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The identification of best practices for teaching students with limited English proficiency and degree of implementation in Salem and Cumberland counties

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THE IDENTIFICATION OF BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHING STUDENTS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AND DEGREE OF IMPLEMENTATION IN SALEM AND CUMBERLAND COUNTIES

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ABSTRACT

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Proficiency and degree of implementation in Salem and Cumberland Counties

2001/02

Dr. Stanley Urban
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The purpose of this study was to determine best practices for teaching students

with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and to investigate the extent to which these are

implemented in two Southern New Jersey Counties. An analysis of current educational

research revealed eleven characteristics of successful programming and instruction for

students with LEP.

A total of 113 questionnaires were sent to randomly selected schools within

Salem and Cumberland counties and 56 were completed and returned. Of the 56 schools

that returned questionnaires, 20 contained significant populations of students with LEP.

Ninety percent of the schools were in compliance with state mandates regarding student

identification and programming. The eleven elements of best practice were ranked by the

respondents according to frequency of use.

MINI-ABSTRACT

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The identification of best practices for teaching students with Limited English
Proficiency and degree of implementation in Salem and Cumberland Counties

2001/02

Dr. Stanley Urban
Graduate School of Rowan University

Through a review of literature, best practices in the education of children with

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) were identified. A survey of school districts with

significant LEP populations revealed the extent to which these practices are being

implemented.

Acknowledgements

To my husband and family for providing the strength and love behind every endeavor.

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Chapter One
Introduction

Public schools in the United States have always been challenged with the task of educating students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Over the past decade however, the number of students of Limited English Proficiency has increased by 68.6% (Tesol, 2001). The phrase "Limited-English Proficient" (LEP) refers to language minority students who are not yet fluent in English (Lucas, Henze, and Donato, 1990).

Historically, students of LEP were viewed using a deficit model and seen as culturally/linguistically deprived. The students were blamed for their failure and schools took little responsibility for helping them. The U.S. Supreme Court helped change that philosophy in 1973 with the Lau vs. Nichols decision. The court held that U.S. public schools had a responsibility to provide an education comprehensible to LEP students (Lucas, Henze, and Donato, 1990). The court stated: Basic English is at the very core of what public schools teach. Imposition of a requirement that, before a child can effectively participate in the education program, he must have already acquired those basic skills is to make a mockery of public education (Lau vs. Nichols, 1973). Shortly after the Lau vs. Nichols decision, the federal government began to encourage and fund research regarding LEP students and successful educational practices. Those research findings were the driving force of the Bilingual Education Act of 1994, P.L. 103-382.

The Bilingual Education Act requires school districts to provide programs for students of LEP with the purpose of ensuring they master the English language, meet high academic standards, and promote self-esteem (National Clearing House for

Bilingual Education, 2001). School districts must also have an effective means for identifying students with limited English proficiency as well as qualified personnel to carry out these tasks. Although the U.S. Congress and professional organizations such as TESOL have published standards and effective practices for the education of language minority students, the federal government has not mandated many specific guidelines for implementing P.L. 103-382. State administrative codes seem to reflect this same practice level of issuing very general guidelines.

Value of the Study

The variety of current programs and practices are representative of the diversity among language minority students' proficiency levels, academic needs and geographic distribution. Some LEP students are recent immigrants while others come from ethnolinguistic groups that have lived on this continent for generations. Some students have had very little prior education and others have benefited from formal schooling even more advanced than their current curriculum, especially in the area of mathematics (Tesol, 2001). The number of language minority students in each district also effects programming decisions. With so much variance, school districts are accountable for reviewing the appropriateness of their education programs for students of LEP.

Research Question

Two specific research questions will be answered in this study. These questions are indicated below and will be introduced again when the results are provided.

1. What are best practices for teaching students with Limited English Proficiency?

2. Are these practices being implemented in Salem and Cumberland County?

Definitions

The following is a list of terms and operational definitions that can be found in Title 6A chapter 15 of the New Jersey Administrative Code and will be used throughout this paper:

"Bilingual education program" refers to a full-time program in which all subjects are taught in the student's native language and English. United States geographical and cultural curriculum is provided in addition the their other required coursework and English as a second language instruction.

