

Researching ESOL/Bilingual Education: *A Brief History*

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AIR Study (1977-1978)

- Malcolm Danoff (primary investigator) of the American Institute of Research (AIR) conducted the first major evaluation of Title VII supported programs (the ones that were funded in 1968 with the Bilingual Education Act).
- Funded by the U.S. Government (cost: \$1 million) to compare progress of ELLs in TBE programs versus mainstream (English Only, submersion) classrooms.
- Critique:
 - Less than six months between pre- and post test
 - Used standardized test (not normed for ELLs)
 - Mislabeled of students (in English this year, but Spanish last year)
 - “Bilingual” programs may not have used L1 instruction

Baker-de Kanter Report (1981-1983)

- Keith Baker and Adriana de Kanter, in their federally funded “Review of Bilingual Education,” asked the following questions:
 - 1) Does TBE increase/lead to better performance in English?
 - 2) Does TBE increase/lead to better performance in content areas?
- The report stated: *“The case for the effectiveness of transitional bilingual education is so weak that exclusive reliance on the instruction method is clearly not justified.”* In other words, because the differences between the outcomes in bilingual programs were not “statistically significant,” bilingual instruction **should not be mandated**.
- Critiques: Used documented success of bilingual programs to argue against bilingual education. [Canadian “English Immersion” programs, really DI]
- As with other studies of this era, they only looked at TBE, the weakest form of bilingual education (not a late-exit program). This may be due to the fact that late exit programs were not funded or common at this time.

Ann Willig (1985)

- *Ann Willig was a psychologist by training and an independent researcher who used a new technique (common and respected today) called meta-analysis.*
- *Willig asked a fundamentally different question. Instead of should bilingual education be mandated, Willig asked: Does bilingual education work?*
- *She selected 23 of Baker and de Kanter's 28 studies, making several significant improvements (Secada, 1987). First, she eliminated five studies conducted outside of the U.S. because of the significant differences in the students, the programs, and the context, as well as one study in which instruction took place outside the classroom (Hakuta & August, 1997).*
- *Second, as required in meta-analysis and in contrast with previous reviews, she quantitatively measured the program effects. [No “vote counting”]*
- *Her overall conclusion: “positive effects for bilingual programs . . . for all major academic areas” (p. 297).*
- *Critiques: Small for a meta-analysis (only 23 studies)*

Rossell and Baker (1986-1988)

- Keith Baker & Christine Rossell conducted a follow up to the Baker – de Kanter study (Keith Baker was involved with both). They received federal funding to look at 300 studies, some of them small, and determined that 72 of them were “methodologically acceptable.” They looked at the math and reading scores on standardized tests for students enrolled in Transition Bilingual Programs.
- Their findings: “The research evidence does not support transitional bilingual education as a superior form of instruction for limited English proficient children.” Despite this conclusion, it states that a small number of studies do support the view that TBE is beneficial. It suggests that the most promising program is an English-based program where the teacher is fluent in the students’ L1 (which could be more in line with Sheltered Instruction than English Only).

Greene (1988)

- Jay Greene reanalyzed the design and conclusions of Rossell & Baker in a meta-analysis.
- *In addition to using standardized tests, Greene also used questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. He controlled for parents' education level and socioeconomic status, unlike Rossell and Baker, focused on studies from the U.S., and eliminated studies that were shorter than one year. This left Greene with only 11 studies (of 72) to use in his meta-analysis.*
- Greene noted several methodological flaws:
 - Inconsistent criteria, phantom studies, Canadian context (different language status between French and English), no controls or effect sizes
- *Conclusions: the use of native language instruction helps achievement in English; use of the home language in school tends to relate to higher achievement than English-only instruction.⁶*

Ramírez Report (1991)

- *J. David Ramirez was the author and primary researcher on a congressionally mandated study. The United States Department of Education and the Federal Government funded \$4.1 million dollars for the study, the largest federally funded study to date. The study used data from 1984 through 1988. Since it reports data from four years, it is considered a longitudinal study, which is important since it looks at language learning and academic growth over a longer period of time.*
- One unique feature is that Ramírez himself defined the programs by looking at their components (what teachers were actually doing) instead of relying on program labels (how teachers defined their program label). So, the programs were defined consistently: English Immersion, Early-Exit, and Late-Exit
- *The study was actually supposed to be eight years long with a larger budget, but the funding was pulled after the first report was published in 1991.*

Ramirez's Findings

- *LEP children's achievement in English reading, language, and mathematics rose steadily in “late-exit” developmental bilingual programs (through 6th grade) and promised to overtake the scores of English-proficient children. By contrast, in “early-exit” transition bilingual programs and English-only “immersion” programs, growth curves leveled off and remained far below national norms. Ramírez was pro-DBE but not TBE.*
- Conclusion: providing substantial instruction in the child's primary language does not impede the learning of the English language or reading skills, and in fact can improve their academic achievement, confirming Cummins' theory that academic language takes 5-7 years to learn. *Ramírez also found there was better parent involvement in late-exit programs.*

