

Mediated Learning Experiences for ELLs

Joel R. Montgomery, EdD

University of Phoenix

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This paper addresses elements of the bilingual program for English language learners (ELL) in Illinois School District U-46 (U-46). Beginning with the context of bilingual education in the United States, the paper also introduces the current state of bilingual programming in U-46. ELL initiatives in light of the U-46 partnership with the Stupski foundation (from 2002-2007) are highlighted and 2007 results (the most recent available) are reported. An on-going ELL initiative involving creating mediated learning experiences (MLEs) for ELLs using Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment (FIE) program is reviewed. The initiative is tied to relevant theories and details of the relevant concepts are introduced. Relevant research concerning both MLEs and the FIE program are summarized. Details of the first year of the pilot study are shared, along with recommendations for continued implementation for the second year. Interviews with four ELL professionals from the district are provided for comments on the ELL program as a whole and on the MLE and FIE program initiatives. The paper concludes with a brief summary and recommendations for ongoing intervention and research.

Foreword

Bilingual Education in the United States—a Brief Review

Bilingualism and bilingual education have been a part of the fabric of the United States of America from post-Columbus times to the present (Fitzgerald, 1993). Acceptance and support for bilingual education has reflected political and social experience within the country and has been linked to economic, social, immigration, national security issues and world views throughout the entire period (Crawford, 1997; Escamilla, 1989; Fitzgerald, 1993; Ovando, 2003).

While generally open and respectful of languages other than English, with the notable exception of acceptance of native American languages, in the late 1880's a variety of national security, economic, and immigration issues began a shift toward an English-only attitude that still has an influence on state policies (Escamilla, 1989; Fitzgerald, 1993; Ovando, 2003).

Beginning with the launching of Sputnik by the USSR in late 1957, acceptance for non-English languages began to grow in popularity. The "invasion" of Florida by Cuban refugees following the Castro revolution prompted Florida to develop a bilingual education program in 1959 that achieved national recognition in 1963 (Escamilla, 1989). This opened the door for renewed bilingual programs in Spanish and other languages in many states. The passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965 set the stage for congressional approval of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (Crawford, 1997; Escamilla, 1989; Fitzgerald, 1993; Ovando, 2003). This act was actually Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education act and was approved as a new provision of the original act. The act was passed in the time of President L.B. Johnson's "war on poverty" and act "strove to help disenfranchised language-minority students, especially Hispanics" (Ovando, 2003, p. 8).

In 1974 United States Supreme Court in their decision about the case, *Lau v. Nichols*, decreed that schools providing English-only education denied equal access to education to students who spoke other languages. Schools were required to "do something meaningful" for students who did not speak English to help them overcome this disadvantage (Fitzgerald, 1993; Escamilla, 1989; Ovando, 2003). The Office of Civil Rights promoted "*Lau Remedies*" in 1975 that became the federal requirements for addressing the needs of language-minority students and served as a blueprint for school districts to follow (Ovando, 2003). In 1981, the *Castañeda v. Pickard* case in Texas resulted in a decision by the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals which

established a three-step test to determining whether school districts were taking “appropriate action” as required by the act for assessing programs serving language-minority students: (a) school programs had to be anchored in sound educational theory, (b) adequate resources and personnel had to be evident in the school programs, and (c) the school programs had to reflect sound practices and results, not only in language but also in such content areas as math, science, social studies, and language arts (Ovando, 2003).

Beginning in the 1980s, political support began to shift away from bilingual education and more toward English-only programs. While research-endorsed bilingual education programs continue, there is strong opposition to including native language instruction and increasing demand for achieving fluency in English (Escamilla, 1989; Fitzgerald, 1993; Ovando, 2003). Many of the opponents to bilingual education are basing their arguments on data not supported by current research (Crawford, 1997).

Bilingual Education in Illinois School District U-46

Available on-line records from Illinois School District U-46 (U-46) do not reflect its involvement with bilingual education prior to 1967. While, like many school districts, there are literally tons of paper files archived in several places, district leaders were not aware of the existence anywhere of a bilingual history. Most school districts in Illinois were chartered in the late 1800s and the immigrant population in Chicago and its environs was of significant size at that time. Many of those immigrants had limited English proficiency. Research indicates that bilingual or primary education existed in Illinois in German, Norwegian, Scandinavian, and Danish (Ovando, 2003). Based on the changes in political support for bilingual education described above, many of these programs would have been discontinued long before the 1950s.

The documented formation of a bilingual program in U-46 appears to coincide with the imminent approval of the Bilingual Education Act, authorizing federal funds for school districts with bilingual programs. “In 1967, Illinois School District U-46 (U-46) started its bilingual program with just 60 students” (Illinois School District U-46, 2008a, p. 1).

