ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT PROGRAMS FOR LANGUAGE MINORITY STUDENTS IN NORTH AMERICA

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Abstract

The paper makes a presentation of special language support programs (Inclusive English Language Programs) that have been developed recently to meet the special needs emotional, social, economic and most of all linguistic, academic, and cultural) of the increasing population of immigrant students in North America, against the background of demolishing previous demographic and linguistic myths.

The massive increase of the number of immigrant populations in the USA in the last few decades – especially after the Immigration Act of 1965 – has brought about great changes in the demographic realities of the country, affecting, alongside other spheres of life, education first of all, and giving rise to all kinds of myths that have had to be gradually demolished.

Among the demographic myths (Cummins et al. 1999:1-7), #1 states that "*the number of students who don't speak English is going down*". On the contrary, it has been proved that "Language minority students, including limited-English proficient (LEP) students, are the fastest growing group of students in the United States today". Latest statistics actually show that by 2010 " 9 million school-age children will be immigrants or children of immigrants, representing 22% of the school-age population (Fix & Passel, cf. Lucas, 1997: X). These figures have demolished yet another myth, #2 – "*most limited English - proficient (LEP) students were born outside of the United States; most of these students are recent arrivals to the USA*" – but reality shows that most LEP students were born in US, and only 20% of these students have been in US for a year or less" Myth #3 - it was wrongly believed that 'students *who do not speak English are found only in large urban areas"*. Even if in the beginning immigrants seemed to prefer settling in large urban areas, today "students who do not speak English are found in many districts in the United States". Closely related to myth #3 was another one, #4, namely that "*only teachers in urban areas can expect to*

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teach LEP students". In reality, "about 50% of teachers – one out of two - can expect to teach an LEP student sometime during their teaching careers".

Faced with such an increasing linguistic and cultural diversity, the communities and most particularly schools have had to take steps to accommodate the diverse needs of the immigrant school populations, coming from all corners of the world, particularly, but not only, from Asia and Latin America.

Consequently, in order to improve the education of ESOL students, a TESOL team elaborated the ***ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students*** (issued in 1997), focusing on the language skills necessary for social and academic purposes. As shown in the *Introduction: Promising Futures*, these standards "provide the bridge to general education standards expected of all students in the United States" (p. 2), highlighting the importance of language in the achievement of content, seen as two inseparable entities.

The intention of the authors was also to refute some of the existing myths regarding Second Language Learning, namely – Myth #1 – *ESOL students learn English easily and quickly simply by being exposed to and surrounded by native English speakers*"

Nevertheless, we think that this could help to a certain extent, since most of the time - except, of course, for home - at school at least, students are exposed only to English – (*English of the Outer Circle*) and actually this is what makes the difference, for example, from *English of the Expanding Circle* such as English in Romania or in any other non-English speaking context country. "Learning a second language takes time and significant intellectual effort on the part of the learner. Learning a second language is hard work; even the youngest learners do not simply 'pick up' the language". (p. 3). In other words this means that language learning is viewed as a shorter or longer process, implying a conscious and hard intellectual effort.

Myth #2: "*When ESOL learners are able to converse comfortably in English, they have developed proficiency in the language*" - is based on the erroneous assumption that language proficiency is the same with academic proficiency (??) and Myth # 3: *In earlier times immigrant children learned English rapidly and assimilated easily into American life"*. This again is a wrong supposition since many of them did not learn the language well or quickly as the requirements for occupying different jobs at that time were not as high as they are today. On the other hand, we would also be inclined to think that there used to be a different, less tolerant attitude towards immigrants. That is why some of them wanted to "melt" into the "locals", for which reason they did their best to achieve the same levels of linguistic and academic proficiency as the native speakers. While today, with more openness, and sensitivity and tolerance to diversity, to multilingualism and multiculturalism, the tendency of "hiding" one's identity behind an accent is less constraining –

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which should in no case be interpreted as a lowering or watering down of the standards of language proficiency.

In TESOL team's view (p. 3) the requirements of effective education for all ESOL students include:

- native like levels of proficiency in English (since standard requirements are the same for *all* students (See also *No Child Left Behind Act* – Educating Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students, 2001; President Bush – "In this great land called America, no child will be left behind").
- maintenance and promotion of students' native languages in school and community contexts since it is well known by now that proficiency in the native language facilitates second language development;
- all educational personnel should assume responsibility for the education of ESOL students; education of ESOL students is too large a goal to be achieved by teachers alone; consequently collaboration and team work among all educators – teaching and/or non-teaching staff - is extremely important and highly recommendable
- comprehensive provision of first-rate services and full access to those services by all students. ESOL students should have access to the full range of curricula – gifted classes, laboratory sciences, college preparatory courses, computer technology, good classroom location etc;
- knowledge of more than one language and culture is advantageous for all students. This last aspect resembles very much the attitude adopted by the European Commission regarding language learning, as reflected in the Linguistic Passport, or by the realities present in many European countries - trilingualism in Switzerland, Flanders, bilingualism in Belgium, or in North America – Canada, bilingualism or multilingualism being today considered a great asset not only for the individual but also for the (whole) society.

