

Running Head: TEACHING ELL STUDENTS

The Culture of Teaching ELL Students Successfully

A Two-Way Bilingual

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the short and long term effects of a Two-Way bilingual education programs on the literacy development of students in K-3 and high school. Two groups included students in English Language Learners (ELL) as well as students who were not ELL. Both groups were instructed in equal 50-50 percent English/Spanish. The academic performance of these students was focus on short-term look at grades K-3 but also follow groups of students through the middle and high school years. Results indicate that there is little difference between programs in the early grades but also the researchers found “very large, cumulative, long-term differences in student achievement; these students were in Two-Way bilingual program during their elementary school years” (Thomas and Collier, 1998, p. 49).

Results show that students in the ELL program make adequate academic progress, confirming the usefulness of the Two-Way bilingual program in reducing the achievement gap between ELL students and others. Educators who use the enrichment models that were initially developed for English learners are beginning to see the power of these models for students.

Why Two-Way Bilingual programs are an option to English Language Learners (ELL) and native English speakers

Since late 1960 the United States have debated how to teach English language Learners students effectively. Most of the programs see identify the education of ELL students as a problem for the school. Thomas & Collier (1997, 1998); Mikow-Porto (2004); Lopez & Tashakkori (2004) have studied ELL students and agree in an efficient Two-Way bilingual program approach. But Thomas & Collier (1998) wrote a concern that ELL students are not receiving the same level of the standard curriculum as mainstream classes. He stated that “the accomplishment and equal opportunity breach increase as mainstream students build in front while ELL students are not advancing” (p.1). Thomas & Collier (1998) also suggests that faculty and staff for the last three decades see ELL students as problem that were to be molded to fit into the already established school acceptance programs of teaching. They wrote “we have often viewed English Learners as a ‘problem’ for our schools, and so we ‘remediate’ by sending them to a specialist to be ‘fixed’” (p. 1). Thomas & Collier (1998) used a great deal of testing data in U.S. schools that show more efficient examples how to teach ELL. Dual language (Two-Way Bilingual) programs help both mainstream and bilingual students to learn and be fluent in two languages. Mikow-Porto et al (2004) wrote “ by the year 2030, nearly 40% of all school age children will be English Language Learners (Thomas & Collier, 2002) or children for whom English is not a first language” (p. 6).

Thomas and Collier (1998) wrote:

“The academic work in the early grades is natural vehicle for proficiency development of the minority language... gradually, with each following grade, the program provides more instruction in English until children learn the curriculum equally through both languages by grade four or five” (p. 24).

Lopez & Tashakkori (2004) in their article about the two-way bilingual education programs state that it shares a transactional relationship between native language (L1) and second language (L2). They affirm that teaching in L1 is not damaging to the growth of ELL skills. Therefore, it should speed up gaining of L2 and the growth of educational skills in L2, including all areas of reading, writing, and any other courses that those two subjects for understanding in school. “the interdependence hypothesis, which stated that there is a transfer of knowledge, skills, and process across language and that the development of primary language literacy skills facilitates the acquisition of academic skills in the second language” (p 20).

Thomas and Collier (1998) suggested that the improvement programs for ELL are excellent and effective when students are challenging to improve academically and use students’ linguistic and cultural experiences as a resource for interdisciplinary, discovery learning is apparent (p 23-24). One limitation to these findings includes the information from Thomas and Collier (1997). They have stated in their research that it is important to remember that long-term studies have not been established yet and that these discussion differences in student achievement; these are only from the short-term findings. Most of the studies of school effectiveness in bilingual/ESL education have focused on short-term look at grades K-3 and many of these studies have concluded that there is little difference between programs in the early grades. They found similar patterns in their data, but as they continued to follow groups of students through the middle and

high school years. They found: “very large, cumulative, long-term differences in student achievement; these students were in Two-Way bilingual program during their elementary school years” (p. 49). They also concluded that minority language cognitive and academic development is an input predictor of academic success in second language (p. 50).

Thomas & Collier (1998, 1997); Mikow-Porto (2004); Lopez & Tashakkori (2004) have studied ELL students learning and agreed that only an efficient Two-Way bilingual program can be successful. According to these researchers the schools in the United States have clear achievement data that point to the most efficient programs that explain how to teach ELL. What is astounding is that these same programs are also dynamic models for school reform for all students. Dual language (Two-Way bilingual) programs help mainstream and bilingual students to learn and be fluent in two languages. These enrichment programs for English learners are extremely effective when they are intellectually challenging and use students’ linguistic and cultural experiences as a resource for interdisciplinary, discovery learning (Chiang 1994, Ovando & Collier in press). Although it has been suggested that we need longitudinal studies to confirm the shorter term studies on how to teach ELL students, educators who use the enrichment models that were initially developed for English learners are beginning to see the power of these models for students. The success of these models will definitely answer and provide the success of our schools as they answer the call of positive growth by the NCLB Act.

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