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Supporting English language learners in today's early childhood classrooms

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Abstract

The purpose of this review is to identify the kind(s) of early childhood instruction and learning environment that best supports students whose primary language is not English. The research examined focused on which teacher strategies used in the classroom improve academic achievement for English Language Learners (ELLs). In addition, the research compared the effects of dual language, or two-way immersion (TWI) and monolingual English immersion (El) early childhood education program models on children's learning. A variety of sources were used and synthesized to provide the reader with informational data and recommendations.

Supporting English Language Learners in Today's Early Childhood Classrooms

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By

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Abstract

The purpose of this review is to identify the kind(s) of early childhood instruction and learning environment that best supports students whose primary language is not English. The research examined focused on which teacher strategies used in the classroom improve academic achievement for English Language Learners (ELLs). In addition, the research compared the effects of dual language, or two-way immersion (TWI) and monolingual English immersion (EI) early childhood education program models on children's learning. A variety of sources were used and synthesized to provide the reader with informational data and recommendations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I

Introduction

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defines early childhood education to include any part- or full-day group program in a center, school, or home that serves children from birth through age eight, including children with special development and learning needs (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009). This review is designed to examine instructional strategies that can be used in the early childhood classroom to enhance the learning of English Language Learners (ELLs) and to explore different classroom models as a means for teaching students whose primary language is not English. Following a review of relevant research, this paper will present recommendations for teachers, administrators, and future researchers to provide adequate professional development for educators, support teachers in their pursuit to teach ELLs, and conduct more research in the area of ELL instruction at the early childhood level. The literature review found in chapter three will offer a comparison of the effects of dual language, or two-way immersion (TWI), and monolingual English immersion (EI) early childhood education program models on children's learning. In addition, the review will examine the role of language of instruction in teaching young ELL students.

A growing number of young immigrant children, many of whom are bilingual or have limited English proficiency (LEP), are entering preschools (Oades-Sese, Esquivel, Kaliski, & Maniatis, 2011). Between 1990 and 2000, the number of PK-12th grade children in the United States who were ELLs doubled to 15% of the population. Likewise, in the 2000-2001 school year, as is representative of the preschool population, 26% of Head Start children nationwide were considered dominant in a language other than English (Anthony et. al., 2009). Given that preschool is a critical period when children's development and learning have the greatest impact

on later school adjustment and academic outcomes (Dickinson, McCabe, & Essex, 2006), it is important to gain an understanding of ELL students' development of academic competence. This will result in high quality early childhood education programs that meet the needs of our society's rapidly changing demographics and diverse early childhood student population.

With the growing number of LEP early childhood students being reported, these young students have the unique challenge of not being proficient in their native language and at the same time being expected to learn a second language (Rodriguez & Higgins, 2005). One of the major goals of schooling in the United States is for all students to reach proficiency in academic English. In order to do this, a deeper understanding of the development and optimal teaching of ELL students is necessary (Anthony et. al., 2009). This raises important questions as to what instructional strategies educators can use to help these students achieve grade level expectations along with their peers, beginning as early as preschool, and what language of instruction should be used to teach them.

Rationale

"Fair does not mean 'equal'; rather, treating children fairly, means treating children differently" (Lee, Butler, & Tippins, 2007, para. 5). This statement directly relates why the topic of ELL instruction is a topic worthy of attention. Early childhood classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse, and educators need to be prepared to differentiate instruction to meet each child's needs. Bredekamp and Copple (2009) expanded their definition of developmentally appropriate practices in *Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Programs* to include: what is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child, what is known about the children's development and learning, and what is known about the social and cultural contexts in which children live. Bredekamp and Copple believed that because culture

and language are critical components of children's development, practices cannot be developmentally appropriate unless they are responsive to cultural and linguistic diversity (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009). The increasing number of students in early childhood settings who come from homes where English is not the primary language, presents a challenge for educators who serve this population. Early childhood teachers need to know how they can best instruct their increasingly diverse students using strategies that are developmentally appropriate for all learners.

Improving the English language and literacy of all children, especially ELL children, is a major concern for educational policy makers, as is reflected in federal initiatives such as Good Start, Grow Smart and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), as well as state and local-level early learning initiatives and instructional policies (Halle, Hair, Wandner, McNamara, & Chien, 2012). In fact, the NCLB Act of 2001 requires that ELL students be held to the same content standards and assessed on the same grade level achievement standards as their peers (Albus, Thurlow, & Clapper, 2007). The NCLB Act also brought about new accountability for educators in addressing the needs of and demonstrating the progress of ELL students, as teachers are now required to segregate and disclose both the academic achievement and English language development rates of their ELL students. Schools that are not able to demonstrate adequate yearly progress may face retributive consequences (Karathanos, 2009). This requires more attention to be paid to the instructional supports and strategies teachers can provide to help get ELL students where they need to be, as well as deciding in what language instruction should be provided.

Purpose of Review

In today's classrooms, academic and social success often hinges on a child's language abilities. Due to recent changes in bilingual education law, children who need extra support in second language acquisition have been mainstreamed into classrooms with teachers who are ill-equipped to meet their needs. Without this support, the children who are struggling to acquire even basic skills in their second language begin to fall behind in academics, creating an ever-increasing achievement gap (Facella, Rampino, & Shea, 2005). The purpose of this literature review is to examine research to determine what kind(s) of instructional strategies can be used in the early childhood classroom to enhance the learning of ELL students and to explore different classroom models as a means for teaching students whose primary language is not English. My goal is to provide concrete evidence through this research to support early childhood teachers in their instruction of ELL students, as well as to identify where further research can be conducted.

