

EDUCATING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS Research & Best Practices

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Synthesis of Research on the Education of English Language Learners

- **Discuss findings from a synthesis of the research on the education of English language learners**
- **Panel of experts on education of ELLs**
- **Focus of synthesis**
 - **Oral language development, literacy development, and academic achievement**
 - **Used scientific methodology for selecting & reviewing studies**
- **Focus of this talk: academic achievement**

Development of Literacy

- **Balanced** approach to literacy (Genesee, 2006):
 - Direct instruction promotes specific skills (decoding, strategies for comprehending text)
 - Process approaches (authentic, whole language) should be a component of literacy instruction
 - Interactive approaches (interaction with others) works
- ELLs benefit from being taught cross-language similarities, differences, & strategies

Organization for Academic Achievement

- **Definitions**
- **Program Issues**
- **Other Program Factors**
- **Language Influences on Achievement**
- **Instructional Issues**
- **Assessment Issues**

Academic Achievement Definitions

- Academic achievement refers to the communicative, mathematical, science, social science and thinking skills & competencies that enable a student to succeed in school and society.
- Academic achievement in research with ELLs usually focused on underachievement of ELLs and limited to outcomes on:
 - Standardized achievement tests - most typical
 - Also: general measures of school attainment (GPA), high school dropout rates, attitudes toward school & school-related topics.

Program Issues

- **Most research focuses on evaluations of various program models.**
- **Address policy issues about the best way to educate ELLs rather than basic research questions.**

Program Issues

2 Types of Studies: #1 Comparative

Compare student outcomes on standardized tests of math & reading achievement across different program types

- **Bilingual vs.**
 - Regular English
 - Structured English immersion (SEI)
 - English as a Second Language (ESL)
- **2 different bilingual models.**



COMPARE



Program Issues

Comparative Evaluation Studies

CENTRAL ISSUE

Does research demonstrate any educational benefits of bilingual or other educational programs specifically designed for ELLs over mainstream English education?

Many reviews of the literature

- **Some reviews conclude bilingual programs are ineffective**
- **Other reviews report bilingual education more effective than English immersion approaches**

Comparative Evaluation Studies

POLICY QUESTION #1: How effective are programs designed for ELLs in comparison to mainstream programs?

• **RESULTS OF THE SYNTHESIS - 1:**

Programs specially designed for ELLs promote at least **EQUIVALENT** and sometimes **HIGHER** outcomes than a mainstream English only class.

- If the **comparison** between a program designed for ELLs (Bilingual/ESL/SEI) and no program (English mainstream) is made in the **early years** of a child's education (grades K-2), it would appear that ELLs in mainstream programs have an advantage.

Comparative Evaluation Studies cont.

