

EDUCATING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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RESEARCH CHAPTERS

- Oral Language Development
- Cross-linguistic and Cross-modal Aspects of Literacy Development
- Literacy: Instructional Issues
- Academic Achievement

Synthesis Team

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Methodology: Search Parameters

- Focus:

Oral language development, literacy development, and academic achievement for English language learners (ELLs)

- ELLs: students who first learn a language other than English in their home and community (U.S.-born or immigrant) and then learn English as a new language

Methodology: Search Parameters

- ✓ Empirical
- ✓ Conducted in the United States
- ✓ Published in English
- ✓ Focused on oral language development, literacy, and academic achievement among English language learners, with outcome measures in English
- ✓ Focused on pre-K through 12th grade
- ✓ Published in the last 20 years (may include seminal works conducted earlier)
- ✓ Published as peer-reviewed journal articles and selected technical reports (no books, book chapters, or dissertations)
- ✓ In the case of literacy, included reading, writing, or reading- or writing-related outcomes

Methodology: Searches

- Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)
- Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA)
- PsycInfo
- Education journals searched by hand
- Technical reports from several federally funded research centers

- Yield = over 4,000 articles and reports were considered

Education journals searched by hand

- Annual Review of Applied Linguistics
- Applied Linguistics
- Applied Psycholinguistics
- Bilingual Research Journal
- Educational Researcher
- Elementary School Journal
- Harvard Education Review
- International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism
- Journal of Education
- Journal of Education of Students Placed at Risk
- Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students
- Journal of Learning Disabilities
- Journal of Reading Behavior
- Language and Education
- Language Learning
- Modern Language Journal
- NABE Journal
- Peabody Journal of Education
- Phi Delta Kappan
- Studies in Second Language Acquisition
- TESOL Quarterly

Technical Reports

- Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence
- National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning
- Center for Language Education and Research
- Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk
- Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing

Methodology: Coding

- ✓ bibliographic citation
 - ✓ type of study
 - ✓ analytic methods
 - ✓ research questions addressed
 - ✓ information about the methodology
 - ✓ information about the sample
 - ✓ domain addressed (oral language, literacy, and/or academic achievement)
- Yield = about 500 articles coded

Methodology: Article Review

- ✓ Appropriate research design to answer the questions being posed
 - ✓ Research that was well carried out and clearly described
 - ✓ Conclusions that were supported by the evidence presented.
 - ✓ Reviewed according to guiding principles for scientific research in education identified in the National Research Council report on *Scientific Research in Education* (Shavelson and Towne, 2001)
- Yield = about 200 articles included in synthesis

Synthesis and Recommendations

■ Synthesis

- Organized studies/reports by domain (oral language, literacy, academic achievement)
- Identified themes for each topic area; reviewed studies in each theme; synthesized findings

■ Recommendations

- Identified strengths and gaps in the research base
- Developed recommendations on future directions for research in this area.

1. ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT: SELECTED FINDINGS

- a) Development of English L2 oral language proficiency takes time
- b) English L2 oral language proficiency is important
- c) The relationship between L2 oral language use and proficiency is complex
- d) Language learning strategies contribute to English language development

(a) L2 ORAL PROFICIENCY DEVELOPMENT TAKES TIME

- ELLs usually require 3-5 years to achieve advanced proficiency in oral English
- Progress from beginning to middle levels of proficiency is relatively rapid, but progress to upper levels is slower
- Same pattern of development is found for ELLs in variety of program types (i.e., bilingual & all-English)
- Same pattern has also been found for acquisition of Spanish-L2 by English-L1 students

(b) L2 ORAL LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IS IMPORTANT

With increased English oral proficiency, ELLs:

- Are more likely to use English and increased use of English is associated with gains in English proficiency
- Are more likely to interact and become friends with fluent/native English-speakers and this provides additional opportunities to use English

But, interacting effectively with English-speakers may require some minimum level of English proficiency

ORAL LANGUAGE is important continued ...