"Bilingual resource program" refers to a program alternative in which students receive daily instruction from a certified bilingual teacher in identified subjects and with specific assignments on an individual student basis.

"Bilingual tutorial program" refers to a program alternative in which students are provided on period of instruction from a certified bilingual teacher in a content area required for graduation and a second period of tutoring in other required content areas.

"Dual language bilingual education program" means a full-time program of instruction in elementary and secondary schools which provides structured English instruction and instruction in a second language in all content areas for LEP students and English speaking students enrolled in the program.

"English as a second language (ESL) program" refers to a daily developmental second language program of up to two periods of instruction based on student needs which teaches aural comprehension, speaking, reading and writing in English using second language teaching techniques, and incorporates the cultural aspects of the student's experiences in their ESL instruction.

"English language fluency" means the ability to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy; to use vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations on practical, social and school topics; to read material for information; and to complete forms and write essays and reports on familiar topics. Language fluency is not the same as language proficiency, which is full command of language skills.

"English language proficiency test" means a test that measures English language skills in the areas of aural comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing.

"English language services" refer to services designed to improve the English language skills of students of limited English proficiency. These services are provided in district boards of education with less than 10 students of LEP, are in addition to the regular school program and have as their goal the development of aural comprehension, speaking, reading and writing skills in English.

"Exit criteria" means the criteria that must be applied before a student may be exited from a bilingual education, ESL, or English language services education program.

"High-intensity ESL program" means a program alternative in which students receive two or more class periods a day of ESL instruction. One period is the standard ESL class, and the other period is a tutorial or ESL reading class.

"Instructional program alternative" means a part-time program of instruction that may be established by a district board of education in consultation with and approval of the Department of Education. All students in an instructional program alternative receive English as a second language.

Overview

Through a review of literature, current "Best Practices" for educating LEP students will be identified and presented in Chapter Two. The research strategy and content of the survey instrument will be described in Chapter Three. The results will be presented in Chapter Four. Finally, Chapter Five will contain a summary, list the conclusions, and provide a discussion of the study.

Chapter Two
Review of the Literature

The past three decades have yielded empirical evidence regarding how children acquire languages and excel in content related subjects. Title VII, Part A of the Improving America's Schools Act (P.L. 103-382) was revised, as recently as 1994, comport with research developments in effective educational practices for teaching students with limited English proficiency. Even the underlying goal of educating students with LEP has shifted from replacing to preserving the student's native language. Instruction no longer focuses on low level basic skills remediation but instead emphasizes high standards and improved accommodations (August and Hakuta, 1997). This chapter will review some of the major studies responsible for such changes in policy and procedure.

A review of the literature yields numerous variables that one must keep in mind when educating students with LEP. These students have diverse backgrounds with enormous differences in culture, internal motivation, family support, and prior school experience. These differences greatly impact the success or failure of any prescribed program. However, researchers have developed some empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of various program models. The program models can be grouped into one of three different approaches, ESL (English as a Second Language), Bilingual Education, or full immersion. There are also variations within the implementation of each type of program based on the needs of the student and district.

The full immersion program model is often used in small districts in which the number of students with LEP are so low the state does not mandate bilingual education or ESL instruction. In a full immersion program, students are expected to benefit from forced use and constant modeling of the English language. Most researchers have not found this to be a successful program option.

In those districts where it is impractical to implement a bilingual or ESL program, full immersion is not the only choice. Authors Lucas and Katz (1994) published a report recommending special alternative instructional programs (SAIPs) as one practical approach for meeting the needs of LEP students. Their study was aimed at identifying how the student's native language was used in these English-based programs. The author's concluded that the student's first language provided them access to academic content and classroom activities. The first language acted as a medium for social interaction, establishing rapport, fostering family involvement, and assisting in students' pride of their culture. The native language is an important instructional component that can be used in a variety ways. At some sites, instructional aides used the student's native language to check for comprehension, explain an activity, or promote social interaction between peers.

