Chapter 16

Perspectives on English Language Learners: Addressing Effective Pedagogical Practices for Bilingual Early Childhood Students’ Reading Success in Dual Language Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

With an increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse school-age student population, there is a need to understand the extent and support needed for English language learners’ (ELLs) reading and literacy success, and the scope that these students are provided with equitable and effective reading and literacy instruction as a common classroom pedagogical occurrence to support their reading and literacy development as well as academic achievement. Specifically, ELLs require more interactive and engaging pedagogy that actively involves them in the learning process with many and varied opportunities for academic and linguistic proficiency development. There is an increased emphasis on native language instruction (LI) as a foundation for literacy skill development. Also, several constructivist and student-centered approaches for literacy instruction and strategies for reading should be implemented for English language learners’ linguistic and academic success. A classroom scenario sets the platform for culturally responsive teaching and learning through practical and authentic classroom application.

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INTRODUCTION

English Language Learners Teaching and Learning Frameworks

Learning how to read is of utmost importance in a student’s life and the importance of getting students off to a good start in reading cannot be overemphasized. Consequently, if students fall behind in learning to read, they often remain behind their peers and their reading achievement gap increases. Most recently, the field of reading and literacy has experienced a shift toward concern about children who historically have been left behind or who have ‘fallen through the cracks.’ Especially in the elementary grades, where success in school is virtually synonymous with success in reading. However, the disparity in the reading skills of students of varying degrees may have additional consequences for their future reading and cognitive development. There should be emphasis on the utilization of best practices to build foundation and provide effective and appropriate instruction for all students, specifically for English language learners.

Dramatic increases in the number of English language learners in US public schools have been well documented, with even greater growth projected in the coming decades. As such, our nation is rapidly becoming increasingly more culturally and linguistically diverse as an estimated one in five children now live in homes in which a language other than English is spoken. Students who are language minorities have been identified as the fastest growing segment of the school population (Wagner, Francis, & Morris, 2005). It has been estimated that by 2030, up to 40% of the school population may speak English as a second language (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

It is important to note that the increase in linguistic diversity in the US population is linked to growing education challenges. Specifically, barriers such as language development and vocabulary further affect English language learners. Teachers may spend most of their day teaching vocabulary and the English language, thus placing content learning on the back burner. This, however, negatively affects the academic success and reading development of English language learners who are struggling in our schools. Teachers must be able to recognize and respond to children’s learning cues. Traditional monolingual instruction, however, is not sufficient to promote accelerated learning among English language learners (Goldenburg, Hicks, & Lit, 2013). Moreover, researchers have noted that the risk of school failure can be attributed to the inconsistency of effective instructional strategies (Waxman & Padrón, 2004). Teachers of second language learners are especially eager to learn ways to adapt their rapidly changing classrooms to accommodate linguistic diversity and support reading achievement (Baumann, Hoffman, Duffy-Hester, & Ro, 2000). Studies have revealed benefits of the elements of effective teaching, such as explaining vocabulary words encountered during reading and using them in different contexts (Collins, 2005).

Additionally, studies have found that dual-language learners develop language skills differently than their monolingual counterparts (Castro, et. al., 2006). Instruction in the native language has been found to strengthen students learning while creating a strong and solid foundation for cognitive and academic growth in English while promoting bilingual competence. The research clearly acknowledges that language development problems for English language learners crop up when support from their home language is not provided, consequently, building literacy and language skills in the first language (L1) helps students build their academic and linguistic proficiency skills in (L2) English (Garcia & Garcia, 2012). More than ever, current focus is on the integration of effect pedagogical practices that support bilingual learners continued reading/literacy development and achievement. Accordingly, there is increased support for implementing effective pedagogical practices that support the reading achievement of English language learners.
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