

Fostering Academic Success for English Learners

What Do We Know?

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Introduction

The number of English language learners (ELLs) has grown exponentially in our region, and fostering their academic success has never been more urgent. Yet a contentious, politically-charged debate over program models perennially displaces some important questions:

Which kinds of language-minority students, instructional methods, and program models are we talking about? Are we using the same terms to refer to the same things?

What instructional practices and programs work best for which students? When are they appropriately used? What's needed to successfully implement them? What are the advantages and risks of different approaches?

What do the most rigorous and reliable research reviews tell us about English language acquisition? About the role of students' native language in teaching reading, learning academic English, and succeeding academically?

What are some pervasive misconceptions that continually cloud the discussion?

The following sections synthesize information from several authoritative sources in order to begin answering these questions in ways that can foster better educational practice and accountability for the success of ELLs.

Section 1: Definitions and Terms

At least part of the difficulty in productively discussing the education of language-minority students has to do with shifting, vague, or inconsistent definitions of the children, instructional methods, and programs involved. The following, drawn from several sources, is an attempt to define the most commonly used terms. Inevitably, some forced choices of definition or categorization are made, and these are noted. Also note that different instructional methods may be used in different programs.

Types of students, defined by language background and English language proficiency:

- **English only (EO):** Students who speak English as a native language and do not speak any other language.
- **Language-minority (LM):** Students from homes where the primary language spoken is not English. LM students may be limited or fluent English proficient (see below).
- **Limited English proficient (LEP), or English language learner (ELL):** Language minority students whose difficulty comprehending, speaking, reading or writing English affects their school performance in English.¹
- **Fluent English proficient (FEP):** Language minority students who have been assessed as able to comprehend, speak, read and write English such that they can function in a mainstream English classroom without any special language services or accommodations. In California, two distinctions are commonly made:
- **Initially fluent English proficient (I-FEP):** Language-minority students initially assessed as *not* LEP and therefore requiring no special language services or accommodations

¹ U.S. Department of Education has not developed detailed standards on how schools should assess children's language proficiency. The Title VII statutory definition is as follows:

The terms "limited English proficiency" and "limited English proficient", when used with reference to an individual, mean an individual

(A) who

- (i) was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English and comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; or
- (ii) is a Native American or Alaska Native or who is a native resident of the outlying areas and comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on such individual's level of English language proficiency; or
- (iii) is migratory and whose native language is other than English and comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and

(B) who has sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language and whose difficulties may deny such individual the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is English or to participate fully in our society [P.L. 103-382, Sec. 7501], as cited in Crawford, 1997.

- **Redesignated fluent English proficient (R-FEP):** Language-minority students initially assessed as LEP who have achieved fluent English proficiency (according to local performance criteria) and been reclassified as such.

Instructional methods:

1. **Native-language instruction:** Use of English learner’s primary language to provide lessons in core academic subjects or reading and other language arts; usually implies that instruction is delivered by a classroom teacher (who may or may not be a native-speaker).
2. **Native-language support:** Use of English learner’s primary language to translate unfamiliar vocabulary or otherwise clarify lessons taught in English; often provided by a native-speaking classroom aide, but may be provided by teacher.
3. **English as a Second Language (ESL)/ English Language Development (ELD):** Any of various approaches to teaching the English language to non-native speakers. As broadly defined in the 1997 TESOL standards, instruction aims to teach students to communicate in social settings, engage in academic tasks, and use language in socially and culturally appropriate ways. Three classic sub-divisions of ESL instructional emphasis are:
 - o **Grammar-based ESL:** Instruction in English that teaches *about* the language: its structure, functions, and vocabulary, typically stressing rules, drills, and error correction.
 - o **Communication-based ESL:** Instruction in English that emphasizes *using* the language skillfully in meaningful contexts; less emphasis on error-correction in early stages, and more on providing understandable input to encourage communicative engagement and lowered resistance to risk-taking.
 - o **Content-based ESL:** Instruction in English that attempts to develop language skills and prepare students to study grade-level material in English. Emphasis is still on language, but augmented with measured introduction of academic subject matter content, vocabulary and beginning concepts
4. **Sheltered English Instruction (in California, often called “Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English” or SDAIE):** Teaching of grade-level subject matter in English in ways that are comprehensible and engage students academically, while also promoting English language development. *Designed for English learners who have reached at least intermediate proficiency and who possess basic literacy skills.* Method requires significant teacher skill in ELD and subject-specific pedagogies; clearly defined language and content objectives; modified curriculum, supplementary materials, and alternative assessments. Often used as a bridge between primary language instruction and placement in mainstream classroom.