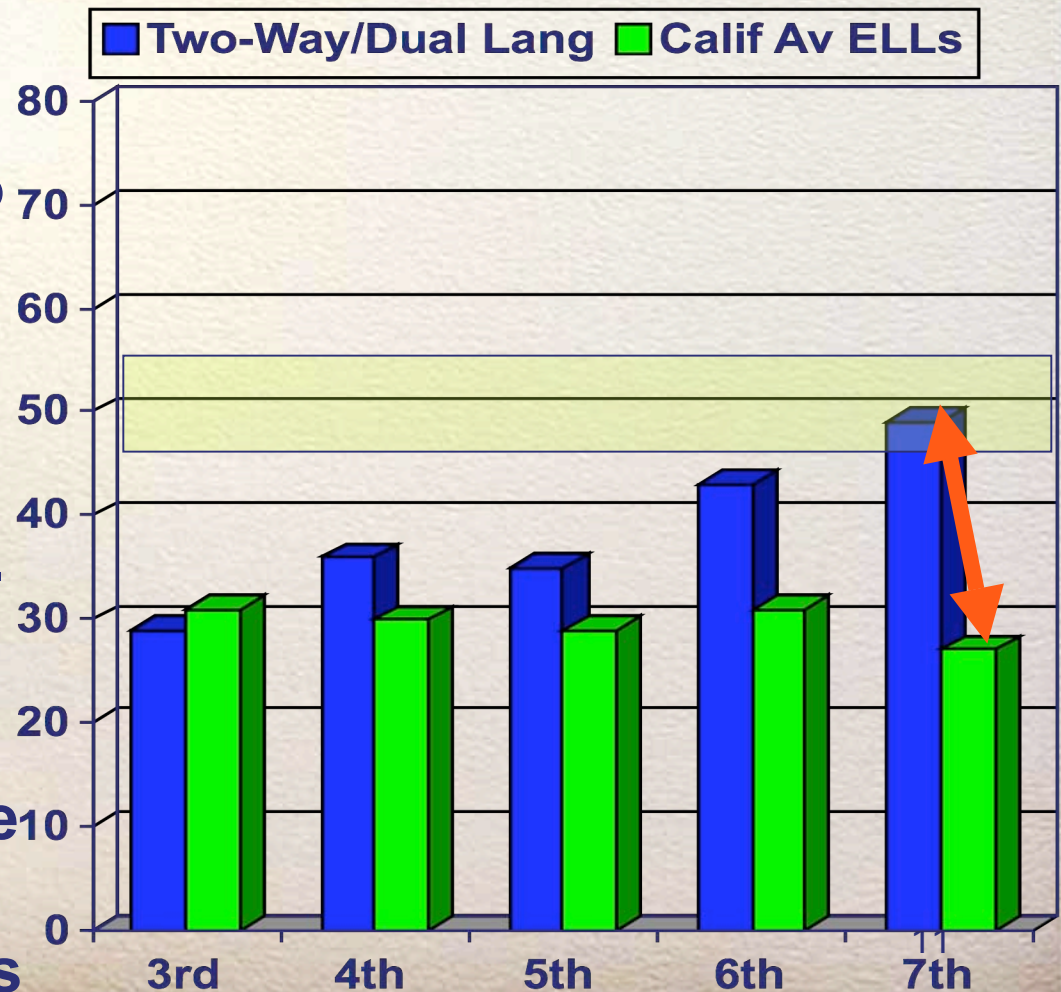
POLICY QUESTION #1: How effective are programs designed for ELLs in comparison to mainstream programs?

RESULTS OF THE SYNTHESIS - 2:

- **By the late elementary grades and particularly in middle and high school grades, ELLs who have received some specialized instruction, particularly primary language instruction,**
 - catch up to & sometimes surpass their comparison peers,
 - score **at grade level,**
 - are less likely to drop out of high school.
- **ELLs who had not been in any specialized program, but participated in mainstream English classes, scored the lowest in comparison to students in any other program and ended their schooling with low levels of achievement.**

Reading Achievement in English Norm-Referenced Achievement Test (NCEs) Spanish Speakers/ELLs

- ❖ ELL students in two-way/dual language programs score low to average, but at or above state norms for ELL students at all grade levels, especially in grades 6-7.
- ❖ By 7th grade, ELLs in two-way/dual language score average, and well above state norms



Comparative Evaluation Studies

• **POLICY QUESTION #2A: Which model leads to higher academic outcomes: Bilingual or ESL or SEI?**

• **POLICY QUESTION #2B: Which bilingual model leads to higher academic outcomes: Early exit or late exit?**

• **RESULTS OF THE SYNTHESIS:**

Only a few studies adequately addressed these questions.

- ELLs who participated in a **bilingual program** (instruction through their L1) **achieved at higher levels** (had higher test scores in English reading & math, higher grades, lower drop-out rates) than students in ESL/SEI
- ELLs who were enrolled in programs with **longer exposure to L1 instruction (two-way, late-exit)** **outperformed students who received short-term exposure (early-exit)**.
- **The better the implementation of the model, the stronger were the results favoring primary-language instruction.**

Program Issues

2 Types of Studies: #2 Descriptive

Describe student outcomes on standardized tests of math & reading achievement in a particular program type.