ESL programs utilize a pull out approach where the student spends most of their day in the regular education classroom but are pulled out for some portion of the school day to learn English as a second language. These programs are more commonly found at the elementary and middle school level. ESL programs are frequently used in districts having few LEP students or a very diverse population of LEP students. Certified ESL teachers do not have to be proficient in their students' native language (Rennie, 1993),

The New Jersey Administrative Code Title 6A: Education requires the district board of education to establish an ESL Program with up to two periods of ESL instruction whenever there are 10 or more LEP students enrolled in the district. As a child gains English language proficiency, he or she is gradually taken out of the ESL program and totally integrated in the regular instructional program (Borden, 1998). A study by Collier (1989) suggests that it takes between seven to ten years for adolescents in pull out ESL programs to attain average scores on standardized tests.

The New Jersey Administrative Code for Education requires a district board of education to establish bilingual education programs whenever there are 20 or more limited English proficient students in any one language classification enrolled in the district. Bilingual Education programs differ from ESL programs in that all required courses and subjects are taught in the child's native language and English. ESL instruction is an additional area of instruction in a Bilingual Education model.

Bilingual education is commonly divided into two categories, early-exit and late-exit. The goal of early-exit programs is to prepare a student for successful participation in mainstream English-only classroom. First language instruction is rapidly phased out and most students are mainstreamed by first or second grade. Students enrolled in a late-exit model remain in their program through-out elementary school and continue to receive 40% or more of their instruction in their native language even after being reclassified as fluent-English-proficient (Rennie, 1993). Some research suggests that parents of students in late-exit programs demonstrate a higher level of involvement in their child's school experience. Consistent parental support is highly correlated with student achievement levels.

In 1992, David Ramirez published one of the most prominent studies in the area of second language education programs. It was sponsored by the National Association for Bilingual Education and marked the foundation of the Bilingual Research Journal. The Ramirez project was a longitudinal study comparing structured English immersion programs with early-exit and late-exit transitional bilingual education programs for language minority children.

The study followed over 2,000 elementary school children over four years and provided a wealth of data and allowed Ramirez to draw the following conclusions: providing LEP students with significant levels of instruction in their native language does not delay the acquisition of the English language and allows the students to "catch up" with their peers in the areas of language arts, English reading, and math. Further data from the study suggested that sixth grade and older students provided with English only instruction will likely fall behind their English-speaking peers. The Ramirez study, like the Collier research (1989), found learning a second language takes six or more years.

There are some interesting similarities between all three instructional models. Despite the language used for instruction, the methods and teaching approaches are typically the same. Researchers in the Ramirez study note that instructional strategies are positive and supportive but too teacher directed, not allowing opportunities for students to produce complex speech. Implications for improved programming would include teacher training in decreasing passive language learning and higher order cognitive objectives.

A 1990 study by Lucas, Henz, and Donato and research by Tikunoff et al., both identify intensive staff development programs designed to assist all teachers in providing

instruction to language minority students as a characteristic of effective LEP programs. The same authors also suggest expert instructional leaders and teachers as key factors in program success.

Two studies by Garcia and Garcia(1991) and Espinosa(1991) identified several characteristics of effective instruction for students with LEP. Characteristics include high expectations and challenging academics for language minority students as well as an emphasis on functional communication between teacher and student. Garcia suggests organization of the instruction of basic skills and academic content around thematic units and frequent student interaction through the use of collaborative learning techniques. As in all areas of education, teachers with a high commitment to the educational success of all their students combined with principals supportive of their instructional staff while maintaining an awareness of district policies are essential. Garcia's research also notes the importance of involvement from majority and minority parents in formal parental support activities.

Summary

Conducting research regarding current best practices in teaching students with LEP is very difficult given the amount of variability within the populations of students. However, data from various sources suggests certain factors make a difference in the overall academic success of students with LEP. Among those factors are: meaningful parental involvement, continuing education for all staff members, administrative support, follow up assessments, and use of the student's native language.

Choosing the best type of program is heavily dependent on the size and homogeneous make-up of each district's LEP population. Larger populations benefit

from a bilingual program or ESL pull out support while smaller populations rely on special alternative instructional programs. Full immersion has not been found to be a successful program model for any population of students with Limited English Proficiency.