Importance of Review

While many schools in coastal regions of the U.S. have a history of attempting to address the needs of ELL students, the issue has become increasingly more complex as patterns of migration among ELL families have changed, leading to the Midwest experiencing dramatic increases in ELL student populations in recent years. Such increases have exceeded 100-200% annually in many mid-western states. These states, which have traditionally had very little experiences serving ELL student populations, face some of the greatest shortages of teachers prepared to work with ELL students (Karathanos, 2009). As a preschool teacher in the Midwest, with an increasingly diverse student population, I want to be well equipped with research-based instructional strategies that I can use in my classroom.

Another key issue in the education of ELL children is language of instruction. In the past, school systems have encouraged English language abilities while neglecting a child's home language. However, a variety of bilingual approaches have been developed with the goal of increasing achievement of dual language learners. Recent research has indicated that valuing and capitalizing on the native languages and cultures of ELL students is integral to their success in school (Karathanos, 2009). Some research has found that bilingual and native language instruction is at least as effective as English immersion (EI), but these approaches remain controversial (Barnett, Yarosz, Thomas, Jung, & Blanco, 2007). With research being confounding, I think a review of this topic will also be beneficial to my understanding of how to best instruct ELLs in my own classroom.

Terminology

The following terms are used frequently throughout this paper. It is critical to the understanding of this literature review that these terms be both consistent and precise.

Bilingual or Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) – a program in which students are provided with native language support until they achieve a sufficient level of proficiency in their second language to benefit from instruction in their second language (Duran, Roseth, & Hoffman, 2010).

Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) – a framework of principles and guidelines for best practice in the care and education of young children, birth through age eight (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009).

Dual language program– a program providing ELL and native English speakers with an education in two languages. Another term for TWI (Barnett et al., 2007).

Dual language learner – young language-learning children who are learning to speak their home language as well as at least one other language at the same time (Halle et. al., 2012).

Emergent Phonics Talk – talk with students that connects sounds to letters, such as identifying first sounds in words, segmenting words, or rhyming (Aukrust & Rydland, 2011).

English Language Learner (ELL)- an individual in an English-speaking environment whose native language is not English (Halle et. al.,2012).

Immigrant – a person who comes to a country to live there (Merriam-Webster, 2012).

Instructional Strategies – a set of systematic activities used by a teacher that contains explicit steps to achieve a specific student outcome. This set of steps must be replicable by another individual in order to be considered a strategy (Albus et. al, 2007).

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) – an English language learner who is limited in his or her proficiency of spoken and written English (Halle et. al., 2012).

Migration – moving from one country, place, or locality to another (Merriam-Webster, 2012).

Monolingual English immersion (EI) or English only (EO) – a program primarily in English (Barnett et. al., 2007).

Native language – language spoken at home (Halle et. al., 2012).

Early Childhood Student– a child from birth through eight years of age (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009).

Second language – language in addition to a person's native language (Duran et. al, 2010).

Two-Way immersion (TWI)- a program providing ELL and native English speakers with an education in two languages. Another term for dual language (Barnett et al., 2007).

Research Questions to be Answered

While trying to determine how English language learners can best be supported in today's early childhood classrooms, I asked these questions:

Research Question 1:

What techniques or strategies are most effective for early childhood teachers to use to support English acquisition in young children for whom English is not the first language?

Research Question 2:

Is it effective to teach ESL students in their native language, English only, or a combination of both?

Chapter II

Methodology

This chapter will outline the methodology used to write my review. I discuss how I chose to locate, select, and analyze the research that is provided in this chapter. I will explicitly demonstrate how sources were organized and reviewed to provide concrete evidence to support my final conclusions and recommendations for further research on this topic.

Method to Locate Sources

At the beginning of my search, I began by doing a basic search on the World Wide Web, using the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and the keyword *ESL*. I quickly realized that this was too broad a search, and I needed to narrow my search to just the early childhood field to see how much information was available. I did find some information about preschool-age students only, but through further investigations, I decided to add what kind of ELL instruction best meets the needs of students at the primary level in order to focus my attention primarily on students ages 3-8. I also did an advanced search using different combinations of the keywords *ESL, instruction, strategies, preschool, early childhood, English as a Second Language, ELL,* and *English Language Learners.* I was only able to find a few articles that had the information I was looking for. Because of this, I read the articles that I found useful and used the references in those articles to conduct forward snowballing and backward snowballing methods to find more articles that had related information. I also used the summaries of past research found in those articles to find different authors on whom I could conduct searches. I then used Google Scholar to search in a similar way and found that Google Scholar also recommended related articles, once I found an article that was relevant. I found this to be useful, as it directed me to additional research articles that were valuable to my review.

When reading through some of the articles that I found, I discovered that there was confounding information in regard to using the child's native language as an instructional strategy. I decided it would be worthwhile to investigate the language of instruction of ELL learners and broadened my search to incorporate this as a second research question. I then did additional ERIC and Google Scholar searches using the search terms *native language, language of instruction, ELL, ESL, classroom models* and *programs.* These searches directed me to several more articles that related to my research questions. After finding many articles through these search engines, I was able to use the University of Northern Iowa's Rod Library to access many of these articles in full-text.

Method to Select Sources

After finding about forty different articles in full-text, I then went through and read these articles more thoroughly to see which articles were of high quality and were original research rather than reviews of research. I also found some articles to have information that was relevant to teaching ELL students at higher grade levels, but not early childhood-age children. This eliminated more than half of the articles that I originally found. I did decide to keep a few articles that were not research articles, but that I felt were pertinent to my topic and gave me background information that I needed in regard to terminology, theories of learning, and policies related to the topic of teaching ELL students. I also used the textbook *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs (*Bredekamp & Copple, 2009*),* because in the field of early childhood, these authors' perspectives on diversity are well-known and recognized.