The program is now called the English Language Learner (ELL) program. Since its inception in 1967, the program’s evolution in the school district has closely matched the changes in funding priorities for bilingual education at the state and federal levels. In 2004 Illinois joined in partnership with the World-Wide Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium (2008). All bilingual education students in Illinois are tested annually on English proficiency standards developed by WIDA (Illinois State Board of Education [ISBE], 2004). In addition to using ACCESS for ELLs to test achievement of English proficiency standards, Illinois also uses a WIDA-developed assessment to place ELLs when they enter the bilingual program (ISBE, 2007). U-46 is the second largest K-12 school district in Illinois and spans 11 widely divergent communities and serves approximately 40,000 students in 40 elementary schools, eight middle schools, and five high schools (Walsh, 2006). In school-year 2007-2008, the ELL program served 6,700 students with limited English proficiency, representing 19.9% of total enrollment. Spanish is the primary language for 98% of these ELLs. The racial and ethnic backgrounds of the 40,000 students in the district are: 41% of the district are Hispanic; 42.7% are white; 6.8% are African-American, 3.8% are Asian or Pacific Islander, 0.2% are native American, and 1.7% are multiracial or ethnic. 42.5% of the student population are classified as low income (Interactive Illinois Report Card [IIRC], 2007).

The State of Illinois requires districts to provide instruction in a child's first language when there are 20 or more students in the same school sharing the same language. U-46

has a significant number of Spanish-speaking children and those students participate in a traditional bilingual program. But, the district also offers two additional programs:

Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI) and Dual Language Program. When less than 20 students speak the same language, they belong to the TPI program, which provides a more specialized curriculum. One of the district's unique programs is the Dual Language Program where students apply for admission and then study both English and Spanish simultaneously. Students in this program are native speakers in one of the languages, and then the classes are conducted in both languages (U-46, 2008a, p. 1).

Rapid growth has transformed the U-46 community. Over the past 12 years, enrollment has increased by approximately 8,500 and the district has opened 13 new schools. The district's ELL enrollment has almost doubled in the last twelve years. In school-year 1994-1995, the figure was 3,283; in the 2007-2008 school year, that figure was roughly 6,700. At the elementary level, almost one in five children in U-46 is an ELL (Stupski, 2006; Walsh, 2006).

District Reform—Realignment of the Instructional System of U-46, 2002-Present

In order for U-46 to meet the needs of the students it served, it began working in partnership with the Stupski Foundation (2008) in 2002 to create a more effective, dynamic, and integrated system throughout U-46, all focused on accomplishing the vision of the district: “Academic success for all.” The partnership with the Stupski Foundation continued until 2007 and the district is continuing to build on the structures and recommendations created during that partnership (Walsh, 2006, U-46, 2008g). Rather than focusing exclusively on the ELL program, the initiatives the district put into place help all students and the professional development programs being implemented benefit all teachers. The first District Improvement Plan was approved by the U-46 school board in 2003 (U-46, 2008g, p. 1). The District Improvement Plan

focuses on improvement in six areas (pillars): Curriculum Instruction & Assessment, High Priority Schools, Fiscal Responsibility, Leadership, Data Management, and Public Trust and Support (U-46, 2008b). As part of the restructuring effort, the district has established a Curriculum Roadmap that serves as “A Tool for Our Teachers.....A Journey for Our Students.....A Guide for Our Parents” (U-46, 2008c). The curriculum roadmap covers the entire U-46 curriculum and aligns the entire curriculum to IL state learning standards. Teachers for different components of the roadmap meet together to decide on common textbooks and curricula and to create district-wide assessments. The curriculum roadmap group for eighth grade pre-Algebra created common assessments two years ago and is in the process of refining the “pacing guide” (rate at which material in the common textbook needs to be covered for students to be ready for the quarterly district-wide assessments [U-46, 2008d]). In the summer, the district sponsors a meeting for teachers of the subject to work collaboratively to improve those elements of the curriculum. This process is followed for all areas of the roadmap. Bilingual and special education teachers are part of the joint taskforces for each of the areas covered. For pre-Algebra, U-46 purchased new textbooks in 2006 available in both English and Spanish. All students in the district work with a common textbook. In addition to the curriculum roadmap initiative, U-46 has hired a number of instructional coaches, including two for bilingual education (U-46, 2008e). These coaches participate in professional development programs and share best practices. They have come into classrooms to model and to coach. The school district is also working with the work of Robert Marzano on academic vocabulary for all students in all grades (U-46, 2008f). U-46 conducts annual audits to assess results and implementation of the recommendations generated from the partnership with the Stupski Foundation as part of its process of ongoing improvement (U-46, 2008g). In school-year 2006-

2007 (the time frame covered in the most recent audit available), U-46 reported on its progress with regard to the 11 recommendations concerning changes to our ELL program and services (U-46, 2008g, pp. 6-8).

