

**Education and Achievement
A Focus on Latino “Immigrant” Children**

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About the Roundtable on Young Children in Immigrant Families

The goal of Young Children in Immigrant Families and the Path to Educational Success, a roundtable funded by the Foundation for Child Development and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, was to connect state and federal policy debates about early childhood education and education reform with emerging research about young children in immigrant families and what they and their families need to support their success at school. Specialists in education and early education—including researchers, key federal and state policy experts, and policymakers—came together for a day-long session with four closely related goals: to inform education and early education policymakers of the growing body of research about young children of immigrants; to educate researchers about policymakers' needs; to build relationships between the two groups; and to generate specific, useful insights about the intersection of policy and research in this field.

This report is one of several papers and policy briefs developed for the roundtable to provide the viewpoints of individual experts in order to stimulate group discussion, offer syntheses of the research on early education/pre-kindergarten and early elementary education as viewed by individual researchers and policymakers, and discuss the policy opportunities and challenges related to immigrant and ELL children age 3 to 8. The views of the papers' authors catalyzed a rich discussion among roundtable participants. A synthesis report that brings together key themes from the whole session is forthcoming.

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Education and Achievement: A Focus on Latino “Immigrant” Children

An estimated 5 million English language learners (ELLs) are in public schools in the United States, most living in immigrant families (Mahoney et al. 2010). This high number of ELLs has brought a change in the demographics of public schools in the nation and a need to account for the educational experiences of these students, both linguistically and academically. Unfortunately, a comprehensive English language development (ELD) program that would facilitate English language acquisition for ELL students living in immigrant circumstances has never been comprehensively articulated and evaluated, particularly in those educational settings that have adopted highly restrictive policies that focus on English language development as opposed to the development of English in concert with overall academic achievement (Gándara and Hopkins 2010). Present federal and state policies have had negligible effects in overcoming the ELL achievement gap, as shown by several recent studies (Losen 2010; Rumberger and Tran 2010).

Acquiring Another Language

Research on the bilingual development of young children over the past three decades suggests that linguistic structures (i.e., phonology, morphology, and syntax) between languages influence one another and that bilingualism is heavily influenced by the environments in which children develop. For these reasons, bilingualism cannot be viewed simply as “the arithmetic sum of two languages” (García 2005, 23).

Young bilinguals in the United States often do not develop their native language beyond early conversational skills learned in the home. Many Hispanic immigrant children, for example, lose native language proficiency at the expense of developing English skills. Several studies have been conducted with young Hispanics and their families to explore the various factors that influence Spanish maintenance even as English skills are being developed (Hammer, Miccio, and Wagstaff 2003; Lee and Samura 2005; López 2005; Pérez-Bazán 2005). They find that native language maintenance is a result of interacting personal and family factors. While Hispanic immigrant children inevitably gain proficiency in English through interaction with the larger community, proficiency in Spanish is associated with the quality and quantity of Spanish use in the home (Pérez-Bazán 2005). Spanish maintenance is also related to parent education levels, where higher levels are associated with greater bilingual and Spanish proficiency (López 2005), opportunities for native language use (Lee and Samura 2005), and attitudinal and motivational features (López 2005).

For language-minority students to succeed in academic settings and perform well in comparison to their peers, they need strong English skills. For a large number of ELLs, this means acquiring them in a second language. Krashen (1985) indicates that in order for this to happen, the learner needs to be exposed to “comprehensible input,” which is input that is “slightly ahead of a learner’s current state of grammatical knowledge” (Gass and Selinker 2001, 200). In other words, input needs to be both meaningful and understandable, at the same time as it provides some grammatical knowledge that is new to the learner. “The teacher’s main role, then, is to ensure that students receive comprehensible input” (Gass and Selinker 2001, 201).

Another important aspect of second-language development is the duration required to attain proficiency: how long does it take second-language learners to attain English proficiency? Research

shows that the answer to this question depends on whether it is posed in reference to oral or academic English proficiency (Collier 1989, 1995; Cummins 1981; Mitchell, Destino, and Karam 1997). Oral proficiency generally precedes academic proficiency and refers to the development of conversational vocabulary, grammar, and listening comprehension. Academic proficiency refers to various skills, including word reading, spelling, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and writing.