DESCRIBE

Descriptive Evaluation Studies

These studies examined & described specific forms of bilingual programs; most common program was two-way immersion

• **RESULTS OF THE SYNTHESIS:**

The results of the descriptive studies are similar to the comparative studies:

- Students who received instruction through their L1 closed the achievement gap with native English speakers and exceeded the performance of their ELL peers in the district (descriptive studies) or in comparison groups (comparative studies).
- ELLs demonstrated positive attitudes toward the program, themselves as learners, school, and other cultures and languages.

Other Program Factors

Characteristics of Effective Programs

- **RESULTS OF THE SYNTHESIS:**

- Program educators shared the belief that "all children can learn".
- Positive school environment -- orderly and safe, had a warm and caring community, and facilitated learning.
- Curriculum was meaningful & academically challenging; incorporated higher order thinking, thematically integrated; clear alignment with standards & assessment.
- Program model grounded in sound theory & best practices associated with an enriched, not remedial, instructional model.
- Enriched model was consistent and sustained over time.
- Teachers in high quality bilingual programs understood theories about bilingualism & second language development; goals & rationale for the model.

Other Program Factors

Conclusions

- The findings on effective programs for ELLs are consistent with research on effective schools for mainstream students.
- Both bodies of research show that students, mainstream or ELL, are more academically successful when they attend schools that provide positive learning environments that integrate rather than segregate students and that include a challenging curriculum for all students.
- Programs serving ELLs are more successful when:
 - they are based on sound theory;
 - teachers understand the program model in which they are teaching and the research-based principles of second language development;
 - students are placed in a consistent and sustained program.

Language Influences on Achievement

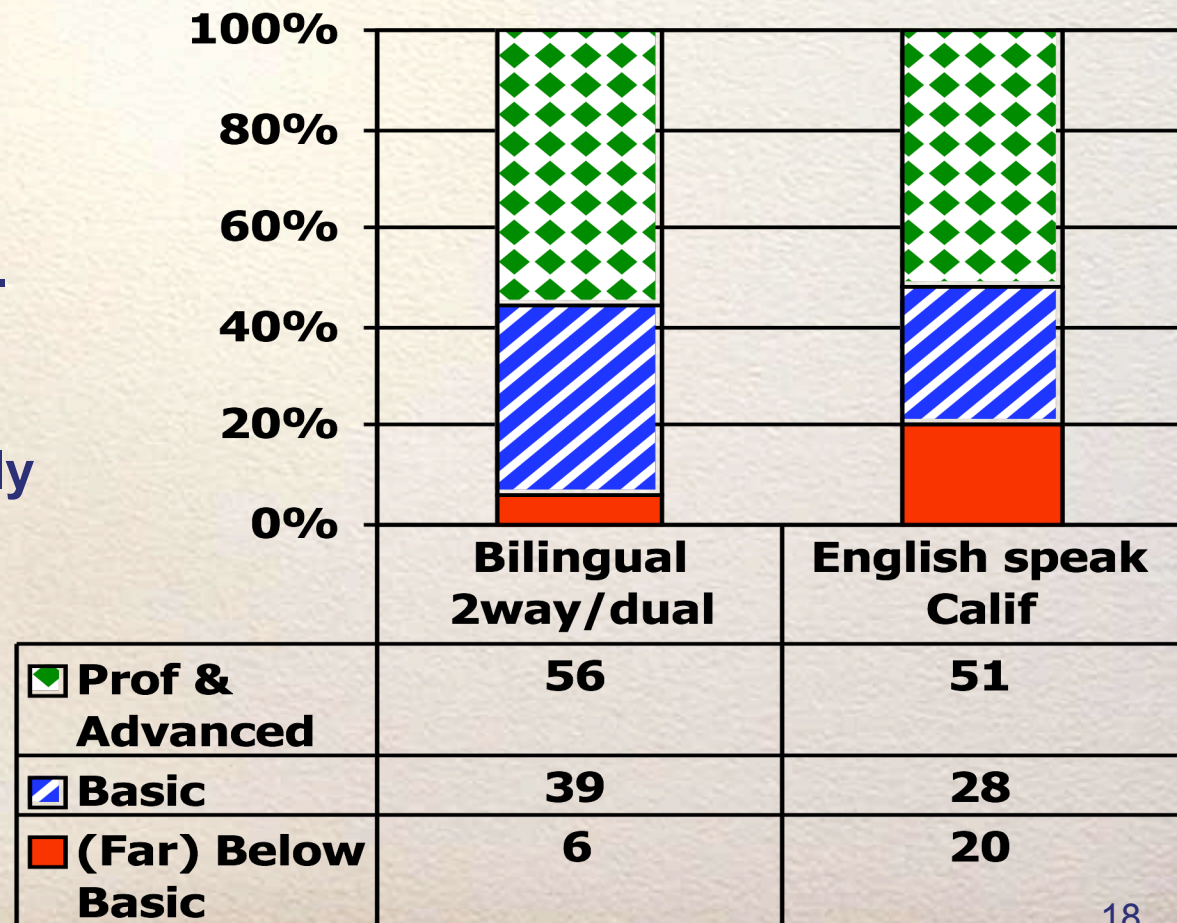
• RESULTS OF THE SYNTHESIS:

