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Principles for the Successful Development and Implementation of Programs Serving English Language Learners (ELLs)

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Many researchers and educators in the field of bilingual and English as a second language (ESL) education are pondering the critical elements that are necessary for the successful development and implementation of programs serving English language learners. In addition, certain socio-cultural factors require considered attention in order to facilitate student success. In the development of any programmatic effort, these are important questions to consider as academic development needs to be interwoven with the social and emotional development of the students in order for educational efforts to be considered effective. This is because the goal of education should be to assist in the development of the "whole child" in the context of his/her community and their educational goals. Research has taught us that in the past there has been a disconnection between educational practices and other ecological settings to which the child also belongs (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). This has lessened the impact of

educational programs because in many cases programmatic efforts have been done in isolation from other socio-cultural factors as if children lived in a social vacuum. Therefore, these questions and issues come to the forefront of education as we face the challenge to provide equal educational opportunities to a growing population of English language learners (ELLs). In school districts across the nation, the number of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds has risen dramatically. They represent the fastest growing segment of the student population by a wide margin. From the 1991–1992 through the 2001–2002 academic year, the number of limited English proficient (LEP) students in public schools grew 96%, while total enrollment increased only 12% (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006). According to the 2002 report by the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, LEP enrollment grew 200% in at least 15 states.

In general, successful programmatic efforts for English language learners will be those that seek to establish (and capitalize on) the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity as well as to socialize children within the cultural values of their communities. Successful programs ensure that cultural practices are continued across each generation through the integration of language and culture in the classroom academic activities. Programs of instruction that are sensitive to cultural and linguistic diversity strengthen current efforts as they interconnect domains of literacy, specific content areas, language and cognition. From the perspective of educating the “whole child” these components are interconnected and inseparable. As language develops, capacities for concept development increase as well. With each new vocabulary item, a new concept for generalization is available to the expanding word-meaning system of the child. With each

advance in the complexity of the word-meaning system, there is the possibility for more complex operations or higher order thinking such as academic discourse (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). However, cognitive and vocabulary development depends on effective delivery of instruction, which in turn is dependent on programmatic efforts and a support system of activities conducive to meaningful teaching practices.

The development of reading comprehension is inseparable from the development of language. If children are not familiar with the language that they are asked to read, if they are unfamiliar with the set of connections across word meanings, if they are unfamiliar with the ways that words modify and relate to each other, then learning to decode print in that language will be difficult. Also, an understanding of what has been decoded will be decontextualized from the socio-cultural experience of the child, therefore affecting reading comprehension (August & Shanahan, 2006; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). This is not to argue against the effectiveness of reading intervention programs' focus on assisting individual children who are struggling readers but to point out that the goal of education is to teach the "whole child" and that children belong to a complex social-ecological system that also includes cognitive, social and emotional development, to name a few. Nowhere is the concern for child socialization and development more applicable than in the education of English language learners from diverse communities. Although it is a changing attitude, in the past, educators have assumed that there is a single trajectory for child development and social functioning (Rivera & Tharp, 2006). In some regards, these educational practices assume that a child's motivation, cultural identity, social functioning and first language are not interconnected components of a greater whole. Much of the research has placed a heavy emphasis on the individual outside

of his or her cultural context (Rivera & Tharp, 2006). Therefore, the integration of language, culture, and values in programmatic efforts is a key principle for successful development and implementation of programs serving ELLs where the goal is to educate students and to assist in their development. After all, successful academic activities in the classroom carry in them the motivation, intentions, values, and perceptions of the students, to name a few. Successful academic activities are engaging and meaningful and they bring to life new concepts, competencies, and knowledge as new schemes are interwoven with knowledge and context of previous meaningful social experiences.

Studies conducted among Hawaiian natives, Alaskan Natives, USA mainland Native Americans, Inuit communities in the Arctic Circle and Hispanic communities in the USA have shown that successful educational efforts are those that include human developmental process of socialization intertwined with educational practices and cultural-historical community factors (Rivera & Tharp, 2006; Darnell & Hoem, 1996; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, Rivera & Waxman, 2008). For example, in the case of Native American communities, in order for the community to survive, their bilingual educational programmatic efforts need to foster the native language that is vital for their cultural practices and community survival. At the same time these Native communities are aware of the importance of validating their children's experiences in the context of the classroom. Culturally relevant instruction allows for children to develop a sense of self in a cultural-historical context but at the same time make instruction meaningful. Research by Diaz, Moll, and Mehan (1986) has shown that instructional conversations in the native language and culturally-preferred interactions, such as collaborative group work, have also allowed Spanish-speaking students to negotiate meaning

and share understandings of concepts studied in English. The use of the maternal language and collaborative work allowed for more complex interactions and deepened students' understanding of academic concepts (Diaz, Moll, & Mehan, 1986).

