

SECTION 5

Critical Issues for School Age Migrant English Language Learners

The implications of English language development in an academic context are many. Learning a second language can be very difficult and time consuming under any circumstance. But school-age LEP/ELLs must not only quickly become adept at social interactions for simple survival, they are also expected to be able to understand, read, write and explain concepts at an academic level appropriate to their age and cognitive development at an increasingly rapid rate. Cummins (1981, 1989) contrasts the differences between these registers of language use:

1. **Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) or social or conversational language** is used in face-to-face everyday communication; and
2. **Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) or academic language** is used in educational settings.

ESL Instruction and the Acquisition of English Language Arts

Over the past fifteen years ESL instruction has changed dramatically and continues to change. The learner is seen as being actively involved in making sense of the new language, both in oral/aural as well as in literacy development. As Hamayan (1993) states: "... Proficiency in a second language can best be developed when it is allowed to emerge holistically and naturally through the use of functional language for authentic purposes." This philosophical/pedagogical shift has required that ESL instruction incorporate a more meaningful and cognitively demanding curriculum.

BICS

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills

- Normally acquired by all native speakers of any language
- Usually by 5 or 6 years old, all children have "naturally" developed BICs in their first language
- Contexts are clear and generally concrete
- Not necessarily related to academic success
- May take up to two years to develop in a second language

CALP

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

- Language skills associated with literacy and cognitive development
- Associated with formal education and increasing cognitive demands. Literacy is fully developed by the majority of native English speakers educated in the U.S. by the age of 11.
- De-contextualized, increasingly requires abstract thinking
- Necessary for reasoning, problem solving, higher order thinking and academic success
- May take 5 –7 years in a second language — largely dependent on level of first language CALP

SECTION 5

Critical Issues for School Age Migrant English Language Learners

ESL Instruction and the Acquisition of Content-Area Knowledge

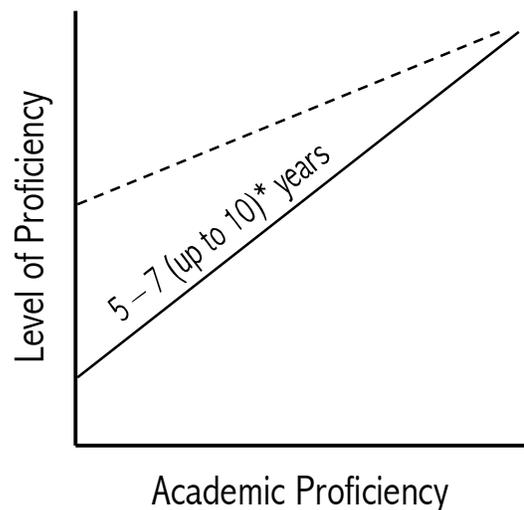
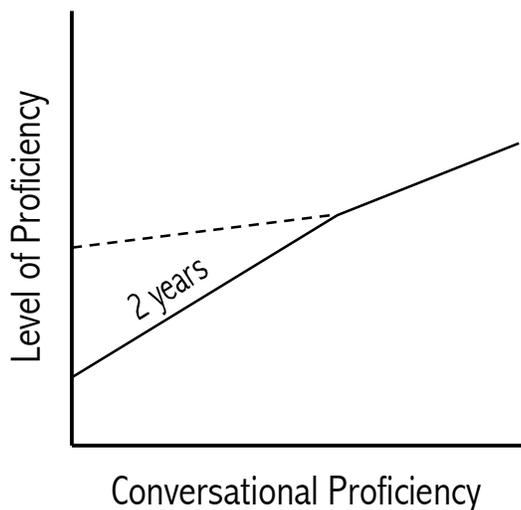
In support of cognitive academic language and content-area integration, O'Malley and Valdez-Pierce (1996) acknowledge:

"...what second language educators have overtly recognized is that the language of each content area has special concepts, vocabulary, and language functions that

require unique forms of instruction in which language and content are integrated. As part of this instruction, students should have opportunities to learn and apply concepts in the content areas through all four language skills.... Research has shown that appropriate content instruction facilitates language learning."

