ESL/Bilingual Education

Abstract

Formal Definition:

The Texas Education Code (TEC), Chapter 29, Subchapter B, §29.051 through §29.064, as sited by the Texas Education Agency Department of Accountability and School Accreditation, states that:

Bilingual education is a state-required program. The state policy mandates that every student in the state who has a home language other than English and who is identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) shall be provided a full opportunity to participate in the required bilingual education program (in districts with 20 or more LEP students in the same language classification in the same grade-level district wide) or the required English as a Second Language (ESL) program (for districts that do not meet the 20 or more LEP criteria).

In addition, Senate Bill 477, enacted in 1981, mandates bilingual and other special language programs for kindergarten through Grade 12. House Bill 72, in 1984, further extended bilingual and special language programs to pre-kindergarten programs serving LEP children. The 74th Texas Legislature in 1995 passed Senate Bill 1; TEC, Chapter 29, Subchapter B; and the 19 Texas Administrative Code (TAC), Chapter 89, Subchapter BB serves as the framework for Bilingual/ESL indicators.
English as a Second Language/Bilingual programs provide the means to meet the educational needs of many students in mainstream and special education settings. Limited English Proficient (LEP) relates to the limited ability to listen, speak, read, and write in English. Texas mandates require that any student who speaks or hears a language other than English in their home and who have difficulty in English be enrolled in an ESL program, which is taught by a trained and certified ESL instructor.

The number of (LEP) students in U. S. schools has increased dramatically, and the population has become increasingly diverse in language and culture as a result. Oppositions toward ESL/Bilingual education are often related to specific practices, in particular, the design of lesson plans in support of the students’ primary language. Studies, however, have proven the effectiveness of programs and approaches that identify and assist students with these specific needs.

Instructional approaches, such as discovery learning, interactive instruction, cooperative learning, and oral and visual methods, help students develop academic competence while also developing English proficiency. ESL teaching methodologies include an array of approaches that focus on preventing the occurrence of early learning problems with immediate comprehensive intervention followed by remediation of academic difficulties.
**ESL/Bilingual Education**

**Facts**

- **ESL Education In Texas** - any student who speaks or hears a language other than English in their home and who have difficulty in English be enrolled in an ESL program, taught by a trained and certified ESL teacher.
- **Culture** – an array of personal experiences and values used by individuals to communicate with one another and share experiences, conceptions and beliefs.
- **Opposition/Misconceptions** – criticism and its effect on public opinion about bilingual education’s goals and practices.
- **Approaches in Instruction** – program design preventing the occurrence of early learning problems with immediate comprehensive intervention, and later remediation of academic difficulties.

**Interpretation:**

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ESL/Bilingual education is structured language instruction, according to Duff, (4), Freeman (7), McKeon (17), & Rennie (21). Program models vary from Stand-Alone design to English-Plus design, and all programs focus on teaching English for effective participation in the classroom. In the best of conditions, the programs consider the students’ learning experiences and cultural backgrounds and taught at the students’ instructional level, TEA (24). Ferris (5), Fradd (6), McKeon (17), Rennie (21), & Spangenberg-Urbschat (23), describe the purpose of an ESL program as developing competency in English by using a modified program of instruction, state-adopted ESL materials, and teaching language skills through listening, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar. Second language acquisition is very different from foreign language learning. When English is studied in another country, the native language and culture remain intact, and there is an expected mutual respect and equality between the cultures. However in America, when non-English speaking minorities are pressured by the
dominant majority into accepting another culture and its language the result can be a
derogatory view of their own culture, Quintero (19) & Smithson (22).

Hinkel (10) clarifies what is meant by cultural meaning in a quote taken from
Thompson’s, *Ideology and Modern Culture* (1990), which describes culture as, “the
pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms, including actions, utterances and
meaningful objects of various kinds, by virtue of which individuals communicate with
one another and share their experiences, conceptions and beliefs.”

Misconceptions surround ESL, and public acceptance or rejection of programs
offered for students whose primary language is one other than English is often based
more on politics or emotions than on what is known about learning or teaching, Krashen
(14). “In the 1980s opposition toward use of languages other than English in education
and other services for language minority students swept the country,” Freeman (8).
Perhaps the most controversial practice involves that a teacher plan her lessons in support
a students’ first language and culture. This aids in developing students’ strengths and
helps identify areas of weakness, Morgan (18). Opponents of education in English as a
Second Language argue that in order to become fluent in English and complete in
society, non-English-speaking students should be taught in English, without the support
of the student’s primary language. Some educators who recognize the importance of the
language and culture that native English-speaking students bring with them to school do
not fully understand the importance of building on the language and cultural base that other students bring.

