

RETHINKING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION for English Language Learners: THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE^{1,2}

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There is an increasing proportion of children in English-speaking countries who grow up speaking other languages exclusively or predominantly during the preschool years. When these children begin school, they may have virtually no proficiency in English or relatively little. In this chapter, these children will be referred to as English language learners or ELLs. For example, in Canada, more than 2.2 million families (of which 40% are children or youth) immigrated to Canada between 1991-2000, the highest number of any decade during the preceding century (Statistics Canada, 2001); and this number was expected to increase as the Canadian government increases immigration quotas (Canadian School Boards Association Consultation Paper, 2006). In the U.S., in 2007, about 10.8 million (or 20%) of school-age children spoke a language other than English at home, and this number is expected to increase 50% by 2025 (Passel & Cohen, 2008). There is a number of explanations for these demographic facts, the primary one being increased immigration of families and children from non-English-speaking, underdeveloped regions of the world to more prosperous English-speaking regions. At the same time, many children who come to school with no or limited proficiency in English are not immigrants or the children of immigrants; but rather are born and raised in English-speaking countries and grow up learning only or primarily the families' heritage languages. This, in turn, may reflect a number of different factors, including lack of parental proficiency in the societal language, parental choice to maintain the heritage language by using it in the home during the preschool

¹ I would like to thank Kathryn Lindholm-Leary, San Jose State University, California, for insightful comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

² Genesee, F., (in press). Rethinking early childhood education for English Language Learners: The Role of Language. In V. Murphy & M. Evangelou, M. (Eds), *Early childhood education in English for speakers of other languages*. U.K.: British Council.

years, or “ghettoization” of children in communities where the heritage language is the lingua franca among community members and, thus, the language to be learned for day-to-day communication.

Children who come to school with no or limited proficiency in English can face a number of significant challenges. From a linguistic point of view, they must learn the societally dominant language for both social and academic purposes along with the cultural norms that govern its use in school and in the community at large. At the same time, they must learn literacy skills along with general and subject-specific knowledge and skills – in science, mathematics, or social studies, for example, in English. As a result of the growing recognition of the importance of the preschool years for children’s cognitive, social and personal development (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2007), more and more children begin education during the preschool years. On the one hand, increasing participation in preschool programs is to be favored since it appears to close the achievement gap between ELL and mainstream students (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003; Frede & Barnett, 2011). On the other hand, the linguistic challenges that ELL children typically face at the onset of formal schooling may begin earlier if they attend preschool programs.

These are also challenges for parents, childcare workers, and educators responsible for raising and educating ELLs because their knowledge and assumptions about how best to promote the educational development of these children may be called into question. There are indeed good reasons to question our assumptions and policies with respect to best practices for educating ELLs not least of which is extensive evidence in the U.S., for example, that many ELLs, on average, underperform in school in comparison to mainstream English-speaking students (Abedi et al., 2006; Kim & Herman 2009). As a result, as adults, they can experience disproportionately high rates of unemployment, poverty, drug- and alcohol-related problems, poor health, and other problems. While all of these outcomes cannot be explained exclusively in terms of quality of education per se, there is no doubt that success in school can serve to ameliorate the most severe forms of these difficulties (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003).

This chapter focuses on the role of language in the educational success, difficulty, or failure of ELL children. While focusing on language makes a great deal of

sense given the importance of language in education, it is critical to recognize that language-related issues are not the only or even necessarily the most serious challenges faced by ELLs in school. Depending on the background of specific children or groups of children, their academic success can be jeopardized by issues related to poverty, poor health, trauma linked to immigration and/or pre-immigrant experiences, cultural differences between home and school, school and school district policies and practices (including assessment requirements), the quality of educational materials, instruction and curriculum, teachers' attitudes, inadequate teacher preparation, and others. Of these, socio-economic status has been shown to be particularly potent (National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics, 2009; OECD, 2010). Individual ELLs can experience a number of different challenges simultaneously with significant and commensurate effects on their academic outcomes (Lindholm-Leary, 2010). It is also important to recognize that not all ELL students do poorly in school and that the academic performance of ELLs can vary from country to country. Two notable exceptions to the general pattern described above are Canada (Aydemir, Chen, & Corak, 2008) and Australia (Cobb-Clark & Trong-Ha Nguyen, 2010). Research has shown that immigrant ELLs in these countries, on average, perform as well or better than native-born students on standardized tests of academic achievement. Explanations for these findings are not entirely clear; but, one reason can be found in these countries immigration policies which favor relatively highly educated immigrants from middle class backgrounds. Whatever the complete explanation of these between-country differences, suffice to say here that the academic performance of ELLs can reflect complex, national-level factors and that across-the-board stereotypes about the academic achievement of ELLs are to be avoided. Because the educational outcomes of ELLs in Canada are atypical, the focus in this chapter is on issues and challenges in educating young ELLs in the U.S. with secondary references to Canada where useful.

