

# AIR®

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS



## COMMON ASSUMPTIONS VS. THE EVIDENCE: ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN THE UNITED STATES A REFERENCE GUIDE

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# Introduction

There is an extensive history of educating English language learners (ELLs) and new arrivals to this country with inconsistent and controversial approaches. The question of how best to teach language and content for ELLs and new immigrants remains largely unresolved in our school practices and state policies. There are contrasting perspectives on and approaches to addressing the needs of ELLs in school communities; these perspectives are often primarily reflections of personal or anecdotal experiences, with only limited research being used to inform practices.

Despite some research evidence to support differentiated approaches for ELLs, the lack of clarity on research-based instructional methodology, coupled with many preconceived notions, contributes to confusion about appropriate policies, goals, strategies, and outcomes for English language learners.

ELLs continue to have disproportionately high drop-out rates, low graduation rates, and low college completion rates.

The primary purpose of this guide is to discuss some common beliefs and compare them with the relevant research literature to address the assumptions that often underlie ELL instruction. In addition, other objectives are to:

- Identify some of the most prevalent assumptions on ELLs
- Highlight relevant research studies that address ELL topics
- Generate knowledge access and application to improve practice
- Inform the development of appropriate policies to elevate the performance of ELLs

This is the first in a series of publications by the AIR ELL center to provide an orientation to knowledge, practice, and policy related to ELLs.



# The Diversity of the ELL Student Population

## Assumption:

- All ELL students are immigrants.

## Evidence:

- ELL students are a heterogeneous and complex group of students. 57 percent of adolescent ELL students were born in the United States, while 43 percent were born elsewhere (National Council of Teachers, 2008). Of these students, 27 percent are members of the second generation, and 30 percent belong to the third generation. These data demonstrate that many ELL students who have been educated exclusively in the U.S. are still not adequately proficient in English to be reclassified as fluent English speakers (Balatova, 2007).
- There is no one profile for an ELL student or one single approach or policy that will meet his or her educational goals and needs. ELLs have different levels of language proficiency, socioeconomic standing, academic expectations, and immigration status (National Council of Teachers, 2008). For example, these students may have immigrated to the U.S. recently, or their families may have lived in the U.S. for over a generation. They also live in diverse settings; some ELL students live in cultural enclaves, whereas others live in neighborhoods of primarily non-ELL families. Additionally, students may come from a home where English is spoken frequently, or from a home where English is not spoken at all (National Council of Teachers, 2008).



- Researchers also have difficulty making comparisons among states regarding ELL students' learning progress because states vary in their policies and practices regarding which students classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) participate in the NAEP testing. Consequently, despite the fact that NAEP data are the only nationally representative data that allow the comparison of LEP students' results across states, their power is limited in the sense that these results are not representative of the student population as a whole (Batalova, 2007).

**Source:**

Batalova, J., Fix M., & Murray, J. (2007). *Measures of change: The demography and literacy of adolescent English learners—A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

National Council of Teachers of English. (2008). *English language learners: A policy brief* (2008). Author.



# ELL & Language Acquisition

## Assumption:

- **Learning two or more languages will impede a child's fluency in both languages.**

## Evidence:

- **ELL students are faced with the challenge of acquiring oral and academic English while keeping pace with their native English speaking counterparts. There has been much discussion regarding the most effective way to encourage language acquisition; the debate has centered on methods that include one-way structured English language immersion,<sup>1</sup> developmental or maintenance bilingual programs,<sup>2</sup> and two-way bilingual immersion programs.<sup>3</sup> Critics of bilingual education have often claimed that the use of native language for students learning English as a second language delays the acquisition of English.**
- **Findings from multiple research studies have established that rapid, unsupported English language acquisition is not a realistic goal for ELL instruction. Rather, students who have received little to no academic or cognitive development in their first language tend to do increasingly poorly as academic and cognitive demands increase after fourth grade and into the upper grades (Thomas and Collier, 2002). Oral proficiency can take 3 to 5 years to develop, and academic English proficiency may take 4 to 7 years. Consequently, a curriculum that supports ELL students' academic and linguistic needs in both languages over a sustained period of time represents**

<sup>1</sup> Language immersion or one-way immersion using curriculum designed for students who are in the process of learning English (Adams and Jones, 2006)

<sup>2</sup> Primarily enroll students who are native speakers of the partner language (What is Dual Language? (2007).

