

The Journal of Educational Issue of Language Minority Students, V. 15, Winter 1995. Boise State University.

---

# Reducing Failure of LEP Students in the Mainstream Classroom and Why it is Important

**Charles Cornell**

**Charles Cornell**, PhD, is an assistant professor of bilingual education/ESL at East Texas State University in Commerce, Texas.

## Introduction

The education of limited English proficient (LEP) students became a concern of U.S. public schools following the *Lau v. Nichols* decision (1974) when the U.S. Supreme Court held schools responsible for helping "students who are certain to find their classroom experiences wholly incomprehensible because they do not understand English," and the U.S. government mandated compliance through the Equal Educational Opportunity Act (EEOA) of 1974. Though neither the *Lau* decision nor the EEOA prescribed bilingual education, it evolved as the preferred method of compliance. Lesser cases, running concurrently with or subsequent to *Lau*, pressed also for bilingual programs (*Serna v. Portales*, 1972; *Aspira v. City of New York*, 1973).

The 1970s saw many bilingual education models including maintenance, transitional, and developmental programs. These typically employed bilingual teachers or teaching assistants to provide instruction to LEP students in two languages<their first language (L1), plus English.

Characteristic of these programs was a homogeneous L1 target group, with Spanish L1 groups predominating in California and the Southwest, and occasional pockets of other L1 populations, such as the Chinese in San Francisco. In the late 1970s and 1980s, LEP students with a variety of L1 backgrounds entered the school system in large numbers. These included Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, Haitians, Koreans, Chinese, and Middle Easterners. Their presence resulted often in six or more first languages being represented in a single classroom.

A Lau Board, created to help local schools comply with the *Lau* decision, struggled to guide well-intentioned districts to serve heterogeneous L1 populations without requiring them to create multiple bilingual programs for which money and qualified teaching personnel often were lacking. At the same time, the Board did not wish that diverse L1 students, whose numbers in some districts were too few to warrant separate bilingual classes, go without language instruction.

To confront this dilemma, special alternative instructional programs (SAIPs) were developed whose focus was to assist students in acquiring English language skills by using English as the vehicle of instruction. These programs include sheltered English, content-based and intensive English, plus other forms of ESL

instruction, and encompass a wide spectrum of classroom methodologies and techniques. Though bilingual programs remain in a few areas where homogeneous L1 groups exist, SAIPs have become the predominant method for providing special language instruction (OBEMLA, 1990). Unfortunately, results of these programs have been less than gratifying. LEP student dropout rates are disproportionately high, and academic success appears limited to occasional rare individuals (Gingras & Careara, 1989; Rumberger, 1983; Valverde, 1987).

### **Time Required to Gain English Proficiency for Academic Work**

Acquiring English proficiency necessary to succeed academically is a painfully slow process for many LEP students. Collier and Thomas (1989) and Cummins (1981) assert that from five to seven years of special English instruction are required for these students to function effectively in academic courses. Collier and Thomas based their conclusion on an assessment of reading, language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science performance of 2,014 LEP students over a 10-year period. Before applying the five to seven years conclusion to our current LEP population, two factors in the study need further analysis. The study sample included a large proportion of LEP students from middle-class families who had received a systematic and uninterrupted education at urban schools in their native countries. Also, during the years their performance was being assessed, subjects received from two to three hours of special English language instruction per day. Students with strong L1 educational backgrounds are able to transfer skills and knowledge to English (Krashen, 1987). Those from more stable homes whose families actively support their educational goals show greater success in acquiring both content and language skills than do students lacking these factors (Hart, 1988; Peterson, 1989; Rumberger, 1983). LEP students from lower-class families from rural areas, whose L1 education was less than systematic and complete and who receive fewer than two to three hours of special English instruction per day might be expected to take longer than five to seven years to acquire English proficiency for academic work. The 1980s and early 1990s saw many such students arrive in the U.S., including refugee children from guerrilla warfare in the mountains of Guatemala and El Salvador, whose L1 education was often intermittent or nonexistent (OBEMLA, 1990; U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Also evident in recent years has been an increasing reliance on ESL programs in which students receive considerably less than two hours of English instruction per day (KSBE, 1993; OBEMLA, 1990).

Responsibility for instructing LEP students in both content and language is falling increasingly upon teachers in mainstream classrooms. Among reasons for this phenomenon are the following.

### **Inadequacy of Pull-out Programs**

The most prevalent ESL format is the pull-out program, in which students are pulled from mainstream classes for brief sessions of English instruction in special ESL centers. Instruction time per student ranges from 15 minutes (the shortest I have encountered) to one and a half hours per day, with 30 to 45 minutes being the norm. The State of Kansas, for example, spends an average of 42 minutes per day in ESL instruction per LEP student (KSBE, 1992). The amount of language learning that can be achieved in 30 to 45 minutes is limited for even the most adept ESL specialist. One pull-out center teacher complained to me recently of having to contend with successive groups of 10-20 students<often displaying considerable diversity in grade and language proficiency<appearing at 40-minute intervals throughout the day. She stated that she felt she was performing little more than a baby-sitting function, and, in her first year of teaching, exhibited symptoms of burnout.