In January, 2008, the Stupski Foundation published a report on defining a comprehensive aligned instructional system (Waters & Walsh-O'Meara, 2008), based, in part, on lessons learned from their partnership with U-46.

Faced with a \$42 million deficit, Illinois district U-46, outside of Chicago, decided to leverage the crisis to re-think its entire system. In order to gain community confidence, build internal accountability, and strategically cut the budget, the superintendent commissioned a series of outside audits throughout the system, including in finance, curriculum, English Learners, special education, and human resources. Armed with this data, she undertook a planning process that resulted in a District Improvement Plan (DIP). Re-adopted and tailored each year, the DIP laid the foundation for the development of a unifying Curriculum Roadmap to anchor the instructional program. In order to jump start the curriculum process, she put in place a Foundation-funded team with external curriculum and assessment leadership supported by internal teacher leaders. This one-year personnel "module" allowed her the time to restructure her cabinet and identify and support permanent internal leaders to take the Curriculum Roadmap to implementation. She strategically began rolling out the assessment and professional development components of the Roadmap with the most challenged schools, particularly those serving English Learners, thereby intensifying and centralizing support for the lowest performing students. Further support for low-performing groups was provided by moving the budget to align funding to need. As a result, between 2003 and 2006 English

Learner performance improved dramatically, moving from 32% to 68% at advanced or proficient in reading and 44% to 75% in math along with a 41% improvement in schools making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (Waters & Walsh-O'Meara, 2008, p. 12¹).

2007 Results on Measures of Annual Yearly Progress

District-wide, limited English proficient (LEP) students (those served by the ELL program) met or exceeded targets for Annual Yearly Progress. 99% of the LEP students took the state tests (ISATs through 8th grade, ACT and PSAE in 11th grade). 60.3% of the LEP students met or exceeded the state standards in reading and 70.8% met or exceeded the state standards in math. For Annual Yearly Progress in 2007, the state expected 55% to meet or exceed state standards in each of these content areas (IIRC, 2007).

Mediated Learning Experiences for ELLs—An Ongoing ELL Initiative

Connections with Relevant Theory and Practice

Adolescent ELLs face all of the challenges of adolescence (Santrock, 2005), plus the challenges inherent in developing fluency in two languages (Cummins, 1979, Fradd & Lee, 2001). Recent arrivals from Spanish-speaking countries will be at various stages in the development of fluency in Spanish (L1). Other ELLs, some born in the USA and some educated in U-46 elementary schools, have no solid language base in either Spanish or English. This is especially true for students whose parents had limited education experiences and had limited fluency in Spanish or English or both. In the classroom these ELLs are fluent in a social form English liberally endowed with both Spanish and “Spanglish” words. Research by Montaña-Harmon (1991) indicates that this social language influenced the writing of the Mexican-American/Chicano students used in her study. Rather than being influenced by Spanish (L1), she

observed that “these students' compositions showed all of the problems associated with a limited level of literacy in English” (p. 419).

Research by Majoribanks (2006) shows that there is an interrelationship between cognitive dispositions and expectations, the learning environment, affective outcomes associated with school experience, and adolescent educational attainment. He also observed that mediation within the other three variables can impact adolescent educational attainment.

Mediated Learning Experiences

Cognitive development, according to Dr. Reuven Feuerstein is dependent on direct intervention over time that teaches the mental processes necessary for learning how to learn. Feuerstein calls these interventions *mediated learning experiences*. Feuerstein’s work connects with Lev Vygotsky’s idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which is the range in which a learner can solve problems independently and the learner’s ability to benefit from expert guidance (Ellis, 2005).

According to Ben-Hur (1998), mediated learning experiences (MLEs) transform a person’s cognitive systems and facilitate cognitive development. Mediators interfere with a person’s world to show meaning, to see the world selectively, to sort relevant data from irrelevant data, to learn to label experiences, and to group experiences by categories. MLEs prepare a person for future learning by providing opportunities to learn how to learn and how to think.

Children who have not received sufficient MLEs are not prepared to deal with the cognitive challenges confronting them as they enter school and are thus unable to benefit from the wealth of classroom experiences offered. Even when faced with hands-on, active-learning opportunities, they fail to find the meaning. They may enjoy creating the

model planets, but they do not understand the related "whys." They fail to achieve academically, fall behind, and lose interest. These children often experience the world in a random, impulsive way and grasp it episodically. They cannot consider several sources of information simultaneously and do not compare their experiences. They do not form relationships between ideas or look for causes. They do not identify problems and are bored even in classes that teachers believe are challenging. They are children who do not feel a need to reason and draw inferences, children who have difficulties in making representations.

Many minority parents withhold MLEs from their children and delegate the responsibility for their cognitive development to the social institutions of the government because they do not see their own culture as necessary, or even appropriate, for the future of their children. MLEs in the classroom can change the course of a child's early cognitive development if he or she did not receive sufficient MLEs as part of his or her early childhood experiences (Beh-Hur, 1998).