The development and implementation of programs serving ELLs, based on fundamental principles for teaching and learning, has emerged as a plausible response to the need for effective programmatic efforts in socio-cultural context. Our goal is to outline what research shows to be some key features of successful programs as well as key components of instruction and program development that should be considered in working with children from diverse communities.

On the development of educational program models

In general research shows that successful efforts include: 1) linguistic, 2) socio-cultural and 3) pedagogical principles that are intertwined in the delivery and implementation of effective educational programs (Francis et al., 2006; Collier & Thomas, 2004; Torres-Guzman, 2002; Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 1997). These principles are therefore consensual generic guidelines that serve as the foundation for effective program development and implementation for serving ELL students. They are empirically derived from the existing corpus of research across age and grade levels, cultural and linguistic groups, and subject matters.

Linguistic principle

Many linguistic points are relevant in designing educational programs for ELL students. One such principle, generally

overlooked, is the fact that abstract vocabulary can only be learned by the use of linguistic context, i.e. by the use of language.

While abstract vocabulary is crucial to cognitive development and to success in school, it is much harder to learn than concrete vocabulary and can only be acquired by explanation or by hearing the vocabulary used repeatedly; examples are words such as "politics," "democracy," "gravity," "joy," and "persistence." The opportunity to master abstract vocabulary must be provided in the students' first language (L1) until a high level of proficiency is attained in the second language (L2). Otherwise, the development of abstract terms and the mastery of the concepts this vocabulary refers to will be delayed; in some instances it may never take place. For example, consider how an abstract term such as "democracy" might be acquired by a Spanish-speaking student learning English, whose proficiency in Spanish is significantly greater than his/her English proficiency. Because "democracy," like all abstract vocabulary, can only be learned by the use of language, the teacher plans to explain the concept of democracy in order to teach the word. Assume that the teacher is bilingual in English and Spanish and can choose which language to use. Because the student is much more proficient in Spanish, the teacher chooses to use that language for her explanation. The student learns what democracy is, in his primary and stronger language and learns that the word for democracy is pronounced "democracia" in Spanish. To learn the corresponding English word, the student must simply learn the pronunciation "democracy." Had the teacher chosen to teach the concept of democracy in English, the time required would likely have been much greater, likely leading to frustration on the part of both the teacher and student. This example illustrates how learning of

abstract vocabulary in English can take place more rapidly by using the primary language of the student.

Another important point within the context of this linguistic principle is that language acquisition processes are domain general as well as domain specific. This means that there are shared innate processes for all humans across cultures. For example, infants, regardless of the language and culture of the society into which they are born begin language acquisition with the babbling stage which takes place between six months and one year of age. These are fundamental innate processes of human developmental learning. At the same time, there are also learning processes that are domain specific and they require the consideration of cultural values, norms, and beliefs related to cognition. For example, the word "educado" (educated) in Spanish encompasses the meaning of being polite, of having good manners. In English, "educated" refers more specifically to formal academic education. When the Spanish word is used the cultural values, norms and beliefs are part of the definition. This is especially relevant in programmatic effort addressing instructional practices for English language learners as well as in the case of assessment instruments that need to take into account the language, literacy and cognitive development of students who operate in bilingual and biliterate environments.

Effective programs seek to provide students' success in both languages. The goal of effective program serving ELLs is not to suppress or deny the child's native language (L1) but to foster second language (L2) development in the context of L1 (Goodman, 1986; Goodman, Goodman, & Flores, 1979; Pérez & Torres-Guzmán, 1996; Waxman, Padrón, & Knight, 1991). Effective programs seek to foster and support the development of competent bilinguals who can manage and manipulate two languages and their complexities in a variety of domains and across social settings

(Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002). Therefore, the outcome is the ability to decode and encode print that conveys messages in a variety of contexts using two linguistic and cultural systems (August & Shanahan, 2006; Torres-Guzmán, 2002; Pérez & Torres-Guzmán, 1996; Christian, 1994; Hakuta & Díaz, 1984).

Programs focused on serving ELLs should provide opportunities to support children's home culture and language while also developing all children's abilities to participate in the shared culture of academic discourse. Academic language builds on and modifies everyday language and the thinking that it reflects. Academic discussion encourages students to move beyond everyday talk and use subject lexicons to express their understanding of concepts. Educational programs implementing contextual academic dialogical activities provide students with many opportunities to use language in appropriate forms with their teacher and peers. To this Vygotsky (1978) points out that linguistic connection during contextual activities give words their meaning. This is because word meaning is both a personal as well as an interpersonal phenomenon. Word meaning is an obviously cognitive concept, because it is verbal thinking. It is also a socio-cultural concept, because word meaning also resides in the community of language users. Programs serving ELL students must carefully weave cultural-linguistic components into their programmatic efforts in order to be effective.