<sup>3</sup> Include a balance of native English speakers and native speakers of the partner language (What is Dual Language? 2007).



a more reasonable approach to closing the achievement gap between ELL students and native English speakers (Hakuta, 2000).

- There is also research to support the idea that learning a second language at a young age can be beneficial to both language and brain development. Research has shown that young children who learn two languages show more neural activity in the parts of the brain associated with language processing (Mechelli, 2004). A 2004 study discovered that this increased neural activity was dependent on the degree of proficiency attained, as well as the age of acquisition (Mechelli, 2004). While late bilinguals also demonstrated an increase in the density in this region of the brain associated with language processing, there was evidence that the effect decreases as the age of acquisition increases (Mechelli, 2004). The authors concluded that early bilinguals learn a second language through social experience rather than genetic propensity, and that the process of second language acquisition may alter the structure of the brain ((Mechelli, 2004).

**Source:**

Adams, M., & Jones, K. M. (2006). Unmasking the myths of structured English immersion: Why we still need bilingual educators, native language instruction, and incorporation of home culture. *Radical Teacher* (75), 16-21 W.

National Dual Language Consortium. (2007). What is dual language? (2007). Retrieved April 19, 2010, from: [http://www.dual-language.org/what\\_is1.htm](http://www.dual-language.org/what_is1.htm)

Hakuta, K., Butler, Y. G., & Witt, D. (2000). How long does it take English learners to attain proficiency? Retrieved February 13, 2007, from: [http://lmri.ucsb.edu/publications/00\\_hakuta.pdf](http://lmri.ucsb.edu/publications/00_hakuta.pdf)

Mechelli, A., Crinion, J. T., Noppeney, U., O'Doherty, J., Ashburner, J., Frackowiak, R., & Price, C. J. (2004). Structural plasticity in the bilingual brain, *Nature*, 431, 757.

Thomas, W., & Collier, V. (2002). *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement*. Santa Cruz, CA: Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence.





# Language Acquisition & Diversity Needs of the ELL Population

## Assumption:

- All children from non-English-speaking backgrounds learn English the same way.

## Evidence:

- ELL programs that do not accommodate the social, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the ELL population will not adequately address the needs of these students. Many educators, administrators, and policymakers assume that ELL students will benefit equally from the same instructional approach. However, providing high quality education for ELL students must include respecting and integrating their native language and home culture in order to promote effective second language acquisition (Adams and Jones, 2006).
- Many factors can impact how ELL students adapt to school settings, such as prior schooling, socioeconomic position, cultural background, and immigrant status. Long-term studies conducted on the academic experiences of ELL students by Thomas and Collier determined that the amount of prior primary-language formal schooling received is the most significant predictor of an ELL's second-language achievement (Thomas and Collier, 2002). Consequently, students who have had a greater number of years of formal schooling in their primary language will have higher levels of English achievement than ELL students who have achieved fewer years of formal schooling.



- **Additionally, U.S. schools use language functions and styles in a manner that is common with mainstream families, but may be less accessible for children from different cultures, who may be used to different types of interaction (McLaughlin, 1992). A child’s personality or home culture can impact his or her second language acquisition by influencing the child’s behavior in an American classroom and thus the child’s English language acquisition. Some children may learn from peers or siblings rather than adults, particularly if they are cared for by older siblings or cousins in their home culture (McLaughlin, 1992). As a result, these students may pay closer attention to their peers in a classroom than to their teacher. Similarly, a child’s personality (e.g., whether the child is outgoing or reserved and shy) can also impact the child’s ability to communicate his or her level of comprehension to the teacher.**
- **Significant linguistic differences may also exist within a classroom. For example, many ELL students speak languages with English cognates, but some ELL students speak languages with only a slight lexical resemblance to English. These students will have greater difficulty learning content-specific vocabulary (National Council of Teachers, 2008), and will require different techniques.**
- **Regardless of these differences, all students have the capacity to learn a second language successfully. Students will be more responsive to instruction that is adapted for culturally diverse backgrounds, and teachers have a responsibility to recognize how different cultural and home experiences affect a child’s behavior, language use, and interpersonal skills (McLaughlin, 1992). Consequently, it is important that schools avoid using a deficit-oriented model<sup>4</sup> of instruction when approaching ELL education. An asset model<sup>5</sup> of instruction is a recommended method for integrating students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds into the classroom and supporting both their language and academic needs.**