### **ESL Pull out Time Often Devoted to Mainstream Homework**

An additional complication arises when the role of the ESL teacher is interpreted as helping LEP students do mainstream homework. Helping students understand their homework is laudable, and often some language training can be infused into homework tutoring, yet, shunting responsibility for homework on the ESL teacher reduces even further the time available for language instruction and raises the question of whether tutoring LEP students in mainstream homework constitutes compliance with government regulations requiring special language instruction.

### **Limited number of Self-contained ESL Classrooms**

Though usually able to provide more language instruction per student, self contained classrooms are much less popular than pull-out programs with most school administrators. Providing language instruction in self-contained classrooms (usually limited to 30 students) requires an expenditure of considerably more staff, equipment, and facilities than does rotating 50 to 100 or more students at 40-minute intervals through one pull-out center in the course of a day.

### **Question of Segregation**

Another factor that may contribute to increasing dependence upon mainstream classrooms for instruction is a concern that separating LEP students from their mainstream classmates could constitute a form of segregation and a denial of equal educational opportunity (Chicago Board of Education, 1991; Garcia, 1991; Gonzales, 1981).

### **The Need for Schools to Meet Mandated Evaluation Criteria**

In recent years, many states have initiated or expanded school and teacher accountability programs. Typical is the current focus upon objective-based instruction, by which students are expected to meet specified academic objectives. Including LEP students in such programs requires a focus on academic achievement as well as language instruction. A number of districts, in fact, have begun experimenting with integrating LEP students into objective based mainstream programs yet providing them with needed language instruction, in some cases through the inclusion of ESL teachers in the mainstream classroom (Mundahl, 1992).

### **LEP Students Already Spend Most of Their School Day in Mainstream Classes**

Whether by intent or default, LEP students spend most of their school day in the mainstream (KSBE, 1993), and their success or failure depends more and more upon the assistance and quality of instruction they receive there. What factors contribute to LEP students' failure, and what are some teaching methods that can increase the probability of success?

### **The Phenomenon of Failure**

Institutional definitions of failure typically involve students' not meeting certain established achievement criteria in comparison with others of the same age or grade level. Such comparisons often show LEP students as working below grade level and failing to meet other expectations defined by the mainstream curriculum.

In addition to institutional definitions are sociological ones that involve wasting talent and resources when students fail to live up to their potential. Concern with a positive adaptation to society through education is expressed in former President George Bush's Education 2000 statement, which includes the goal that, "every

school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy," and that, "every adult American will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy" (cited in U.S. Department of Education, 1991a, pp. 3, 52). We are familiar with failure based upon poor grades or low test scores but will explore also lost potential through inadequate preparation as another type of failure affecting LEP students.

## **Dropping Out of School**

Dropping out is dismissed too often as a manifestation of inadequacy or lack of interest on the student's part and as having little to do with action from the school (Fernandez, Paulsen, & Hirano-Nakanishi, 1989; Rosado, 1991). By the act of abandoning school, dropouts leave our sphere of responsibility, and gone and forgotten, cease to be among our concerns. Yet, they fall clearly within the category of those not likely to reach their potential.

LEP students drop out for a variety of reasons. These include a history of poor evaluations in which the student simply gives up in what has come to look like a hopeless battle. Fernandez, Paulsen, and Hirano-Nakanishi (1989) note that prejudice against Hispanic students, which may manifest itself in teacher attitudes toward academic work performed, is a significant contributor to low grades. Cornell (1993a), in a study of Hispanic dropouts in the New Orleans area, found that good performance often was discounted by teachers. Rather than gaining recognition for work well done, Hispanic students often found themselves accused of cheating or copying. When earned appreciation for quality work is withheld, students lose interest in further dedication to what is seen as a no-win involvement, and the seeds for dropping out are sown.

A tendency for some teachers to discredit Hispanic students' work was corroborated by an experience involving my adopted daughter who, like my other children, was born and raised in Latin America, but who, with her Lenca-Maya background and cinnamon complexion exhibits distinctly Latin-American physical characteristics. During her first year in a U.S. high school, she received an "F" on an English composition, the teacher claiming it, "had obviously been copied." Seeing my daughter's distress, knowing she had not copied, and that the composition was on a par with others she had done as an honor student at a bilingual high school in Latin America, I decided to visit the teacher and plead for reconsideration. No sooner had the teacher identified "Ana's father" as a professor from a local university than she assured me that there must have been some mistake; of course the composition had not been copied. The grade was changed, but, unfortunately, for the wrong reason. What would have ensued had I been more in line with the teacher's expectations of an Hispanic parent, or, perhaps, simply had not gone in to question the initial grade?