The following sections examine the beliefs and attitudes of North American educators and the public at large with respect to the role of language in early childhood education and during the primary school grades (ages 5-7) because these beliefs have shaped policies and practices with respect to ELLs in significant ways. Empirical

evidence that refutes these beliefs is then discussed and alternative strategies for educating ELLs based on this evidence are then considered.

Beliefs about Educating ELLs

Policies and practices with respect to educating ELLs have historically been driven largely by beliefs and attitudes with respect to language learning and, in particular, dual language learning (see also Espinosa, 2013). These beliefs and attitudes, in turn, have reflected a combination of what might be called “common sense” as well as scientific theories of what is best for ELLs when it comes to learning English. Socio-political and legislative factors have also played a significant role. For example, in the 1960s, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) in the U.S. declared that educating ELLs in mainstream classrooms using only English instruction, without special provisions to respond to their special linguistic and cultural backgrounds, was a violation of their civil rights because it was a form of discrimination based on ethnic and/or national origin. The OCR also argued that instruction in English only without special provisions or accommodations effectively precluded ELLs from equal access to the benefits of education in comparison to children who were already proficiency in English. It was at that time that bilingual forms of education for ELLs emerged; these programs are described briefly in a later section. Subsequent legislation in a number of states in the U.S. eroded support for and access to bilingual programs. For example, in 1998, Proposition 227 in California resulted in state legislation that established a number of administrative requirements that significantly reduced enrollment in bilingual programs. Several other states subsequently passed English-only legislation. Notwithstanding the importance of such socio-political and legislative factors, this chapter focuses on the important role that attitudes and beliefs about language learning and about the relationship between language and learning in general have played in shaping educational policies and practices with respect to young ELLs.

Generally speaking, educational policies and practices concerning the role of language in the education of ELLs have been shaped by four commonly held-beliefs (see Cummins, 1981; Grosjean, 1985; and Cook, 1992; for earlier renditions of these ideas).

1. Learning and using more than one language is burdensome and has associated costs or disadvantages.
2. Young children are effective and efficient (second) language learners.
3. Amount of exposure is a significant correlate of language competence.
4. The languages of bi- and multilinguals are separate neuro-cognitive systems.

Taken together, these beliefs have important implications for thinking about when and how ELLs should learn English -- for example, to what extent ELLs should begin to learn English during the pre-school years in order to prepare them for formal schooling in English; the role of the L1 in pre-school and school programs where English is otherwise used as the only language of instruction; whether ELLs should receive instruction in the home language to ensure acquisition of academic objectives while they learn English; and whether their achievement in non-language subjects (such as mathematics or science) and in English (such as reading and writing) should be assessed in the same ways and, in the case of English proficiency, using the same benchmarks as are used with monolingual native English-speaking students. In fact, these beliefs have been the historically prevalent way of thinking about educating young ELLs and about preparing them for school entry. The influence of these beliefs and attitudes has been most evident in educational programs during the elementary (primary) and secondary school years, but has also impacted thinking about pre-school education as more and more children attend pre-school programs.

In brief, these beliefs and “theories” underlie what might variously be referred to as assimilationist, submersion, or “monolingualist” educational policies and practices (Wiley, 2014). Under these views, for most of the 20th century to the present, most ELLs have attended pre-school and primary school programs in which they have been educated exclusively in English along with native English-speaking children. They might receive some instruction or support in English-as-a-second-language (ESL) in separate (or pull-out) classrooms by specialist ESL teachers; but, otherwise, formal instruction in language arts and the rest of the curriculum has been and continues to be provided by teachers who often have little or no background on how to teach language or other school subjects to students who are learning through a language they are still acquiring. Individualized instruction (or individual educational programs—IEPs), a corner stone of

contemporary general education, that reflects ELLs' specific backgrounds has not been commonplace for ELLs, although it has become more common recently.

Belief in the importance of early acquisition of English has extended to families who often think that they should begin to use English with their children as soon and as much as possible so they are prepared for English-only schooling. In fact, at times, parents of ELL children have been encouraged to use English with their children even though they themselves might not speak English well. Wave upon wave of immigrant parents, committed to ensuring the academic success of their children, have abandoned use of the heritage language in the home and made valiant efforts to use English -- even when they lacked full proficiency in that language (Wong-Fillmore, 1991). All of this makes sense if the four foundational beliefs presented earlier are valid. Evaluations of the educational outcomes of ELLs during the school years suggests that the approach suggested by these beliefs is not working. To cite one example, the 2005 report of the National Assessment of Education Progress (e.g., see Fry, 2007) indicated that ELLs scored significantly lower than national norms and other learners in the nation's schools (see also Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2006, for a review). This then raises the question of the validity of the foundational beliefs that have dominated thinking about educating ELLs.

Examining Beliefs

In this section, research is considered that examines the validity of each of the general beliefs presented in the preceding section. This review is necessarily selective and simplified owing to space limitations; but it nevertheless serves to highlight research findings that challenge conventional ways of thinking about educating ELLs and opens the door to considering alternative strategies that might be more effective.