Procedure to Analyze Sources

In order to determine that the articles I selected were original research articles, the first way I analyzed my sources was to skim through each of them and eliminate any articles that simply stated the authors' opinions or were a review of previous research that had been conducted. If they were not original research articles, but I felt I still might be able to use them as a reference to find other articles or to gain background knowledge on my topic, I kept them for possible use. If the article was original research on my topic, I read it more thoroughly and then analyzed these sources using an annotated bibliography. As I read and reflected on the articles, I took notes which helped to summarize the main ideas of each article. I also highlighted anything that I thought I might paraphrase or quote in my paper so I would be able to quickly reference it later in my writing process.

Criteria to Include Literature

When looking for current research articles I did not have difficulty finding articles that were as recent as the past 5 years. I wanted to find articles that were current or at least written within the past 10 years, but did not want to completely disregard research that was done more than 10 years ago if the information still seemed to be applicable or important. Most of my articles did not date back farther than 2005. I also included the newest version of the textbook *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs*, which was written in 2009 and contained relevant information to the topic of ELL instruction at the early childhood level.

Chapter III

Literature Review

Present Problem/Research Questions

A National Center for Educational Statistics survey found that only 29.5% of teachers of ELLs, including those who teach bilingual classes or specific ELL program models, have any related training (Hite & Evans, 2006). The number of children in the United States who are ELLs is growing rapidly, and this trend is even stronger at the early childhood level, as one in four early childhood students is reported to speak a language other than English at home. While many ELL students are mainstreamed into early childhood education settings, there have also been a variety of bilingual approaches developed with the goal of increasing the achievement of ELL children (Barnett et. al, 2007). A review of research will assist all early childhood teachers in appropriately instructing young ELL students in their classrooms, by providing specific instructional strategies to assist ELL students with language acquisition, and ultimately, knowledge in all content areas.

The Research on Second Language Acquisition

Theories of second language acquisition. There are several theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) that have been developed. These theories are most relevant to classroom teachers who are not explicitly teaching a second language, but rather facilitating second language acquisition while teaching content.

The most widely accepted theory of SLA is that of Cummins and is referred to as the Common Underlying Proficiency Theory. Cummins incorporated psychological and cognitive factors into the language acquisition process, and hypothesized a developmental interdependence influenced by the importance of cognitive skills in the language process. He argued that first-

language acquisition plays an important role in second-language development because of transfer of the cognitive skills used in the acquisition of the first language to the acquisition of the second language (as cited in Rodriguez & Higgins, 2005).

Another approach is based on a broad theory known as Input-Interaction-Output (IIO). Through this model, Krashen contended that students learn in stages that require teachers to provide *input*, or language the learner is able to understand, just beyond the learner's current level. In the intake stage, learners must process the input and match it against existing knowledge and then integrate the input to either use it for immediate use *(output)* or store it for future use. Language growth takes place when the learner is able to make him or herself understood (as cited in Hite & Evans, 2006).

A second theory of Krashen's model is referred to as the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which refers to mental and emotional blocks that can impede a language learner. If the filter is up, input is prevented from getting through. This theory stressed the importance of teachers recognizing their ability to create a non-threatening environment for students learning a second language. Krashen distinguished *learning* a second language from *acquiring* one. He viewed learning a second language as focusing on the rules to use the language, while acquiring a second language was the process that occurs unconsciously in situations in which language is used for real communication skills, such as when you are just *picking up* a language. This theory is referred to as his Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis (as cited in Hite & Evans, 2006).

Schumann's Acculturation Theory proposed that a learner is successful in SLA to the degree that he or she can acculturate into the target language culture. This theory suggested that ELLs will progress faster in SLA when they are treated, and begin to see themselves, as part of

the English language group and when students are motivated to identify with people who speak English (as cited in Hite & Evans, 2006).

Language of instruction. The research on language of instruction for English language learners is confounding. How to effectively meet the needs of the growingly diverse early childhood student populations remains unresolved. Some studies have suggested that children may lose their first language when a *high prestige* second language is introduced, emphasizing the importance of teaching ELLs in their native language or in an English immersion (EI) or English Only (EO) model. Many educators, policymakers and even parents view bilingualism as a limited capacity phenomenon, believing a person can be strong in one language or another, but not both, because there is limited capacity in the brain for both (Dixon, Wu, & Daraghmeh, 2012). Other studies have found that bilingual early childhood programs promote development in both languages rather than hindering the growth of the second language (Barnett et al., 2007). One common dual language approach is called two-way bilingual immersion (TWI). In this model, programs provide ELL and native English speakers with an education in both English and the students' native language (Barnett et al., 2007). Another bilingual approach, called Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE), provides students with native language support until they achieve a sufficient level of proficiency in their second language that would allow them to benefit from instruction in that language (Duran et. al, 2010).

Barnett et al. (2007) conducted an experimental study to compare the effects of dual language, or TWI, and EI early childhood program models. In their study, 150 three and four-year old students, selected from a lottery of over 1000 children, were randomly placed into a TWI (Spanish and English) or EI program in the same school district. All classrooms in this study used the High Scope curriculum and met high quality standards for class size, adult-child

ratio and teacher qualifications. In the TWI model, each classroom of students rotated weekly

between two teaching teams. One team consisted of a teacher and an assistant who both taught

in English, and the other consisted of a teacher and an assistant who both taught in Spanish.