Another contributor to LEP dropout is alienation from the curriculum. Alienation may result when beliefs expressed in the mainstream curriculum differ from those held by minority students. Often teachers or texts assume a common value structure for all students and the acceptance of certain sociocultural myths. Myths promulgated in many public schools—some of which are undergoing scrutiny, include Columbus' discovering America and proving that the world was round. In fact, America was here all the time, and the Mayans, a civilization that developed here, knew not only that the world was round but had calculated its rate of rotation with an accuracy close to that achieved by modern scientific instruments—and may have done so some 900 years before Columbus' voyage (Arguelles, 1987; Arveni, 1975).

Other myths include the belief that freed slaves after the Civil War were a happy-go-lucky crowd with rarely a serious thought, that westward expansion of the United States, or manifest destiny as it was called,

was natural, just, and proper, and that settlers from Europe had a right to take Native Americans' land unless forbidden to do so by the United States government.

Conflicts between beliefs of what is correct and proper as taught in the classroom and those held by the minority student also may render the curriculum offensive or incomprehensible (Cornell, 1993b). Likewise, a curriculum in which certain racial, ethnic, or language groups, including African Americans, women, foreigners (except perhaps Mafia or drug lords) are simply invisible, and that reinforces the impression that they are nobody and their history and contributions do not count in the salient scheme of things, can seriously erode minority students' interest and self-esteem.

A curriculum seen as irrelevant to their needs also may block ethnic/language minority students' involvement. This may occur when material being taught or the purpose for learning it reflects values and goals seen as belonging uniquely to members of the dominant culture. The minority student often cannot visualize being in a situation that would demand such skills. A notable exception, in which alienation from the curriculum was overcome, is that of Los Angeles math teacher Jaime Escalante's success in stimulating Hispanic students to identify with the subject of calculus (Lytle, 1987; Meek, 1989).

Alienation from the school as a social institution can precipitate dropping out. Social ostracism, often subtle, may be perpetrated by peers or teachers. Though ostracism is rarely directed specifically at LEP students, the link between LEP and ethnic/racial minority status, plus a tendency for some to reject those who don't speak their language, make LEP students likely targets. "Oh, we don't sit with them," or, "you can't understand them, even when they talk English," are typical of peer comments. Ostracism may result from well-meaning attempts to include language/ethnic minority students. These attempts may backfire due to a teacher or administrator's lack of cultural awareness. A statement such as, "for our international fair, we'll all bring a typical food of our family, and, Rosa, you can make tortillas," could be innocent and sincere. However, Rosa may see it more as a slight than as a welcome invitation.

### **Failure and the At-risk Student**

The U.S. Department of Education defines at-risk behavior to include teenage pregnancy, transmission of sexual disease, and involvement with drugs or gangs (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1991b). Language/ethnic minority students are somewhat more prone than Anglo Americans to become involved in one or more of these behaviors (Rosado, 1991; Valverde, 1987). This is not because they have fewer values or lower moral standards. Rather, they often turn to other sources of acceptance after having been rejected by peers and teachers from the dominant culture. Cornell (1993a), in her study of Hispanic dropouts, points out that students who feel rejected by their Anglo American classmates and who seldom receive anything other than reprimands from teachers and administrators often join teenage gangs just to be accepted by someone.

### **The Passive Survivor**

When students drop out of school, get pregnant, or are injured in a gang fight, they become statistics (if little else) and we note that something has gone wrong. More subtle and perhaps as tragic is the passive survivor. This is the student who is never disruptive, never loud or argumentative, never bothers anybody, but who likewise, never participates in class activities or completes schoolwork.

Ironically, many passive survivors are among those some teachers consider their best behaved pupils. Often the passive survivors include a disproportionately high number of LEP students. Their teachers may not know quite what to do with them or how to involve them in classroom activities. Many have never had an

interest stimulated or been urged to develop a talent. So, instead of achieving some potential, they sit year after year quiet and invisible in the back of the room, until, finally, they pass out of the system largely unaffected by the educational process.

### **Rigid Application of Mainstream Criteria in Evaluating LEP Student Achievement**

LEP students measured against mainstream criteria often fall short of meeting instructional objectives when compared to their mainstream counterparts. However, such evaluation may overlook what might be impressive individual progress in comparison to where they began. Failure to meet mainstream standards becomes even more pronounced when demonstrating success relies heavily upon English language proficiency. Assessment instruments designed to measure intelligence, learning capacity, or subject knowledge often in reality test a person's language usage abilities (Boron, 1992; Damico, 1992; Hughes, 1989; Oller, 1992).

Evaluation against criteria established for mainstream students that relies heavily on English language skills or overlooks individual progress is likely to lock LEP students into a failure mode with little chance for escape.

These are some sources of failure likely to plague LEP students in mainstream settings. The following observations and suggestions are offered toward helping provide them with a positive educational experience.