To begin, it has been widely believed that learning and using more than one language is burdensome and has associated costs and disadvantages (Belief 1). However, this commonly-held belief runs into empirical obstacles from diverse sources. An assumption of this particular belief seems to be that the human neuro-cognitive capacity for learning and using language is fundamentally monolingual in nature and, thus, learning and/or using two languages requires additional cognitive resources that can stretch learners' capacity and, in turn, limit their linguistic and communicative

competence. Indeed, an early theory of bilingual acquisition argued that children who grow up learning two languages during the pre-school years go through an early stage when input from the two languages is treated as part of a single system (e.g., Volterra & Taeschner, 1978). Neuro-cognitive separation of the two languages was thought to emerge only during the third year of life and, thus, it was only after two years of age that these learners were truly bilingual. Bilingual children's use of words or grammatical structures from their two languages in the same sentence or conversation (i.e., code-switching or code-mixing) was taken as evidence in support of this theory.

This view has been rejected by extensive research, and there is now a consensus that young children to the above expectations, ELLs in bilingual programs demonstrate the same or even higher levels of ability in English as ELLs in English-only programs, and they similarly attain the same and sometimes higher levels of academic achievement as ELLs in programs in which instruction is provided only in English (Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2006).

While there are other sources of evidence that challenge the notion that dual language learning is burdensome, perhaps the most compelling exposed to two languages from birth are able to distinguish their two languages, functionally, and probably therefore cognitively, from the earliest stages of development (e.g., Paradis, Genesee, & Crago, 2011). That learning and using two languages is not burdensome is also attested by evaluations in the U.S. of the language abilities of pre-school and school-age ELLs in bilingual programs in which at least 50% of instruction takes place in Spanish and the rest in English (see Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2012, for more detailed discussions of these issues). Findings from these studies reveal that, contrary evidence comes from studies of children who grow up learning two languages from birth under conditions of neuro-cognitive impairment. Arguably, children with specific language impairment (SLI) or Down Syndrome, for example, who have well documented difficulties acquiring language that are known (in the case of children with Down Syndrome) or thought (in the case of children with SLI) to be linked to genetically-based neuro-cognitive impairments should have greater difficulty learning two languages than one. Contrary to this hypothesis, research on such learners indicates that they do not differ significantly from children with the same impairments who are

learning only one language (e.g., Paradis, Crago, Rice & Genesee, 2006; Kay-Raining Bird, et al, 2005; see also Marinova-Todd & Mirenda, in press, for research on children with Autism Spectrum Disorder), although they do demonstrate more language-related difficulties than children without these challenges. It is difficult to reconcile these diverse findings with the belief that the human neuro-cognitive capacity for language learning is fundamentally monolingual and is challenged when required to learn more than one language.

It is also widely believed that young children are effective and efficient language learners (Belief 2). As a result, it is generally expected that second language (L2) acquisition by young children will proceed quickly and effortlessly and will result in native-like proficiency largely through untutored, natural exposure to the target language, especially if such exposure involves contact with native-speaking peers. This thinking is based, in part, on the critical period hypothesis of language learning, according to which the human neuro-cognitive abilities that are responsible for language learning are particularly “plastic” during early development, usually thought to be between birth and 12 to 13 years of age. Accordingly, it is during this critical period when language learning is relatively effortless and results in complete mastery of language (e.g., Long, 1990).

With respect to L2 acquisition, there is evidence that, other things being equal, children are more likely to attain native-like levels of oral proficiency or at least higher levels of proficiency in an L2 in the long run than learners who begin to learn an L2 when older (Long, 1990). However, there is no consensus on how early is early enough for native-like competence to be acquired and, in fact, whether monolingual natively-like capacity is possible among any learners who begin to acquire a language after one or two years of age. In this regard, research conducted in Sweden by Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam (2009) examined the language abilities of immigrants to Sweden who had immigrated at different ages, including during the preschool years. In comparison to native Swedish speakers, most preschool-age immigrants in their study did not demonstrate native-like competence in Swedish as an L2 even after more than 20 years of exposure when a battery of diverse and demanding language tests were used. In a similar vein, our own research on internationally-adopted (IA) children from China has

shown that they score significantly lower than matched non-adopted children on a variety of standardized measures of language ability, including expressive and receptive vocabulary and grammar (Delcenserie & Genesee, 2013). This was found even though, as a group, the adoptees had begun learning the adopted language between 12 and 24 months of age and even though they had exclusive exposure to the adopted language post-adoption. These children did not show similar delays in general cognitive, socio-emotional or non-verbal memory development suggesting that their language development was uniquely affected by their delayed exposure. These findings suggest that even when L2 acquisition begins at an early age it may be more complex and difficult than has generally been thought.