Feuerstein Instrumental Enrichment Program

Feuerstein's research with his theory of cognitive modifiability has "led to the development of an elaborate curriculum called *Instrumental Enrichment*, which provides the kinds of needed mediated learning experiences" (Ellis, 2005, p. 90).

The program consists of a series of content-free lessons, called *instruments*, which are grouped in areas of cognitive abilities. Students work on *instruments* with paper and pencil for about two to three hours weekly. The teacher is the mediator and assists the students to transfer what they are learning from the program back to the classroom. The program is sufficiently sophisticated to make it crucial that teachers have a considerable amount of teacher training in its use (Ellis, 2005).

Research on MLEs and the FIE Program

Kaufman & Burden (2004) reported the results of a study on the effects of mediation training with FIE program. In particular, the study focused on the process and outcome of peer learning interactions between young adults with serious learning disabilities. Ten young adults between the ages of 18 and 27, participated in a year-long program based on Feuerstein's theory of mediated learning and included 178 hours of cognitive intervention using the FIE program. The peer mediation process was supplemented by an additional emphasis on collaborative group discussions at the end of every session. The results of the experiment showed that, after one year, the participants' learning self-concept was well above average. Their reflections about how the FIE program had helped them to change and their descriptions of what was required to provide effective mediation "demonstrated deep levels of cognitive, emotional and social development" (p. 107).

In their reflection on the study itself, Kaufman & Burden (2004) observed that young adults with significant and even profound learning disabilities functioned very effectively as peer tutors and learning support agents for each other, and that they actively enjoyed working in this capacity. Moreover, given appropriate training and opportunity, they also learned to reflect upon and articulated their thoughts and feelings about the experience.

They also noted that the project evolved from one with a teacher-mediator introducing FIE to individuals into one in which the students began to take on the role as peer tutor-mediators, the individuals became friends and the project became more of collaborative learning than strictly peer tutoring. This positive evolution represents several outcome features of successful MLEs. The project leader, in a facilitator role, emphasized the importance of the group sharing their experiences and discussing barriers to successful teaching/learning and ways

of overcoming these barriers. It would be hard to distinguish the relative contributions of those two aspects of the work and both definitely played an important part. In the opinion of these two researchers, additional emphasis upon collaborative group work can add a vital extra dimension to peer tutoring programs by focusing upon aspects of MLE that might otherwise be overlooked. (Kaufman & Burden, 2004).

Tzuriel & Shamir (2007) reported on a study on the effect of Peer Mediation with Young Children (PMYC). PMYC is aimed at teaching young children how to mediate to their peers. The main goals of peer mediation are to develop children's mediation teaching style and cognitive modifiability. PMYC was developed based on Vygotsky's socio-cultural and Feuerstein's mediated learning experience theories. The main objectives of the study were to investigate the effects of PMYC program on participant's cognitive modifiability of mediators and learners and to study the effects of cognitive level of the learner and mediator on their cognitive modifiability following the program. (This study did not focus on the FIE program or its instruments.)

Following the intervention, the experimental mediators had learned to be more effective teachers and showed higher level of analogies scores, as well as higher improvement on the dynamic analogies measure as compared with control mediators. The experimental learners showed higher pre- to post-intervention achievements on the sequencing problems as compared with control learners. When there was a match between the mediator and learner's cognitive level (i.e. low-low or high-high) the differences between the experimental and control groups were minor and negligible. When the mediator-learner cognitive levels did not match, the experimental learners received higher scores than the control learners. Mediators in the experimental group had to cope with the incongruent cognitive level by changing their approach

to mediation and consequently enhancing the learner's performance. These findings supported their main expectation that "children who learn how to mediate become themselves better self-mediators (i.e. better learners)" (Tzuriel & Shamir, 2007, p. 161).

Taking the application of the results of the current study one step further, especially with regard to children who lack adequate mediation processes at home, "A possible alternative solution for the lack of mediation might therefore be development of the peer mediation approach among peers, for the benefit of the learners and even more so for the benefit of the mediators" (Tzuriel & Shamir, 2007, p. 161).

Contini de González (2006) provides a review of Feuerstein's mediated learning experience theory and traced the development of this theory and its impact on ideas regarding cognitive modifiability. She also introduces the Instrumental Enrichment program and the cognitive map on which the instruments are based. She links Feuerstein's theories with related theories of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), learning potential and scaffolding. Cognitive abilities are an essential resource for learning in childhood. As school failure is often associated with cognitive ability deficit, it has severe emotional and social consequences. In this work, a new theoretical model to deal with cognitive deficits is developed. The following notions are taken into account: mediated learning experiences (Feuerstein), Zone of Proximal Development, Learning Potential and Scaffolding. Static assessment is compared with dynamic assessment. The 3 phases of the model: test, intervention, post-test, and the cognitive map considered in the phases are analyzed. The Instrumental Enrichment Program (Feuerstein) is described. This method which combines diagnosis with intervention periods leads to cognitive change constituting a powerful resource for working with mentally retarded or culturally deprived children" (p. 107).

