport. Using only product criteria, such as how high the student can jump and how fast the student can run, would not recognize the second student for the things that student does well and which are equally legitimate and relevant criteria for the class.
3. Early in the school year, explain to students what and how you grade. Show examples of good work. Use scoring rubrics with clear criteria. Involve students in developing criteria for evaluating assignments. Teach students to evaluate their own work.

4. Have grades reflect a variety of performances (some less dependent on fluent language skills) such as participation, projects, portfolios, and oral explanations.
5. Adapt tests and test administration. For example, allow more time for LEP students, or read the test to them. Teach test-taking skills and strategies. Since grading on a curve is often unfair to beginning ELL learners, use criterion-referenced tests.
6. Teach students how to evaluate their own work. Have students conduct self-evaluations. Talk to students after grading if you think their expectations were different from the grade they received.
7. Grade beginning ELL students as “satisfactory/unsatisfactory” or “at/above/below expectations” until the end of the year. Then assign a letter grade for the year.
8. Put a note on the report card or transcript to identify the student as an English Language Learner. Write comments to clarify how the student was graded.

In addition to developing a grading plan, also occasionally perform a “self-check” of your methods of assessing students. The following questions could be used:

Do I test what and how I teach? For example, if I’m teaching complex thinking and thematic units, am I assessing student knowledge of relationships and interdependence, or am I assessing knowledge of isolated facts? If my teaching requires students to apply and use new knowledge, does my assessment involve application of knowledge or does it only require recall or recognition of information?

Do I use a variety of assessments, including alternative assessments? Alternative assessments may reflect better what and how a teacher teaches. Projects, for example, often require integration and use of skills and knowledge in a way that approximate performances required in real life. Portfolios show student growth over time and include student self-evaluation and reflection.

When I use more traditional tests, such as multiple choice or short answer, do I review the tests to make sure that language and cultural bias has been minimized, and do I teach test-taking strategies to all my students?

Teachers who think through the grading issues that are most relevant to their classes; who develop guidelines that work for them and that they can clearly and consistently explain to students, parents, and others; and who self-check their assessments periodically, will surely fatten their lambs while weighing them.

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From Theory to Practice

Number 10



Working with Families

Families and teachers both are preparing children for the future. Both have the goal of nurturing and educating children. And yet, despite this common goal, families and schools often encounter difficulties collaborating in children's education.

Laurie Olsen and her co-authors of *The Unfinished Journey: Restructuring Schools in a Diverse Society* found that family involvement, especially for language minority families, is one of the most critical features of restructuring schools, but also one of the most difficult to implement. In their two-and-one-half-year investigation of school restructuring, they visited 32 California schools, all with language minority students. They found many types of family involvement, which they categorized into three paradigms. In planning family involvement, schools should consider how to implement components from each of these three paradigms.

First paradigm: Schools involve families in supporting the education of their children. In this paradigm, schools encourage parents and other family members to provide home support for the schools' educational program. However, providing this support may be difficult for families who are recent immigrants and who are still learning English themselves. Schools may assist these families in a variety of ways. They may set up native language orientation for families about the U.S. school system or they may create literacy, ESL, and parent education classes for adults. Family involvement specialists may facilitate family attendance at orientation nights and parent/teacher conferences. Teachers may create family learning projects for families and students to finish together at home after the activities are introduced to students in the classroom. Topics in family learning projects could include using the newspaper index, using the comics to learn, or comparing TV shows for similarities or differences.

In *A Magical Encounter*, Alma Flor Ada describes a family literacy program called "Parents, Children and Books" in which parents collaborate in creating books to share with their children. In a series of meetings, facilitators read illustrated children's books with parents in small groups; parents then share the books with their families at home, reading or retelling the story based on the illustrations. After experiencing dramatic readings of illustrated stories, parents participate in creating books based on their own experiences, dictating text in their native language to a facilitator on topics such as "From yesterday to tomorrow" (a collection of riddles, sayings, and rhymes), or "When my life changed ..." (a sharing of oral histories). The facilitator types the text into books, which are returned to parents for sharing with their families. Through this program, parents learn how to read or discuss books with their children, promoting "their children's cognitive and language development, while at the same time, creating a home atmosphere that is conducive to the sharing of experiences and feelings."

Second paradigm: Schools involve families as advocates for school programs. In this paradigm, families support schools by helping to solve problems brought on by budget cuts or by advocating innovations created by the schools. Family members may volunteer in the school or raise funds for field trips or textbooks. Family members and teachers may band together as advocates on important issues. In one school, parents and teachers formed the Partnership School Committee to petition the school board to expand the school's immersion program from a strand within the school to a schoolwide program. "Immersion parents shaped the outcome. ...The board finally approved immersion. It was a wonderful victory." In this paradigm, schools and families join forces in support of educational programs that schools might not be able to carry out by themselves. As a result of this collaboration, family members learn how to advocate effectively for educational innovations.

Third paradigm: Families have a right to democratic participation in the functioning of the school. In this paradigm families are deeply involved in decision making in their children's schools as the most important advocates for their children and their children's education. In this role, families help to ensure that education is culturally and linguistically appropriate.

This paradigm is the most critical for the wellbeing and education of language minority students. Furthermore, in some states family participation in school decision making is mandated by law. In many cases, however, this paradigm may be the most difficult to implement and the one most likely to lead to conflict. How and in what areas will family members participate in decision making? In classroom visits? On committees making curriculum decision? Because this paradigm brings families into nontraditional areas of influence in the school, teachers and administrators, as well as family members, may need to learn new roles and ways to communicate.

Differing cultural and language expectations can also be barriers to this type of family involvement. For example, teachers might introduce math concepts through the use of manipulatives, whereas some parents might view these activities as "play" rather than education. In some households parents might expect children to accept the opinions of their elders, whereas teachers might expect children to voice and defend their own opinions in class.

By creating lines of communication among families, teachers, and other school personnel, schools can begin to mediate differences. One teacher links families and schools through "parent interactive journals," which she writes with families of her first-graders. Once a week, each student takes home a journal in which the teacher has written a short note to the family in the English or in the family's native language. Any family member may respond in writing, over the telephone, or in a meeting with the teacher. These journals and exchanges become interactive records of families' lives, experiences, and expectations of the schooling process.

Implementing the three paradigms:

All three of these paradigms are critical for students and their families. There must be family academic support for student learning, financial and advocate support for schools buffeted by budget cuts, and meaningful collaboration between families and schools. In addition, families have a vital role to play in informing schools about the culture, values, and languages of their children. Thus, it is important to create ways for families to participate meaningfully in educational decision making.

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