Reporting on data from 5,585 ELLs from four different school districts (two from the San Francisco Bay Area and two from Canada), Hakuta, Goto Butler, and Witt (2000) analyzed various forms of English proficiency as a function of length of exposure to English. This study plotted English proficiency as a function of length of residence, which was calculated by subtracting age of immigration from present age. Hakuta and colleagues found that oral proficiency took three to five years to develop, and academic English proficiency required four to seven years. Moreover, socioeconomic factors tended to slow the rate of acquisition. Studies assessing the duration of English acquisition have been mostly conducted with school-age children.

Rather than stipulating time limits for ELLs to attain English skills, it has been suggested that education policy and practices should continue to identify and leverage children's abilities and provide empirically sound instructional and curricular practices to help children academically succeed, understanding that the development of satisfactory English skills requires a number of years. Historically, school districts and states have approached the language development and education of ELLs in very different ways. Unfortunately, these approaches are typically influenced not by rigorous research, but by politics and ideology (García and Jensen 2009).

Recent theoretical contributions to this arena suggest linguistic, cognitive, and the social character of a child's development are inherently interrelated (García 2005; García and Frede 2010). As children develop their ability to use language, they absorb more understanding of social situations and improve their thinking skills. This in turn allows them to learn how to control their own actions and thoughts. Through a culturally bound and socially mediated process of language development, children construct mental frameworks (or schema) for perceiving the world around them. If language is a tool of thought, it follows that as children develop more complex-thinking skills, the mental representations through which language and culture embody the child's world play a significant role. This perspective is especially important for young children negotiating two or more languages (Hammer, Miccio, and Rodriguez 2004).

Unfortunately, educational policy and practice discussions regarding the education of bilingual students are often overly simplistic and focus solely on linguistic deficiencies (i.e., limited English skills) (García 2005; Jensen 2008; Rolstad, Mahoney, and Glass 2005; Stritikus 2001; Tharp and Gallimore 1989). They tend to neglect the complex interweaving of students' cultural, linguistic, and cognitive development. In their study of the possible effects of language on cognitive development, Hakuta, Ferdman, and Diaz (1987) recognize the importance of acknowledging these three important strands in children's development and addressing them in schools. They conclude that most of the variance in cognitive growth directly relates to how society affects and manipulates cognitive capacities. Therefore, cultural and contextual sensitivity theories that examine the social and cultural aspects of cognitive development would best serve immigrant student populations (García 2005; García and Frede 2010).

Schooling

Debates regarding program types that best develop the academic skills of immigrant children whose native language is not English continue to cause tumult among practitioners, academics, and policymakers. The fundamental issue underlying this argument has been whether bilingual or English-only approaches more effectively boost and sustain the academic achievement of immigrant ELLs. Early research surrounding this issue was inconclusive. More recent research (including syntheses, meta-analyses, and other reviews) suggests academic benefits of bilingual over English-only programs—on average, an increase of 0.2 to 0.3 standard deviations in test performance (e.g., Greene 1998; Rolstad et al. 2005; Slavin and Cheung 2005). One problem with broad comparisons of program types is that there is not one “bilingual” program or approach (García 2005; García et al. 2005), but several. As mentioned above, they differ in required teacher qualifications, curriculum, the student population they are designed to serve, instructional approaches, and variations of Spanish/English use, among other aspects.

Relatively new in the United States, dual-language (DL) programs—also known as two-way immersion (TWI)—offer a unique approach to bilingual education. Designed to teach English to language-minority students and a foreign language (such as Spanish) to native English speakers through dual-language content and instruction in a shared classroom (i.e., English-plus-Spanish [EPS] approaches), available research suggests positive effects for ELLs and for language-majority populations (García and Jensen 2006). It is important to note that the implementation of these programs varies in the amount of time they devote to each language (e.g., 50–50 vs. 90–10 models), the grade levels they intend to serve, language and curriculum division, and the populations they intend to serve (Center for Applied Linguistics [CAL] 2005). On the other hand, DL programs are unified by common notions of learning (based heavily on Vygotskian [or sociocultural] notions of social interaction and naturalistic learning), second-language acquisition, the importance of teaching language through content, and the goal of producing bilingual students (Genesee 2010).

Comparisons between programs for ELLs and native English speakers show that DL participants score as well or better on standardized achievement tests in English and Spanish than same-age peers educated in other programs (Howard, Sugarman, and Christian 2003). Indeed, studies document native Spanish speakers participating in DL programs to outperform other Spanish speakers enrolled in other programs in English reading and mathematics as well as Spanish pre-reading, reading, writing, and mathematics (Barnett et al. 2006; Cobb, Vega, and Kronauge 2005). Therefore, the schooling alternative that recognizes the child and family heritage language and is responsive to it, like the DL program, are highly beneficial to these students when local policy allows such programs (Frede and García 2010). Unfortunately, several states and many districts have adopted highly restrictive language education policies and practices (Gándara and Hopkins 2010). This paper turns now to schooling efforts that address this type of policy circumstance but are relevant to any high-quality and effective educational intervention for young ELLs.