Contini de González (2006) suggests that more investigation is required for this new model of diagnosis and intervention. There are several potential challenges to the model. The intervention depends on the clinical experience and wisdom of the evaluator. It is also difficult to determine if the quality of execution and the period of training are related to the treatment itself or to other factors. Some of these other factors include expertise of the mediator and the subject's cognitive impairment. The primary question of the approach's effectiveness hangs on this point, are the effects produced by the materials used, by the rapport with the mediator, or by the mediator's expertise? Criticism is also made about the lack of clear rules regarding the conduct of training sessions. The relationship that develops between the mediator and the subject will also impact the conduct of the training sessions. A final question is how long will the gains in learning potential last? After the mediated learning experience is concluded, how long can the less experienced subject hold on to what he has gained? (p. 120-121)

This new method, used successfully in Israel by Feuerstein with culturally deprived adolescents, is a powerful and promising proposal for work with children and adolescents who come from backgrounds or cultural deprivation with mild mental retardation. Its implementation has shown that cognitive change is possible. This opens hopeful prospects for intervention for educational psychologists who work daily with children living under poor conditions, and for whom school failure is one of the distinguishing characteristics that often leads to dropping out of school. Abandonment of the school system leads to greater marginalization and social exclusion. Hence the relevance this new method takes to the field of evaluation and psychological intervention (Contini de González, 2006).

Forsyth (2004) had one of Feuerstein's original studies (first published in 1979) republished in 2004 as "Voices from the Past" (Feuerstein, Rand, Hoffman, Hoffman, & Miller,

2004). He then wrote a review of the study and Feuerstein's approach. In his review he raises similar questions to those raised by Contini de González (2006).

Head & O'Neill (1999) report the results of a study using mediated learning experience and FIE in a pilot program at a secondary school for children with social and emotional behavior disorders. The researchers noted that, while the approach required a high degree of commitment both by staff and students, the results were very encouraging. "The overall benefit of the IE programme can perhaps be summarised by saying that it lies in the realisation that the planning behaviour and self-regulation fostered by the programme lead to successful living" (p. 128).

Hobbs (1980), wrote a book review on Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment which was published by the American Society for Curriculum and Instruction. In his review he introduces Dr. Feuerstein and his work and background, including first-hand glimpses of both MLE and FIE in action in Israel.

MLEs and FIE at Kimball Middle School, U-46 2007-2008

On June 11, 2007, Dr. Meir Ben-Hur, senior consultant with the program representing Dr. Feuerstein in the U.S.A. came to Kimball Middle School in Elgin, IL, to teach 19 teachers how to be mediators for the Feuerstein Instrumental Enrichment program. He had five days in which to introduce us to the program and the instruments, to model and learn how to facilitate and mediate the program, and to begin to understand the theory and the cognitive map used to support the Instrumental Enrichment program. Teachers-in-training were active and made plans over the summer to implement the first year of a two-year pilot at Kimball beginning in September, 2007. Some preliminary piloting had taken place during school-year 2006-2007, enough to generate support for a "full-blown" pilot.

FIE Instruments-Year 1

Two non-verbal instruments were selected for use, the Organization of Dots and Analytic Perception. Two complementary instruments were selected for each of these. Orientation to Space I complements Organization of Dots and would be initiated about two weeks after students began working with Organization of Dots. This instrument required more vocabulary to be learned. Those two instruments would be used during the first semester. Analytic Perception and its complementary instrument, Comparisons, were scheduled for the second semester. Comparisons also required some unique vocabulary and would be introduced shortly after the non-verbal instrument was introduced. The two non-verbal instruments required more time to complete and had many more pages for students to work on than the complementary instruments.

ELLs and timing of FIE sessions

In the first semester, Organization of Dots was allotted two to three periods per week, with classes rearranged so that trained mediators could be with the students. This instrument was completed during the double-block of English and Reading. Orientation to Space I was also allocated, on average, two periods per week, with classes rearranged so that trained mediators could be with the students. This instrument was complete during the double-block devoted to math. ELL level one and two classes were mediated in Spanish, though the vocabulary for the Orientation to Space I was introduced in both Spanish and English. ELL level three and four classes were mediated in English.

Instrument completion—year one

With the exception of minor attrition, most ELLs completed both the Organization of Dots and the Orientation to Space I by the end of the first semester. One or two classes needed to finish the last Organization of Dots pages in the first two weeks of the second semester.