Chapter Three
Design of the Study

This study will attempt to determine whether two Southern New Jersey Counties

are effectively implementing current best practices for teaching students with Limited

English Proficiency. This will be accomplished by conducting a survey, which ascertains

the number of enrolled LEP students and identifies programming/practices implemented

by each district. The data will then be evaluated to determine if best practices are being

used given the districts population of students.

Sample

A sample of two Southern New Jersey Counties was chosen for this study.

Cumberland County consists of 16 districts totaling 53 schools, 2319 professional staff,

and 25,428 enrolled residents. Salem County consists of 14 districts totaling 31 schools,

1157 professional staff members, and 13,038 enrolled residents. Table 3.1 illustrates the

ethnic diversity of enrolled students in each county.

Instrumentation

This study utilizes an original survey to collect data from each district within the

two counties. A copy of the survey instrument is contained in Appendix A. The survey

contains a fill in the blank portion for the purpose of gaining identifying information

regarding student enrollment. The second portion of the survey consists of a checklist

and scale designed to measure the degree to which school districts are using best

practices. The checklist of practices is derived from Title 6A Chapter 15 of the New

Jersey State Administrative Code as well as the ESL standards published by TESOL

(Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages). The survey was sent to randomly

selected schools within the districts of both counties.

Data Collection

For this study, 113 surveys were sent to randomly selected schools within Salem

and Cumberland County School Districts. Personnel from the Salem County School

District completed and returned 63% of the survey forms. Replies were received from

45% of Cumberland County Schools. A total of 56 surveys were retrieved for a return

rate of 50%.

Analysis of the Data

Listed below are the four key elements examined in each survey:

- The number of student with LEP enrolled in the school

- The instrument used for identifying students with LEP

- The type of program(s) available

- Strategies and practices used within the program

Once the number and homogeneity of students with LEP was identified, the program type

was measured against criteria established in New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:15.

The remaining questionnaire items were ranked according to frequency of use.

Table 3.1

Ethnicity/Gender	Cumberland County	Salem County
White Males	6225	4409.5
White Females	5786.5	4318
Black Males	3617.5	1252
Black Females	3427	1234
Hispanic Males	3059	272
Hispanic Females	2863	218
Other Male	263	67
Other Female	205	16

*Enrollment information is based the 1999-2000 NJ Education Statistics published on the New Jersey Department of Education website.

Chapter Four
Results

Two research questions are answered in this study. The questions are discussed sequentially and the data pertaining to these questions are presented in the form of discussion.

What is best practice for teaching students with LEP?

1. Best practice begins with the identification process. School districts should have a consistent procedure for identifying students and appropriate assessment tools.

2. The New Jersey Administrative Code has developed the following guidelines mandating specific programs based on the number and homogeneity of the LEP population within the district.

- Bilingual Education – 20 or more students

- ESL(2 periods daily) – 10 or more students

- Special Alternative Instructional Program– less than 10 students

3. Successful Bilingual, ESL, and SAIP programs have the following characteristics:

- Involvement of non English speaking families in their child's education

- Providing all staff with training in effective instruction for LEP students

- Organization of basic skills through thematic units

- Providing an equal amount of homework for LEP students

- Instruction in non-verbal communication

- Using English in structured social interaction

- Curriculums containing creative writing and cultural components

- Fostering the student's native language

- Re-Testing students after exiting a program

Are Salem and Cumberland County School Districts implementing best practice?

Of the 56 schools that completed and returned surveys, 20 had significant

populations of students with Limited English Proficiency. Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin,

Gujarati, Urdu, Russian, Ukranian, Pujab, Japanese, Toga log, Turkish, and Chuut were

among the native languages found spoken among the various districts.

Ninety percent of the districts were in compliance with using consistent and

appropriate assessment techniques for identifying students with LEP. The Maculaitis

Assessment or MAC was the most frequently used tool. There are five color-coded

levels of the MAC, which evaluate English proficiency of K-12 students in speaking,

listening, reading, and writing. Another popular tool was the IDEA Proficiency Test or

IPT. The IPT also contains both oral and written language components. The reading and

writing proficiency test are designed to meet APA standards for assessment of those

skills.

