Chapter 6
Supporting Emergent Bilinguals through Linguistically Appropriate Instruction

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ABSTRACT

Being able to use linguistically appropriate instruction is an important area of competence for teachers of young emergent bilinguals. This chapter synthesizes theory and research that is key background knowledge for making linguistically informed instructional decisions: information on proficiency levels, on second language acquisition (SLA), and on classroom language demands. From this foundation, the chapter proposes four functions of linguistically appropriate instructional strategies: (1) getting emergent bilinguals involved in classroom routines and providing ample opportunities for interaction; (2) drawing on emergent bilinguals' existing language and literacy competencies; (3) promoting grade-level vocabulary learning; and (4) scaffolding listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Finally, this chapter offers some specific suggestions of activities or instructional strategies that fulfill each of these functions along with additional resources that may be helpful.

INTRODUCTION

As of 2011, approximately 13% of elementary and secondary students enrolled in US schools were classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) (US Department of Education, 2011), while

estimates of children learning English as an additional language enrolled in pre-school settings range from 11.4% for district-funded preschools to 30% for Head Start and Early Head Start programs (NCELA, 2011). Furthermore, data suggest that these figures are growing (NCELA, 2011) and as such, it is increasingly likely that most classroom teachers will work with children learning English as an additional language. With their crucial role to

play in affording this group high-quality learning experiences that will prepare them for higher education and careers, it is imperative that classroom teachers be prepared for the task.

In order to be effective in supporting growth in both a new language and in grade-level content, classroom teachers need to be well-versed in a variety of topics, including language as a written and spoken system, the lexicon, attitudes toward language varieties, tasks associated with academic English, challenges of learning English as an additional language for both speaking and writing, and assessing written English (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2000), to name a few. Teachers also need to be familiar with approaches to culturally-responsive (Au, 2007; Gay, 2010) and linguistically appropriate instruction, the latter of which involves using knowledge about students' language proficiency, processes of second language acquisition (SLA), and classroom language demands as decision-making resources in planning to support children developing proficiency in English as an additional language. This purpose of this chapter is to provide background on stages and processes in SLA, explain the language demands of the early elementary classroom and suggest linguistically appropriate instructional strategies. Though the ideas offered here may be relevant to teachers of younger or older students, this chapter is written primarily with students in grades kindergarten to three in mind. The intended audience is educators of students in these grades, administrators, and faculty in teacher education.

BACKGROUND

This chapter is focused on the linguistic aspect of teaching young immigrant children effectively in schools in the United States. While not all immigrant children speak a language other than English and some children in the schools who speak a language other than English were born in the US, the focus of this chapter is immigrant children and children of immigrants who are in the process of developing English in addition to the language(s) of their homes. This is a group variably referred to as *Limited English Proficient* (LEP), *English language learners* (ELLs), and *emergent bilinguals*, to name a few (see Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012 for a comprehensive list). In this chapter, I refer to them as emergent bilinguals, following the example of other researchers and educators (e.g., Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012; García, 2009; García & Kleifgen, 2010) who wish to emphasize what these children already can do rather than what they are still learning to do, to credit them with the enormous resource of proficiency in a language other than English and emphasize the range of their linguistic capabilities, and to acknowledge them holistically as individuals with a range of cultural and linguistic environments, experiences, and needs rather than more narrowly as students or learners (Firth & Wagner, 2007).

The idea of linguistically appropriate instruction has a close cousin in the notion of culturally responsive instruction, which has the three-part goal of promoting school success for culturally and linguistically diverse students, building bridges between home and school, and helping students maintain their heritage language(s) and culture(s) (Au, 2007). In other words, "culturally responsive instruction allows students to attain academic success through classroom activities structured in ways that students find comfortable and understandable and that do not violate cultural values brought from home" (Au, 2007, p. 13). Culturally responsive educators take a hybrid approach to instruction by using practices that draw on both minority and majority worldviews.

In a related discussion of linguistically appropriate practice, Chumak-Horbatsch (2012) identifies three different types of practices in working with young immigrant children: assimilative, supportive, and inclusive. From this perspective, assimilative practices promote monolingualism and monoliteracy and focus on immersing the child in the mainstream language and community;

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