   English-speaking students have acquired pre-reading and basic reading abilities to meet the demands of a regular classroom. Therefore, these students have a good start in attaining the mental framework necessary for successful learning. On the other hand, the LEP student who is struggling to speak, read, and comprehend the English language will have few, if any, of the pre-skills necessary for academic success. Reid (20) contends that success is possible only to the extent that teachers are willing and able to use appropriate variations of instructional strategies. Research by Kagan (11) states that cooperative learning increases the probabilities that students will master, retain, and transfer knowledge and skills by maximizing input, output, and context variables. Some variable characteristics include: developmentally appropriate, comprehensible, frequent, functional, and identity congruent. Similarly, teachers should differentiate instruction for LEP students according to their entry-level language skills and provide information in a way that is clearly understood.

   Research indicates that success in concept learning can be achieved through, and among others, oral and visual methods, discovery learning, interactive instruction, cooperative learning, fine arts, and through supporting first language development. Moreover, since students learn concepts best in their primary language, programs that
support a student’s first language and culture help the student gain self-confidence and a positive attitude toward school, Kessler (12) & Krashen (14).

Application:

ESL/Bilingual students in Texas represent many diverse ethnic groups and generate a richness of the many languages and strengths that form our schools. The need for language acquisition is represented in the number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in Texas public schools, which increased from 479,576 in 1995-96 to 570,603 in 2000-2001, Kim (13) & TEA (24).

The goal of most ethnic groups is to maintain their culture identity of which language is an integral part. Teachers can uncover issues and concerns of importance to learners through speaking and writing activities by using journals, photos, family traditions, and life experiences, Bacha (1) & Quintero (19). Ideally, this goal can be achieved through “cultural pluralism with structural assimilation, where access to goods and services and to the social institutions like education and justice are available,” Hinkel (10).

Opposition to these practices is evident in the national media. Extreme examples of opposition became apparent in 1997, when signatures were collected for the “English as Required Language for Instruction Initiative” for the 1998 electoral ballot. This initiative mandates schools to teach academic subjects only through English, using “structured English immersion,” and makes it difficult for schools to offer any primary language
support. Especially when using the term bilingual, the public mistook its meaning of one language and not two separate languages, Goldman (9). Such bills reflect anti-immigrant sentiment and ignore the progress of effective education, Freeman (8), & Krashen (14).

Numerous mainstream teachers are also faced with a lack of knowledge regarding the education of English language learners. According to Freeman (8), some educators may simply decide that these students cannot learn, so they are placed in the low groups. Although labeling benefits initial identification, it focuses on the students’ weaknesses and blinds the educator of the knowledge and abilities that the student possesses in their first language. English language learners labeled “Limited English Proficient,” give students and those who work with them the impression that they are deficient. Some attribute this lack of fluency in English to a lack of understanding, and thus, many ESL students are unnecessarily labeled as learning disabled. “Instead of seeing bilingualism as a special ability and valuing both the language and culture of the ESL student, some educators view bilingualism as an hindrance,” Freeman (8).

Finding ways to meet the needs of special students is of major concern. Students who perform below their potential are educationally disadvantaged, teachers should make curriculum applicable to all students and identify strategies that will encourage their success. The keys to communication and importance of language-rich classrooms, with visual/realia displays, lead to the discovery about how listening, speaking, reading, and writing fosters fluency and literacy, Bentson (2).
Teachers can help ESL students comprehend content subject matter as they acquire English language skills. Here are some examples of successful approaches:

- **Support the student’s home language and culture; bring a multicultural perspective to the subjects you are teaching.**
  Encourage students to bring in pictures, poems, dances, or games.

- **Simplify your speaking**
  Speak clearly, slow down, avoid slang and idioms, and control sentence length.

- **Use videos, filmstrips, and audiocassettes.**
  Tape-record the readings.

- **Use gestures and concrete referents**
  Speak with your hands to make things easier. Use props and visuals.

- **Avoid true/false questions.**

- **Demonstrate; use manipulative.**

- **Pair or group ESL students with native speakers.**
  Much of language learning comes from interacting with peers.

- **Be very careful of your body language.**
  Know what your body language is saying to them
  Don’t shut them out.

- **Increase your knowledge.**
  Learn as much as you can about the language and culture of your students: Go to the movies, read books, ask your students whether they agree with your impressions.
  Learn as much of the student’s language as you can.
  Widen your own worldview.
Bibliography


24. Texas Education Agency (TEA), (2001). *Assistance available to schools educating limited English proficient students* [On-line web site].

Web References/Sites

ESL Links Page for Students
http://www.pacificnet.net/~sperling/student.html

Links to ESL/EFL/TESL/TEFL Links Pages (ITESLJ)
http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/Links.html

ESL Links Page for Teachers
http://www.pacificnet.net/~sperling/links2.html

Many ESL/EFL Links for Students
http://www.artsci.wustl.edu/~langlab/ESL.old.html

Selected Links for ESL Students
http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/ESL.html

ESLoop
http://math.unr.edu/linguistics/esloop/esloop.html

Sites Neteachers Though Were Cool
http://math.unr.edu/linguistic/neteach.html

Interesting Links for ESL Teachers
http://polyglot.cal.msu.edu/mitesol/linkseslteachers.html