Ninety percent of the school districts were in compliance with regulations

matching type of program to the population of LEP students. Many school districts

provided programs beyond necessary state guidelines. Of the two districts that were not

in compliance, one school utilized a full immersion program for 15 LEP students and the

other provided only one period of ESL instruction per day for 25 LEP students.

Table 4.1 is used to illustrate the frequency of best practices used with the school districts. The elements of best practice most frequently used were the use of creative writing, curriculums containing a cultural component, equal homework, and guided social interactions. Areas for improvement included staff training, native language progress reporting, parental involvement in activities, and instruction in non-verbal communication.

Table 4.1

Best Practice	Never Used	Sometimes Used	Often
Progress reports sent home in native language	4	11	5
Entire staff training	6	9	5
Basic skills taught in thematic units	0	8	12
Parent involvement in school activities	4	12	4
Equal Homework	0	7	13
Re-testing following program exit	3	12	4
Instruction in non-verbal communication	4	9	6
Structured social interactions	0	4	15
Creative writing instruction	0	5	18
Cultural component	0	2	18
Fostering native language	1	10	8

Chapter Five
Summary, Conclusions, and Discussion

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine current best practices for teaching students with Limited English Proficiency and to investigate the extent to which best practices are implemented in two Southern New Jersey Counties. An analysis of current educational research revealed eleven characteristics of successful programming and instruction for students with LEP.

A total of 113 questionnaires were sent to randomly selected schools within the two counties and 56 were completed and returned. Of the 56 schools that returned questionnaires, 20 contained significant populations of students with LEP. Ninety of the schools were in compliance with state mandates regarding student identification programming. The eleven elements of best practice were ranked according to frequency of use.

Conclusion

Research surrounding best educational practices for students with Limited English Proficiency suggests that numerous variables must be considered given the diversity within every linguistic group of students. However, empirical evidence has been developed which demonstrates common characteristics of successful instruction for students with LEP. This research is the driving force behind current standards in Public Law 103-382 and is reflected in New Jersey Administrative Code.

This study demonstrated that the majority of schools with Salem and Cumberland County are in compliance with LEP student identification and programming. The instructional practices of these programs are largely reflective of current best practice. Areas identified as in need of improvement were parental involvement, staff training, and instruction in non-verbal communication.

Discussion

The combination of an increasing population of linguistically diverse students with recent federal laws mandating student mastery of the English Language has created an enormous task for local school districts. Professional organizations such as Teachers of English as a Second Language (TESOL) have published research-based standards, which have been used in developing state guidelines for programming and instruction.

The two New Jersey counties examined in this study have been largely successful in responding to standards for best practice. Several questions arise from this study, which provide implications for further research. What standards have the greatest impact in student success? What activities are used to carry out each standard within the various school districts? What are parent, student, and school personnel reactions to current ESL/Billingual Education instructional approaches?

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Appendix

School District: _____   School Name: _____

Number of students identified Limited English Proficient _____

Native Language _____   Age Range _____

Instrument used to identify students _____

■■
Type of program

____ Bilingual Education Program   ____ ESL Program
__Part time   __Full Time   __1 period daily   __2 periods daily
__Early Exit   __Late Exit   __more than 2 periods daily

____ Full Immersion Program   ____Instructional Program Alternative

Checklist	Never	Sometimes	Often
- Are progress reports sent home in student's native language?	____	____	____
- Are ALL staff provided with training in effective instruction for language minority students?	____	____	____
- Are basic skills organized into thematic units?	____	____	____
- Are parents of language minority students involved in organized school activities?	____	____	____
- Are language minority students given the same amount of homework?	____	____	____
- Are language minority students re-tested after exiting a program?	____	____	____
- Are students instructed in non-verbal communication?	____	____	____
-Are students using English in structured social interactions?	____	____	____
- Is written language taught through creative expression?	____	____	____
- Does your curriculum contain a cultural component?	____	____	____
- Is the student's native language fostered?	____	____	____

How so? _____