Programs were compared on measures of children's growth in language, emergent literacy, and

mathematics. To do this, the researchers administered the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test

(PPVT-III), the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery-Revised (WJ-R) and two

phonological awareness subtests (Spanish and English PreLas2000). In the TWI group,

assessments were given in both English and Spanish, and in the EI group, Spanish-dominant

children were assessed in English and Spanish, while others were tested in English only. The

researchers also measured the classroom environments of both program models using the Early

Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R). Results of this study, based on a

comparison of pre- and post-tests, indicated that all children made substantial learning gains in

language, literacy and mathematics. For both groups of children, standard scores on the PPVT

increased from 78-84, a 6 point gain. Standard score gains were roughly 5 points on the WJ-R

Picture Vocabulary and 3 points on the WJ-R Applied Problem tests. Raw score gains on the

unstandardized literacy measures were evident, as children advanced from recognizing 4 or 5

letters to recognizing 10 or 11 letters in English. There were no significant differences between

treatment groups found on measures of English language ($p < .05$). Among the native Spanish-

speakers, the TWI program produced large gains in Spanish vocabulary compared to the EI

program ($es = .61$ and $.56$, $p < .001$), without losses in English language learning. On measures

of classroom quality, the ECERS-R scores revealed no significant difference between the EI and

TWI programs. However, results did indicate that in the TWI program, classrooms scored

significantly better ($F (2,33) = 10.75$, $p <.05$) than the EI model on incorporating the cultural

background into classroom life. The researchers also noted that bilingualism has been found to yield added cognitive benefits for children's learning and development over the long term (as cited in Hakuta & Garcia,1989; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995).

Duran et al. (2010) conducted a longitudinal, experimental comparison of EO and TBE instruction on the language and literacy development of low-income Spanish-speaking students as they went through preschool, followed by a traditional EO kindergarten. In this study, 31 Spanish-speaking preschoolers age 38-48 months were randomly assigned to two Head Start programs differing only in language of instruction (English or Spanish). In both classrooms, the lead teacher was licensed in early childhood and both classrooms had a native Spanish-speaking assistant; however, in the EO setting the bilingual assistant spoke only in English. In both classrooms, the Creative Curriculum was used and the teachers intentionally planned for the same themes to be covered throughout the year in each classroom. Three assessments of teacher quality were used to ensure that there were not confounding differences between the classroom teachers. Graduate research assistants videotaped each classroom, using focal sampling for 10 minute observation periods. The Creative Curriculum assessment form was used to measure children's growth. Classroom teachers collected observational data on social/emotional development, prosocial behavior, cognitive development, language development, and motor development. The lead author and graduate research assistant also measured the quality of the classroom environments in each classroom using the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO). Researchers measured five dependent variables (receptive and expressive vocabulary, letter-word identification, alliteration, and rhyming in English and Spanish) using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test -4 (PPVT-4), Woodcock-Munoz Language

Survey-Revised (WMLS-R), and Early Literacy Individual Growth and Development Indicators (EL-IGDIs). For the TBE classroom, results showed significantly higher growth ($p < .05$) on both Spanish oral vocabulary and letter-word identification measures with higher scores in picture naming ($r = -.42, p < .05$), letter scores ($r = .46, p < .01$), and picture scores ($r = -.47, p < .05$) in Spanish for TBE than for EO. There were no significant differences between classrooms on the same measures in English. These results suggested that TBE may be a promising approach to supporting Spanish language and literacy development without significant cost to English development, as well as a viable alternative to traditional EO models.

Paez, Tabors, and Lopez (2007) compared the language and early literacy skills of 319 bilingual preschool students in Massachusetts and Maryland (Early Childhood Study or ECS) with144 monolingual Spanish-speaking children in Puerto Rico (Puerto Rican Comparative or PRC). Data collection included four subtests of the Woodcock Language Proficiency Battery and a researcher-developed phonological awareness task. Results showed, on average, that children in the ECS sample performed below average in both English and Spanish when compared to monolingual norms and continued to lag behind monolingual students of the same age. Even though children in the ECS sample made small gains in their English vocabulary over the time period from fall to spring ($t (310) = -3.93, p < .001; d = 0.12$), they were still below average based on the normative scores. The ECS sample performed, on average, more than two standard deviations below the population mean in Spanish vocabulary skills as well. In addition, this gap increased slightly as the students failed to make age-appropriate gains from the fall to spring ($t (315) = 4.94, p < .001; d = 0.18$). The findings of this study demonstrated that bilingual students have limited oral language skills and suggested that the PRC group may have an advantage over the ECS group in oral language skills because those children only had to learn one language.

Dixon et al. (2012) explored three common assumptions concerning bilingual children's language proficiency: (1) their proficiency in two languages is usually unbalanced; (2) low socioeconomic status (SES) indicates low proficiency in both languages; and (3) encouraging parents to speak some societal language at home will promote its development. They conducted a random sample of 282 bilingual Singaporean kindergarteners (167 Chinese, 70 Malay, and 45 Tamil) with varying income levels. Students' receptive English oral vocabulary was assessed using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III (PPVT-III), which was translated into each child's native language as the most reasonable alternative for obtaining approximate equivalent measures of a child's vocabulary in the three different ethnic languages. The raw scores were used in the analysis because, for these languages, no standardized measures existed that had been normed on the Singapore population. A parent questionnaire was also sent home in both English and the students' native language, so each family could respond in the language of their choice. Parents were asked what language(s) they used with their child, what language(s) their child used with them, and what language(s) their child watched on television. Six local bilingual research assistants were trained to administer the instruments during sessions that lasted approximately 45 minutes. The results of the study showed that children with high proficiencies in both languages were equally represented in the low, middle, and high SES groups, demonstrating the achievability of strong vocabulary in two languages for children of different SES. Children mostly exposed to one language from different sources generally showed strength in that language. Children exposed to both languages at home were most likely to show low proficiency in both languages, although many children exposed to both languages gained high proficiency in English or both. Researchers believed that their results affirmed previous findings that SES and home language exposure influenced bilingual children's proficiency and suggested that early

childhood educators assess bilingual students in both languages and collaborate with families to develop bilingual children's vocabulary. These researchers concluded that the common recommendation to parents to speak the school language (English) at home was at first supported by their findings, but that it must be taken into consideration that their study was correlational and that parents' proficiency in both languages was not measured and could play an important role. Rather than recommending a certain language at home, they suggested that parents engage in vocabulary-building practices, such as conversations, storytelling, and reading, in whatever language(s) they are using at home. They also recommended that early childhood teachers work with parents to help reinforce school concepts at home by providing materials to encourage parents to speak and interact more with their children, in the parents' preferred language.