ITELL

The Institute for Teaching English Language Learners (ITELL) represents a collaboration led by Arizona State University in partnership with the Navaho Nation (located in rural Northern Arizona), along with Cartwright, Murphy, Phoenix, Balsz, Roosevelt and Wilson elementary school districts. This effort is a result of Arizona’s ELL student education policy, which is highly restrictive and

promotes a one-size-fits all mentality with regard to achieving educational success for these students; in particular, the policy installs a mandatory four-hour block of instruction focused on teaching the mechanics of the English language and prohibits any instruction in the student's heritage language. The present intervention recognizes that the law exists and must be followed, but it constructs a more comprehensive intervention to support teachers' need to increase the academic achievement of ELLs. It draws heavily on critical elements of theory, research, and practice to achieve the following four goals. These elements should be a part of any research-based intervention for young ELL children:

1. Provide students with a classroom environment that optimizes both language development and the acquisition of content-specific knowledge.
2. Provide teachers with the instructional support needed to maximize student potential.
3. During the calendar year, increase the opportunity ELLs have to interact with their teachers and participate in learning activities.
4. Improve and expand how parents and families contribute to the academic growth of their children.

Specific objectives and measurable outcomes corresponding to the goal were established to guide program activities and measure progress.

In Support of Goal 1

Objective: While adhering to the policies mandated by the state of Arizona, restructure the current mandatory English-only instruction that embeds teaching the mechanics of the English language into academic content.

Rationale: To be effective, teachers must provide a classroom environment with ample opportunity for students to practice academic language thoughtfully and meaningfully (Espinosa 2010). Although current Arizona law permits the integration of language and content (de Jong, Arias, and Sanchez 2010), ongoing monitoring of the schools by the Arizona Department of Education focuses only on how well teachers are presenting the mechanics—an administrative focus that leads many districts to ignore important content instruction needed for students to make academic progress in English. The ITELL intervention will restructure instruction to support a curriculum that adheres to the volume of second-language learning research suggesting that optimal learning occurs when students are taught language mechanics within rigorous, academically focused instruction (see August and Shanahan 2006; August, Goldenberg, and Rueda 2010; García 2005; and Valdés 2009).

In Support of Goal 2

Objective: Provide professional development combining state-of-the-art technology with progressive teaching methods that reflect best practices in the area of English language development.

Rationale: A vast body of research has documented a direct link between ELL student achievement and the expertise and experience of their classroom teacher (Frede and García 2010; García 2005). When examining Latino ELL students, as much as 40 percent of the total variance in student achievement can be attributed to teacher characteristics. Do teachers have at least three years of experience teaching ELLs? Do they use instructional strategies that are specifically responsive to students acquiring English in academic contexts? Do they receive the continuous

professional development and classroom-related support they need to determine the effect their instruction has on student outcomes? Are they given the support they need to use regular authentic assessments of student achievement to assess this impact? The proposed intervention will use the knowledge base regarding the relationship between teacher factors and student success to enhance each teacher's capacity to increase academic achievement in ELLs.

In Support of Goal 3

Objective: Increase opportunities for children at the participating sites to participate in afterschool instruction summer school programs.

Rationale: Recently, the National Task Force on Early Education for Hispanics (2007) has identified that expanding a student's opportunity to learn is a prerequisite for increasing academic achievement in ELL students, particularly those students enrolled in the early grades (i.e., grades 1–4). More specifically, after an extensive review of the literature, the Task Force found that allowing ELL students to engage in academic content with their teachers after school and during the summer months can raise achievement by approximately 20 percent over three years. Particularly effective in this regard are after school efforts that “frontload” the next day's lessons, as well as summer programs that use a student's heritage language to prepare them for the next grade level.

In Support of Goal 4

Objective: Implement PIQUE, AVANCE, Abriendo Puertas, and other programs whose effectiveness in promoting parental engagement is well documented.

Rationale: Recently published research has begun to make clear that parental engagement of ELL students is positively associated with academic performance (Rodriguez-Brown 2010). Again, this relationship seems to be strongest in the early grades (García and Miller 2008). Parental engagement programs implemented by ITELL will assist parents in contributing to the academic growth of their students through linguistically and culturally responsive strategies (García, Scribner, and Cuéllar 2009). Each program will have at least one independent evaluation certifying that the program increased parental engagement.