Given the adjustments to schedules associated with formal assessments (ISAT and MAP) and the other schedule conflicts during the second semester, the Analytic Perception instrument was barely started—perhaps three of 26 pages completed. More work was done with the Comparisons instrument, though that, too, was not completed by the end of the year. Students averaged two to three class periods per week with each instrument during the first semester, and slightly less time during the second semester.

Student experiences and feedback

Classes were combined for many of these FIE sessions. Most classes had at least 24 students, often with only one trained mediator. As a consequence, the mediated learning experiences envisioned for the program were not executed as well as was anticipated during the summer. Some students enjoyed the instruments and the mediated learning experiences; others expressed boredom, continued to be impulsive, and refused to think about a strategy. Few students could actively apply strategies acquired during the FIE program to class work outside the program.

Faculty experiences and feedback

The program has great value and requires intense planning and patience and more training for the class—not mediation training with the instrument, more how to work in the FIE class. Class sizes were too large. While the instructor manuals for the different instruments were very good, most mediators wished for more mediator-training and felt that they could be more effective the next time they facilitated the program. Scheduling during the second semester was extremely full, and test-preparation took precedence over thinking-preparation. While that was a violation of common sense, it represented the correct assessment of common practice and priorities.

Student outcomes

Other than the regularly scheduled formal assessments of MAP and ISAT, no particular assessments pre- and post- were created for the FIE program. While some students could clearly articulate strategies and improved thinking skills during the FIE sessions, others could not. As with most interventions, change takes time to anchor. Seventh graders taking FIE again next year may anchor improvements and build on that platform. Eighth graders exiting to high school without significant reinforcement of any of the learning from the program may not be expected to retain much over the summer.

Recommendations for Year Two

Based on the review of related literature above, the mediated learning experiences and the Feuerstein Instrumental Enrichment programs should definitely be continued. They show real potential for delivering value to the students. At the same time, especially based on new priorities and schedules and a slight shifting of personnel, planning must be given to assure proper additional mediator-training and that students are placed in class sizes appropriate for effective mediated learning experiences. Training will be required for Year Two instruments in any case. Last year's training was only for the instruments used in Year One. Because last year's seventh graders will be back next year, making sure the pilot continues with them will help gather data for a more longitudinal study of impact of the program. Teacher-mediators also need to be supported in assisting the students transfer their learning to the classroom context. Because this type of training has been shown to have positive benefit on social-emotional learning and behavior, those aspects of the MLE need to be pursued more in teacher-training and in facilitating the FIE sessions with the students. Peer mediation (suggested in some of the

research studies) should be a formal part of the program, coupled with an emphasis on cooperative learning as suggested by Kaufman & Burden (2004).

Interviews

Four interviews were conducted as a part of this research. Three of the interviews focused on the ELL program in U-46 as a whole and two focused especially on the implementation of the FIE program pilot at Kimball Middle School.

Interview with Doug Johnson, outgoing ELL Coordinator, Kimball Middle School

How long have you been involved in ESL/Bilingual/ELL programming?

“I began in 1988 in Albuquerque, NM. I opened ESL/Bilingual programs in two middle schools and one high school before coming to Kimball Middle School from Larsen Middle School seven years ago. Next year I will be opening the ELL program at Elgin High School.

(Doug is a trained FIE-mediator.)

How would you describe the district’s current ELL program?

“It is one of the best ELL programs in the area and has many strengths — more now than 10 years ago.” It diversifies levels and offers support to all levels. Native language instruction is provided and transitional classes are offered.

ESL 5 is the best of both. Students’ schedules include some “regular-ed” (non-ELL) classes and one ESL class.

The district keeps opening ELL programs at neighborhood schools, allowing ELL students to remain a part of their neighborhoods rather than being bused to central locations for ELL programming.

What do you see as some of the strengths of the program?

I see scheduling based on diversification of ELL skill levels, native language instruction, and ESL 5 as being strengths, along with opening more access to ELL programming at the neighborhood level.

What do you see as some of the weaknesses of the program?

Overall, our program is a “detractive” program—in that it removes support for native language.

A major weakness is the lack of on-going support for native language instruction. These ELL students will not fit into normal Spanish classes taught as a foreign language in secondary schools. Many are not fluent in reading and writing in Spanish and need more support to build those skills in native language fluency. They need a “Spanish for Spanish-speakers” course—actually a series of courses that would allow them to maintain and increase native language fluency while building fluency in English as well.

Interview with Edmundo Jimenez, ELL Teacher, Kimball Middle School

How long have you been involved in ESL/Bilingual/ELL programming?

“I have been a bilingual teacher in District U-46 for four years. I teach 7th grade math to students at ELL levels 1, 2, and 3. (Edmundo is also a trained FIE-mediator.)

How would you describe the district’s current ELL program?