Halle et al. (2012) longitudinally examined predictors and outcomes of early versus later English language proficiency among ELL kindergarteners through their eighth grade year. A nationally-representative sample of approximately 19,000 first-time kindergarteners, with a sub-sample comprised of 2,700 children, was selected to explore differences in reading and math achievement between ELLs and native English speakers, based on the grade at which English proficiency is attained. English proficiency among these students was measured using the ECLS-K Oral Language Development Screener (OLDS). This screening evaluated children's listening comprehension, vocabulary, and command of expressive language. Researchers first administered the OLDS to all ELL children during the fall of kindergarten, and thereafter only administered it again to students who did not receive a passing score, in order to measure the grade at which English proficiency was achieved. Results showed that ELLs who were proficient in English by kindergarten entry kept pace with native English speakers in both reading and math initially and over time. ELLs who were proficient by first grade had modest gaps in reading and

math compared to native English speakers; those gaps closed narrowly or persisted over time. ELLs who were not proficient in English by first grade had the largest initial gaps in reading and math achievement compared to their native English speaking peers, but the gap narrowed over time in reading and grew over time in math. The results of this study indicated that there is variability in the developmental trajectories of ELLs based on the grade at which they attain proficiency in oral English language use, and that ELL children who are proficient in English at kindergarten entry perform as well as or better than their English-speaking peers on measures of socio-emotional and behavior development, reading, and math as they enter kindergarten, and grow at the same rates or faster in these areas over time. The researchers of this study suggested that exposure to center-based care in the year prior to kindergarten was associated with a higher likelihood of English proficiency by the time of kindergarten entry and emphasized the importance of early childhood education in the school readiness of ELL children. These researchers also emphasized that the exclusive use of the dominant language could put ELL children at risk of loss of their home language and their cultural identity and recommended support of both languages.

Oades-Sese et al. (2011) conducted a longitudinal study to identify the social and academic competencies that would predict later academic achievement in Hispanic economically disadvantaged bilingual preschool students. They also examined children's growth in English oral language skills two years later. Participants were 207 Hispanic American preschoolers, ages four and five, from fifty early childhood classrooms. In study one, researchers used a person-centered approach to identify six profiles of preschoolers' social competencies: temperament, emotional regulation, autonomy, cognitive ability, bilingual skills, and level of acculturation. Findings revealed profile differences in social competence and a significant relationship between

bilingualism and social-emotional development. The two profiles of social competence (emotionally regulated English-dominant and emotionally regulated Spanish-dominant) were highest on the social competence function (high play interaction, lower play disruption, and lower play disconnection) and the vulnerable profile (dysregulated low bilingual) was lowest on social competence function (low play interaction, higher play disruption, and higher play disconnection). Researchers then conducted pairwise Games-Howell post hoc analysis to identify which profiles differed significantly on the function. The emotionally regulated English-dominant profile was significantly higher on the function than all other profiles except for the emotionally regulated Spanish-dominant profile ($p < 0.1$). The emotionally regulated Spanish-dominant profile was significantly higher than the assimilated monolingual, socially emerging bilingual, and dysregulated low bilingual profiles. Finally, the reticent functioning bilingual profile was significantly higher than the assimilated monolingual and dysregulated low bilingual profiles. These findings revealed profile differences in social competence and a significant relationship between bilingualism and social-emotional development.

In study two, researchers used a variable-centered approach to determine which profile(s) related to academic success and English proficiency two years later. Findings indicated a significant relationship of early social-emotional development to later academic success and English acquisition, highlighting the role of bilingualism. Based on the ninety participants in study two, all groups had increased in English proficiency two years later. The largest growth was evident for the socially competent Spanish-dominant group (mean difference score of 25.94). The second largest growth was shown by the vulnerable group (mean difference score of 11), although they performed almost two standard deviations below the mean. The remaining three profiles experienced changes that ranged from 4.88 to 8.23 standard scores from pre- to

post-test. The researchers examined the different scores of the six profiles with ANOVA and found they were all statistically and practically significant ($p < .001$). Tukey's HSD post hoc test determined that the emotionally regulated (socially competent) Spanish-dominant group grew statistically significantly more proficient in English from pre- to post-test compared with all five other profiles. The researchers noted that these findings may have implications for early identification of ELLs who are at risk, and they proposed that ELLs who lack competency in a language at preschool, warrant interventions that promote the development of language skill. They also noted that because this study highlighted the complex relationships among cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional factors, that bilingual children may benefit from more intense exposure to language modeling in the classroom in addition to building social-emotional skills (Oades-Sese et al., 2011).