Program models:

The following are eleven program models currently recognized in the professional literature. Each model is described in detail in three sets of subsequent tables:

1. An **inventory** identifies goals, target and classroom populations, and languages used to teach literacy and subject matter
2. **Types of instructional models** provides definitions and characteristics, suggests when appropriate to use, and identifies elements of successful implementation
3. **Summary of advantages and concerns** highlights particular strengths and potential drawbacks

Bilingual education models initiate instruction in the ELLs' primary language while developing their English language skills. Note that *only* two of these models aim for full bilingualism; the others aim for English proficiency only and use the primary language to develop initial literacy skills or facilitate access to academic content while English is developed. Models described include:

- **Early-exit transitional bilingual education**
- **Late-exit transitional bilingual education**
- **Developmental or maintenance bilingual education**
- **Bilingual immersion**
- **Integrated (i.e., non-segregated) transitional bilingual education**
- **Dual-language or two-way immersion**

Immersion education models initiate instruction in the student's *non-native* language, teaching the second language and academic content largely or completely in this language.² Note that two of these models also aim for full bilingualism, one for language-*majority* students (Canadian French immersion), and the other for students of endangered indigenous languages (e.g., Navajo). Models described include:

- **English Language Development (ELD) or English as a Second Language (ESL) Pull-out**
- **Structured English immersion**
- **Submersion with primary language support**
- **Canadian French immersion (language-majority students)**
- **Indigenous language immersion (endangered languages)**

² Canadian French immersion does introduce some instruction in English (students' L1) after first two years, and continues in French (L2) and English for three more years.

Section 2: Inventory of Bilingual and Immersion Educational Models

MODELS	GOALS	TARGET POPULATION	CLASSROOM POPULATION	LANGUAGE USED TO TEACH:	
				LITERACY	SUBJECT MATTER
Bilingual Education:					
Early-Exit Transitional	ELD	Minority	Segregated	L1 literacy first, rapid shift to English, program is 2-3 years	Some degree of instruction in L1, rapid shift to English
Late-Exit Transitional/Developmental or Maintenance	Late-exit: ELD Developmental: bilingualism	Minority	Segregated (Maintenance: partially segregated later)	L1 literacy first, then gradual shift to English, program is 4-6 years; Maintenance: Continues L1 Lang. Arts through middle grades	Most subjects in L1 with ELD; gradually to all subjects in English. Maintenance programs emphasize bilingual/bicultural proficiency
Bilingual Immersion	ELD	Minority	Segregated	L1 and English literacy from beginning	Concept development in L1; sheltered English for all subjects
Integrated Transitional Bilingual Education	Partial bilingualism, ELD	Minority with majority participation	Integrated	L1 literacy first, exposure to English from the beginning	All subjects in L1 and in English, but assignment by student suited to language needs, and particular program structure
Dual language Immersion (aka two-way bilingual)	Bilingualism	Minority and Majority	Integrated	Minority language first for each group, or L1 and L2 for both	All subjects in L1 and L2 distributed over the grades. Distribution varies by program
Immersion Education:					
English Language Development (ELD) or English as a Second Language (ESL) Pull-Out	ELD	Minority	Partially Integrated	In English; specified period for development of English-language skills	Grammar- and Communication-based ESL; Content-based ESL in some programs
Structured Immersion	ELD	Minority	Segregated	In English (some limited L1)	Sheltered English in all subjects
Submersion with Primary Language Support	ELD	Minority	Integrated	English literacy, limited L1 literacy	All subjects in English with tutoring in L1
Canadian French Immersion	Bilingualism	Majority, international	Segregated	L2 first, English (L1) later	All subjects in L2 for 2 years; in English (L1) and L2 remainder of schooling.
Indigenous Language Immersion (e.g. Navajo)	Bilingualism	Minority	Segregated	Endangered L1 first, then both L1 and English	L1 for all subjects first, gradually increase use of English in subject areas