- **BILINGUAL PROFICIENCY AND BILITERACY ARE POSITIVELY RELATED TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN BOTH LANGUAGES.**

- **Bilingual** Hispanic students had **higher** achievement scores, GPA's, and educational expectations **than monolingual** English-speaking Hispanic peers.

English Language Art California Standards Test by Language Proficiency

❖ By grades 7-8, bilingual students who began school as ELLs and participated in two-way/dual language programs achieve as well as or slightly better than English speaking students instructed only in English



Language Influences on Achievement cont.

• RESULTS OF THE SYNTHESIS:

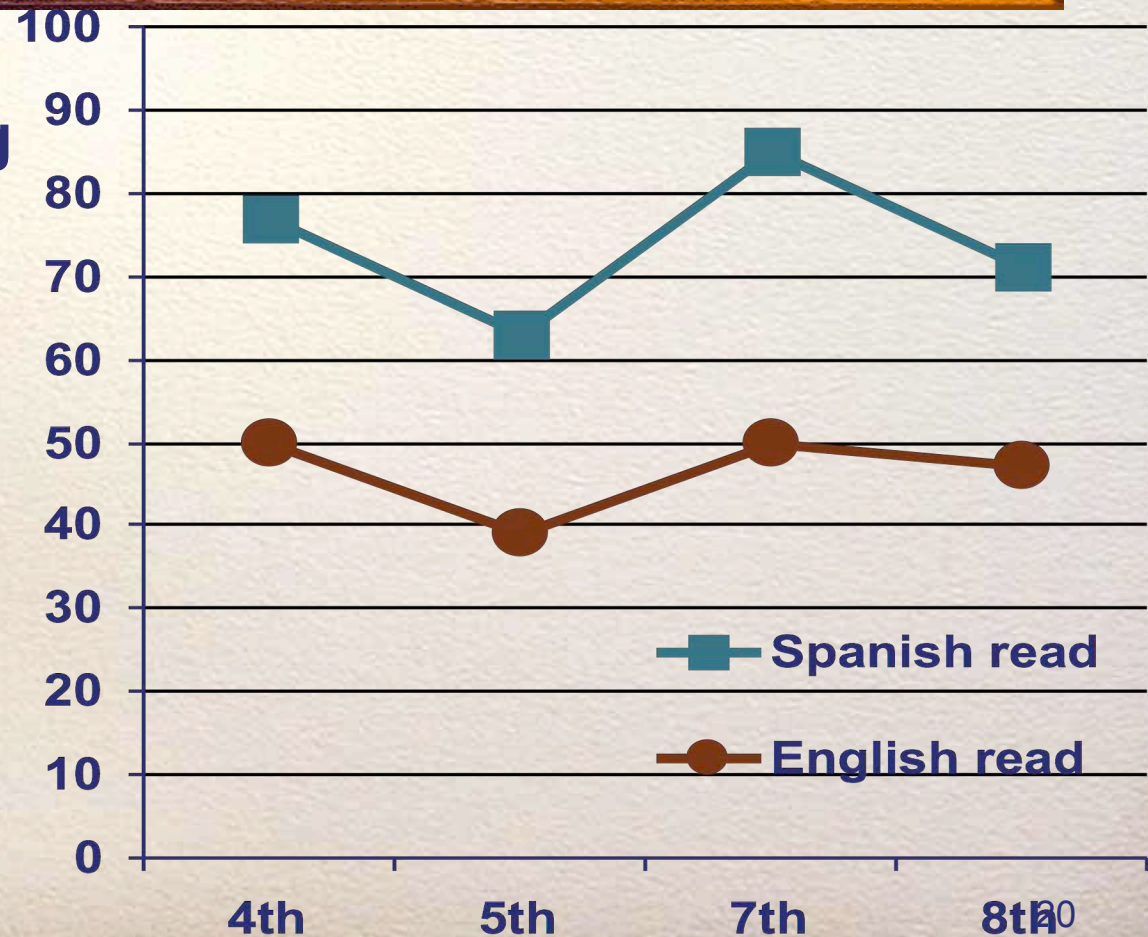
- **BILINGUAL PROFICIENCY AND BILITERACY ARE POSITIVELY RELATED TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN BOTH LANGUAGES.**