Effective teaching of ELL students. As a result of their research, Halle et al. (2012) recommended that early childhood teachers strive to support both the child's native language and English. Specifically, they mentioned the use of research-based curricula, instructional practices that support both the first and second language, and literacy development of the dual language learner. They suggested that this be accomplished by intentionally incorporating elements of the child's home language and culture into the classroom and curriculum, building on the child's prior knowledge to support the learning of new concepts, and maintaining a classroom environment that values and supports bilingualism. They emphasized that early childhood classrooms that support the child's native language while exposing the child to English are likely the best able to help children achieve proficiency in their native language as well as English. Results of their study also suggested that children's participation in cultural heritage activities at home may also facilitate English language learning, but they saw a need for future analyses to

explore whether there are racial or ethnic differences in the amount or type of activities in which ELL families engage, and the strength of association between family customs and English proficiency among different ethnic groups within the ELL population. Researchers also saw a need for schools to design policies and practices that would effectively engage parents of ELL students. They noted that some of the biggest challenges included a lack of bilingual staff in schools, communication barriers between English-speaking staff and ELL families, and differences in schools' and families' expectations of students' development and learning.

Based on their research, Dixon et al. (2012) recommended that teachers focus on factors that they can control in their classrooms, such as the environment and teaching practices. Along with the importance of working alongside parents, as discussed earlier, they highlighted the importance of providing a language- and literacy-rich environment, in both the students' native language and in English, whenever possible, and engaging children in language-rich interactions and activities. They believed that teachers can help children avoid the risk of low vocabulary in both languages by building a proficiency in at least the school language, or English. They also stressed the importance of teachers upholding high expectations for all of their bilingual students, regardless of their SES or home language, based on their findings that students are capable of reaching high proficiency in two languages.

Facella et al. (2005) interviewed twenty early childhood educators from two linguistically and culturally diverse public school districts in Chelsea, Massachusetts, and Brookline, Massachusetts, and asked them two open-ended questions about their teaching practices. The first was what strategies they found to be effective in language acquisition with their ELL students, and the second question asked why they felt these strategies worked. The students sampled were from grades prekindergarten through second grade. The twenty teachers in the

sample mentioned twenty-eight different strategies they found to be effective in working with the ELLs in their classrooms. On average, teachers mentioned approximately ten strategies each during their interviews. The strategies fell into three main categories: strategies for engaging learners emotionally, strategies for teaching language specifically, and strategies for teaching in general. The results of the data, when analyzed, showed four strategies that were named by the majority of the teachers as being effective. These were gestures and visual cues; repetition and opportunities for practicing skills; use of objects, real props, and hands-on materials; and multisensory approaches. In conclusion, the researchers found that a variety of strategies were found to be effective when teaching ELLs, but more importantly, that many of these strategies were deemed effective by teachers from both school districts sampled, across multiple grade levels, and with children who were culturally and linguistically diverse. The researchers also found a need for teachers to research the way ELLs acquire their second language and choose the appropriate strategy for working with each child as an individual. While this type of research seems very informal compared to other in-depth research I have read on this topic, it is useful because it was information gathered from current practicing teachers who work with ELL students. Researchers also noted that the strategies compiled were research-based strategies. It is important to rely on other teachers' successes in their classrooms, because in learning different strategies that some teachers have found to be successful, other practicing teachers can replicate this success in their own diverse classrooms.

Aukrust and Rydland (2011) researched whether talk exposure quality in preschool classrooms attended by young Turkish-speaking children in Norway predicted their first grade second language and literacy outcomes. The researchers predicted that development of vocabulary, listening comprehension, and code-related skills resulted from experiences with

different types of exposure. Researchers expected that children who experienced preschool classrooms characterized by rich word use and discourse complexity would have a more developed vocabulary and listening comprehension skills in first grade. They also predicted that those who experienced more emergent phonics talk, or talk which connects sounds to letters, in preschool would have more developed code-related skills in first grade. Participants were 25 children (14 boys, 11 girls) with a mean age of five years, ten months with Turkish as their home language and Norwegian as a second language. The children in this sample attended 18 different preschool classrooms and 20 different first grade classrooms a year later. To capture talk exposure, researchers sampled one group time in each preschool classroom and videotaped the whole group. Videotaped group time conversations were transcribed into computer files using the transcription conventions of the Child Language Data Exchange System. Children's second language oral skills and code-related skills were individually assessed. Students' vocabulary and listening comprehension skills were assessed in both preschool and first grade, and code-related skills were assessed in first grade only. This study examined talk exposure based on the entire conversation collectively produced and listened to in the classroom. Two measures related to vocabulary richness exposure were computed, which were word tokens and density of word types. Discourse complexity was also measured as a ratio of word types appearing within explanatory talk. Density of talk about sounds and letters was identified in order to capture classroom emergent phonics talk. The study revealed that preschool vocabulary richness and discourse complexity predicted first grade receptive vocabulary skills, but did not predict first grade listening comprehension. Contrary to what was hypothesized, preschool emergent phonics talk did not predict variance in first grade code-related skills. Results of this study showed that in contrast to monolingual students who are continuously confronted with words in a great variety

of situations and contexts in and out of school, second language learners in an immersion environment may depend almost exclusively on the input they receive at school and may therefore hear and use words in more restricted situations. This study suggested that the discourse context of the words children hear may be important for second language learners' acquisition of word knowledge. Preschools that embedded words within explanatory discourse seemed to offer more word learning conditions that were supportive and sufficiently complex for children to acquire word meaning. This study was limited in a few ways, as sampling data was only taken from a group setting and the sample size was relatively small. However, this study is important in that it shows that young second language learners can acquire more words and more depth of word meaning in preschool settings in which they hear many words and in which words appear within discourse contexts that support comprehension.