Sources: Brisk, 1998; August and Hakuta, 1997

Goals: Language goals; Target population = language-minority or –majority; Classroom population = language-minority or –majority together or separated

Section 3: Types of Instructional Program Models

DEFINITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS: The linguistic goal of the program (English language development or bilingualism); the target population of the program; the duration of the program (when specified); and other outstanding characteristics.

WHEN APPROPRIATE: Considers district or school demographics; student characteristics; and resources (Rennie, 1993).

ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION: All models presuppose support from family, community, and school administration; well-trained teachers with experience in first and second language pedagogy; and appropriate, well-designed teaching materials.

INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL	DEFINITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS	WHEN APPROPRIATE	ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION
Bilingual Education:			
Early-Exit Transitional	<p>Goal is to develop English skills without sacrificing or delaying learning of academic core and develop English fluency to successfully move students to mainstream classrooms</p> <p>Students are ELL and from same language background</p> <p>Some content instruction in native language, transition to English as rapidly as possible</p> <p>Usually transition to mainstream in 2-to-3-years</p>	<p>Sizable group of ELLs who speak the same language and are in the same grade</p> <p>Limited number of bilingual teachers available to teach in the higher grades</p>	<p>Includes some content instruction in English and builds competency in oral and written academic English</p> <p>Develops literacy in the primary language as foundation for English reading</p> <p>Often uses sheltered instructional strategies</p>
Late-Exit Transitional/ Developmental or Maintenance	<p>Goal is to develop academic proficiency in English and students' first language</p> <p><u>Transitional programs:</u> generally place less emphasis on developing students' first language and more emphasis on the first language as a bridge to English language development</p> <p><u>Developmental programs:</u> generally place equal emphasis on developing and maintaining students' primary language and academic English proficiency</p> <p>Students are ELL and from same language background</p> <p>Significant amount of instruction in native language while continuing to increase instruction in English (4-6 years)</p>	<p>Sizable group of ELLs who speak the same language and are in the same grade</p> <p>Bilingual teachers available to teach in the higher elementary (or later) grades</p> <p>Interest and support from language-minority community in maintaining primary language, learning English, and achieving academically in both languages</p>	<p>Bilingual teaching staff proficient in using both languages for academic instruction</p> <p>Develops literacy in the primary language as foundation for English reading</p> <p>Language arts instruction in primary language and English</p> <p>Often uses sheltered instructional strategies</p>

INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL	DEFINITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS	WHEN APPROPRIATE	ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION
Bilingual Immersion	<p>Goal is English language development Students are ELL and from same language background Most instruction in English; first hour of the day, teachers teach primary language literacy and explain concepts in students' primary language. Sheltered English for all subjects. Students may use primary language even when instructed in English Transitional model, usually 2-4 years, then enter mainstream</p>	<p>Sizable group of ELLs who speak the same language and are in the same grade Limited number of bilingual teachers available to teach in the higher grades</p>	<p>Bilingual teaching staff proficient in using both languages for academic instruction (though L1 used much less) Teachers trained in second language methodology and teaching content in a second language (often sheltered instructional strategies).</p>
Integrated TBE	<p>Goals are English Language Development and partial bilingualism Targets minority students within majority classroom Allows teachers and students to use native language in mainstream classrooms</p>	<p>When there are significant numbers of students with same language background, but not necessarily enough for a whole class Bilingual teachers and/or assistants, who are available and trained, share a classroom with a monolingual-English teacher.</p>	<p>Some teaching is done in both the primary language of the bilingual students and English Teachers and languages have equal status</p>
Dual language Immersion (aka two-way bilingual)	<p>Goal is to develop strong skills and proficiency in students' first language and a second language About half the students are native speakers of English and half are English-language learners from the same language group Instruction in both languages ("90/10": begins 90% in non-English, 10% English, gradually increasing to 50/50; or "50/50": 50% non-English, 50% English for all students from beginning)</p>	<p>Approximately half the students are native English speakers and half are native speakers of another language Bilingual teachers who are trained to teach learners in both languages</p>	<p>Strong commitment from school, family, and community 'Sheltered instruction' used as students learn content subjects through non-primary language Substantial peer interaction to tap student's language resources Program continues after elementary school</p>
Immersion Education:			
ELD (English Language Development)/ESL (English as a Second Language) Pull-Out	<p>Goal is fluency in English Programs targeted to ELLs Students integrated in mainstream, English-only classroom in other subjects with no special assistance <u>ESL</u>: Students pulled-out for instruction aimed at developing English grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills, not academic content <u>Content-ESL</u>: Augmented ESL which includes academic content, vocabulary, and beginning concepts</p>	<p>Diverse population of language minority students (many different languages). Trained ESL resource teacher(s) available Students have varying levels of English, but usually at beginning-level proficiency</p>	<p>In content-ESL students grouped around grade levels, not English proficiency Appropriately trained ESL teachers</p>

INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL	DEFINITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS	WHEN APPROPRIATE	ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION
Structured Immersion	<p>Goal is fluency in English</p> <p>All students in program are English Language Learners</p> <p>Content instruction in English with adjustment to proficiency level so subject matter is comprehensible (such as sheltered English instructional methods)</p> <p>Typically no native language support or development</p>	<p>Sizable group of ELLs who speak the same language and are in the same grade; or:</p> <p>Diverse population of language minority students (many different languages)</p>	<p>Teachers use sheltered instructional techniques to meet needs of ELLs</p> <p>Teachers have strong receptive skills in students' primary language</p>
Submersion with Primary Language Support	<p>Goal is fluency in English</p> <p>Targeted to minority language student within the majority-English language classroom</p> <p>Uses primary language to support English language content instruction; develops very limited literacy skills in primary language</p> <p>Bilingual teachers tutor small groups of students by reviewing particular lessons covered in mainstream classes, using students' primary language.</p>	<p>Few students in each grade level who are English language learners</p>	<p>Bilingual teachers and/or aides available</p>
Canadian French Immersion	<p>Goal is fluency in French (L2) and English (L1) (bilingualism)</p> <p>Target population is language-majority students learning minority language (no language-minority peers in class)</p> <p>Immerses students in second language for first 2 years using sheltered language instruction, then introduces English (L1)</p> <p>Late immersion model provides intensive instruction in L2 in the fifth, sixth, or seventh grades</p>	<p>All students native speakers of majority language, which is highly valued inside and outside of school</p>	<p>Strong family support to learn L2</p> <p>Teachers use sheltered instructional strategies to facilitate comprehension in L2</p>
Indigenous Language Immersion (e.g. Navajo)	<p>Goal is bilingualism</p> <p>Supports endangered minority language (in which students may have weak receptive and no productive skills)</p> <p>Develops academic skills in native language and culture as well as English language and mainstream culture (Bilingual/Bicultural)</p> <p>In some programs, students come to school knowing some oral native language, others focus on language revitalization</p>	<p>Students and school identify with cultural and linguistic heritage</p> <p>Teachers are fluent in both languages</p> <p>Community desires and supports immersion program</p>	<p>High quality materials in both languages</p> <p>Use of sheltered English instruction</p> <p>Program shaped and modeled by native bilingual teachers</p> <p>Program is socially, linguistically, and cognitively compatible with native culture and community context</p> <p>Whole school program</p>

Note: L1=primary language; L2=second language; ELL=English language learner; ELD=English language development; ESL=English as a second language