1. Help LEP students gain acceptance and positive recognition in the classroom and throughout the school. Help them integrate both academically and socially into the classroom. One suggested technique is to initiate poster, display, and other projects whereby the efforts and accomplishments of LEP students can gain audience throughout the school. In addition to bulletin board displays, these projects could include a classroom publication or music, dance, drama, or other performance in which both LEP and native English speaking students can work together and both gain recognition and self-esteem.
2. Initiate cooperative learning activities. Cooperative learning, an effective technique and one that fits the learning style of students from Latin America, allows positive cross-cultural interaction between Anglo U.S. students and those from other cultures (Bennett, 1990; Caldwell, 1991; Cochran, 1989; Hernandez, 1989).
3. Choose class discussion topics in which LEP students can display expertise and draw upon their unique personal experiences. Discussions could compare social customs in other countries and those in the U.S. Presentations by LEP students on such topics as, "An immigrant's views on United States' child rearing and discipline" or "Impressions of the United States that foreigners get from Hollywood films" would give them an opportunity to gain positive recognition for academic efforts while, at the same time, take them from the margin to the center of class activities. Such discussions offer the additional advantage of providing mainstream peers with an interesting and nonthreatening opportunity to learn about other cultures and ways of perceiving life. Thus, efforts to integrate LEP students into mainstream activities need not occur at the expense of learning opportunities for their English-proficient classmates.
4. Be sensitive to, and work with, different learning styles. Many LEP students come from cultures where teaching and learning styles differ from those common in the United States and may have difficulty responding well to some of our popular classroom practices. Many styles used in the U.S. reflect technological advances and classroom materials and facilities often not available in other countries. For example, library research projects, use of videos, movies, and other visual aids, as well as computer assisted learning are techniques used widely in the U.S. but are rarely seen in most LEP students' countries of origin.

Though many U.S. styles have proven effective with LEP students once they become accustomed to them, we cannot assume they can adapt instantly to local classroom methods and assessment techniques. One approach is to use cooperative learning and other styles familiar to LEP students, while gently breaking them in to group discussion and other techniques popular here (Cochran, 1989).

Table 1 outlines some characteristics of teaching and learning styles prevalent in Latin America. When these learning styles fail to mesh with teaching styles, frustrations such as those confronting Mario and Mrs. Powell (See Table 2) are likely to occur. Mario's failure in Mrs. Powell's eyes as well as feelings of ineffectiveness in reaching him that she may have stem from just such a clash and reflect upon neither Mrs. Powell's teaching ability nor upon Mario's motivation for learning. The alternative scenario (Table 3) demonstrates working with, rather than against, Mario's learning style. In this version, both Mario and Mrs. Powell are more apt to feel that the exchange has been productive.

*Table 1. Learning Styles from Latin America*

Teacher:

- assumes a role of academic authority,
- may be the only one to possess a textbook,
- lectures and writes critical information on the chalkboard,
- is able to provide little or no audio-visual or reference material to supplement the discourse,
- expects students to provide specific detailed information on tests and examinations,
- tends to use fill-in-the-blanks and short answer testing techniques.

Student:

- depends almost entirely upon the teacher as the source of subject information;
- copies in a cuaderno (notebook) anything and everything the teacher writes on the chalkboard;
- focuses upon memorizing material (often word for word);
- is reluctant to question the teacher in class when something is not understood;
- depends upon and will seek help from fellow classmates to explain points not understood;
- frequently consults with classmates outside of class to decipher unclear notations or statements by the teacher;
- readily shares notes, ideas, and knowledge with classmates.

*Table 2 . Mario in Science Class: A Mini Case Study*

Mario arrived in the United States recently and attends a public middle school located on the edge of a metropolitan area. In El Salvador, he had some English classes in public schools plus one year

at a bilingual school. His English proficiency is classified as "intermediate." He was exited from a transitional bilingual program and now attends mainstream classes given only in English. In his 6th Grade science class, the following dialogue occurs between Mario and the teacher, Mrs. Powell, during an oral question-and-answer session which she has just initiated.

"So then, what do you think might be some of the things that cause depletion of the ozone layer? Mario? MARIO?"

"Oh! I am sorry Mrs. Powell. I was copy what you put on the board."

"Didn't you hear what I asked? Aren't you going to participate in our discussion?"

"Oh, yes. Yes!"

"Why are you copying everything on the board? You even copied the picture I drew of the ozone layer! All this is in your book. Now, pay attention to the discussion. You do know what the ozone layer is don't you?"

"Oh, yes. It is a layer of heavy oxygen gas in the periphery of the ionosphere that protects the earth's crust from direct rays of the sun."

"That's right. Now, how would you answer my question?"

" A-a-a-a-a Would you repeat me the question please?"

