Structured English Immersion: Experiences and Trends

Policy Briefing to the Texas State Board of Education

Austin, Texas

Don Soifer
Lexington Institute
February 9, 2006
Structured English Immersion

Dual Language

Opportunity

English as a Second Language

Transitional Bilingual Education

Structured Immersion

Dual Language

Opportunity

English as a Second Language

Transitional Bilingual Education
California’s Immersion Experience

• Proposition 227 passed in 1998.

• Immersion programs “not normally intended to exceed one year.”

• Implementation has been uneven by nearly all accounts.

• Steady, strong gains in English proficiency for past 3 years.

• Generally, California school districts with most incomplete compliance with Prop. 227 showed smallest increases (below state averages).
California’s Immersion Experience (2)

- While test scores have improved, reclassification rates to “English proficient” status has changed very little and remains just above 8 percent.

- Statewide, much of the progress in 2004 occurred in grades 5 through 12.

- “Many educators had predicted catastrophe if bilingual classes were dismantled in this state … But the prophecies have not materialized.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>25 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>34 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>43 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>47 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*California English Language Development Test*
Atwater (CA) Elementary School District

- 4,700 students in grades K-8 / 26 percent English language learners
- Many younger students exiting immersion program within one year

Students In Top 2 Categories of English Proficiency on CELDT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>12 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>43 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Atwater’s Tri-Level System

• Accelerated Classes for English (ACE)
  – Focuses on English oral development
  – Focuses on phonics and letter sounds

• Bridge Program
  – Continue English learning along with content learning

• Mainstream Classrooms
  – Instruction in English at grade-appropriate levels
Los Angeles Unified School District ELLs

- Rising English fluency rate outpaced state average.

- All grade levels increased population in top 2 levels of English proficiency ≥ 17 percentage points since 2001.

- 7th and 8th grade increased by 43 percentage points.

- District placed increased focus on improving instruction for ELL students (42 percent of school population).
Interaction, not segregation: Mix English learners with fluent speakers wherever possible.

Build teacher confidence by providing ongoing training.

Make English the language of instruction in the classroom, and use Spanish only when necessary to explain assignments.

Teaching reading through phonics works better than the whole-language approach.

Protect and maximize classroom instructional time.

Key lessons learned by California districts with successful structured immersion programs:

(Continued…)

(Continued…)}
Lessons Learned (2)

- Provide a structured program in which students move up the ladder of fluency. Atwater, like many districts, uses a tri-level approach: Accelerated Classes for English for beginners, Bridge of intermediates, and Mainstream for advanced speakers.

- Continue to provide support after students enter the mainstream.

- Explain the program to trustees, teachers, principals, and parents: Everyone needs to be on board.

- Incorporate specially-designed curricula and textbooks for English learners and, where possible, contact educators and administrators from successful immersion districts for advice.
Brain science research indicates earlier (before age 7) is better than later for learning a second language.

Phonology (accent, pronunciation, vowels and syllables) HIGHLY sensitive to Age of Exposure.

(Petitto, 2002)
## Optimal Exposure? Early is Best

### Unsupported View

Teach second language later when child has “cognitive base”

### STRONGEST Formula

Native fluency in both languages

The earlier children are exposed to two languages, the stronger they are in each language across multiple and rich contexts

(Petitto, 2003)
Factors Why English Language Learning Can Take Longer

• Higher mobility/transience of population

• Older immigrant students / quality of prior formal education

• Exposure to second language outside of classroom

• Educational and Financial Incentives for schools not to reclassify children too quickly
Good news…

- Compared with 6 states with largest LEP populations, Texas ELLs have highest percentage proficient in math (50 percent) and language arts (45 percent).

- This is also true of formerly ELL students -- within two years of reclassification -- in math (76 percent) and language arts (79 percent)

(Lexington Institute, 2005)
“Transitional” in Name Alone?

- 10 percent of Texas ELLs transitioned out of special language classrooms into mainstream classrooms in 2003-04.

- 11 percent made the transition in 2002-03.

- 40 percent of Texas ELLs in grades 3-5 administered state NCLB reading assessments in non-English native language.

(U.S. Department of Education, 2005)
“Students often do not have access to the more rigorous, challenging, relevant courses unless they are considered fluent in English. There should be more of a correlation between the test scores and the reclassification rates.”

Thank You!

Don Soifer
Executive Vice President
Lexington Institute
1600 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 900
Arlington, VA 22209
Tel. 703.522.5828   Fax: 703.522.5837
Email: soifer@lexingtoninstitute.org
Select Publications Discussing Structured English Immersion


Greene, Jay P. “A Meta-Analysis of the Effectiveness of Bilingual Education,” Austin, Texas: The Public Policy Clinic of the Department of Government at the University of Texas, 1998.


Select Publications (3)


