English Language Learners and Language Development

Citation: Linda M. Espinoza, Challenging Common Myths about English Language Learners. National Association of State Boards of Education. June 2008 [excerpted from p 47]

Conclusions

The following conclusions rest on the current research and practice:

1. All young children are capable of learning two languages. Becoming bilingual has long term cognitive, academic, social, cultural, and economic benefits. Bilingualism is an asset.

2. Young ELL students require systematic support for the continued development of their home language.

3. Loss of the home language has potential negative long-term consequences for the ELL child’s academic, social, and emotional development, as well as for the family dynamics.

4. Teachers and programs can adopt effective strategies to support home language development even when the teachers are monolingual English speakers.

5. Dual language programs are an effective approach to improving academic achievement for ELL children while also providing benefits to native English speakers.

6. Hispanic Spanish-speaking children enter kindergarten with many social strengths that are the result of positive parenting practices that need to be acknowledged and enhanced.

7. Hispanic parents value high quality early education and will enroll their young children if programs are affordable and accessible.

Finally, recognizing the period from ages three to eight as critical for language development is necessary for providing the continuity and extended time for children to fully benefit from these programs. The PK-3 years are critical years for developing mastery of the sounds, structure, and functions of language, and thus are an ideal time to expose children to the benefits of two languages.
With regular and continued application of these findings, we can improve the educational outcomes for ELL children as well as the social and economic strength of our diverse communities. However, doing so will require that we all abandon outdated misconceptions and diligently inform our practices with current scientific findings.

**Reaction Questions:**

1. Why is early childhood education (Ages 0-8) important to the linguistically diverse stakeholders within your community?

2. Do you believe that your school/district/state has adopted effective strategies to support home language development? Please give some examples from your experience.

3. In your view, what are the benefits of young children learning more than one language? Are there any disadvantages? If so, what?

4. Do you believe that home and community experiences can positively influence early education for ELL children? Please give some examples from your experience.

5. In your view, what is meant by a dual language program? From your perspective, what are the advantages and disadvantages of a dual language program?

6. In your opinion, what are the misconceptions/myths about bilingualism being offered in the schools?

**Application Questions:**

1. What types of training or professional development might be necessary to assist educational personnel, and other stakeholders? How do I get my staff to understand the value and importance of dual language acquisition?

2. All young children are capable of learning two languages which has long term cognitive, academic, social, cultural, and economic benefits. What steps is your school/district taking facilitate the learning of two languages?

3. How do school systems provide systematic support for the continued development of the student’s home language?

4. Hispanic Spanish-speaking children enter kindergarten with many social strengths that are the result of positive parenting experiences. How can the school/district acknowledge and enhance these social strengths?
5. In what ways can the school system foster the awareness of both social and cultural bilingualism?

6. What processes/procedures might be helpful at the classroom, building, district, and state levels to foster or support the importance of cultural and linguistic identity?

7. How might the school and district support home/school communications when the home speaks another language other than English?

These questions were developed by the following stakeholders working together within the IDEA Partnership:

Role: Family Member
Location: California

Role: Higher Education
Location: California

Role: Higher Education
Location: California

Role: Special Education Teacher
Location: California

Role: General Education Administrator
Location: Illinois

Role: General Education Administrator
Location: Pennsylvania

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