As shown, the ITELL program will draw from empirical research to generate a comprehensive prototype of English language instruction that will be of great educational significance to ELLs in Arizona and other areas that impose restrictive policies on the teaching of English learners. Guided by the goals and objectives listed above, ITELL will employ three main strategies: build capacity at the participating school sites; create and implement summer academies; and (3) provide extended learning opportunities for teachers, parents, and students.

Capacity Building

As a means of building capacity, the audience of emphasis will be coaches, teachers, and principals. Coaches will engage in comprehensive on-the-job mentoring, face-to-face training, collaborative peer discussions, book studies, action research, and online discussions of coaching protocols and practices. Principals will receive professional development on effective measures to assess instructional practices in the ELD classroom. Teachers will receive professional development focused on the coach's role and their own role in student achievement. District personnel, principals, coaches, and teachers will engage in facilitated discussions regarding the restructuring of the mandated four-hour block. The purpose of these discussions is to work with ITELL colleagues

in integrating research-based practices for ELD instruction, while adhering to the time and language instruction specifications required by the law.

Summer Academies

Teachers and coaches will participate in summer academies addressing five critical areas of language instruction: culture and cultural diversity, language and language acquisition, literacy development, academic/content area development, and assessment and evaluation. Teachers will work side by side with their coaches in a classroom setting that employs the enhanced four-hour block design to plan and apply the information they have learned, receive feedback from their colleagues, observe others in practice, offer feedback, and engage in discussions on effective practice.

Extended Learning Opportunities for Teachers, Parents, and Students

ITELL will recognize and promote parents, teachers, and students as active learners and change agents. Teachers will receive ongoing, job-embedded professional development targeting instructional practices or skill areas identified by them, their coaches, and ITELL personnel as producing academic achievement. It will involve approximately 60 hours of interactions, including face-to-face trainings, coaching, online discussions, visits to other classrooms, and book studies. Coaches will work with teachers to help develop or enhance skills and put them into practice. Teachers, coaches, and principals will implement instruction according to the enhanced four-hour block adopted by the partnership. ITELL colleagues will assist schools with designing extended learning opportunities, such as after school programs, Saturday school, and summer school sessions that embed research-based practices to foster the collaborative engagement of parents and students in the learning process, including the use of the heritage language in these expanded opportunities to learn. This is significant since the present Arizona policy prohibits the use of the student's heritage language in any regular education services provide during the normal school day.

Conclusion

Of course, a teaching and learning community that is responsive to the dynamics of social, cultural, and linguistic diversity within the broader concerns for high academic achievement both requires and emerges from a particular schooling environment, whether DL or ITELL or something that encompasses the same critical elements. While considerable work has been devoted to restructure schools and change the fundamental relationships among school personnel, students, families, and community members, seldom have these efforts included attention to the unique influences of the linguistic and sociocultural dimensions of these same relationships and structures.

A knowledge base put forward in this overview recognizes that academic learning has its roots in both out-of-school and in-school processes. Diversity is perceived and acted on as a resource for teaching and learning instead of a problem. A focus on what students bring to the schooling process generates a more asset/resource oriented approach. This redirection or "transformation" considers a search for and documentation of particular implementations of principles of teacher development which serve a diverse set of educational environments. An understanding of how individuals with diverse sets of experiences, packaged individually into cultures, "make meaning," communicate that meaning, and extend that meaning, particularly in social contexts we call schools, makes a huge difference for immigrant children and their families. Such a mission requires in-depth treatment of the processes associated with producing diversity,

issues of socialization in and out of schools, coupled with a clear examination of how such understanding is actually transformed into pedagogy and curriculum which results in high academic performance and overall social well-being for all students.

It has become quite apparent that the United States has not substantially progressed in its efforts to fully educate sons and daughters of recent immigrant families. In fact, some states have acted politically to pass highly restrictive educational policies related to these students, even, in the face of evidence that would counter those policies or at the least indicate that there is not “one-size-fits-all.” It is not always the case that robust and rigorous research can change policies, but it remains possible that such research regarding immigrant students could be highly useful for policy and education practice modifications. The expanded utilization of DLL programs is a hopeful sign of that possibility—these programs are not a “silver bullet” for ELLs, but they offer an alternative with solid empirical evidence for success in selected populations and specific conditions.

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