In this brief encounter, how does Mrs. Powell's teaching style differ from Mario's learning style? What are some of Mario and Mrs. Powell's individual perceptions and behaviors that reflect aspects of their different cultural backgrounds? What is happening to Mario even though he obviously has studied the material and desires to do well in science class?

*Table 3. Mario in Science Class: A Second Version*

In his 6th Grade science class, the following dialogue occurs between Mario and his teacher, Mrs. Powell, during an oral question-and-answer session.

"In nearly every city and town there are things that make smoke and toxic gasses. These create air pollution and cause depletion of the ozone layer, as it says under the picture on page 49 in our book. We know this happens here, but, let's see if it occurs in other countries too. Mario? Is the city you come from big or small?"

"Oh. It is a very big city, Mrs. Powell."

"Are there things that cause air pollution there?"

"Oh, yes. We have the factories that make smoke and smells bad sometimes."

"Does anything else make air pollution?"

"Oh, yes. We have many cars, and many diesel trucks that go in the city, and diesel busses that make a lot of smoke."

"Where does the smoke go?"

"Up in the air...We don't see it, but it goes up, up...and all the way to the ozone layer and it make chemical changes with the ozone and it not work so good for filter rays from the sun."

"What does your city do about air pollution?"

"They make the trucks go on just some streets sometimes, but if the factories make smoke and the trucks and busses make smoke, most times they don't do nothing."

"Do you think they will make laws someday to decrease air pollution?"

"

"Maybe, someday, if it get bad enough."

"Thank you, Mario. Now, who can tell me some sources of air pollution that we have right here and some of the measures local and State governments are taking to reduce them?"

In this scenario, what has Mrs. Powell done? Has Mario been an effective participant in the discussion? Does he understand the concepts of the lesson? Does he come off as a good student or a bad one? Does he feel good about himself? Will he be likely to participate in future class discussions? How does Mrs. Powell feel about her own effectiveness as a teacher?

5. Encourage parental interest and participation in their children's education. LEP students, as well as others, whose parents participate to some degree in their education show higher achievement and are less likely to drop out of school (Hart, 1988). Soliciting parental participation is not easy. Many parents are as limited in English proficiency as their children frequently more so and manifest culture based as well as socioeconomic reasons for nonparticipation (Wedel & Cornell, 1991). Often, the only contact schools make with parents of LEP students is to report delinquent behavior (Wedel & Cornell, 1991). Parents are as sensitive to rejection as are their children and often fear encounters with teachers or other school personnel or with Anglo U.S. parents at parent organization meetings or similar functions (Wedel & Cornell, 1991).

Nevertheless, one can initiate and promote positive communication with parents, perhaps recruiting the help of a translator, and can demonstrate friendliness and a genuine interest in the children. As a beginning, send home some of the student's good schoolwork along with a few words of praise. Again, a translator may be helpful. Through this simple act, parents can see the school as a place where their child can be successful and the teacher as a person who recognizes that people of their culture can accomplish good things. Self-esteem and family ties benefit. The student begins to form a positive identity with the school and to perceive it as a place to gain recognition and acceptance, perhaps thereby making gangs, promiscuous sexual encounters, drugs, and similar avenues for acceptance and recognition no longer necessary (Reyes & Jason, 1993).

6. Realize that many LEP students come from poverty conditions and make allowances when appropriate. Though not unique to LEP students, the situation of new immigrants, many of whom are LEP, often involves living on the economic fringes of society (Rumberger, 1983; U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Recognizing this situation may require certain adjustments on our part. We must, of course, avoid assuming that all LEP students live in poverty which could be as damaging as failing to recognize that some do. Making adjustments in our expectations does not mean lowering our expectations of their ability to perform academic work but rather in the facility they may have for doing so. The following guidelines are offered:

*Don't expect these students to have access to magazines, reference materials, and other resources at home.* Likewise, the family may not be able to provide transportation to the library.

*Don't assume that the student can study at home.* This is perhaps a shocking and alien concept for those unfamiliar with poverty conditions. "The dog ate my homework" may be quite tame compared to what really may have occurred. Often in the crowded conditions associated with poverty, the child does not have a satisfactory place to study, or being able to do so may depend upon the actions of others in the household. If there is space, there may be considerable noise and distraction, parents or siblings coming and going, loud music, or a television nearby. The very neighborhood may be full of noise and distraction. Drunkenness, loud arguments, threats of violence, drugs, and abuse, though not unique to poverty conditions, often are associated with them. Students may be required to care for younger children or do numerous household chores in the evening.

*Don't expect material contributions to fund drives or other activities.* Even bringing a dish for a potluck luncheon may be beyond the family's resources. Pressure from teachers or staff can be as damaging as ridicule from one's peers to the student who cannot contribute. Participation in such activities should be limited to functions that don't require material outlay.