Fairfax 1988 (Collier & Thomas)

- This study is also known as the “Age On Arrival” study because it found that the age in which immigrant children were enrolled in schools did matter. Virginia Collier and Wayne Thomas, Professors at George Mason University, received federal funding from the to look at 2,014 “advantaged” immigrant children (they came from middle to upper-middle class homes.) They were diverse in ethnic makeup from all parts of the world, and all of them were learning English as a second or additional language in the Virginia district.
- The students were grouped into three age ranges: 5-7, 8-11, 12-15. The students were tested in 4th, 6th, 8th, 11th grades, and the researchers analyzed achievement test scores from the district’s massive database. The researchers were looking for those who met the 50th percentile (which is considered “grade level” [Note: An average exit or redesignation criterion is the 36th percentile].
- This was a six-year, longitudinal study, so academic and language growth can be seen over that length of time.

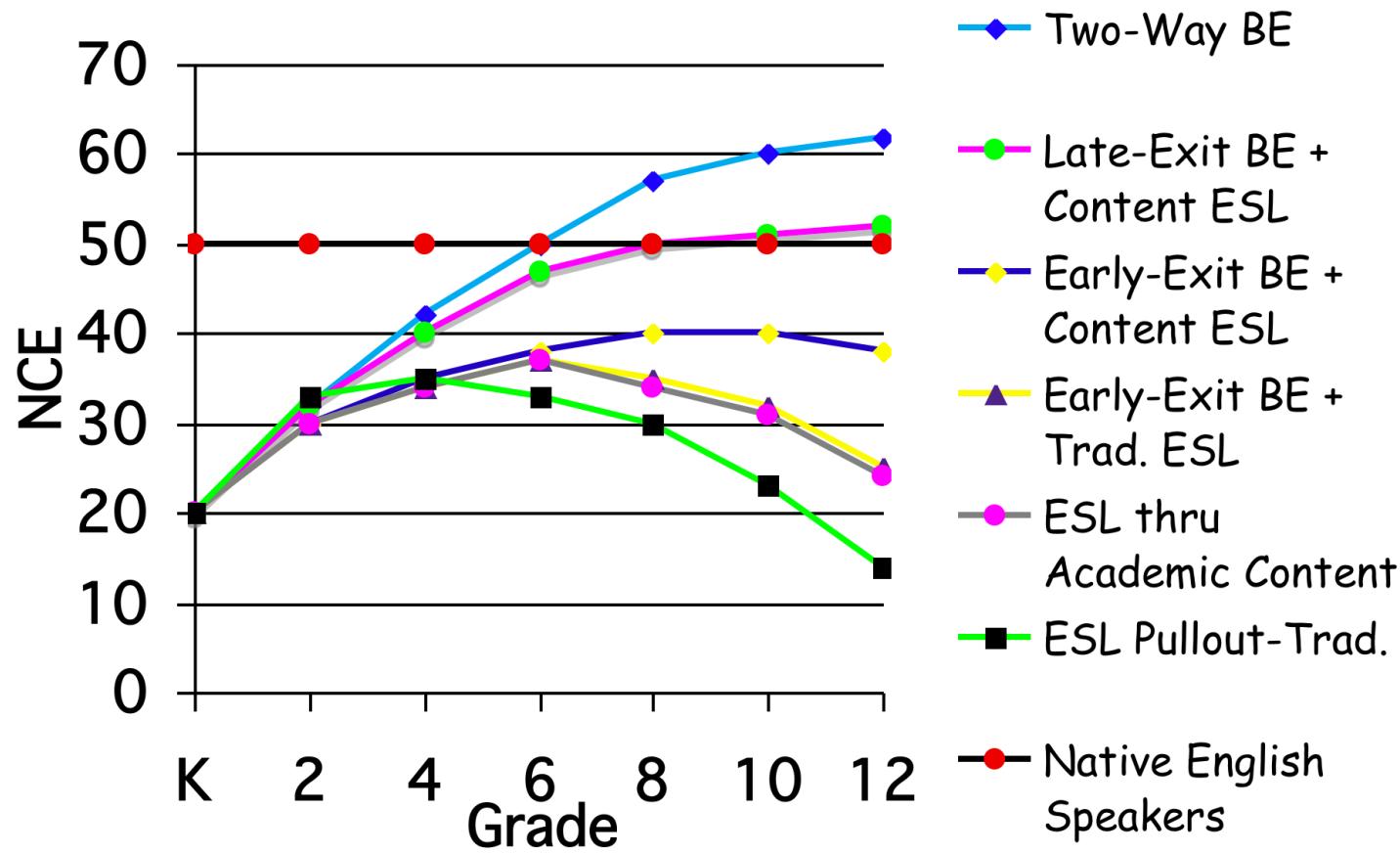
Age on Arrival: Findings

- *Children who started in an ESL-only program at ages 8-11 (i.e., after having learned to read in their home countries) soon outperformed children who had enrolled in the same program at ages 5-7. Even though these students were not enrolled in a bilingual program in the United States, they could draw from their formal education in their native language (from their home countries): de facto bilingual education.” This prior learning in their L1 made them more efficient at learning content. So...*
 - *younger ELLs are not more efficient language learners*
 - *supports Jim Cummins’ notion of transfer, that concepts and prior learning gained in a student’s L1 does not need to be re-learned in the L2. The student simply needs to learn the English in order to express that knowledge.*
 - *supports Ramírez’s findings supporting DBE. In fact, they found that it takes 4-9 years for ELLs and FEPs to catch up in content*