Socio-cultural principle

Borrowed from socio-cultural theory, this socio-cultural principle serves to focus programmatic effort on connecting instruction to students' lives as well as making instruction meaningful by the inclusion of social, ecological and individual

experiences. There are a wide range of social contexts and circumstances beyond classroom and school that influence academic accomplishment (August & Hakuta, 1997). The reality of students' lives is anchored in contexts outside school (August & Hakuta, 1997; Bergman, Minicucci, McLaughlin, Nelson, & Woodworth, 1995; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1992). The socio-cultural principle encourages the use a variety of direct and indirect approaches to draw on students' familial and local contexts of experience. Instructional practices that include culturally responsive teaching incorporate the everyday concerns of students, such as important family and community issues, into the curriculum. For example, a lesson or unit on health may include the role of practices such as the 'curandero' or healer in order to connect the known, what the child knows, with the unknown, subject matter and instructional goals. Community activities, social practices and environmental materials aid to connect instruction and to make classroom activities meaningful for the children (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Tharp et al., 2000). By working from and validating students' existing knowledge base, this teaching practice improves the acquisition and retention of new knowledge and develops students' self-confidence and self-esteem. For students whose experiences and everyday living may not be parallel to those experiences found in the school environment, culturally responsive teaching makes new subject matter and everyday lessons relevant and significant. It increases the transfer of school-taught knowledge to real-life situations and exposes students to knowledge about other individuals or cultural groups (Rivera & Zehler, 1991). Culturally responsive teaching helps students prepare themselves for meaningful social roles in their community and the larger society by emphasizing and connecting both social and academic domains.

Parent/community involvement

The literature on the development of effective programs also suggests that strong families and effective parenting are critical to children's future developmental outcome. This will require programmatic efforts focused on parental involvement in their children's educational development. However, such efforts should also seek to understand and implement programs in which parents can be participants as well as programs that assist parents to become participants in areas where assistance is required. In this context, child development and family/community development are intertwined. Research shows that such programmatic efforts carry many benefits (Kumpfer & Alvarado, 2003). In a longitudinal study researchers concluded that parents have a larger impact on their children's future behavior than previously understood. Therefore, parents' involvement in their children's education is an important point of leverage for any program seeking to improve students' academic success (Resnick, Bearman, Blum, Bauman, Harris, & Jones, 1997). In general, researchers have also found that parent involvement programs are most effective when (1) the training focuses on assisting younger children (3 - 10 -year- old); (2) the training can be generalized to the home setting; and (3) when the approach is contextual to family and community needs (Kumpfer & Alvarado, 2003). There is ample evidence indicating that the road to greater success in program development includes programs that are based on scientific findings and community-based models that include all players within the particular ecological setting (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004; Wandersman & Florin, 2003; Israel, Shulz, Parker, Becker, Allen, & Guzman, 2000; Cochran, 1988; Braun, 1997; Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Pedagogical principle

Research shows that education must be meaningful and responsive to students' needs, as well as linguistically and culturally appropriate (Tharp et al., 2000). Instruction must specifically address the concerns of students who come from different cultures and who are often trying to learn a new language. The home and community environment must be tapped into and connected to students' learning in addition to focusing on knowledge learned in the classroom (Waxman, Padrón, & Arnold, 2001). When teacher and students work together for a common product or goal and have opportunities to converse about the activity, learning is likely (Rogoff, 1991; Moll, 1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wertsch, 1985). In natural (non-formal) settings even the youngest students, as well as mature adult learners, develop their competencies in the context of joint activity. Whether it is mother and child cooking together, or leader and team producing together on the shop floor, shared ways of understanding the world are created through the development of language systems and word meanings that are used during shared activity. Language, thinking, values, and culture have deep interconnections; dialogue, particularly during joint productive activity, supports students' academic achievement and affective development (Tharp, 1997; Cazden, 1986; Au, 1980; Vygotsky, 1978). Students need authentic and purposeful opportunities to speak and write, to practice language use, and to receive the natural feedback of conversation from their teacher and peers. For example, oral and written language development can be fostered by restating, modeling, offering alternative phrasing, and questioning (Rivera, Galarza, Entz, & Tharp, 2002). Everyday

language and academic language need continuous and integrated development.