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<sup>4</sup> Models that are deficit-oriented are based on the perspective that a student fails in school due to poor intellectual abilities, linguistic difficulties, low motivation to learn or behavioral issues (Scanlan, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> A model of instruction where student cultural and linguistic differences are valued, respected and utilized to the benefit of both native and non-English speakers (Holmes, Rutledge, & Gauthier, 2009)



**Source:**

Adams, M., & Jones, K. M. (2006). Unmasking the myths of structured English immersion: Why we still need bilingual educators, native language instruction, and incorporation of home culture. *Radical Teacher* (75), 16-21 W.

Holmes, K., Rutledge, S., & Gauthier, L. (2009). Understanding the cultural-linguistic divide in american classrooms: Language learning strategies for a diverse student population. *Reading Horizons*, 49(4), 285-300. Retrieved February 1, 2010, from ProQuest Education Journals. (Document ID: 1935140301).

McLaughlin, B. (1992). *Myths and misconceptions about second language learning: what every teacher needs to unlearn*. Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence. NCRCDSSL Educational Practice Reports, Paper EPR05.

National Council of Teachers of English. (2008). *English language learners: A policy brief* (2008). Author.

Scanlan, M. (2007). An asset-based approach to linguistic diversity. *ACEI Focus on Teacher Education*, 7(3), 3-7.



# Language Skills

## Assumption:

- Children from non-English-speaking backgrounds have fully acquired English and are ready to be mainstreamed once they are able to speak it.

## Evidence:

- Educators often choose to “mainstream” children who are capable of conversational English into an all-English classroom too quickly. Proficiency in oral communication skills does not mean that a child has the complex academic language skills needed for classroom activities. However, teachers often assume that children who converse relatively fluently in English are in full command of the language, and transfer students who demonstrate oral proficiency out of ELL programs after 1 or 2 years (Grant and Wong, 2003).
- Teachers should be aware that mainstreaming a child based on an oral language assessment is not appropriate and may hinder future academic progress. In particular, children may have language problems in reading and writing that are not obvious given their oral capabilities, and which stem from gaps in vocabulary and syntactic knowledge (McLaughlin, 1992). These issues may continue at the middle and high school level if oral abilities are the only measure used to determine English proficiency (McLaughlin, 1992).

### Source:

Grant, R. A., & Wong, S. D. (2003). Barriers to literacy for language-minority learners: An argument for change in the literacy education profession. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, (46)5, 386.

McLaughlin, B. (1992). *Myths and misconceptions about second language learning: what every teacher needs to unlearn*. Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence. NCRCDSSL Educational Practice Reports, Paper EPR05.



# The “Sink or Swim” Approach

## Assumption:

- Older generations of immigrants successfully learned English without any special language programs.

## Evidence:

- The myth that early generations of immigrants were able to acquire English language proficiency without ELL accommodations has encouraged a persistent belief that rapidly increasing a child’s exposure to English is an effective instructional approach (Adams and Jones, 2006). Nonetheless, historical evidence suggests that immigrants have consistently struggled to learn English to succeed in school and in the labor market, and have always required support to learn English and successfully assimilate.
- In 1911, the U.S. Immigration Service discovered that 77 percent of Italian, 60 percent of Russian, and 51 percent of German immigrant children were one or more grade levels behind in school, compared to only 28 percent of non-immigrant Americans (Haynes, 2002).
- Additionally, the performance of previous generations of immigrants does not provide an accurate model of success for current ELL students. Early immigrants to this country could obtain an industrial job with a low level of education and few English language skills (Haynes, 2002). However, the average level of education needed to succeed in the U.S. labor market has increased, along with job competition. Consequently, immigrants who are not



college educated and have poor English skills have a difficult time entering the current job market (Haynes, 2002).

- The “sink or swim” approach is also not effective for newly arrived students who do not have adequate levels of literacy in either their native language or English. These students enter the school system with limited or no experience with the English language or the American school system. The heterogeneity of these students presents a challenge for educators; these students enroll in U.S. schools with a diverse range of language proficiencies and subject area knowledge, both in their native language and in English (Short, 2003).
- Newcomer schools or programs represent one approach that aims to address the needs of students who are recent immigrants by providing more effective educational practices for the secondary population. These programs are designed to target students who were recent immigrants, who have no or low native language literacy, have low English literacy, and who may have sporadic educational backgrounds (Short, 2003). This approach also aims to create a supportive environment for these students by fostering close ties between families and the community (Short, 2003).