“For Spanish speakers it uses native language (L1) to help students learn English (L2).” Currently the ELL program is a “school-within-a-school.” ELL students are in the same classes with each other rather than being integrated too soon into “regular” classes. When this happened in the past, ELL students were thought to be “second-class citizens.” Now they have more self-esteem.

Some content courses are in Spanish and ELL 1 and 2 students receive a Spanish Language Arts class with instruction and reading in their native language

What do you see as some of the strengths of the program?

It uses Spanish as a base (L1) to connect to English (L2).

Students need a base in Spanish.

Coordinators for the ELL program in each school are resources and advocates for all ELL teachers and for the ELL students.

More federal grants have been made available for bilingual education, representing more money for minorities.

What do you see as some of the weaknesses of the program?

The ELL program (bilingual education) apparently does not receive all the grant money collected by the district for bilingual programming. There is no money for math manipulatives or for before and after-school programs to help students bridge the education gaps they come with.

Our kids (ELL students) are not sent to the right help when they need it. Many native English-speakers go to a “service team” and are sent for help with problems immediately. ELL students are retained with the problems, rather than sending them for help. It takes a long time for these students to get the help they need.

The bilingual system is always being challenged politically. Some people want the system to go away. This is a challenge for ELL teachers—our jobs are always at risk

The social-emotional learning (SEL) needs and the socio-economic needs of ELL students are not being met at school or at home. This results in behavior at school which interferes with the learning process.

What needs to be changed in the ELL program?

Our students are more at risk to be “contaminated.” They do not have built-in morals or social-emotional competence. They need education in social-emotional learning (SEL). I built the Illinois SEL standards into my lesson plans this past year. When I surveyed my students at the end of the school year, some of my students found this instruction valuable and some did not see the value.

Social-emotional learning for all students needs to be addressed more completely at both the school and district level. Illinois requires schools to teach to the Illinois SEL standards and our school and the district are just now exploring how to meet these new requirements. For our ELL students to be more successful with SEL, we need whole school involvement.

What worked with the Mediated Learning Experiences and the FIE program this year?

The design of the FIE instrument pages is clear and students liked it. They felt they were doing something important and funny at the same time.

What needs to be changed in the MLE and FIE program next year?

The number of students needs to be reduced. I felt that we were overcrowded. This situation didn't let me to mediate as expected. I think that this program should be only applied to students that really need it. That would be a way to reduce group size and the mediator would have more opportunity to help the students.

What did I learn by mediating the FIE program this year?

I started visualizing the cognitive deficiencies of students and more importantly, to understand what those deficiencies were. Also I learned that we need more input from Ben-Hur and have more practice to do it better.

How did the MLE and FIE program help students?

It helped students because they realized about new vocabulary and own deficiencies they didn't know they had.

The students had the opportunity to practice independent work and cooperative work during each session, a good opportunity to practice SEL as well.

Interview with David Gamboa, ELL Teacher, Kimball Middle School

How long have you been involved in ESL/Bilingual/ELL programming?

“I have been a bilingual teacher in District U-46 for 17 years. I teach 7th grade science to students at ELL levels 1, 2, 3, and 4.

How would you describe the district's current ELL program?

“It is a bilingual program. Students learn in both languages.

There is an education gap. Students come to middle school at the right age (12-14) and many have little schooling (perhaps two years of formal education). Their fluency in Spanish is also limited—like seven-year-olds.

What do you see as some of the strengths of the program?

The district has approved the same textbooks with an English and Spanish version for math and science. As a consequence, students are getting an equal education with regard to content.

The ELL program operates as a school-within-a-school. This allows ELL students to work and learn together and not to feel “looked down upon” by other students.

There is a bilingual home school liaison, bilingual social workers and bilingual psychologists are also available for students.

What do you see as some of the weaknesses of the program?

While our textbooks have been translated into Spanish by the book companies, these publishers provide a vast array of support resources to accompany the textbooks—workbooks and visuals for the students, lab manuals and sheets, tests, puzzles, and other support materials. None of these materials have been made available to us in Spanish (if they even exist). We waste a lot of time translating needed support material.

Students do not have the science manipulatives they need to learn the content in a hands-on way—no labs for ELL students, no math manipulatives available for math students.

Most of our bilingual ELL students receive almost no academic support at home. Most parents are almost illiterate themselves; work multiple shifts at low-paying jobs. Some may even be here illegally, though that does not impact the attendance of their children in public school.

The way our bilingual students see life—given their family and economic conditions—is different from the way middle-class native English speakers see life. Our students are waiting to reach working age when, most often with their parents’ blessing, they can leave school to work full-time to help the family. Many of our parents have low expectations for their children and have little regard for formal education.

What needs to be changed in the ELL program?

We need to improve the bilingual community from its roots. We need to form groups of parents to whom we will teach English. We can also help these parents to see the value of education.