Moreover, commonly held beliefs about how easily young learners can acquire an L2 do not take into account the complexities of language learning in the context of schooling. In this regard, North American education researchers increasingly distinguish between language for social communication and language for academic purposes as a means of understanding the academic development and, in particular, the academic difficulties experienced by some learners. While there is no consensual definition of academic language, for present purposes, the succinct definition offered by Chamot and O'Malley (1994) will suffice. According to these authors, academic language is "the language that is used by teachers and students for the purposes of acquiring new knowledge and skills...imparting new information, describing abstract ideas, and developing students' conceptual understanding" (p. 40). To expand on Chamot and O'Malley's definition, academic language refers to the specialized vocabulary, grammar, discourse/textual, and functional skills associated with academic instruction and mastery of academic material and tasks; it includes both oral and written forms of language.

Emerging evidence indicates that the acquisition of L2 oral language for academic purposes in school-age students is a complex process that takes considerably longer than previously thought. In a review of research on the oral language development of ELLs in the U.S., Saunders and O'Brien (2006) concluded that ELLs, including those in all-English programs, are seldom awarded ratings of "generally proficient" (but not native-like) in English even by grade 3. In fact, none of the studies they reviewed

reported average ratings of “native-like” in English until grade 5. In a longitudinal study of 24 ELLs (called ESL in the study) in Edmonton, Canada, Paradis (2006) found that after 21 months of exposure to English, only 40% performed within the normal range for native-speakers on a test of grammatical morpheme production (e.g., the use of “s” to pluralize nouns or “ed” to express past tense in verbs), 65% on receptive vocabulary, and 90% on story grammar in narratives. Similarly, Parrish et al. (2006) note that a report of the American Institutes for Research evaluation of the implementation of Proposition 227, legislation that curbed access to bilingual forms of education, concluded that the “current probability of an EL (*English learner*) being redesignated to fluent English proficient status *after 10 years in California* to be less than 40 percent” (p. III-1) (text in italics added by chapter author). They went on to state: “we estimate that 75 percent of EL students are not redesignated [*as fluent English proficient*] after five years of schooling (p. III-33). Their reclassification figure of only 25 percent is close to the figure reported by Grissom (2004), who found that only 30 percent of ELLs were reclassified within five years.

Bolstering these results, findings from a number of reviews and individual studies on proficiency levels in English among ELLs indicate that it can take ELLs between 5 to 7 years to achieve proficiency in English for academic purposes (August & Hakuta, 1997; Cummins, 1981; Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2006; Thomas & Collier, 2002). In these studies, language proficiency was defined in terms of performance on standardized tests of the type used to assess academic progress and, thus, can be considered measures of language for academic purposes. In a review of research on child ELL learners, Paradis (2006) concluded that “obtaining oral language proficiency in the L2 on par with native speakers can take most of the elementary school years” (p. 401) and, moreover, that there is considerable inter-individual variation in rate of L2 development. These estimates contrast with informal impressions that children can acquire highly proficient levels of competence in an L2 for social purposes very quickly.

An equally complex and related issue concerns the expectation that more exposure to English in school will result in greater proficiency than less exposure (Belief 3). Research findings from both minority language ELLs learning English in the U.S. and from majority language students learning in L2 immersion programs in Canada (e.g.,

English-speaking students learning French in bilingual programs; see Genesee, 2004, for a review) indicate that amount of time or exposure alone cannot explain the language learning outcomes that have been reported for students in these programs. On the one hand, research in the U.S. and Canada has shown that time or amount of exposure does matter when it comes to learning a minority language; for example, ELLs in Spanish-English bilingual programs achieve higher levels of proficiency in Spanish than ELLs in English-only programs (Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2012). On the other hand, studies of the English language development of Spanish-speaking ELLs in the U.S. indicate that the level of proficiency that they achieve in English, the majority group language, is not related to amount of exposure to English in school in a simple correlational fashion (e.g., Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2006). In other words, more exposure to and instruction in English in school does not necessarily result in higher levels of proficiency in English. In this regard, Saunders and O'Brien noted that rates of progress in attaining proficiency in oral English by the end of elementary school were "strikingly consistent" for ELLs in different types of programs, described in more detail in the next section, regardless of how much instruction in English they received. ELLs who receive some instruction in English in the primary grades sometimes demonstrate an initial advantage in English over ELLs with reduced instruction in English; but, these differences disappear by the end of elementary school. Of particular note, similar findings have been found in bilingual (Spanish-English) pre-school programs for low SES ELLs in the U.S. (Barnett et al., 2007; Lindholm-Leary, 2014; Rodriguez et al., 1995). More specifically, ELLs in bilingual pre-school programs did not differ significantly from ELLs in English programs on English language tests; in contrast, the bilingual program participants showed significant advantages in comparison to the English program participants. Clearly, the minority-majority status of the language matters, with exposure in school being much less important when it comes to learning the majority language, English, than a minority language such as Spanish or French.

This is not to say that exposure is totally unimportant. Below some minimal level of exposure, bilingual children are likely to demonstrate less proficiency or competence than monolinguals (see Thordardottir, 2011, for evidence on simultaneous bilinguals).

However, children who are learning two languages do not need as much exposure as monolingual children to attain native-like levels of proficiency. In other words, they can perform as well with less input. That sheer amount of instruction in English is not related in any simple and direct way to achievement in English will probably come as no surprise to most educators who understand that instructional time must be turned into effective teaching and learning to pay off. The question is what constitutes effective instruction for ELLs – pedagogical factors matter, to be discussed in the next section.