Section 4: Program Model Advantages and Concerns

INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL	PARTICULAR ADVANTAGES	PARTICULAR CONCERNS
Bilingual Education:		
Early-Exit Transitional	<p>Berman (1992) notes that early-exit TBE:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. makes efficient use of limited bilingual teachers by concentrating them at early grades 2. maintains native language oral fluency 3. builds in bilingual communication with parents <p>Ramirez (1991) found that limited English proficient students in TBE improve their skills in mathematics, English language, and reading better than expected in comparison to at-risk students in the general population.</p>	<p>Berman (1992) notes native language skills may not be fully developed to allow transfer to English.</p> <p>Ramirez (1991) found most students remain in this program longer than expected.</p> <p>Brisk (1998) notes that success of early-exit TBE measured more by speed at which students are mainstreamed than content-area learning.</p> <p>Cummins (1998) maintains “quick-exit transitional bilingual education is an inferior model based on an inadequate theoretical assumption; this model aspires to monolingualism and does little to address the causes of bilingual students’ underachievement.”</p>
Late-Exit Transitional/ Developmental or Maintenance	<p>Encourages proficient bilingual students</p> <p>Strong promotion of students’ primary language literacy skills not only develops a conceptual foundation for academic growth but also communicates clearly to students value of the cultural and linguistic resources they bring to school (Cummins, 1998).</p> <p>Increased involvement of minority-language speaking families in children’s education because of home language use.</p>	<p>Students entering late or exiting early from the program (transience)</p> <p>Maintaining continuity of program model across grades and schools</p>
Bilingual Immersion	<p>Appears to improve language arts achievement compared to transitional bilingual programs (Brisk, 1998).</p>	<p>Students may be unprepared for transition to mainstream classrooms.</p>
Integrated TBE	<p>Increases academic and social contact of minority and majority students through integrated classrooms.</p> <p>Supports bilingual students who have been mainstreamed</p>	<p>In practice, may become submersion with primary language support, if teachers and language do not have equal status (Brisk 1998).</p>
Dual language Immersion (aka two-way bilingual)	<p>Students learn language and acquire positive cross-cultural attitudes from each other and teachers.</p> <p>Integrates minority children and English-speaking peers</p> <p>Evaluations indicate effectiveness in promoting academic achievement and high levels of language proficiency for both groups of students.</p>	<p>Language used in early grades of immersion may be modified to accommodate English speaking students, impacting language development of language-minority students (Valdés, 1997)</p> <p>Privileged status may be conferred on participating language-majority students (Valdés, 1997).</p> <p>Unknown effect of programs using languages with different alphabets (i.e. Cantonese/English).</p>

INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL	PARTICULAR ADVANTAGES	PARTICULAR CONCERNS
Immersion Education:		
ELD (English Language Development)/ESL (English as a Second Language) Pull-Out	Students with different primary languages can be in the same class. Flexible in accommodating small numbers of ELLs with diverse languages. Teachers do not need to be fluent in primary language(s) of students.	Very costly as additional ESL resource teachers must be used. Does not build on students' primary language for academic development Pull-out may stigmatize students or have them miss content instruction
Structured Immersion	Allows for English content instruction for intermediate ELLs. Students with different primary languages in the same class.	Complex subject matter content could be diluted. Rapid mainstreaming before development of sufficient English proficiency. Much variation in models Definitional blurring common in research
Submersion with Primary Language Support	Provides some support and access to comprehensible input	Largely a "sink or swim" method Neglects literacy development Insufficient access to academic content
Canadian French Immersion	Students achieve a high level of fluency in second language. Students score at or above norm of English speakers in monolingual English programs in tests of reading and mathematics.	Students' second language is "fossilized" since there is no contact with native French (L2) speaking peers Limited interpersonal communication skills
Indigenous Language Immersion (e.g. Navajo)	Programs shaped and supported by local people with authority to mold social environment of the school Rock Point Community School students (AZ-Navajo/English) improved academic achievement, scoring higher than neighboring schools, other Navajo-speaking students on reservation, and other Indian students on CAT reading test (Holm, 1995).	Few texts and curriculum available in indigenous languages. Few programs extend beyond elementary school.

Note: L1=primary language; L2=second language; ELL=English language learner; ELD=English language development; ESL=English as a second language

Section 5. English language Acquisition and Academic Success: What Do We Know?