We need to institute the practice of home visits for all of our ELL students. We need to see the circumstances and living conditions of our students. Many live in crowded conditions; sleep in closets, and have no place to study at home.

e-Mail Interview with Issamary Rosiles, ELL Fresh Start Coordinator, Kimball Middle School

Note: Issamary was trained as a FIE-mediator last summer and participated in the “mini-pilot” of the program in 2006-2007. This e-mail interview was targeted exclusively on Issamary’s experience with her MLE and FIE program experience at Kimball MS during school-years 2006-2007 and 2007-2008. David Gamboa, an ELL science teacher at Kimball Middle School was interviewed regarding the ELL program in general. He was not trained as a facilitator-mediator in the FIE program.

What worked with the MLE and FIE program this year?

Most of the students enjoyed the program but the ones that I asked said they were bored. The teacher did not present it in a fun way or they did not complete the sheets. I am not sure how it ran this year because I was not directly involved with it. I really missed working with this activity. I feel it helped develop other areas of their mind and use other skills to accomplish tasks.

I was interesting to see the growth of the students from start to finish. They took their time and reflected on each assignment. They were I guess you can say forced to change their thinking by the use of the DOTS.

I even tried some of the sheet with my 10 and 5 year old. My oldest understood what needed to be done and could find the figures but when it came to explaining her strategy it was difficult. My youngest was struggling to find the figures. He was a bit too young for this activity he just wanted to make shapes using any dot even if it meant using it twice. We only got to sheet 3 but it was a start. They are still asking for more.

The same happened with the students in the class they wanted more.

What needs to be changed?

I wish it would be the same for other content areas. I feel that the class size needs to be changed. We had really big groups this year when classes were combined to teach FIE.

What did you learn?

We had a focus group the year before which was the intervention group and the level 1 ESL students. This really benefitted them.

How can it help the students?

They learned a lot of the vocabulary that was emphasized in the program and learned to relate things to real life experiences. They also had to come up with game plans for things they would do at home. They needed to write it out step by step. This the kids enjoyed because they really do not think about the process of doing things on a daily basis. So they would write the instructions and read it to the class to see if it made sense or maybe something was left out by mistake.

Summary and Recommendations

Summary

This paper addressed elements of the bilingual program for English language learners (ELL) in Illinois School District U-46 (U-46). Beginning with the context of bilingual education

in the United States, the paper also introduced the current state of bilingual programming in U-46. ELL initiatives in light of the U-46 partnership with the Stupski foundation (from 2002-2007) were highlighted and 2007 results (the most recent available) were reported. An on-going ELL initiative involving creating mediated learning experiences (MLEs) for ELLs using Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment (FIE) program was reviewed. The initiative was tied to relevant theories and details of the relevant concepts were introduced. Relevant research concerning both MLEs and the FIE program was summarized. Details of the first year of the pilot study were shared, along with recommendations for continued implementation for the second year. Interviews with four ELL professionals from the district were provided for comments on the ELL program as a whole and on the MLE and FIE program initiatives. The paper concludes with a brief summary and recommendations for ongoing intervention and research.

Recommendations

Based on the information gleaned from various sources during the research for this paper, it is clear that there is an ongoing need for ELLs to receive support in order to be more effective as they acquire and apply language acquisition skills and as they begin to build and use critical thinking skills required for academic and social success beyond the walls of K-12 schools. Mediated learning experiences have been demonstrated to assist children, adolescents, and young people who have been culturally deprived or brain-injured in some way to learn how to learn and to be effective in using critical thinking skills. These experiences also offer the potential of being used in connection with cooperative learning to improve social-emotional learning and behavior. These factors certainly make the implementation of effective mediated learning experiences for ELLs a clear priority for next year and for the years to come. Feuerstein's

Instrumental Enrichment program has been demonstrated to be a useful tool that can assist U-46 to train teacher-mediators and to begin applying these skills in the classroom. Based on experiences to date with the program at Kimball Middle School,² teachers need more training in mediating effectively and in training students to become peer-mediators. Additional training for teachers and ELLs in how to create effective cooperative learning classrooms would also assist in building greater skill and in overcoming some of the socially-reinforced obstacles to language learning and literacy discussed in the research.

Questions for the future

How can an effective MLE program be started and continued at other middle schools in U-46?

How can schedules involving teacher and room utilization, class size, materials, and optimal classes for MLE be coordinated within a building and within a district?

Is this another initiative, like academic vocabulary, that needs to expand to the entire district rather than remaining an ELL initiative? (42% of the entire district are Hispanic while only 6,700 students are receiving ELL services.)

How can this initiative be supported in terms of district budget priorities and AYP criteria?

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² The author of this paper is also trained as a FIE-mediator and was part of the Kimball MS implementation of MLE and FIE in 2007-2008.