Thomas – Collier Study (2002)

- Funding from CREDE
- Large sample size: 210,054
- One of the most respected features of this study is the sampling procedure, or the way students were grouped into appropriate groups for SES, length of time in school, and educational background.
- They grouped students into longitudinal cohorts in the following programs: 2-way immersion, late exit (DBE), early exit (TBE), and ESL pullout. For example, all ELLs of similar socioeconomic and educational background who attended school in a district from kindergarten through Grade 4 constituted one longitudinal cohort, all students who attended Grades K to 5 were in another, up through a Grades K-12 cohort.
- In the final stages of the study, researchers compared achievement results of all cohort groups based on program of instruction. This allowed them to draw conclusions about the academic success students had in the varying programs.

English Learners Long Term K-12 Achievement on Standardized Tests in English Reading Compared Across Seven Program Models



Why can't we PROVE whether Bilingual Education or English Immersion is better?

- Three major studies (AIR; Baker and de Kanter; Rossell and Baker) of existing evaluations or individual studies concluded that bilingual education did not have a statistically significant impact and therefore should not be mandated as the only means of instruction for ELLs.
- Recent U.S. studies or analyses that find an advantage for the use of two languages: Rivera 2002; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass 2005; Slavin & Cheung, 2005
 - “strong convergent evidence that the educational success of ELLs is positively related to sustained instruction through the student L1” (Genesse, 2005)

Program Evaluations

- Given the variety of bilingual education programs, there is no easy answer to the question, “Does Bilingual Education work?” (Rivera, 2002)
- The question itself is unreasonable:
 - Level of implementation (how much L1? Teacher training? Integration with English speakers?)
 - Wide variety in goals of programs (ELD)
 - Wide variety in school, community and state climate
 - Big studies lump together good and bad programs
- None of this research has asked the question, “Does monolingual education work?” It would be like asking, “Does math education work?” Well . . . It depends on a lot of factors!

- *Few studies focused on the most successful, late-exit or developmental programs, because they were rare/underfunded (BEA)*
- *Few looked at the use of language:*

“How first and second languages are employed is critical to the success of an educational treatment. **The questions involve quality, not quantity, of instruction.** Does the program use the mother tongue merely to provide translations, or does it seek to develop native-language literacy and other academic skills that will transfer to English? **Is ESL [or language instruction] focused heavily on memorization and skill-building exercises, or does it stress communication in meaningful contexts?** Does sheltered [content] instruction simply “water down” academic content, or do teachers consciously use what students already know to make lessons comprehensible and stimulate the growth of academic English?” (Crawford, 2004, p. 222)

The political saga of the NLP study . . .

- According to *USA Today*, “Bilingual report gets shelved after 3 years” (10/27/05)
- The DOE in 2002 appointed the **National Literacy Panel**, a non-partisan research group, to analyze *studies on how ELLs develop literacy*
 - Diane August (Principal Investigator);
 - Timothy Shanahan (Chair), Fred Genesse (and 13 expert members); Catherine Snow (a Senior Advisor)
 - Panel produced a 600-page report
- The Department of Education spent over \$1.8 million, but decided not to release the report

Findings: National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth

- Individual differences exist in literacy dev't
 - Phonological awareness and working memory
- Key components of reading work for ELLs
 - Need to teach unknown phonemes
- Oral proficiency in English is critical
 - Sheltered literacy plus ELD/ESL
- Oral proficiency and literacy in the L1 can be used to facilitate literacy development in L2
 - Some literacy skills transfer, such as reading strategies and higher order vocabulary skills

The Controversial Piece

- “Studies that compare bilingual instruction with English-only instruction demonstrate that **language-minority students instructed in their native language as well as English perform better**, on average, on measures of English reading proficiency than language-minority students instructed only in English . . . at both the elementary and secondary levels.”
- Furthermore, “there is no basis in the research findings to suggest that [bilingual programs] are in any way disadvantageous to English academic outcomes” (August & Shanahan, 2006, p. 639).

In summary . . .

The politicization has clouded the issue, but it is beneficial for students to use their native languages in the classroom. A review of the research finds that the use of L1 is effective in teaching both English and content-area knowledge. Early-exit and subtractive models may be slightly better at second language acquisition (the speed of oral English) than English-only programs, but do not improve cognitive skills. Late-exit and additive models are best for long-term academic and cognitive gains

Whether you are a bilingual teacher or not, you can validate students' home language and culture. There will be psychosocial as well as academic benefits.¹⁹

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