Sorting out what we know about teaching language minority children is a complicated task. The debate is at least as much about politics and emotions as about pedagogy and science. And preconceived positions often influence both the slant and interpretation of the research. In any body of research, differences in focus, approach and methodology across studies make it difficult to identify conclusive findings. On a polarized issue like bilingual education, critics are pleased to highlight such problems as evidence that the research can't be trusted. Of course, the criticism itself often stems from bias; studies of poor quality are sometimes cited as definitive simply because they support a critic's position.

Despite these difficulties, the three most technically rigorous reviews of the research to date do provide some conclusions. National Research Council (NRC) studies in 1992 and 1997,³ along with a 1998 meta-analysis⁴ offer some guidance to those who believe bilingual education programs should be reformed, not thrown away. Findings from these studies include:

- ***Timeframes for learning English vary widely, yet students with strong native-language proficiency are more likely to develop greater English proficiency.***
- ***Native language instruction bolsters English language learners' academic success.***
- ***Native-language use is one effective component among many that educators must be free to use to promote academic success for English language learners.***
- ***Schools need to assemble a set of program components that work for the children in their particular community, given its goals, demographics, and resources.***

It's clear, in short, that no one program works for all children. It's also clear that native language instruction is no magic bullet—just as no other single program component would be. Taken together, these findings imply a need for local autonomy, an interrelationship between what's desirable and what's feasible, and an effort to move the debate beyond program labels and language of instruction to the broader set of issues schools must address to ensure the academic success of language-minority children.

³ Meyer, M.M, and Fienberg, S.E. (1992). *Assessing Evaluations Studies: The Case of Bilingual Education Strategies*. Panel to Review Evaluation Studies of Bilingual Education, Committee on National Statistics, National Research Council. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

August, D., and Hakuta, K. (1997). *Improving Schooling for Language-Minority Children: A Research Agenda*. Committee on Developing a Research Agenda on the Education of Limited-English-Proficient and Bilingual Students, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

⁴ Greene, J. (1998). *A Meta-Analysis of the Effectiveness of Bilingual Education*. Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, in collaboration with University of Texas at Austin and Harvard University. Claremont, CA: Tomas Rivera Policy Institute. The document is included in briefing binder appendix.

The Researchers Elaborate

In the 1997 NRC study, a committee of nationally-recognized researchers led by August and Hakuta notes that the beneficial effects of native-language instruction are clearly evident in programs labeled “bilingual education” and also appear in programs labeled “immersion.”⁵ This NRC committee also conducted a rigorous review of the research on effective schools and classrooms and found the advantages of native-language use to be a prominent theme, “even in exemplary programs designed to provide instruction primarily in English.”

The committee therefore advises educators to move from thinking of programs as “all or nothing” treatments (i.e. student is either in program or not) to thinking of program components – features available to meet the differing needs of particular students. As the NRC report notes, “Two students in the same program could receive different elements of the program; moreover, programs that are nominally very different – especially the most successful ones – may have very similar characteristics.” Among the common characteristics cited are:

- some native-language instruction, especially initially;
- for most students, a relatively early phasing in of English instruction; and
- teachers specially trained in instructing English-language learners.

Finally, the committee accepted the conclusions of the 1992 NRC panel of the Committee on National Statistics, which saw positive relationships “consistent with empirical results from other studies and that support the theory underlying native language instruction.”

In his 1998 meta-analysis, Greene concluded that LEP students who are taught using at least some of their native language perform significantly better on standardized tests (of all tests in English, and tests in English reading) than similar students taught only in English. “The fact that the studies of bilingual programs with random assignment, which is the highest quality research design, have even stronger results greatly increases the confidence in the conclusion that bilingual education positively affects educational attainment.”

Greene compared the use of some native language to English-only instruction, since “program labels...have no consistent meaning in the evaluations [studied], nor are the detailed features of many programs fully described; the only division of programs that can accurately and consistently be applied is whether native languages are used in instruction or not.” He notes that his meta-analysis could not address the questions of how long students should be in programs offering primary language instruction; how much native language should be used in instruction; and what age groups are most appropriate for these techniques.