Length of Time Required to Achieve Age-Appropriate Levels of Social and Academic Language Proficiency

Native English Speakers -----
ESL/English Language Learners _____



Sources: Cummins, J. (1991). The role of primary language development in promoting education success for language minority students. *Schooling for language minority students*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, pp 3 – 9; Collier, V.P. (Fall, 1995). *Acquiring a second language for school*. (Directions in language and education, Vol. 1, No. 4). Washington DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.

*Typically 5 – 7 years if ESL learners have had 2 –3 years of first language schooling in their home countries; 7 – 10 years without first language schooling prior to attending U.S. schools.

SECTION 5

Critical Issues for School Age Migrant English Language Learners

The Role of the Native Language in Acquiring English

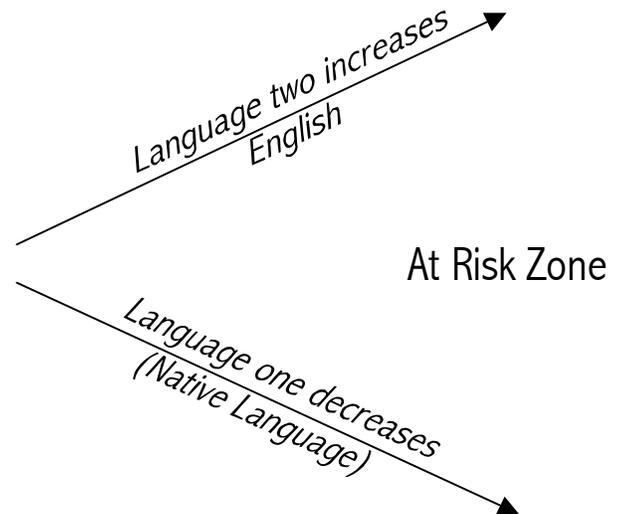
Study after study has also demonstrated that there is a strong and positive correlation between literacy in the native language and learning English. Cummins (1989) explains that:

“...although the surface aspects (e.g. pronunciation, fluency, etc.) of different languages are clearly separate, there is an underlying cognitive/academic proficiency which is common across languages. This common underlying proficiency (CUP) makes possible the transfer of cognitive/academic or literacy-related skills across languages. Transfer is much more likely to occur from minority to majority language because of the greater exposure to literacy in the majority language outside of school and the strong social pressure to learn it.

In March 1998 the National Research Council, in its study entitled “Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children” (Snow, Burn and Griffin, eds.), recommends that:

“LEP children should be taught to read in the first language while acquiring proficiency in spoken English and then subsequently taught to extend their skills to reading in English.”

The importance of valuing the skills and knowledge which students bring to the school regardless of the native language they speak cannot be underestimated. It is in utilizing the students’ background knowledge that a more effective and efficient transition to acquiring English can best be accomplished.



1. Pre-schoolers – cognitive and linguistic development interrupted. Children may present as developmentally delayed.
2. Five to eleven year olds – cognitive, linguistic and academic development interrupted. Children may present as delayed or learning disabled.

SECTION 5

Critical Issues for School Age Migrant English Language Learners

Bilingual Education

Bilingual education is the use of two languages as the media of instruction in part or all of an instructional program. Several types of bilingual education programs exist, including:

- **Transitional bilingual education programs**, in which the primary language of the student is used for instructional support until some prescribed level of proficiency in the second language is reached;
- **Maintenance bilingual education programs**, in which the primary language of the students is first used, with gradual transition toward the use of the primary language in some subjects and the second language in others;
- **Two-way programs (also known as dual language programs)**, in which two languages are employed, one of which is English, for the purpose of instruction, and which involve students who are native speakers of each of the languages. Both groups of students, English language learners and native English speakers, have the opportunity to become bilingual and biliterate. They learn curricula through their native language and the second language while continuing to develop skills and proficiency in both.