*Be a little tolerant of irregular attendance.* Poor attendance should not be ignored. However, there may be times when understanding and forbearance are indicated. Disorganization, unreliable transportation, financial crises, disruptions in normal family relations, and other circumstances not unique to but often encountered in poverty settings, can contribute to absences from school which are well beyond the student's control.

7. Develop good working relationships with ESL or bilingual education specialists. More often than not, these are highly trained professionals, many of whom are former mainstream teachers who have obtained an additional ESL or Bilingual Education endorsement and may have or may be pursuing a graduate degree. Most are anxious to work with mainstream teachers in instructing LEP students. However, this does not mean that they exist merely "to help the foreign kids do their homework." In many cases, they have assessed LEP students' needs and developed a distinctive English language curriculum that they are willing to help integrate into the mainstream program. Productive interactions include:

*Frequent two-way consultation over curriculum and LEP students' needs and progress.* Integrating elements of mainstream and ESL curricula can help mainstream teachers, specialists, and students. Mutual curriculum objectives, problems, and successful as well as unsuccessful teaching techniques used with LEP students can be discussed and evaluated.

*Cooperation on activities, such as dramas, musical presentations, or food fairs.*

*Consultation and mutual assistance in communicating with parents.* The ESL or bilingual specialist may be able to translate that note to be sent home with a student's schoolwork.

*Experimentation with various inclusion models.* Team teaching, visits to one another's classes, or sharing instruction on an exchange basis are possibilities. Inclusion efforts, however, appear to be successful only when there is mutual respect for professional competence and a colleague-colleague relationship rather than when a teacher-helper relationship exists (Mundahl, 1992).

8. Use alternative methods of assessment. LEP students may be making excellent progress in both language and content and be contributing to class activities yet be unable to meet certain standards of assessment such as satisfactory mainstream test scores. One characteristic of the whole language approach, for example, is that students are evaluated on their actual work rather than on work substitutes such as tests and other simulations (Heald-Taylor, 1989; Lim & Watson, 1993). Successful test taking in the United States often requires the ability to extrapolate data, draw inferences, compare and contrast, or support an argument or point of view in essay form. These skills are valuable yet may be absent or understressed among students from other cultures. Many students raised and educated within U.S. culture find successful test taking an elusive art. To the LEP student, it may be even more so. An alternative to more traditional testing is to evaluate LEP students' actual production, a basic tenet of portfolio assessment, or their demonstration of a particular skill in use rather than by giving tests on the subject. A parallel in the teaching profession is to evaluate a teacher's instructional ability on the basis of classroom performance rather than on scores on a National Teachers' Exam or other standardized test. Alternative methods include portfolio assessment and the evaluation of projects such as putting together a science display, reciting a poem, demonstrating a principle of physics, or telling about a cultural tradition.

9. Make sure that students acquire cognitive academic as well as basic interpersonal language skills. Often it is easy to misinterpret a student's facility in interpersonal conversation as an indication of ability to solve math work problems, write compositions, or understand descriptions in a technical book. A conscious effort must be made to encourage, guide, and assist them in developing academic skills. Both pressure and guidance should be a gradual but continuous application of Krashen's  $i + 1$  principle (Krashen, 1987), where students acquiring a second language are given language just a little beyond their present level of understanding. This principle may be applied as well to the acquisition of cognitive material.

10. Recognize that LEP students use a different culture-based experience pool, and fill in the gaps where necessary. Consciously or unconsciously, teachers raised in this culture often assume students will bring an Anglo American experience pool to any classroom learning situation. Because of a different environment and upbringing, the experience pool that immigrant LEP students use for listening and reading comprehension may be quite different from that of students born and raised in the United States. I recall an instance when a well-meaning kindergarten teacher was describing the life and duties of a firefighter to her students, many of whom were from other cultures. When she mentioned that the firefighters had to dress quickly "and slide down the pole," blank stares crossed many faces. She was halfway into her description of fire-alarm boxes and the problem of false alarms before she realized she had lost most of the class back at

the fire station.

Before embarking on a lesson, consider whether all students, particularly LEP students, have the experience or knowledge to understand the topic. If there is doubt, or to ensure a level playing field for all, a preliminary discussion can supply the background schema and critical vocabulary required for useful learning from the activity.

11. Avoid the creation of negative self-fulfilling prophecies. In this phenomenon, what the teacher expects the student to accomplish turns out to be what the student in fact accomplishes, or, as is often the case, what the student is evaluated as having accomplished. The effects of teacher expectations received attention in the late 1960s (Beez, 1968; Palardy, 1969; Nash, 1976; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Rothbart, Dalfen, & Barrett, 1971). Rosenthal and Jacobson, in perhaps the best known of these studies, selected a random sample of elementary students in a lower-middle-class suburb of San Francisco and from these extracted an experimental group. Teachers were told that students in this group could be expected to show "intellectual blooming" in a few months. At the end of a year, the "blooming" group displayed significant gains in IQ relative to the controls. Rothbart, Dalfen, and Barrett (1971), using similar methodology, falsely identified groups of "high expectancy" and "low expectancy" students. In subsequent evaluations, teachers rated "high expectancy" students well above "low expectancy" ones. These studies show the effects of teacher bias, favorable or unfavorable, upon achievement and evaluation. Teacher expectations based upon negative national, cultural, language, or other stereotypes can be damaging, as when my daughter's English teacher judged her composition as beyond the capabilities of a Latin American.