Hite and Evans (2006) conducted a qualitative study using surveys and interviews of practicing first-grade teachers to find out what strategies these mainstream teachers used to support the ELL students in their classrooms. Participants for this study were drawn from 10 Title I elementary schools in a large Florida school district serving approximately 182,000 students. Schools were selected in both urban and rural settings, with ELL populations of at least 15 percent. Twenty-two first grade teachers were selected for the initial survey, and 19 of them completed the follow-up interview. Participants completed a written survey designed to elicit general responses about their experience, the languages spoken in their classroom, the physical environments, and general instructional delivery used in their classroom. The second part of the survey contained three open-ended questions about how teachers adjusted their teaching for ELLs, whether or not they created their own materials, and what strategies or concepts related to these students would be most beneficial for pre-service teachers to acquire. The researchers

transcribed these interviews and individually developed preliminary categories using an inductive approach to delineate distinct and internally consistent categories. Six categories emerged from the data that were consistent with the review of research conducted by these researchers: adjustment of teaching approach, modification issues, parent interactions, affect and classroom philosophy, peers as teachers and use of students' native language.

In regard to the adjustment of their teaching, teachers cited a number of common strategies that they used in their classrooms consistently, including the use of visuals, manipulatives, repetition, and simplification of speech. Other teachers also stressed the need to limit their own use of idioms or to be aware of figurative language in the materials they used. Participants mentioned the importance of modeling, attention to cultural backgrounds, and adjusting their approach to assessment when necessary (ie. Allowing children to test orally when they are unable to write the answer, or telling other peers who speak their native language and can translate the answer for them). Finally, they stressed the importance of avoiding making assumptions about what students know about a given topic. Issues in modifications that were cited included materials being modified either by changing them in some way to make them more appropriate or creating new materials. All teachers in this study were vocal about the need to establish effective communication with parents, and making sure the parents understood the requirements of the classroom and the demands on the students. In addition, they noted that good parent communication provided the teacher with insights into the students' backgrounds, both personal and cultural. Researchers also stressed that communication with ELLs' parents be done in their native language when possible. All participants reported using peers as teachers to assist the ELLs, and using other children in the classroom with some proficiency in both English and the ELLs' native language to provide assistance to the teacher, particularly in translating. In

regard to the use of native language, several participants also mentioned the importance of learning a few basic phrases in the child's native language. This study led the researchers to three major conclusions. First, the strategies for teaching literacy and content material to first-grade students are compatible with strategies for teaching language, literacy, and content to ELL students. Secondly, the teachers in this study held students to high expectations and had positive feelings about their ELL Students, which is conclusive with other research. Their third conclusion was that teachers found benefits from student-student interaction, and research emphasized the importance of appropriate language models for ELL students (Hite & Evans, 2006). While this study was qualitative in nature, it offered the researchers a comparison of what current teachers are doing in their classrooms with what the research supports. It also included a variety of ideas that other practicing teachers find useful to support the ELLs in their early childhood classrooms.

Summary of Findings

Several theories of Second Language Acquisition exist, and while they are all different, each offers suggestions for how teachers can better educate ELL students. Cummins' theory stressed that first language plays an important role in learning a new language (as cited in Rodriguez & Higgins, 2005). For teachers, this means that ELL students need to have proficiency in their native language in order to have the capacity to learn a second language, and the extent to which teachers can foster the growth of students' native language directly impacts what they will learn in English. Krashin's theory of SLA stressed that second language is learned, it is not just acquired. Teachers need to be cognizant of this, and not just assume that their students are *picking up* on what they are teaching them. Several of the theories of SLA that were mentioned earlier, also focused on the significance of teachers creating non-threatening

environments in their classrooms and ensuring that ELL students feel a part of the classroom culture (as cited in Hite & Evans, 2006).

The research on language of instruction is confounding, but there are some commonalities that can be found. Children in both monolingual and bilingual early childhood programs of all kinds make educational gains based on exposure and instruction that take place in quality early childhood classrooms. However, on measures of incorporating cultural backgrounds and diversity into the classroom life, bilingual programs outperform EO models (Barnett et al., 2007). I think that this evidence is important to recognize, because based on theories of second language instruction, it is important for students to feel comfortable and safe in their classroom environment in order to learn a new language (as cited in Hite & Evans, 2006). When a student's culture is not considered in his or her learning process, a non-threatening environment could be difficult to create. While some research shows an advantage for ELL students who are taught in a monolingual program, because they only have to learn one language, growth of ELL students' language and literacy development in their native language has been noted in bilingual programs (Duran et al., 2010). The research also found that students are capable of reaching high proficiency in two languages (Dixon et al., 2012). According to Cummins' theory of SLA, this is imperative to them learning English and making language and literacy gains in English (as cited in Rodriguez & Higgins, 2005). Overall, the research shows that the most effective education for ELL students incorporates the child's native language and second language, as well as his or her cultural background. These findings are also analogous with The National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC, 1995) recommendations for working with linguistically and culturally diverse students. Their core recommendations for working with young children in relation to language of instruction are to:

1) ensure that children remain cognitively, linguistically and emotionally connected to their home language and culture; 2) encourage home language and literacy development, knowing that this contributes to children's ability to acquire English language proficiency; 3) help develop essential concepts in the children's first language and within cultural contexts they can understand; and 4) support and preserve home language use (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009).

There were many instructional practices found throughout the research that support both the first and second language, and literacy development of the dual language learner. Teachers can focus on factors they can control such as their classroom environment, by ensuring that it is language- and literacy-rich, in both the students' native languages and in English (Dixon et al., 2012). Interviews with teachers reported some common strategies that were found to be effective in teaching ELL students. These were simplification of speech, gestures and visual cues, repetition and opportunities for practicing skills, use of objects, real props, and hands-on materials, and multisensory approaches to working with these students. All teachers also noted the importance of establishing good parent communication, in their native language when possible, in order to gain insights into the students' home lives and cultural backgrounds in order to bring that element into the classroom life. When assessing students, it was also highlighted that accommodations often need to be made in order to allow students multiple modes of showing what they know. These strategies also align with NAEYC's position statement on diversity, which suggests developing and providing alternative and creative strategies to encourage all students' participation and learning; convincing families that home's values and norms are honored; and providing children with many ways of showing what they know and can do (Bredekamp &Copple, 2009).