The development of academic language for ELLs can be achieved through purposeful and meaningful activities. Cognitive guided instruction can be delivered through the rearrangement of activities such as cooperative learning activities in which student work together in developmentally appropriate activities and instructional conversational activities in which students are challenged by the teacher into higher order meta-cognitive processes (Rivera et al., 2002). While cooperative learning is appropriate for all students, it is critical for students who may face socio-economic disadvantages. Through collaborative practices, they can also develop the social skills and inter-group relations essential to academic success. Cooperative learning activities influence students by (1) providing opportunities for students to communicate with each other; (2) developing social, academic, and communication skills; (3) decreasing anxiety and boosting self-confidence and self-esteem through individual contributions and achievement of group goals; (4) improving individual and group relations by learning to clarify, assist, and challenge others' ideas; (5) developing proficiency in English by providing students with rich language experiences that integrate speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Christian, 1995; Rivera & Zehler, 1991); and (6) providing skills that are necessary to function in real-life situations, such as the utilization of context for meaning, the seeking of support from others, and the comparing of nonverbal and verbal cues. Therefore, instructional models that integrate these teaching strategies offer great academic, social and developmental outcomes for all children. These instructional methods have been shown to be effective in the teaching and

learning of English language learners in the USA classrooms (Francis et al., 2006).

Key implications

Overall, research suggests that the best practices include linguistic, socio-cultural and pedagogical principles that serve as the foundation for effective program development and implementation for serving ELL students. In order to create effective instructional environment the principles described in this article and highlighted below need to be interwoven within the context of instructional activities.

Linguistic principle

- Abstract vocabulary is best taught by the use of linguistic context. The opportunity to master abstract vocabulary must be provided in students' first language (L1) until a high level of proficiency is attained in the second language (L2).
- Mastery of a second language is best achieved when instructional practices include the cultural values, norms, and beliefs of the students.
- Effective programs must provide students' success in both languages fostering second language (L2) development in the context of L1.
- Programs focused on serving ELLs should provide opportunities to support children's home culture and language while also developing all children's abilities to participate in the shared culture of academic discourse.

Socio-cultural principle

- Programmatic efforts should connect instruction to students' socio-cultural contexts.
- Culturally responsive teaching must draw on students' familial and local contexts of experiences.
- Parental involvement is an important component in any program seeking to improve the academic success of ELL students.

Pedagogical principle

- Education must be meaningful and responsive to students' needs, as well as linguistically and culturally appropriate.
- The home and community environment must be connected to students' learning activities in the classroom.
- Competencies are developed in the context of joint activity; therefore, instructional programming should be based on authentic and purposeful opportunities to learn and to practice language and literacy.
- Instructional strategies must be designed to stimulate and foster complex thinking.

Children learn what they are taught. If they are taught only facts and basic skills, they will learn only facts and basic skills. Academic language will be learned if it is taught (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000). Instructional strategies, within any successful program for ELLs, will need to be designed to pose problems, ask questions, and make comments and suggestions that stimulate students' thinking and extend their learning. In this way, teachers can urge students to question and challenge, find alternative and

deep problem solutions, rationalize and justify, and continually seek information to produce more complex and higher order thinking habits (Resnick & Hall, 1998). Typical classrooms provide infrequent occasions for sustained conversation and rarely arrange for it to occur on a regular schedule. There are consequences: students' mastery of languages, conversational conventions, and academic content are effectively postponed, if not eliminated (Au, 1980; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Rosebery, Warren, & Conant, 1992). By middle school, such restricted opportunities result in language minority students' limited academic success and low self-confidence in their ability to learn (Padron, 1992; Dalton & Youpa, 1998). Good teaching uses meaningful content presented in life-like situations (Allington, 1990; Chamot, 1992; Means & Knapp, 1991). This type of classroom discourse carries the community's values and emotional shadings. Talking together not only develops higher order thinking but also socializes children into community values. It also teaches them the conventions and pleasures of human relationships. ELL students, especially, should not be deprived of these experiences.

Summary

The development of meaningful and culturally responsive activities is a necessary condition for effective educational programs. The task of designing systems for assistance is that of designing activity settings. The criterion for an effective setting for educational activity is that teacher support should be provided whenever necessary in the performance of a task.

Communities across the world are seeking to develop programs that will respond to the needs of their children within a socio-historical context of their past history, their present

conditions and their future goals. It is hoped that this article points out some critical features that are needed for the successful development and implementation of educational programs focused on serving ELLs. It provides possible avenues for future implementation of educational programs in school settings. It also points out that development and implementation of educational programs need to be done in steps that take into account social context. It is in this context that successful educational programs may emerge as a plausible response to the educational needs of ELLs. The goal of education is the development of the whole child. It is in this view that we find a place for different programmatic efforts as we consider that child development is intertwined with community development. Therefore, communities across cities and the nation have much to gain through the education of the "whole child." As Tharp and Gallimore (1988, p. 93) noted, "...meaningful discourse is the medium in which society creates minds, and by which minds create society." Our course of action on the teaching and learning of ELLs will dictate the future of each community and the future of our nation.

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