Greene also found that the estimated benefit of using at least some native language in instruction is about *one-fifth of a standard deviation*, or about 20% of the one standard deviation “achievement gap” often noted between minority and white students on standardized tests nationwide. This conclusion appears to complement the 1997 NRC study findings, which noted that educating language-minority students effectively is not just about helping them learn English, but helping them learn the academic core curriculum as well.

⁵ See program models, in Definitions and Terms, above.

The NRC committee identified the following attributes of effective schools and classrooms that benefit all students, especially English learners:

- supportive but challenging schoolwide climate (including aligning teacher, student, and family beliefs, assumptions, and expectations toward high academic achievement);
- strong instructional leadership at the school level;
- customized learning environment, adapted to meet the identified instructional needs of students;
- articulation and coordination of programs and practices within and between schools
- use of native language and valuing of home cultures as resources to be built upon, rather than liabilities to remediate;
- curriculum that balances basic and higher-order skills;
- explicit skills instruction for certain tasks, particularly in acquiring basic skills and learning strategies;
- opportunities for student-directed activities (small group work on conceptual tasks, peer tutoring) particularly in using language to make sense or create meaning;
- instructional strategies that enhance comprehension (sheltered instructional approaches, calling attention to language while using it, providing background knowledge and building on previous knowledge);
- opportunities for practice (built-in redundancy, extended dialog and instructional conversation);
- systematic student assessment to adjust instruction to students' needs and improve program practices in a timely way;
- high-quality, sustained staff development that improves classroom practice; and
- family involvement to build supportive environments at home and home-school connections.

With respect to effective practices, see also Brisk's criteria for creating a good school, quality curricula, and quality instruction for English language learners, summarized in Chapter 6, "Beyond the Debate", in briefing binder appendix.⁶

⁶ Brisk, M.E. (1998). *Bilingual Education: From Compensatory to Quality Schooling*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Section 6. Teaching Reading to English Language Learners

The National Research Council's Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children recently completed the most authoritative, comprehensive review of the research on normal reading development and instruction and on preventing reading difficulties in young children.⁷ This study documented a number of important findings about teaching English reading to language-minority children. These include:

- English-speaking children making initial attempts at reading understand, if they are successful, the products of their efforts; they read words they know and sentences they understand, and...can self-correct efficiently. Non-English speakers have much less basis for knowing whether their reading is correct because the crucial meaning-making process is short circuited by lack of language knowledge.
- Giving a child initial reading instruction in a language that he or she does not yet speak can undermine the child's chance to see literacy as a powerful form of communication by knocking the support of meaning out from underneath the process of learning.
- Initial reading instruction in the first language does no harm, and it seems likely both from research findings and from theories about literacy development that initial reading instruction in the second language can have negative consequences for immediate and long-term achievement.

The committee therefore urged "initial literacy instruction in a child's native language whenever possible" and suggested that "literacy instruction should not be introduced in any language before some reasonable level of oral proficiency in that language has been attained."

On the question of which language to use when teaching English language learners to read, the committee recommended the following guidelines:

- If language minority children arrive at school with no proficiency in English but speaking a language for which there are instructional guides, learning materials, and locally available proficient teachers, then these children should be taught how to read in their native language while acquiring proficiency in spoken English, and then subsequently taught to extend their skills to reading in English.
- If language minority children arrive at school with no proficiency in English but speak a language for which the above conditions cannot be met and for which there are insufficient numbers of children to justify the development of the local community to meet such conditions, the instructional priority should be to develop the children's proficiency in spoken English. Although print materials may be used to develop understanding of English speech sounds, vocabulary, and syntax, the postponement of formal reading instruction is appropriate until an adequate level of proficiency in spoken English has been achieved.

⁷ Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., and Griffin, P. (1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, National Research Council. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press

Section 7. Misconceptions That Cloud the Discussion

The following statements are common misconceptions:

All forms of bilingual education are more effective than all forms of English-only instruction.

