



Structured English Immersion: Experiences and Trends

Policy Briefing to the Texas State Board of Education

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**Structured
English
Immersion**

**Transitional
Bilingual
Education**

Opportunity

**Dual
Language**

**English as a
Second
Language**

California's Immersion Experience

- **Proposition 227 passed in 1998.**
- **Immersion programs “not normally intended to exceed one year.”**
- **Implementation has been uneven by nearly all accounts.**
- **Steady, strong gains in English proficiency for past 3 years.**
- **Generally, California school districts with most incomplete compliance with Prop. 227 showed smallest increases (below state averages).**

California's Immersion Experience (2)

- **While test scores have improved, reclassification rates to “English proficient” status has changed very little and remains just above 8 percent.**
- **Statewide, much of the progress in 2004 occurred in grades 5 through 12.**
- **“Many educators had predicted catastrophe if bilingual classes were dismantled in this state ... But the prophecies have not materialized.”**

(The New York Times, 2000)

California English Language Learners In Top 2 Categories of English Proficiency on CELDT*

2001	25 percent
2002	34 percent
2003	43 percent
2004	47 percent

***California English Language Development Test**

Atwater (CA) Elementary School District

- **4,700 students in grades K-8 / 26 percent English language learners**
- **Many younger students exiting immersion program within one year**

Students In Top 2 Categories of English Proficiency on CELDT

2001	12 percent
2004	43 percent

Atwater's Tri-Level System

- **Accelerated Classes for English (ACE)**
 - Focuses on English oral development
 - Focuses on phonics and letter sounds
- **Bridge Program**
 - Continue English learning along with content learning
- **Mainstream Classrooms**
 - Instruction in English at grade-appropriate levels

Los Angeles Unified School District ELLs

- **Rising English fluency rate outpaced state average.**
- **All grade levels increased population in top 2 levels of English proficiency \geq 17 percentage points since 2001.**
- **7th and 8th grade increased by 43 percentage points.**
- **District placed increased focus on improving instruction for ELL students (42 percent of school population).**

Key lessons learned by California districts with successful structured immersion programs:

- **Interaction, not segregation: Mix English learners with fluent speakers wherever possible.**
- **Build teacher confidence by providing ongoing training.**
- **Make English the language of instruction in the classroom, and use Spanish only when necessary to explain assignments.**
- **Teaching reading through phonics works better than the whole-language approach.**
- **Protect and maximize classroom instructional time.**

(Continued...)

Lessons Learned (2)

- **Provide a structured program in which students move up the ladder of fluency. Atwater, like many districts, uses a tri-level approach: Accelerated Classes for English for beginners, Bridge of intermediates, and Mainstream for advanced speakers.**
- **Continue to provide support after students enter the mainstream.**
- **Explain the program to trustees, teachers, principals, and parents: Everyone needs to be on board.**
- **Incorporate specially-designed curricula and textbooks for English learners and, where possible, contact educators and administrators from successful immersion districts for advice.**

Cognitive Window of Development

- **Brain science research indicates earlier (before age 7) is better than later for learning a second language.**
- **Phonology (accent, pronunciation, vowels and syllables) HIGHLY sensitive to Age of Exposure.**

(Petitto, 2002)

Optimal Exposure? Early is Best

Unsupported View

**Teach second language later when child has
“cognitive base”**

STRONGEST Formula

Native fluency in both languages

**The earlier children are exposed to two
languages, the stronger they are in each
language across multiple and rich contexts**

(Petitto, 2003)

Factors Why English Language Learning Can Take Longer

- **Higher mobility/transience of population**
- **Older immigrant students / quality of prior formal education**
- **Exposure to second language outside of classroom**
- **Educational and Financial Incentives for schools not to reclassify children too quickly**

Texas Programs for ELLs

Good news...

- **Compared with 6 states with largest LEP populations, Texas ELLs have highest percentage proficient in math (50 percent) and language arts (45 percent).**
- **This is also true of formerly ELL students -- within two years of reclassification -- in math (76 percent) and language arts (79 percent)**

(Lexington Institute, 2005)

“Transitional” in Name Alone?

- **10 percent of Texas ELLs transitioned out of special language classrooms into mainstream classrooms in 2003-04.**
- **11 percent made the transition in 2002-03.**
- **40 percent of Texas ELLs in grades 3-5 administered state NCLB reading assessments in non-English native language.**

(U.S. Department of Education, 2005)

“Students often do not have access to the more rigorous, challenging, relevant courses unless they are considered fluent in English. There should be more of a correlation between the test scores and the reclassification rates.”

- California State Superintendent Jack O’Connell, 2005.

Thank You!

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Select Publications Discussing Structured English Immersion

***The ABC's of English Immersion: A Teacher's Guide.* Washington, DC: Center for Equal Opportunity, 2001. Available online at: www.ceousa.org/abc.html.**

Jorge Amselle and Amy C. Allison. "Two Years of Success: An Analysis of California Test Scores After Proposition 227," August 2000, Amherst, MA: READ Institute.

Diane August and Kenji Hakuta (editors), "Improving Schooling for Language Minority Children: A Research Agenda," Washington, DC: The National Academy of Sciences Press, 1997.

Valentina A. Bali, "Sink or Swim: What Happened to California's Bilingual Students After Proposition 227," *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, Fall 2001.

Kevin Clark. "From Primary Language Instruction to English Immersion: How Five California Districts Made the Switch," *Read Abstracts*, June 1999.

Glenn, Charles, "Improving Schooling for Language Minority Children: A Research Addenda," *READ Abstracts*, May 1997.

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- Glenn, Charles L. *Language Minority Children in School: A Comparative Study of Twelve Nations*. New York: Garland Press, 1996.**
- Greene, Jay P. "A Meta-Analysis of the Effectiveness of Bilingual Education," Austin, Texas: The Public Policy Clinic of the Department of Government at the University of Texas, 1998.**
- Haver, Johanna J. *Structured English Immersion: A Step-by-Step Guide for K-6 Teachers and Administrators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2003.**
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- "English Acquisition Program Cost Study," May 2001, Arizona Department of Education, authored by READ Institute/Center for Equal Opportunity and Sjoberg and Evashenk Consulting.**

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Select Publications (4)

Torrance, Kelly. "Immersion Not Submersion: Converting English Learner Programs from Bilingual Education to Structured English Immersion in California and Elsewhere." Arlington, Virginia: Lexington Institute, October, 2005.