

Chapter 3

The Effect of New Environments on Children's Language Ability: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Change is the only constant. This is the mantra for immigrant children and those who serve them. Schools and communities are employing various approaches to addressing the needs of these children and their families. In many schools, there are several levels of English proficiency. Students who are in the initial level have the lowest level of English proficiency, while those at the terminal level have the highest level. State reading standards are unique for each of these levels. ELL classrooms are often challenging places to teach and learn because students in them come from an assortment of different backgrounds and have many different proficiency levels. Because of this, many learners need individualized or differentiated instruction. This chapter explores how an early intervention language specialist addresses the needs of immigrant learners at a Title I kindergarten class as recorded in an instructional journal.

INTRODUCTION

No lone definition of what comprises an immigrant student is suitable, and definitions vary from country to country (Smeeding, Wing, & Robson, 2010). In this context, we define an immigrant

student as any child who registers in a public school, is under the age of 18, and is foreign born or has at least one foreign-born parent. Innate in this definition is the view that the children and their families make the new country their lasting home. Who Are English Language Learners? *English language learner* (ELL) is a label used to pinpoint diverse populations of students who

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share a small number of characteristics. As used here, English language learner refers to a person who has a first (home, primary, or native) language other than English and is in the process of acquiring English. Other terms used to refer to English language learners include: language minority students, English as a second language (ESL), culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD), and limited English proficient students (LEP). The U.S. Department of Education defines the term *limited English proficient child* as an individual who is aged 3 through 21, and who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school.

It is also a student who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English. This student could be one who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas. The limited English proficient child is one who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency or is migratory and whose native language is a language other than English. They typically who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant and whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual the ability to meet the state's proficient level of achievement on state certain assessments. This would also include the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English or the opportunity to participate fully in society.

Based on present federal law, a Limited English Proficiency student is recognized as a person: "... ages 3 to 21, enrolled in elementary or secondary education, often born outside the United States or speaking a language other than English in their homes, and not having sufficient mastery of English to meet state standards and excel in an English-language classroom." The portion of LEP school-age learners has also risen swiftly over the

past twenty years. Between 1993 and 2003, the LEP student populace escalated 84 percent as the general student population enlarged by 12 percent. From 1970 and 2000, the quantity of learners K-12 who speak Spanish at home increased from 3.5 to 7 million, while the number of learners speaking Asian languages tripled from 0.5 to 1.5 million. The number of learners of immigrants expanded most hurriedly between 1990 and 2000 in Nevada (206 percent), after that North Carolina (153 percent), then Georgia (148 percent), and finally Nebraska (125 percent). These turns have been deeply felt by the latest gateway cities as Las Vegas, Nevada; Charlotte, North Carolina; Atlanta, Georgia; and Omaha, Nebraska.

The English Language Learner student population in the U.S. has developed considerably in current years, and is projected to maintain that growth in approaching decades. This means that the demand on teachers, administrators and policymakers to generate and support high quality, successful preschool programs for ELLs will also continue to expand in neighborhoods around the nation (Garcia and Gonzales, 2006). These demographic changes do not only impinge on preschools, however. The learners who are now in preschool will soon move all the way through the nation's school system, and their ability to thrive in elementary, middle, and high school possibly will depend on how efficient their preschool programs were. When these children become adults, they will find themselves playing an vital role in and contributing to the nation's society in a political, social, cultural, and economical manner — and education will be one of the fundamentals essential for those previous preschoolers to realize their complete capability.

Even for learners who speak English minimal opportunities to participate in early childhood education makes it more difficult for them to make up losses in later years because they are one-step behind as their contemporaries continue to add on to the cognitive and language knowledge they acquired in preschool. For learners who do not speak

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