**Source:**

Adams, M., & Jones, K. M. (2006). Unmasking the myths of structured English immersion: Why we still need bilingual educators, native language instruction, and incorporation of home culture. *Radical Teacher* (75), 16-21 W.

Haynes, J. (n.d.). *Myths of Second Language Acquisition*. Retrieved April 19, 2010, from: [http://www.everythingsl.net/downloads/myths\\_SLA02.pdf](http://www.everythingsl.net/downloads/myths_SLA02.pdf)

Short, D., & Boyson, B. (2003). Secondary school newcomer programs in the United States. Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence, Research Report No. 12.



# Dual Language Programs & Native English Speakers

## Assumption:

- **Native English speakers will experience academic and language delays if they are enrolled in dual language programs.**

## Evidence:

- **A study on the academic performance of native English speakers in two-way bilingual education programs<sup>6</sup> determined that these students successfully maintained their English skills in addition to acquiring a second language, and tested above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile in all subject areas on tests in English. The researchers also concluded that these bilingually schooled native English speakers achieved on par with or higher than their counterparts in monolingual education programs (Thomas and Collier, 2002).**
- **Additionally, the researchers observed benefits from dual language programs for both ELL students and native English speakers. They noted that native English speakers improved their performance in a second language for each continuing grade level and that ELL students benefited from the natural language acquisition process of interacting with grade-level peers (Thomas and Collier, 2002).**
- **Many parents and educators are concerned that native English-speaking students enrolled in bilingual education will “lose ground” compared to their**

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<sup>6</sup> Two-Way Bilingual Immersion programs are designed to span 5 or 6 years and are implemented through the following two models: a 90-10 model, in which 90 percent of instruction is in the minority language, gradually increasing English instruction to 50 percent by grade 5, or a 50-50 model, in which 50 percent of instruction is in English and 50 percent is in the minority language.



monolingual English-speaking peers. However, evidence presented in the *National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement* demonstrates that the dual language approach is beneficial for native English speakers as well as ELL students, and does not impede either academic achievement or English language acquisition (Thomas and Collins, 2002).

**Source:**

Thomas, W., & Collier, V. (2002). *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement*. Santa Cruz, CA: Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence.





# Immersion vs. Bilingual Approaches to ELL Education

## Assumption:

- **Bilingual education delays English Language acquisition for children from non-English-speaking backgrounds.**

## Evidence:

- The ideological and programmatic disparities between English immersion and bilingual program models have prompted intense debate regarding the most effective method of instruction for ELL students. Proponents of immersion programs believe that providing instruction primarily in English and to a class with both ELL and native English speaking students forces ELL students to learn English more quickly (Adams and Jones, 2006). However, this claim represents a persistent misconception and does not align with optimal learning conditions that promote the development of academic or linguistic proficiency.
- Research on ELL achievement strongly indicates that children need a more comprehensive approach in order to encourage the simultaneous achievement of academic and English language proficiency. In structured immersion programs, ELL students may be taught by a mainstream teacher with little understanding of second language and who does not properly modify the instruction to help ELL students of varying levels of language proficiency to comprehend the content (Adams and Jones, 2006). Consequently, these ELL students have difficulty either accessing key content



instruction or expressing their comprehension, and thus struggle to keep pace with their native-English-speaking peers.

- Long-term studies conducted by Thomas and Collier on ELL achievement demonstrated that ELL students schooled in English-only programs rarely attained the grade level success of their native English speaker counterparts. Rather, these studies revealed that ELLs who attended English-only mainstream programs exhibited large deficits in reading and math achievement by grade 5 compared to students who participated in language support programs (Thomas and Collier, 2002). Additionally, students who did not receive any bilingual or ESL support and were placed into mainstream English classes upon arrival represented the lowest performing group, with the highest drop-out and grade retention rates (Thomas and Collier, 2002).
- By contrast, Thomas and Collier demonstrated that students who were schooled in bilingual programs would outperform their counterparts in monolingual programs in academic achievement across curriculum after an estimated 4 to 7 years of dual language program instruction (Thomas and Collier, 2002). Students placed in bilingual classes have been shown to learn English at the same rate as children in English-only programs, and demonstrate higher levels of academic achievement than students from English immersion programs in high school (Thomas and Collier, 2002).