Finally, educators and to some extent researchers have long assumed that the languages of bilingual students are separate and, thus, that development and use of each language is independent, what Cummins (1981) referred to as the separate underlying proficiency hypothesis (Belief 4). That this notion is taken seriously is evident in educational programs for ELLs that traditionally have discouraged and, in some cases, even prohibited ELLs from using their home languages in school. Even most current programs that use two languages for instruction -- as in U.S. bilingual programs, relegate each language to designated subjects or instructional times on the assumption that using both languages or drawing links between the two is not useful and may even be detrimental to mastery of English. Even in bilingual immersion programs for majority language English-speaking students in Canada, teachers systematically avoid using both English and French during the same instructional periods, and students are required to likewise use only French during French periods and English during English periods.

To the extent that this hypothesis is true, it would explain, at least in part, the other beliefs under discussion. In particular, it could account for the belief that learning and using two languages is burdensome and that exposure has a significant impact on language proficiency because it would mean that bilinguals need to learn twice as much as monolinguals. In contrast, if the acquisition of two languages is interdependent and, in particular, if acquisition of one language facilitates acquisition of aspects of another language, then these beliefs are untenable or, at least, need to be modified to acknowledge that overlap between two languages can result in savings in the time and cognitive effort needed to learn an additional language.

In fact, there is a growing body of scientific research that the languages of bilinguals are not independent of one another and, to the contrary, that the boundaries between the languages of bi- and multilinguals are dynamic and permeable. For example, as noted earlier, researchers have found that child and adult bilinguals and, in particular, simultaneous bilinguals are able to code-mix without violating the grammatical constraints of either language, most of the time (e.g., Paradis, Genesee, & Crago, 2011). The ability to interweave two languages during oral discourse without violating the grammatical constraints of either language indicates that bilinguals have access to the grammars of both languages simultaneously and automatically -- how else could error-free code-mixing be explained? There is also a great deal of evidence of significant and positive correlations between reading skills in one language and reading skills in another in bilinguals; the nature and extent of the interaction depends to some extent on the typological similarity of the languages and their orthographic systems (e.g., Genesee & Geva, 20076). Research on the acquisition, comprehension, and production of two languages during second language learning and during proficient bilingual performance has revealed further that both linguistic systems are differentially accessible and activated at virtually all times (e.g., Gullifer, Kroll & Dussias, 2013). Moreover, the two languages of bilinguals share a common cognitive/conceptual foundation that can facilitate the acquisition and use of more than one language for communication, thinking, and problem solving. This research also suggests that competence in two, or more, languages engenders the development of sophisticated cognitive skills for negotiating and minimizing cross-language competition (Kroll, 2008). Findings from these studies reveal a highly sophisticated system of cognitive representations, access, and use, and they deepen our understanding of the language performance of bilinguals that would go unexamined were researchers focused on the cognitive aspect of language that are characteristic of monolinguals **only**.

Implications

Taken together, these findings challenge some traditional widely-held views concerning language learning in educational programs for ELLs. Increasingly, North American educators have been motivated by recent findings to explore alternative possibilities to create more effective, evidence-based policies and practices. Some of

the implications of these findings for educating young ELLs are discussed in this section; they will be reviewed with respect to three aspects of early childhood education and instruction: (1) language of instruction, (2) oral language development, and (3) pre- and early literacy instruction.

1) Language of Instruction

The most radical innovation to have been tried in educating ELLs in the U.S. involves the language of instruction. More specifically, educators in the U.S. have experimented with the effectiveness of educating ELLs using the heritage language along with English for instruction of significant portions of the curriculum, including literacy- and non-literacy related subjects. Very briefly, in bilingual elementary school programs for Spanish-speaking ELLs, for example, between 50% and 90% of the curriculum is taught in Spanish in the primary grades -- Kindergarten to grade 2. Depending on the particular program, instruction in English increases gradually after grade 2 so that it is the predominant language or only language of instruction by the end of elementary (primary) school (see Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2012, for more discussion). The rationale behind these programs is that teaching literacy and academic subjects initially in a language ELLs already know will permit them to begin to acquire literacy skills right away and, at the same time, to keep up in academic domains while they are learning English. Once their English skills have advanced sufficiently, then ELLs will be better able to keep up to grade-level standards in literacy and other school subjects taught in English. In brief, this approach is thought to be a better way to increase the chances that ELLs will not fall behind and, in fact, will close the gap with native speakers more readily than if they are taught entirely in English.