- **Significant positive correlations** between Spanish reading and English reading, between English reading and English math, and between Spanish reading and Spanish math, suggesting that there are complex but supportive interdependencies in the language, literacy and academic development of bilingual students.

Reading Achievement in English & Spanish

Norm-Referenced Tests (Scores in NCEs)

- Similar patterns between reading achievement in English and Spanish



Instructional Issues

• **RESULTS OF THE SYNTHESIS:**

- There is little research on how to make instruction more accessible and meaningful to ELLs in areas considered challenging by native English speakers (i.e., science, math).
- A significant factor to bear in mind for such learners is the cognitive overload they experience when learning academic content area through a second language.
- Research indicates the importance of incorporating language development components and sheltering techniques into content instruction.

Instructional Issues

Language Development

Learning Objectives	Student will be able to understand, ask, and answer in a full sentence basic informational questions (where, who, what) about
Content Standard(s)	Language Arts: Describe people, places, things, locations, actions Language Development: Ask and answer questions
Language Frames & Structures	<p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ W hat is the name of your school? ▪ W here is your school? ▪ W ho is your teacher? <p>Answers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ My school is Chavez Language Academy ▪ My school is in Sacramento ▪ My teacher is Ms. Martinez
Vocabulary	Where, Who, What, Name, School, (Chavez Language Academy) City (Sacramento), Teacher (Ms. Martinez)

Assessment Issues

There are many challenges in assessing the academic achievement of ELLs, and little research.

- **Test norms may be inappropriate** because of differences between ELLs and students in the norming samples, and language proficiency and other background factors may influence test performance.
- Language of assessment should match the language of instruction.
- Modifying test questions to reduce language complexity may help narrow the performance gap between native English speakers and ELLs.

Conclusions

- The results from the synthesis indicate that ELLs are more successful when they participate in programs that are specially designed to meet their needs (ESL, bilingual, etc.) than in mainstream English classrooms; results are strongest for primary language instruction.
- A program that is enriched, consistent, provides a challenging curriculum, and incorporates language development components and appropriate assessment approaches is also supported by the findings of the research in this synthesis.