12. Adapt material when it seems beyond LEP students' language capacity.

The mainstream curriculum focuses on content and rarely considers that some students may be struggling with vocabulary and language at the same time they are trying to grasp concepts. Surprisingly, LEP students often grasp a concept before they have grasped the language skills to express or discuss it. They may be able to function effectively in class projects long before they can explain in intelligible English what they are doing and why. Yet, they understand. Having LEP students give a demonstration, draw a picture, or otherwise indicate a working understanding of a concept may be a more valid means of determining their grasp of the material than relying upon their completing the questions at the end of the chapter. Generally this requires getting away from the programmed teacher's manual, many of which seem written on the assumption that teachers must be led step by step through every lesson or are unwilling or incapable of designing activities on their own—perhaps accounting for the plethora of busy work, characteristic of many manuals—and being creative and developing activities based upon an assessment of students' needs and interests, which is particularly apropos when developing or selecting materials for use with LEP students. Though developing one's own activities appears to demand more work at the onset, in the long run such activities become almost self-generating and often lead naturally into productive discovery and inquiry-based lesson units, in which students express interest in specific topics or areas of study and determine many of their own learning objectives. When permitted to study topics in which they have an interest and genuine curiosity, students become more personally invested in gaining the knowledge and skills involved. This is true particularly when units or directions of study are suggested by the students themselves. Motivation, organization, and evaluation become natural extensions of the students' interest and need not be imposed externally by the teacher.

13. Apply general principles of good teaching to LEP as well as to other students in the classroom. Teaching practices that stimulate curiosity, interest, enthusiasm for learning, and active participation in classroom activities are as vital to LEP students as to others. Methods that are more conducive to these effects include

whole language, inquiry, and discovery techniques. To be avoided are repetitious and meaningless exercises (Krashen, 1987; Oller, 1993) including such activities as memorizing lists of spelling or vocabulary words out of context, an activity that, as many of us will testify, can kill enthusiasm for learning as quickly for native speakers as for those with limited English.

14. Enjoy and learn from your LEP students. LEP students can be a challenge but also a source of enriching and rewarding teaching experiences. Using their presence as a positive resource helps create an environment whereby success replaces failure, and, at the same time, provides us with an excellent opportunity to broaden our understanding of different cultures.

Instruction of LEP students, in both content and language, is likely to occur more and more within the mainstream curriculum in the coming years. Its effectiveness will depend largely upon an awareness of factors that contribute to LEP students' failure and the employment of innovative approaches, methods, and techniques that reduce the likelihood of failure and enhance their chances for academic success and increased English proficiency.

### References

Arguelles, J. (1987). *The Mayan factor*. Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company.

Arveni, A. (1975). *Archeoastronomy in pre-Colombian America*. Austin, University of Texas Press.

*Aspira v. City of New York*, (58 F.R.D. 62, L.S.D. N.Y. 1973).

Beez, W. V. (1968). Influence of biased psychological reports on teacher behavior and pupil performance, in *Proceedings of the 76th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association*, No. 3, pp. 605-6.

Bennett, C., (1990). *Comprehensive multicultural education: Theory and practice*, 2nd Edition. Old Tappan, NJ: Allyn.

Boron, J. (1992). SEA usage of alternative assessment: The Connecticut experience. *Proceedings of the Second National Research Symposium on Limited English Proficient Student Issues: Focus on evaluation and measurement*. v2, p. 187. United States Department of Education Office of Bilingual and Minority Language Affairs. Washington, DC. Aug. 1992.

Caldwell, K., (1991). *Cooperative learning: Language development in the content areas*, 1991 TESOL Convention, New York, December, 1991.

Chicago Board of Education, (1991). *Dual language immersion program models, elementary school*. Chicago.

Cochran, C., (1989). *Strategies for involving LEP students in the all-English medium classroom: A cooperative learning approach*, Program information guide series, Number 12, National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, Summer.

Collier, V., & Thomas, W. (1989). How quickly can immigrants become proficient in school English? *The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, (5), 26-38.

Cornell, C. (1993b). Language and culture monsters that lurk in our traditional rhymes and folktales. *Young Children: Journal of the National Association for the Education of Young Children*, (48).

Cornell, J. (1993). Factors contributing to Hispanic students' tendency to drop out of school. MIDTESOL Regional Conference, Lincoln, NE, Oct.