Likewise, there are bilingual preschool programs that use both Spanish along with English (see Barnett et al., 2007, Lindholm-Leary, 2014; and Rodriguez et al., 1995, for examples). For purposes of this discussion, these programs will be referred to as bilingual pre-school (3-5 year olds) and bilingual elementary (primary) school (5-10 year olds) programs. The first language of a large majority of ELLs in the U.S. is Spanish, and it is for this reason that most bilingual programs use Spanish along with English and for the focus on these particular programs in this chapter. While using ELLs' heritage language is clearly not realistic in many settings because there are too

many different heritage languages and an insufficient number of qualified teachers who speak those languages, these alternative models of education for ELLs are worth considering here because they pose the most serious challenge to traditional views on how best to educate ELLs. If it can be shown that bilingual instruction in pre-school and/or elementary school programs does not compromise ELLs' acquisition of English and/or their general academic development or that, to the contrary, it benefits their language and general academic development, then there would be reasons to question traditional beliefs that favor using English only and from early on and, furthermore, to consider alternative educational strategies besides those that are based on exclusive use of English as the language of instruction.

Five fairly recent meta-analyses have examined the achievement of ELLs in bilingual versus English-only elementary school programs. They all concluded that ELLs in bilingual programs scored as well as or often better than ELLs in English-only programs on tests of literacy and other school subjects (e.g., mathematics) in English (see Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2012, and Goldenberg, 2008, reviews); at the same time, the bilingual program participants performed significantly better on measures of Spanish language proficiency. In their review, Genesee and Lindholm-Leary note that ELLs in English-only programs generally show an advantage in English in the primary grades (K-3), but differences are no longer evident when students are evaluated in the middle or late elementary grades, once English is used as a language of instruction. Lindholm-Leary and Borsato (2006), in fact, report that evaluations in California, which has one of the highest proportion of ELLs in the U.S., reveal that, in the long run, ELLs in bilingual programs often outperform ELLs in English-only programs on state-mandated tests. Evaluations of bilingual pre-school programs, while few in number, also report that there is no significant advantage in English among ELLs in English-only programs in comparison to ELLs in bilingual programs and that bilingual program participants demonstrate superiority in Spanish (Barnett et al., 2007, Lindholm-Leary, 2014, and Rodriguez et al., 1995).

In sum, the findings from this research do not provide support for the assumptions that underlie early and exclusive focus on English as the language of instruction during either the pre-school or elementary school years. To the contrary, they demonstrate

that bilingual program participants demonstrate superiority with respect to maintenance of the heritage language and, in the case of elementary school programs, in domains of achievement related to English literacy and general academic achievement. Thus, use of ELLs' heritage language need not be avoided or discouraged in school and, to the contrary, should be encouraged – where possible, in order to support maintenance of the heritage language and take advantage of crosslinguistic facilitation that has been found among such learners, to be discussed in the section on literacy. A further implication of these findings is that parents or caregivers of ELLs with limited proficiency in English themselves need not be discouraged from using the heritage language in favor of English on the assumption that an early start will be advantageous. To the contrary, parents of ELLs should be informed of the potential advantages of developing the heritage language during the preschool years especially when parents are literate in that language and can engage in literacy activities in the heritage language with their children. Parents may need guidance on how to do this. Promoting bilingualism through support of the heritage language along with mastery of English is itself a valuable goal in an increasingly globalized environment.

2) Oral Language Development

Evidence, reported earlier, from research on the oral English language development of ELLs during the school years indicates that ELLs require many years of schooling to acquire native-like proficiency in English for academic purposes. In fact, many ELLs do not attain native-like or even advanced levels of proficiency by the end of elementary school; these findings are particularly likely among ELLs from low SES backgrounds. This poses serious obstacles to their academic achievement and literacy development because attainment of advanced levels of reading comprehension, which are critical for academic progress as students advance through school, can be impeded by weak oral language skills. Clearly an emphasis on an early start to learning English along with extended exposure to English in school without systematic support do not guarantee the advanced levels of proficiency in oral English that ELLs need to succeed in school in the long run. An important and obvious implication is that ELLs need planned and systematic support in acquiring oral language proficiency in English that is sustained over grades. Support should focus on language for academic or cognitive

purposes since most ELLs appear to have little difficulty acquiring sufficient proficiency in English to function socially with their peers and others. The question arises: How can the oral English language development of ELLs be promoted so that, over the long term, they attain advanced levels of proficiency commensurate with the academic demands of the curriculum as they progress through school? Addressing this question brings us to considerations of pedagogy.

The available evidence, albeit limited at present, suggests that a dual pronged approach is called for. One prong calls for direct instructional support for oral language development. In the U.S., this form of instruction is often referred to as English Language Development, or ELD. The other prong calls for systematic integration of English oral language instruction with instruction in academic subjects or content. In the U.S. and Canada this is often referred to as sheltered instruction. In contrast to direct language instruction (i.e., ELD instruction), the primary focus of sheltered instruction is to promote general academic achievement by reducing the linguistic demands of the material to be learned. A dual pronged approach is complementary since language and academic development are inseparable, albeit they may have different primary instructional objectives. Thus, content-based sheltered instruction focuses on advancing ELLs' academic achievement with a secondary focus on advancing their English language development, while ELD instruction aims to directly promote the acquisition of academic language skills that often elude ELLs when no additional support is provided and thereby to enhance ELLs' academic achievement indirectly by making them better able to benefit from academic instruction in English.