With increased English oral language proficiency, ELLs:

- Use more complex language learning strategies, specifically strategies that allow them to interact more effectively with others
 - Instruction may facilitate the acquisition of such strategies
- Have a wider repertoire of language skills, including language skills for academic purposes

(c) LINK BETWEEN L2 ORAL LANGUAGE USE & PROFICIENCY IS COMPLEX

- ELLs who use English in classroom (more than L1) tend to make stronger gains in English
 - however, these effects vary with level of proficiency and with whom they interact in English
- Mixing ELLs & English-proficient students can be beneficial
 - however, care must be given to the nature of the tasks, the training of non-ELLs, and level of proficiency of ELLs:
 - Fluent English-speakers do not often provide language-learning opportunities for ELLs
 - Cooperative learning tasks similarly do not always afford lots of language learning opportunities for ELLs (focus is often on task completion)

L2 ORAL LANGUAGE USE & PROFICIENCY continued....

- ELLs from homes in which English is used more frequently tend to demonstrate higher levels of English oral proficiency; **however**,
 - English use at school probably plays a more important role in supporting English for academic purposes
 - general oral language proficiency/use may be less important than proficiency in oral English that is directly related to academic language and literacy
 - L1 reading-related language skills are positively linked to English-L2 development

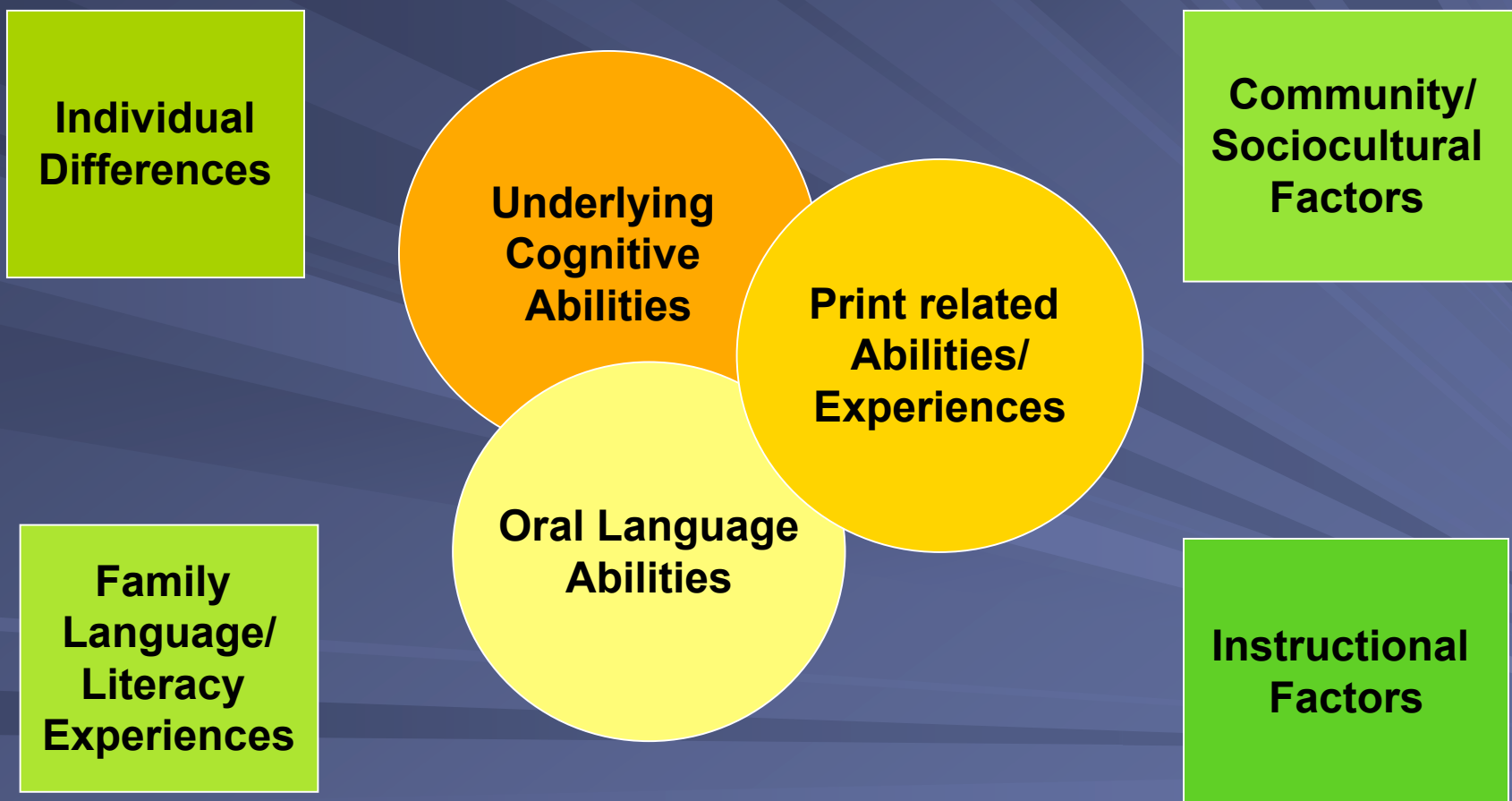
(d) LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES CONTRIBUTE TO ENGLISH L2 LEARNING