FALSE. It is essential to look beyond labels and assess overall design, quality of staff and materials, and effective implementation. Cummins considers especially weak those early-exit transitional programs that provide primary-language instruction with some oral English until grades 2 or 3, then drop students into all-English classes taught by mainstream teachers unprepared to support bilingual students' academic growth. He states that he would not hesitate to choose a monolingual program where the entire school was striving to partner with parents and community, build on students' personal and cultural experiences, and promote critical literacy, over a bilingual program where there was no commitment to these goals.

The more time children are exposed to English, the more English they will learn. FALSE.

Intuitively, this seems true. But there is no simple, linear relationship between amount of exposure to a second language and amount learned. What matters is not just quantity of time, but also the degree of *engagement in learning*: Students learn a second language through *comprehensible input that they can connect to prior knowledge*. Also, students learn best when “instruction is chunked into meaningful units, spread over larger periods, and when format is varied” (Gandara, 1997). Moreover, Hakuta (1998) notes the “time-on-task” theory of learning in general is no longer considered viable by scientists of learning: “The question of learning is not how much [time-on-task], but when and in what sequence.”

It's always best to use the child's native language when introducing reading instruction.

FALSE. According to Cummins, circumstances and resources should dictate whether to teach reading first in the child's native language, English, or both simultaneously.⁸ Moreover, the NRC Committee on Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children recommends that the student's level of oral English, along with available resources, be used to determine the language of initial reading instruction (see “Teaching Reading to English Language Learners”).

Limited English proficient students learn English faster in English-only programs. FALSE.

English learners are not randomly or equally assigned to different programs: Those entering bilingual education programs tend to have had less schooling, are from poorer families, and attend higher-poverty schools than those in all-English programs. *Uncontrolled* comparisons show all-English program students on average learn English faster than students in bilingual education programs, but *these differences disappear when background factors are controlled for*. When factors such as *initial* proficiency in English and the native language, prior schooling, and socioeconomic status are controlled for, students acquire English at similar rates regardless of program.

⁸ Cummins and others note that because Spanish has a higher phoneme/grapheme correspondence (how you say it is how you write it) than English, it may be easier to introduce reading in Spanish first, if circumstances allow.

Canadian-French immersion proves that structured English immersion works. FALSE. The former is a successful, fully *bilingual* model which supports biliteracy and aims to develop language-*majority* students' abilities in the minority language. Also, researchers note that these students are still far behind the native French-speaking comparison group after 2 years of monolingual L2 instruction, but catch up fully after 5 years -- three years after instruction in their native (English) language is introduced. (Lambert and Tucker, 1972, Cummins, 1998) As such, they argue this model actually provides better support for bilingual education approaches.

English language arts instruction should be delayed for several grades until students' literacy in their primary language is established. FALSE. All well-designed bilingual programs have English language development, including literacy, built into the overall plan across grades. Some bilingual models develop primary language literacy first and delay English language arts instruction until oral English fluency is developed sufficiently either to phase in English reading instruction (e.g., "90/10" dual immersion; maintenance) or to transition students to English reading (e.g., late-exit transitional). Other models introduce English language arts instruction much sooner (e.g., those *without* bilingualism as a goal, such as early-exit transitional, or bilingual immersion). (Brisk, 1998, Cummins, 1998)

Young children learn second languages easily, and the younger the child, the more skilled he or she will be in acquiring a second language. FALSE. The impression that children learn languages faster than adults arises because a young child does not have to learn as much as an adult to achieve competence in communicating. However, research does not support these beliefs, particularly in learning more abstract, academic language skills. Other than in pronunciation, younger children are often at a *disadvantage* compared with older children and adults in learning second languages quickly and effectively because they don't have access to prior knowledge, memory techniques and other learning strategies and cognitive skills. (McLaughlin, 1992; August and Hakuta, 1997).

Bilingual education in and of itself will elevate student achievement. FALSE. Native language use is an important but insufficient ingredient in promoting language-minority students' academic success. Many elements of effective schooling must converge to foster success for language-minority students. (See August and Hakuta's effective schools' and classrooms' attributes, in "English Language Acquisition and Academic Success: What Do We Know?" above; also see Brisk's lists of quality school, curricular, and instructional characteristics, in briefing binder appendix.)