Several versions of sheltered language instruction have been proposed for enhancing the general educational outcomes of ELLs in the U.S.; the Sheltered Instruction Observational Protocol (or SIOP, Echevarria & Graves, 2007) is one such approach; the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA; Chamot & O'Malley, 1994) is another. Both approaches were designed for elementary school age learners; the SIOP model has been adapted to also apply to preschool-age learners, but with important modifications (Echevarria, Short & Peterson, 2011). The SIOP Model, which enjoys some empirical support (see Echevarria & Short, 2010, for a review), is a framework for teaching non-language academic subjects (such as social studies) to

ELLs using strategies and techniques that make the content of the curriculum comprehensible. At the same time, SIOP serves to promote the development of ELL's language skills across the four domains of reading, writing, listening, and speaking in content-specific domains. In effect, SIOP is a set of pedagogical strategies that seek to circumvent or reduce the linguistic barriers that ELLs face when confronted with academic instruction in English and, at the same time, to enhance ELLs' proficiency in English for academic purposes using the academic curriculum as a vehicle for planning and promoting language development (see Echevarria, Voigt & Short, 2010, and Echevarria, Short & Peterson, 2011, for more detailed discussions of the rationale, empirical justifications for, and guidelines for applying this model). SIOP is particularly useful because it conceptualizes and considers ELD as part of general educational planning for ELLs and, thus, helps to ensure that ELD instruction is part of a coherent plan for educating ELLs.

Turning to ELD -- at present, the research evidence on what constitutes effective ELD instruction is limited but growing, especially when it comes to preschool learners (see Goldenberg et al, 2013; Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010; and Snow & Katz, 2010, for overviews of what is currently thought to be effective ELD instruction). There are significant areas of overlap in the recommendations emanating from current research and professional discussions of effective education for preschool-age and elementary-school-age ELLs. With respect to pre-school programs, current evidence-based views are that high quality preschool programs can be effective learning environments for both monolingual English children and ELLs (see Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010, and Snow & Katz, 2010, for specific recommendations for elementary school contexts). Goldenberg and his colleagues, for example, concluded that the features of what they refer to as "generic" high quality preschool programs "appear to support the learning and development of young DLLs (or ELLs, added by author) as well as monolingual English children" (p. 95). Their conclusions, like those of others, are understandably cautious because of the paucity of research and the lack of a single definition of "high-quality preschool program". In short, what we know to be effective early childhood education for monolingual children can serve as the foundation for designing preschool programs for ELLs.

At the same time, as Goldenberg and his colleagues and others emphasize, important modifications are called for. At the school and program level, it is important that a supportive environment be created that is responsive to linguistic and cultural diversity among students in the program and that such diversity be seen as an asset for both individual learners and the school as a whole. More particularly, this means that: school administrators, education specialists and teachers be knowledgeable about and understand the linguistic and cultural diversity of ELL children in their care; they view ELLs' existing language skills and knowledge as resources to develop; and they know how to harness these resources in the service of their general education. From a language learning point of view, effective early learning environments endorse an additive view of bilingualism and seek to foster development of ELLs' home languages at the same time as they acquire competence in English. In contexts where there are reasonable numbers of ELLs who speak the same heritage languages, this means incorporating those languages in instruction and, as much as possible and appropriate, into the day-to-day life of the classroom. This is advisable not only because research suggests that it will support their acquisition of English and general skills and knowledge, but also because it will create an inclusive classroom environment. Where use of ELLs' heritage language is not feasible, then alternative strategies are possible. For example, partnerships between families, communities and the school can create an additive learning environment by bringing the language and cultural resources linked to students' backgrounds into the school (Roberts, 2009, for suggestions). This can also enhance and enrich the learning environment of mainstream monolingual English learners. Positive teacher attitudes toward diversity and their ELL students and active and positive relationships between parents, the school and teachers have been linked to enhancements in ELL outcomes in preschool and primary school programs (Vitiello et al., 2011). In brief, what is important here is that ELLs be viewed in terms of their strengths and that any vestige of attitudes that view language and cultural diversity as problems to be solved be replaced with attitudes that support ELLs in their diversity.

Specific modifications to instruction are also called for to enhance the effectiveness of "generic" high quality preschool programs. Reviews of research on both

preschool and elementary school programs for ELLs recommend the following language-related modifications:

- 1) intentional or explicit focus on language teaching and, in particular, vocabulary and grammatical features that might be difficult to acquire
- 2) designated times or small group work when language can be the explicit focus of instructional attention
- 3) focus on oral language that is useful for higher order cognitive or academic purposes that is age-appropriate, although written forms of language can also be incorporated
- 4) lots of modeling and examples of to-be-learned aspects of language
- 5) plenty of opportunities for children to use and practice targeted language skills
- 6) use of interactive activities that are meaningful and authentic and expand students' opportunities to use language
- 7) pair or small group work with students who are more proficient in English, provided activities are planned carefully to ensure equitable involvement by all members of the group
- 8) use of visuals and realia to make new language, concepts, or skills comprehensible and easier to learn
- 9) individualized and adapted instruction to reflect individual ELL's "lived experiences" rather than socio-cultural stereotypes about the ethnolinguistic groups they belong to.