Chapter IV

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The purpose of this review was to investigate what kind(s) of instructional strategies can be used in the early childhood classroom to enhance the learning of ELL students and to explore different early childhood classroom models as a means for teaching these students. Findings from the investigation and synthesis of those findings were reported in chapter three.

The research questions posed in Chapter one are re-stated and conclusions are drawn below. *Research Question 1: What techniques or strategies are most effective for early childhood teachers to use to support English acquisition in young children for whom English is not the first language?* Several strategies for working with ELL students that were consistently found in the research included simplification of speech, gestures and visual cues, repetition and opportunities for practicing skills, use of objects, real props, and hands-on materials, multisensory approaches, and assessment accommodations (Facella et al., 2005; Halle et al., 2012; Hite & Evans, 2006). *Research Question 2: Is it effective to teach ESL students in their native language, English only, or a combination of both?* While the research on this topic was confounding, the majority of the research stressed the importance of incorporating students' native languages and cultures into the classroom (Barnett et al., 2007; Duran et al., 2010; Halle et al., 2012). This can best be done in bilingual programs or in early childhood classrooms in which the teacher is mindful of creating a non-threatening environment and makes a conscious effort to support students' native languages and cultural backgrounds. These findings aligned with developmentally appropriate practices for linguistically and culturally diverse early childhood classrooms, which are supported and recommended by NAEYC (2009).

Identification and Synthesis of Insights

As an early childhood educator of a diverse classroom, I had many ideas and notions already in place about what quality early childhood programing should look like. NAEYC's recommendations emphasized that early childhood programs are responsible for creating a welcoming environment that respects diversity, supports children's ties to their families and community, and promotes both second language acquisition and preservation of children's home languages and cultural identities. These recommendations are ones that I have lived by in my own classroom for the past seven years. When I reviewed the most current research on how to best instruct young ELL students, many of the recommended strategies were ones that I was already using in my integrative classroom, in order to make accommodations for the multiple levels of development that I see in my three, four, and five year old students, and not necessarily ones I was specifically using for my ELL students. These strategies are ones that most teachers would find easy to use in their everyday teaching. The more difficult aspect of teaching ELL students is how to incorporate their native language and cultural background into the classroom, and this requires a lot more time and attention.

Recommendations

Early childhood teachers must balance diverse needs in their classrooms, and need to be prepared to modify instruction for students who are learning English as a new language. Regardless of the type of program in which ELL students participate, a constant factor in the successes of these students is the instruction they receive from their teacher. Based on the research I have found and the experiences I give my own students in my classroom, I would recommend that teachers:

- use students' native languages as much as possible throughout the school day and incorporating all students' cultures into the classroom culture;

- create a welcoming and diversified classroom;

- become more knowledgeable about how to relate to children and families whose linguistic or cultural background is different from their own; Professional development can assist these teachers in gaining better communication skills in order to do this.

- have more in-depth knowledge about second language acquisition and helping students reach academic English proficiency;

- make accommodations for assessments in order to gain a true understanding of what students know; Translators can be utilized to administer assessments as well as offering multiple modes for taking the assessment whenever possible.

- make their classroom visually and literacy-rich;

- use a hands-on approach to teaching, including gestures, repetition, and having manipulatives accessible to the learners.

Future Projects/Research

With the research I have read on teaching young ELL students, I think it would be very interesting to conduct a project in my own three, four, and five year old integrative classroom. I currently have two three year old students in my classroom whose primary language is Vietnamese. I would like to conduct an experiment to see if incorporating their culture into our daily lives would increase their participation, as they are both very quiet and shy. I also have a Vietnamese paraeducator who could assist me in translating with their parents in order to gain insights into their home lives. I would conduct this research in the Fall of 2012, using pre- and post-assessments of their participation levels.

Educational Policies

The United States is a nation of great cultural and linguistic diversity and as mentioned earlier, classrooms today continue to become increasingly diverse. NAEYC (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009) clearly stated that, for the optimal development and learning of all children, educators must accept the legitimacy of children's home language, respect and value the home culture, and promote and encourage the active involvement and support of all families. I believe that more professional development and teacher in-service opportunities need to be allocated to the teaching of ELLs. This training would result in high-quality instruction tailored to enhance the specific developmental needs of these children. As previously mentioned, early childhood is a critical period when children's development and learning have the greatest impact on later school adjustment and academic outcomes (Dickinson et. al, 2006), and having highly trained educators at this level could lead to additional long-term success in attaining other educational goals.

Teacher Practices of Self and Others

One thing I have discovered as a teacher is that I can and need to continue to learn and grow myself. In writing this paper, I have been able to reflect on my own teaching and think about ways that I can help the ELL students that I currently teach. In collaborating with other teachers at my school I have learned that they too want to know more ways that they can better instruct the ELL students in their classrooms. As teachers, we need to reach out to our administrators and request professional development that can help us with this task. There are many opportunities, nationally and statewide, as well as local resources that are underutilized. Specific training, from which all teachers at my school could benefit, would be in language acquisition, second language learning, use of translators, working with diverse families, and

community involvement. As a supervisor and leader in my building, it is going to be a personal

goal of mine to ensure that more trainings like these take place in the 2012-2013 school year.

Chapter V

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