The TESOL team's views are reflected in a concentrated form in the ***ESL Standards*****,** which include the following three goals with three distinct standards each, for personal, social and academic purposes, at all age levels, and implying successively more complex requirements (pp. 9, 10):

Goal 1:- to use English to communicate in *social* settings – more specifically:

- to participate in social interaction
- to interact in, through, and with spoken and written English for personal expression and enjoyment
- to use learning strategies to extend communicative competence

Goal 2:- to use English to achieve a*cademically* in all content areas

- to use English to interact in the classroom

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- to use English to obtain, process, construct, and provide subject matter information in spoken and written form

- to use appropriate language learning strategies to construct and apply academic knowledge

Goal 3:- to use English in *socially and culturally* appropriate ways

- to use the appropriate language variety, register and genre according to audience, purpose and setting

- to use nonverbal communication appropriate to audience, purpose and setting

- to use appropriate learning strategies to extend the socio-linguistic and socio-cultural competence

Since instruction is a bipolar process, and since the Standards presented so far have been focused only on ESOL students' needs and requirements, and since the other pole – the personnel – more specifically the ESL teachers - is equally important, and given the great demand for such teachers, (see figures at the beginning!), TESOL have also given special consideration to designing the standards for the accreditation of initial programs in P-12 ESL Teaching Education. (TESOL / NCATE Program Standards, 2003:15, 16). These standards are organized around five domains – *Language* (describing language, acquisition and development), *culture* (nature and role of culture, cultural groups and identity), *Instruction* (Planning for standards based ESL and content instruction, managing and implementing standards based ESL and content instruction, Using resources effectively), *Assessment* (issues of assessment, language proficiency assessment, classroom based assessment for ESL) and the last and, maybe, most important one, *professionalism*, (partnership and advocacy, professional development and collaboration), each of them with standards - thirteen in all - divided in their turn into performance indicators that can be met at the following three proficiency levels:

Approaches Standard – candidate teacher has knowledge about the subject content but does not apply it adequately to the classroom.

Meets Standard – candidate teacher demonstrates the dispositions, knowledge, and skills to teach English learners effectively, and apply the knowledge in the classroom and other professional teaching situations;

Exceeds Standard – candidate teacher consistently demonstrates the dispositions, knowledge, and skills that demonstrate positive effects on student learning and go on to successful teaching

Special programs for teachers who need certification as ESL teachers have been organized by different states, based on Federal Grants, e.g. - Salisbury, Maryland, for the last two years – *Accelerated Career Enhancement* – (twelve participants in the first year, sixteen in the second) –

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to train teachers for getting an MA in ESL . Program Models for Language Minority Students – summer 2004 – for example, resulted in four projects : Building Bridges (Reading Program for Elementary and Secondary Schools) ; HELLO video project – High School English Language Learners Orientation, CHEER - Community Helpers Encouraging Everyday Reading – adaptation of program to Primary School pupils, Adapting for Success: Mainstream English Language Learners – Professional Development Conference Proposal.

As we have seen, ESOL students are students with special needs – emotional, social, economic, linguistic, academic, cultural – and ideally all efforts should be made to integrate them into the new, larger community of their new country.

Special programs , focusing on a specific social integration need of the newcomer students, based on the cooperation with the community and with their families, have already been in use, but in what follows we shall concentrate our attention upon several structured language programs meant to enable immigrant students to achieve ESL linguistic performance.

The choice as well as the effectiveness of a certain model depends on the fulfillment of these special needs, on the availability of personnel and material resources, closely related to and dependent upon the federal and state legislation, as well as the local requirements, all contributing to the immigrant students' achieving the academic standards expected of (and valid for) all students.

1. (ESL / ESOL) Pullout

It is an approach which will work especially in low-incidence classrooms. It is specially designed for students who do not speak English (whose mother tongue is not English) and consists in organizing special tutorial programs by pulling students out of the regular classes of English literacy instruction only for part of the day, the rest of the day being spent in mainstream classes.

The "personnel" side of this approach is (usually) covered by a(n) (credentialed) itinerant ESOL teacher, who, by travelling form school to school, may provide ESOL instruction.