**Source:**

Adams, M., & Jones, K. M. (2006). Unmasking the myths of structured English immersion: Why we still need bilingual educators, native language instruction, and incorporation of home culture. *Radical Teacher* (75), 16-21 W.

Thomas, W., & Collier, V. (2002). *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement*. Santa Cruz, CA: Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence.



# ELL Instruction

## Assumption:

- **Good instruction is good enough for everyone, including ELL students.**

## Evidence:

- **A recent study<sup>7</sup> on the implementation and effects of a balanced literacy approach in San Diego City Schools indicates that while all students may benefit from aspects of good instruction, ELL students require additional instructional supports. Instruction for ELLs should include the use of their native language, the use of differentiation to adjust literacy instruction, and a focus on Academic language development with the understanding that “one size does not fit all”(O’Day, 2009).**
- **Specifically, ELL students need more explicit language instruction, and teachers must have enough knowledge of second language acquisition to anticipate potential barriers to ELL students’ comprehension. In the same study, researchers found evidence of an overall decrease in the emphasis on biliteracy education.<sup>8</sup> The study revealed that three out of the nine case study schools included in the study had no biliteracy classrooms after 2004-2005, and three of the remaining six schools drastically reduced the number of bilingual classes offered (O’Day, 2009). Teachers from the remaining three**

<sup>7</sup> This study examines data from a 3-year study of implementation and effects of a balanced literacy approach in San Diego City Schools (SDCS). The sample includes data collected over 2 years from 133 teachers as well as school administrators and instructional coaches from nine case study elementary school and over 24,000 elementary English learner students in the district.

<sup>8</sup> Models implemented in the SDCS included biliteracy, Structured English Immersion (SEI), and Mainstream English Cluster (MEC).



**schools that continued to offer biliteracy programs reported an increasing focus on early transition and on English (O’Day, 2009).**

- **Students who were moved from biliteracy classrooms into mainstream classrooms presented a challenge to teachers. These teachers reported feeling unprepared for the instructional needs of ELLs (O’Day, 2009). Similarly, the study noted that approaches designed for ELL students, such as differentiation, are not effective unless a teacher has a background in second language acquisition, and understands how to tailor texts for literacy instruction. These teachers must be able to understand potential barriers to an ELL’s comprehension of the text as well as be able to analyze and monitor a student’s linguistic needs and progress (O’Day, 2009).**
- **Use of supports outside the classroom is critical for facilitating English language development. ELL students would benefit from the availability of additional supports to help them understand the meanings of certain tasks and classroom activities, as well as to engage them cognitively in the activities (O’Day, 2009). Additionally, the results of the study’s quantitative analysis<sup>9</sup> indicated that the use of outside supports would help improve the acquisition of oral language, and thus improve reading comprehension (O’Day, 2009).**

**Source:**

O’Day, J. (January 2009). Good Instruction is Good for Everyone—Or is it? English language learners in a balanced literacy approach. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 14(1), 97-119.

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<sup>9</sup> The researchers observed that the effect for discussion/conversation was large and significant for ELL students. This result may indicate that opportunities to for discussion in the classroom improve reading comprehension for ELL students by helping to build the students’ oral proficiency and literacy development.



# Improving ELL Instruction at the Middle and High School Level

## Assumption:

- Most ELL students have learned English by middle and high school.

## Evidence:

- Educational policies are often formed on the assumption that ELL students have already learned English in the early elementary grades. This is due to the belief that ELLs uniformly began English instruction during the early grades in elementary school, and were thus reclassified as fluent speakers in secondary school. However, an increasing proportion of ELL students are middle and high school students. These students are usually recent immigrants with gaps in their formal education or long-term ELLs who have not achieved a proficient level of academic or English coursework (Hakuta, August, and O'Day, 2009).
- These students present a challenge to secondary school educators because their needs are significant and diverse. Language-minority students who demonstrated lower levels of English proficiency were less likely to complete high school. Among language-minority students, roughly 51% of those who spoke English with difficulty failed to complete high school, whereas only 18% of those who spoke English very well did not complete high school (NCES, 2004). English language learners who graduate from high school and go on to college often experience course failure or are required to enroll in remedial English and writing courses due to inadequate academic English literacy skills (Harklau et al., 1999).