- ELLs acquire & use language learning strategies that appear to emerge in a hierarchical order:
 - From receptive – to learn words (e.g., repetition, memorization)
 - To interactive – to engage in interaction (e.g., attention-getters, elaboration)
 - To language/communication monitoring – to maintain and repair communication (e.g., appeal for assistance, requesting clarification)
- Explicit instruction may help ELLs use such strategies & advance proficiency

2. LITERACY: SELECTED FINDINGS

- a) L2 reading development is complex
- b) L2 and L1 reading development are the same in important ways
- c) L2 reading development is different because ELLs draw on L1 competencies & experiences
- d) what matters depends on the learners' stage of L2 language development
- e) teachers and instructional approach matter

(a) LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IS COMPLEX

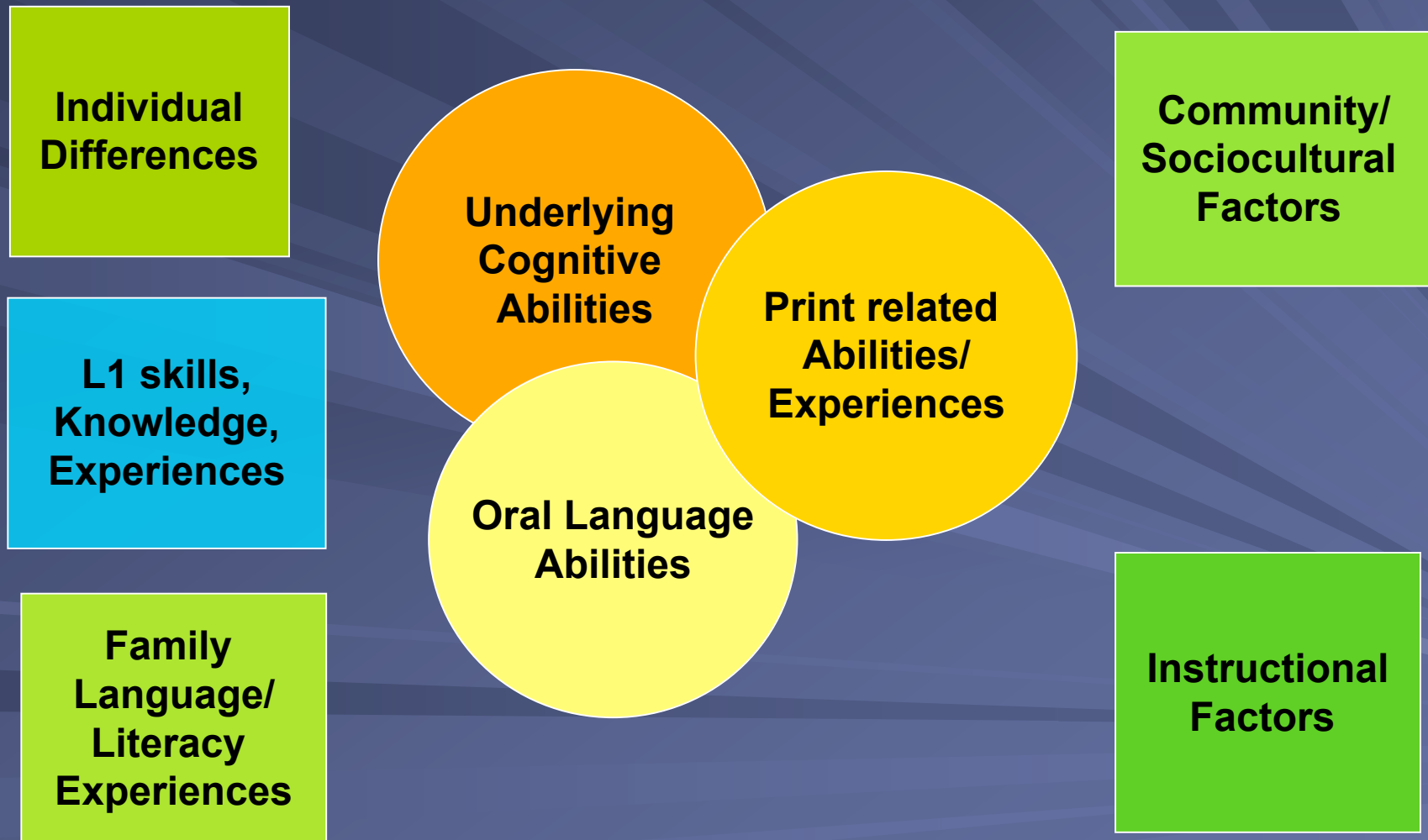


(b) L2 & L1 READING DEVELOPMENT ARE THE SAME IN IMPORTANT WAYS

The same basic factors that influence English-L1 literacy development influence English-L2 literacy development:

- Underlying cognitive abilities:
 - phonological awareness in English
 - phonological short-term memory in English
 - phonological recoding in English
- English oral language skills:
 - English oral language skills linked to reading/writing are important in early stages
 - General oral language skills in English are important in later stages
- Print-related abilities in English: emergent literacy

(c) L2 LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IS DIFFERENT



L2 LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IS DIFFERENT

continued....

- ELLs have a **reservoir of bilingual skills & experiences** that they draw on:
 - Underlying cognitive abilities linked to L1: phonological awareness in L1, phonological short term memory in L1, phonological recoding in L1
 - L1 Oral language skills: vocabulary, grammar and comprehension
 - Emergent literacy skills in L1
- Enriched literacy experiences in L1 at home or in pre-school facilitate English literacy development in school

L1 INFLUENCES ON L2 LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

- L1 skills permit ELLs to **bootstrap** into L2 literacy