All reviews of research on effective instructional strategies for promoting language and literacy development in ELLs also point to the importance of incorporating ELLs' home languages, where feasible and useful, into instruction; this is particularly true when it comes to pre- and early literacy -- discussed in the next section (e.g., Goldenberg et al., 2013; Riches & Genesee, 2006; Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010). As noted earlier, use of ELLs' heritage languages for day-to-day instruction may not be realistic in many settings, but strategies for drawing on ELLs' skills and knowledge in the heritage language can include: ELLs with a common heritage language work together using the heritage language on specific tasks and then share their work with other students in English; students bring examples of written language from home to share with other students and the teacher; "bridging time" when teachers work with

students to identify similarities and differences between English and their heritage languages (Beeman & Urow, 2012); and teachers teach all students common words or expressions (such as greetings, days of the week) in the various languages of the ELL students in their class. Aside from direct benefits to learning, some of these activities can serve to create a supportive and additive bilingual environment.

3) Development of Literacy Skills

As noted earlier, extensive research has revealed that there are significant facilitative interactions between the languages of ELLs. While this has been noted in a number of domains of learning, it has been noted most consistently in the acquisition of skills and knowledge related to reading. More specifically, there are significant positive cross-linguistic correlations for phonological awareness, knowledge of the alphabetic principle, word decoding skills, print awareness, and general reading ability; correlations are, of course, larger the more similar the languages. In brief, young ELLs with pre-reading or early reading skills in the heritage language demonstrate better reading skills in English and can acquire reading skills in English more easily than ELLs with no or less well developed early reading skills in the heritage language (see Genesee & Geva, 2006, for an extensive review of the relevant research). In a related vein, evidence from evaluative studies of bilingual preschool and elementary school programs for ELLs, discussed earlier, indicates that teaching ELLs to read in the heritage language does not hinder the development of reading skills in English; to the contrary, it can be facilitative (e.g., Espinosa, 2010; Riches & Genesee, 2006). At the same time, literacy instruction in the home language supports biliteracy.

It follows then that when planning literacy instruction for young ELLs, it is helpful if teachers are aware of their ELLs' existing literacy-related skills and of literacy-related practices in the home so that they are better able to individualize instruction that builds on their existing skills. Assuming that all ELLs lack literacy skills is wasteful and may result in students with existing literacy skills in the home language becoming disengaged because instruction does not line up with what they already know and can do. For example, students who already have early decoding skills do not need the same level or kind of support to learn to decode in English as ELLs with no such skills. This can be done even if teachers themselves do not know all of the languages of their

students: ask students to identify similarities and differences in sounds, words, and grammar in their two languages – even young learners can do this and it helps enhance their metalinguistic awareness, a critical skill in the development of literacy. Similarly, when trying to determine if an ELL might be at risk for reading impairment or reading difficulty, abilities in the heritage language should be taken into account in order to determine whether difficulties learning to read in English are linked to an underlying impairment or are simply a reflection of the student’s incomplete mastery of English (Erdos et al., 2014). Teachers, even monolingual teachers, should be encouraged to draw on ELLs’ literacy skills in the heritage language during literacy instruction (see Lyster, Collins & Ballinger, 2009, for an example of a biliteracy reading program). It also follows then that parents who are literate in the heritage language should be encouraged to support their children’s acquisition of early literacy skills in the heritage language— by reading to and with their children; by engaging in pretend writing and in sound and word games; and by demonstrating the value of reading and writing in their own use of language in the home. Cloud, Genesee and Hamayan (2009) and Roberts (2009) provide more extensive discussions and practical examples of how to promote the acquisition of literacy skills in ELLs.

FINAL WORDS

ELLs in many English-dominant countries struggle in school; statistics from countries such as the U.S. indicate that ELLs experience disproportionately high drop-out and failure rates in school. While there is growing evidence that preschool programs can enhance children’s preparedness for school (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003), if preschool programs are designed using the same assumptions and beliefs that underlie current thinking about elementary school education, we risk recreating the same pattern of failure among ELLs in early childhood education programs as we see in current programs. This chapter considered how conventional beliefs and attitudes about second language teaching and learning and about dual language acquisition in general may be undermining our attempts to create successful preschool programs for ELLs. A growing body of evidence from research in education, psycholinguistics, and cognitive science challenges conventional views and, in particular, argues that dual language acquisition is not a zero-sum game and, in fact, that maintenance and development of ELLs’

heritage language may facilitate English language development. The challenge now is to reconceptualize strategies for educating young ELLs so that educators draw on their existing language skills in ways that are practical, effective, and feasible – even in classrooms with ELLs who speak multiple heritage languages and even when teachers themselves are monolingual. Research has begun to address these critical issues and we have the beginnings of better understandings of how to do this; albeit much still remains to be done.

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