- **Consequently, efforts should be made to target English language development and content learning in the middle and high school curriculum. Professional development for subject area teachers should also be expanded to improve teacher capacity in assessing the content and language needs of ELL students. Teachers must also understand how to simultaneously develop subject area knowledge and academic language proficiency for ELL students.**

**Source:**

Hakuta, K., August, D., & O'Day, J. (March 2009). *The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act: Recommendations for addressing the needs of English language learners*. ELL Working Group on ELLs.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2004). Language minorities and their educational and labor market indicators—Recent trends. Retrieved April 19, 2010, from: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2004/2004009.pdf>

Harklau, L., Losey, K., & Siegal, M. (1999). *Generation 1.5 meets college composition: Issues in the teaching of writing to U.S.-educated learners of ESL*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.



# ELL & Special Education

## Assumption:

- **Many children from non-English speaking backgrounds have learning disabilities rather than problems with language acquisition.**

## Evidence:

- **Children can be misdiagnosed as learning disabled because their academic English skills have developed at a slower rate than their conversational English. Research has demonstrated that a child can develop conversational English in about two years, but it takes 5 to 7 years<sup>10</sup> for a child to develop comparable academic language (Cummins, 2001).**
- **Overrepresentation of ELL students in special education has been linked to the size of the ELL population in school districts as well as the lack of adequate language support programs. Poor assessment instruments also exacerbate the issue of inappropriate referrals—these instruments cannot distinguish cultural and linguistic difficulties from disabilities (National Council of Teachers, 2008). Some educators argue that there is no harm in placing ELL students who are failing in special education, but evidence does not support this claim (Artiles and Ortiz, 2002).**
- **Rather, language support programs should be designed to support English language acquisition in a sustained manner in order to ensure that ELL**

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<sup>10</sup> The authors would like to note that research estimates regarding oral and academic language acquisition time frames vary depending on author or source. Consequently, the above time frame estimated by Cummins differs from an earlier citation from Thomas and Collier, who estimated that oral language proficiency may take 3 to 5 years to develop where as academic language proficiency may be developed over 3 to 7 years..



**students have attained full proficiency. Even the most effective language support programs are estimated to have the capability to close only half of the achievement gap in 2 to 3 years (Thomas and Collins 2002). Consequently, Thomas and Collier recommend that ELL participation in language support programs be maintained for at least 5 to 6 years, and with demonstrated achievement improvements of above-average yearly progress for ELL students, to close the achievement gap with non-ELL students (Thomas and Collier, 2002).**

**Source:**

Artiles, A. J., & Ortiz, A. A. (2002). *English language learners with special education needs*. McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems Co.

Cummins, J. (2001). *The academic and political discourse of minority language education: Claims and counter-claims about reading, academic language, pedagogy, and assessment as they relate to bilingual children's educational development*. Summary of paper presented at the International Conference on Bilingualism, Bristol, April 20, 2001. Accessed at: <http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/claims.html>.

National Council of Teachers of English. (2008). *English language learners: A policy brief* (2008). Author.

Thomas, W., & Collier, V. (2002). *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement*. Santa Cruz, CA: Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence.





# School Capacity for ELL Education

## Assumption:

- Schools should only provide English-only instruction because they do not have the capacity to meet the needs of all linguistic groups.

## Evidence:

- School administrators have argued for adopting English-only approaches given the increasing diversity of languages spoken by ELL students. However, research has demonstrated that ELL children need home language support over the 4 to 7 years that academic English can take to develop (Hakuta, 2000). Consequently, integrating language support services into classroom instruction represents an integral component of promoting academic achievement for ELL students.
- There is strong evidence to support the idea that dual language programs can greatly impact ELL student achievements. Studies have shown that students who have had at least 4 to 7 years of dual language schooling outperform comparable students in monolingual programs (Thomas and Collier, 2002). Thus, providing bilingual schooling in the U.S. addresses academic and language proficiency simultaneously, and promotes high long-term academic achievement (Thomas and Collier, 2002).
- These results demonstrate that schools should make an effort to support the development of a child's first language while teaching the child English. An effective approach would include an enrichment bilingual/ESL program that addresses the full spectrum of students' developmental needs, which include linguistic, academic, cognitive, emotional, social, and physical needs (Thomas and Collier, 2002). Schools need to create an environment that encourages



and simulates a natural approach to learning a language, and teaches a student's native and second languages in separate instructional contexts without using translation (Thomas and Collier, 2002).