- L1 skills are particularly important in early stages of L2 literacy development when L2 skills are not well developed
- L1-L2 influences can happen automatically, but ELLs benefit from being taught cross-language similarities, differences & strategies (e.g., use of translation or cognates)

L1 INFLUENCES ON L2 LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

continued....

- Many L1-based influences are positive ⇒ **positive transfer** and result in appropriate or accurate L2 skills
- Some L1-based influences result in **negative transfer**: e.g., use of L1 phonology for L2 spelling and decoding
- Even “negative transfer” indicates active use of strategies to break into L2 reading

(d) WHAT MATTERS CHANGES AS STUDENTS' LITERACY SKILLS PROGRESS

- **L1-based skills**, knowledge, & experiences are important early in L2 literacy development; e.g., use L1 phonology in L2 spelling – **take advantage of them**
- **L2-based skills** become important as literacy advances – ELLs start to look like English-L1; e.g., spelling errors reflect L2 phonology

continued...

WHAT MATTERS CHANGES AS STUDENTS' LITERACY SKILLS PROGRESS *continued*

- **Phonological awareness** is important in early stages – for decoding; PA is less important once decoding skills are acquired
- **General oral language proficiency** is important in later stages when emphasis is on text and comprehension that involves prediction, inferencing, and higher order processing of information
- **Language genres** that are familiar to students (e.g., narrative) are important early while genres that are unfamiliar are important later (expository, scientific)
- **Meaning** is always important, but literal/familiar meaning is probably more important early and inferential meaning/implications is more important later

(e) INSTRUCTIONAL ISSUES

- **Direct instruction**: learning through explicit & direct instruction of specific reading/writing skills or strategies
- **Interactive approaches**: learning that is mediated through interaction with other learners or more competent readers & writers: e.g. instructional conversations
- **Process approaches**: learning through engagement in authentic use of written language for communication or self-expression: e.g., whole language

INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES: WHAT WORKS?