Cummins, J. (1981). Age on arrival and immigrant second language learning in Canada: A reassessment. *Applied Linguistics*, (2), 132-149.

Damico, J. (1992). Performance assessment of language minority students. *Proceedings of the Second National Research Symposium on Limited English Proficient Student Issues: Focus on evaluation and measurement*. (2), p. 137. United States Department of Education Office of Bilingual and Minority Language Affairs. Washington, DC.

Fernandez, R., Paulsen, R., & Hirano-Nakanishi, M. (1989). Dropping out among Hispanic youth. *Social Science Research*, 18, 21-52.

Garcia, E. (1991). Education of linguistically and culturally diverse students: Effective instructional practices report: National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning, Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, DC.

Gingras, R., & Careara, R. (1989). Limited English proficient students at risk: Issues and prevention strategies. *New Focus, Occasional papers in bilingual education*. Washington, DC: NABE (800) 321-NCBE.

Gonzales, J. (1981). Special report: Short answers to common questions about bilingual education: *Agenda* 11 (4), 29-33.

Hart, T. (1988). Involving parents in the education of their children. *Oregon State School Study Bulletin*. Nov. 1988.

Heald-Taylor, G. (1989). Whole language strategies for ESL students. San Diego. Dormac, Inc.

Hernandez, H., (1989). *Multicultural education: A teacher's guide to content and process*. Riverside, NJ: Macmillan.

Hughes, A. (1989). *Testing for language teachers*. Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press: 1989.

KSBE (1992). *Bilingual education demographics: Kansas 1992-1993*. Kansas State Board of Education/Program Support Services. Topeka.

KSBE (1993). *Fall 1993 Kansas ESL/bilingual data table*. Kansas State Board of Education. Topeka.

Krashen, S. (1987). *Principles and practices in second language acquisition*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentiss-Hall.

Lim, H., & Watson, D., (1993). *Whole language content classes for second language learners*. The Reading

Teacher, 46(5), 384-393.

Lau v. Nichols, 414 US 563 (1974).

Lytle, V. (1987). Beyond elitism. NEA Today. Nov, 1987. 10-11.

Meek, A. (1989). On creating ganas: A conversation with Jaime Escalante. Educational Leadership, Feb. 46-47.

Mundahl, J., (1992). Help for mainstream teachers with LEP students. Minneapolis Public Schools, Minneapolis, MN.

Nash, R. (1976). Teacher expectations and pupil learning, Henley and Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

OBEMLA, (1990). National forum on the personnel needs for districts with changing demographics: Staffing the multilingually impacted schools of the 1990s. United States Department of Education Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs. Washington, DC.

Oller, J. (1992). Language testing research: Lessons applied to LEP students and programs. Proceedings of the Second National Research Symposium on Limited English Proficient Student Issues: Focus on evaluation and measurement (p.43). United States Department of Education Office of Bilingual and Minority Language Affairs. Washington, DC.

Oller, J. (1993). Methods that work: Second edition. Boston. Heinle & Heinle.

Palardy, J. (1969). What teachers believe - what children achieve. Elementary School Journal, 69, pp. 380-4.

Peterson, D. (1989). Parent involvement in the educational process. ERIC Digest Series Number EA43. Eugene, OR. ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management.

Reyes, O., & Jason, L. (1993). Pilot study examining factors associated with academic success for Hispanic high school students. Journal of Youth and Adolescents, 22(1), 57-71.

Rosado, J. (1991). Being good at being bad: The Puerto Rican student overachieving at underachieving. Urban Education, 25 (4), 428-34.

Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1968). Pygmalion in the classroom, New York. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Rothbart, M., Dalfen, S., & Barrett, R. (1971). Effects of teachers' expectancy on student-teacher interaction, Journal of educational psychology, 62, pp. 49-54.

Rumberger, R. (1983). Dropping out of high school: The influence of race, sex, and family background. American Educational Research Journal, 20 (2), 199-220.

Serna v. Portales, 351 F. Supp. 1279 (N.D. Mex 1972).

U.S. Department of Education, (1991a). America 2000: An education strategy. Washington, DC.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Secretary, (1991b). The condition of bilingual education in the nation: A report to congress and the president, Washington, DC.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Policy and Planning (1993). New land, new knowledge: An evaluation of two education programs serving refugee and immigrant students. Final Report. Washington, DC.

Valverde, S. (1987). A comparative study of Hispanic high school dropouts and graduates: Why do some leave school early and some finish? Education and Urban Society, 19 (3), 320-329.

Wedel, E., & Cornell, C. (1991), Hispanic parents' non-participation in their children's schooling: Causes and cures. Southern Regional TESOL Conference, Atlanta, GA.

[Return to JEILMS v.15 Table of Contents](#)

---

*The HTML version of this document was prepared by NCBE and posted to the web with the permission of the author/publisher.*

[go to HOME PAGE](#)

www.ncela.gwu.edu

[an error occurred while processing this directive]