- Schools with limited capacity should focus on strategies that aim to draw on the diversity of their student body as a resource rather than viewing it as an obstacle to instruction. There has been increasing acknowledgment that quality of instruction can be as important as the language of instruction (Cheung and Slavin, 2005).
- Thus, encouraging teachers to be responsive to cultural and linguistic diversity in the classroom and promoting collaboration between general education teachers and ELL specialists represents one key approach to improving instruction (Scanlan, 2009; Holmes, Rutledge, & Guathier, 2009). Teachers can also implement strategies such as identifying texts<sup>11</sup> to promote cross-language transfer and encouraging ELL students to look for similarities between their first language and English to develop second language acquisition (Cummings et al., 2005).

**Source:**

Cummins, J., Bismilla, V., Chow, P., Cohen, S., et al. (2005). Affirming identity in multilingual classrooms. *Educational Leadership*, 63(1), 38-43. Retrieved February 2, 2010, from ProQuest Education Journals. (Document ID: 895449801).

Hakuta, K., Butler, Y. G., & Witt, D. (2000). How long does it take English learners to attain proficiency? Retrieved February 13, 2007, from: [http://lmri.ucsb.edu/publications/00\\_hakuta.pdf](http://lmri.ucsb.edu/publications/00_hakuta.pdf)

Holmes, K., Rutledge, S., & Gauthier, L. (2009). Understanding the cultural-linguistic divide in american classrooms: Language learning strategies for a diverse student population. *Reading Horizons*, 49(4), 285-300. Retrieved February 1, 2010, from ProQuest Education Journals. (Document ID: 1935140301).

Scanlan, M. (2007). An asset-based approach to linguistic diversity. *ACEI Focus on Teacher Education*, 7(3), 3-7.

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<sup>11</sup> Identity texts are products that may include writing, speaking, visual, musical, dramatic, or multimodal combinations, and represent are positive statements that students make about themselves. These assignments are designed to be cognitively challenging, but also encourage cross-language transfer by allowing students to incorporate contexts that are meaningful to them (Cummins et al., 2005).



# ELL & Parental Involvement

## Assumption:

- **Parents of ELL students do not want to be involved in their children's education.**

## Evidence:

- **Districts and teachers tend to approach ELL and immigrant students as a challenging minority group rather than a cultural and linguistic resource to be cultivated. However, the families of ELL students are valuable assets, and should be developed as resources to enhance ELL education, rather than considered a deficit to overcome (National Council of Teachers, 2008).**
- **Educators tend to think that parents of ELLs should be responsible for developing the home language. However, in some cultures, parents do not see education as part of their role. For example, in Mexico, parents see themselves as responsible for teaching morality and manners, and academic education is left to the professionals (Sparks, 2009). These parents do not see themselves as responsible for teaching academic language.**
- **Encouraging parent involvement has to go beyond inviting parents to meetings, or having ESL or basic literacy classes (Sparks, 2009). These approaches imply that educators expect parents to be illiterate, to have low proficiency in English, or to not know how to parent appropriately. School communication and involvement with parents should focus on leveraging their strengths rather than focusing on their deficits. Cultivating parent involvement**



**represents a critical step in improving the academic achievement of ELL students.**

- **Communication between parents, administrators, and educators should also be strongly encouraged, particularly in situations where parents may choose not to enroll their children in language support programs. Educators should strongly counsel parents against refusing language support services, if their child is eligible, because this decision could negatively impact the long-term academic achievement of their children (Thomas and Collier, 2002).**

**Source:**

Sparks, S.(2009). Teacher ambassador urges more ELL parent involvement. *Education Daily*, 42(101), 1. Retrieved February 2, 2010, from ProQuest Education Journals. (Document ID: 1750579401).

National Council of Teachers of English. (2008). *English language learners: A policy brief* (2008). Author.

Thomas, W., & Collier, V. (2002). *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement*. Santa Cruz, CA: Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence.