- **Direct instruction** & interactive approaches produced significant gains in learning
- **Process approaches** produced mixed results at best and no enhancement in many cases

DIRECT INSTRUCTION WORKS

- **Direct instruction** promotes acquisition of specific important skills:
 - (1) phonological awareness ⇒ decoding
 - (2) strategies for comprehending text
 - (3) strategies for inferring the meaning of new words from context
- **Direct instruction** should be used strategically (as needed) and should always keep the big picture – functional literacy – in mind

INTERACTIVE INSTRUCTION WORKS because it:

- facilitates adaptation & accommodation to individual differences in abilities & styles
- models & promotes language for academic & cognitive purposes: explanation, analysis, and formulation of complex ideas
- extends language use for academic & literacy purposes

PROCESS-APPROCHES alone ARE NOT SUFFICIENT

- Process approaches should be a component of all literacy instruction to ensure meaningfulness, authenticity, and functionality
- Process approaches need to be supplemented with direct approaches to ensure acquisition of critical sub-components of literacy – they are not sufficient alone

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.
- Two distinct groups of studies:
 1. **Comparative** evaluation studies -- compare student outcomes on standardized tests of math & reading achievement across different program types -- usually bilingual vs. something else (no program, Structured English immersion, English as a Second Language, 2 different bilingual models).
 2. **Descriptive** evaluation studies -- describe student progress in a particular program type.

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?

Numerous 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:**

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

- If the comparison between a bilingual/ESL/SEI program 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.
- By the **late elementary grades and particularly in middle and high school** grades, ELLs who have received some specialized instruction, particularly first language instruction, catch up to and sometimes surpass their comparison peers. They score **at grade level** and 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.

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/TBE).
- **The better the implementation of the model, the stronger were the results favoring primary-language instruction.**

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;**
 - when **teachers understand the program** model in which they are teaching **and the research-based principles of second language development;**
 - when 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.
- **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.

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).
- Research indicates the importance of incorporating language development components and sheltering techniques into content instruction.
- 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.

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 and when the program is consistent throughout the student's education.

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 corpus.

SOME IMPLICATIONS -- 1

- ELLs need to be educated in programs that provide specialized instruction for the educational needs of ELLs; extended instruction through the L1 (i.e., two-way immersion and late-exit programs) is preferable than short-term instruction through their L1 (i.e., early-exit and TBE programs) and mainstream English programs.
- Programs for ELLs should be enriched, consistent over grade levels, provide challenging curricula, and include language development components.

SOME IMPLICATIONS -- 2

- Teachers should design instruction to promote oral language development strategically and, in particular, in line with academic language needs

- Teachers need to work at **multiple levels**:
 - sub-component level (phon. awareness, letter-sound)
 - word-level
 - text-level
 - cognitive/meaning level

- The specific focus will depend on students' **stage of literacy development**

SOME IMPLICATIONS -- 3

- The same kinds of factors that influence L1 literacy development are important for L2 literacy – **focus on these factors**
- Skills (cognitive & linguistic; L1 & L2) that are linked to reading and writing are most important in early stages of learning to read; general oral language skills are important in later stages

SOME IMPLICATIONS -- 4

- ELLs draw on L1 skills during literacy activities when they have L2 gaps – especially early in development & even later -- ***bilingual reservoir of skills***
- Teachers should recognize such transfer as signs of constructive learning strategies and promote them

SOME IMPLICATIONS -- 5

- Teachers need a **repertoire of instructional strategies**: direct, interactive, process
- They should use different approaches strategically
- **Continuity and coherence** across grades is critical if real development is to occur

FUTURE RESEARCH

- Sustained programmatic research on the longitudinal development of, and influences of instruction on, oral language, literacy, and academic skills of ELLs across the K-12 span.
- Longitudinal research on the co-development of oral and literacy skills, literacy and academic skills, and oral and academic skills.

FUTURE RESEARCH (cont.)

- Research on: students in the middle and high school grades, non-Hispanic students, and students with special challenges (e.g., language impairment, learning disabilities)
- Research on the influence of school and classroom variables (such as student composition) on ELLs' development.

How to Obtain Book & Journal Article

■ Educating English Language Learners

book available here at CAFE, through the publisher (Cambridge University Press), or through amazon.com (paperback & hardcover)

■ Journal article available at CAFE website

http://www.bilingualeducation.org/pdf/JESPAR_Article_ELL.pdf

Genesee, F., Lindholm-Leary, K., Saunders, W., & Christian, D. (2005). English language learners in U.S. schools: An overview of research findings. Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk 10(4), 363-385.