Though largely advocated in the beginning – since *ideally* it puts together students facing the same language problems, making them feel emotionally more comfortable, by placing them with their "likes" - such an approach also has shortcomings and flaws, since it deals separately with ESL instruction and content instruction, and is educationally discriminatory in that by laying the stress on English language acquisition only, the access to content in academic subjects, and consequently to achieving (state or local) academic standards, is limited and delayed until students are proficient enough in English.

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2. Sheltered English or Content ESL

This approach represents a step forward in that it implies a simplification of the English language used in class in order to teach both ESL and subject-area content at the same time. However, this simplification does not mean a watering down of the content of mainstream subjects taught to non-LEP students, - which again would be academically discriminatory - but only an adjustment of the key academic concepts and vocabulary to the language proficiency level of LEP students. The advantage of such an approach is that it is inclusive, and enables LEP students to reach state and local academic standards in comprehensible, even though, simplified English.

3. SDAIE (Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English)

This is a superior, improved and more sophisticated variant of sheltered English, the main difference between the two lying in the fact that the content is no longer simplified but taught at the appropriate grade level by the regular content teacher, thus doing away with any kind of discrimination, linguistic or academic. (Some knowledge of LEP students' language could help, though!)

4. Structured Immersion

It is an approach in which all instruction is carried out or conducted in English but since the teacher has some knowledge of his students' native language, the latter may feel more comfortable by using it, but the important thing is that the teacher will most often respond in English. Such an approach contradicts two of the L1 (native language) instruction myths – #1 - *Teachers in English medium classrooms should not allow students to use their native language, as this will retard their English language development*" but in reality, "allowing students to use their native language facilitates cognitive and academic growth" (Samway et al, 1999:12) since students learn the language while developing thinking skills; and #2 –"*when LEP students speak in their native language in English medium classes, they are likely to be off-task*", since in reality "such students are about as likely to be off-task as monolingual English speakers" (Samway et al. 1999:14)

Since we mentioned this last approach, may be we should clarify the confusion that is sometimes made with **Submersion** .

5. Submersion, also known as **sink and swim, -** and relabeled improperly by some as **immersion** - is considered by some specialists (Berube, 2000: 47) as a "do-nothing" approach, and as illegal under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

As it is known, the total **linguistic immersion** originated in Montreal, Canada, and was at the time hailed as a successful method of learning a second language. What worked with the

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Canadian students - who were motivated to learn English in a context where French enjoyed the same social status as English - proved to be less successful, even banned in USA, since being obliged to *sink or swim* within the context of the language of the majority was considered by many immigrant students as discriminatory against their native language.

6. Bilingual Education or **Two -Way Bilingual Education**

This is an approach which is based on the use of the students' culture and native language in teaching them academic content (except, of course, for English). The advantage of this approach is that it enables students to have access to the general state and local academic standards in two languages, the transition from L1 to English being achieved gradually alongside proficiency in English. Obviously, in this approach, instruction is conducted by specially credentialed bilingual teachers. Those who opposed this type of education, on grounds of its being too expensive, circulated the myth that "*bilingual education is a luxury we cannot afford*" but in reality "the actual cost of bilingual education is largely unknown; however, whatever the cost, it may be worth it in terms of benefits" (Cummins et al, in Samway, 1999 :13)

7. Metacognitive Strategic Learning

It represents a superior type of approach, and, as the name shows, it is a social-cognitive learning inclusion model, based on the students' prior knowledge as well as on their collaborative and reflective learning, and awareness of self-regulated acquisition of English.

8. Developed on this model, the post-elementary-level approach **CALL (Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach)** is a combination of language, content and learning strategies through student preparation, presentation, guided practice, and strategic self-evaluation. In this respect in *A Framework for Academic Language Learning* , Cummins and Schechter, ed, (2003: 8-15) expertly speak of three focus areas – focus on *meaning* - making input comprehensible, developing critical thinking; on *use* – using language to generate new knowledge, generate literature and art, act on social realities; and on *language* – awareness of language forms and language uses, critical analysis of language forms and uses.

The basic aim of all these approaches (less so Immersion – *sink or swim*) is to provide the most appropriate services to the students so that they may benefit fully from and succeed in an education conducted in English" (Berube, 2000:45) since researches carried out in the field (Thomas and Collier, 1997, cf. Berube, 2000: 45) have proved that the academic performances of students who were exposed to English in such inclusive programs - that is incorporating or

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integrating content instruction with language learning - were by far better, being grounded on the recommendations made by well–established researchers in the field of program designs – (Chamot and O'Malley, 1987 – cf. Berube, 2000: 45), namely that they should be "grounded on well-controlled recent research, should explain what and how the LEP student will learn, and should provide guidance for instruction", (as presented in several works on this topic; *Learning Strategies Handbook*, 1999, Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, and Robbins, cf. Berube, 2000: 47).

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