

ADJUNCTS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

By Bonnie McCune, Library Community Programs Consultant
Colorado State Library
Prepared for English Language Acquisition Unit, 2002

While teachers and instructional methods are the basis for English language acquisition, intangible, often immeasurable qualities like motivation, support from family, and cultural perceptions impact student success regardless of the academic approach. Often they can be the major factor in retention of older students.

It may seem an insuperable task to affect these qualities and ultimately improve student achievement. Where can you get the time and resources when each day you're struggling with not only teaching but basic essentials of communication like "May I go to the bathroom" or getting students to sit in their seats?

Like any attempt at innovation and change, increasing family or community involvement requires attention, planning, collaboration and involvement. It also requires some risk along with determination. It does NOT demand elaborate and costly schemes. It does NOT mean you must implement every type of concept that comes across your desk.

Read these over and think about one you might like to try. See what fits with your personality, school, and students. Then give yourself time and leeway to discover the joy of a new way to excite your students and help them learn.

THE CORPORATE CULTURE

The education community, along with business and government, does indeed possess what might be called a "corporate culture." This can vary substantially from district to district, even class to class. But historically, students from multicultural backgrounds have been disparaged by educational systems that thwart educational equity. This is due primarily to the fact that schools are extremely analytic in their instructional approaches, and they tend to ignore the cognitive styles engendered by most multicultural learners. Such prejudices have resulted in the negative mislabeling of some students, such as being incompetent, lazy, or unwilling to learn; misdiagnosis of cognitive (intellectual) abilities; overrepresentation in special education programs; and under-representation in programs for students with gifts and talents. (10/146)

This misperception by no means is limited to the education community. The public at large is even more erroneous in its common misbeliefs about bilingual/ELA education like some of these: English is losing ground to other languages in the US, the best way to learn a language is through total immersion, and so forth. (5, 1-5) So the ELA teacher or administrator has a double challenge.

As the bulk of children at a school make lower than the normative progress, this is associated with teaching practices and expectations, which can consolidate or even exaggerate that low progress. Such schools are less likely than others to have the early and personalized contact with the families of prospective students that would enable schools to optimize the transition for these students. (9,41)

Culture has been recognized as a significant factor affecting the development of learning styles in children and adolescents. Empirical studies on learning style (also referred to as cognitive style) have been conducted to understand life-styles, the process of adaptation, and cultural patterns for different ethnocultural patterns for different ethnocultural groups. (10/144) These styles impact not only the methods in which children learn and work together but also how teachers teach and how teachers perceive children's achievements.

ELA students may be viewed in terms of their "deficiencies." But perhaps the deficiencies lie in the schools' programs or corporate culture. (2/301) Rather than looking at these students as disadvantaged, consider viewing them as possessing different perspectives, cultures and outlooks valuable for others to learn about and useful as a basis for education.

Dyson (1997) reframes the view of children with diverse culture and language from being 'at risk' to one of providing teachers with rich cultural resources on which to build. (9, 52)

Having students with cross-cultural experiences (e.g., international, English as a second language--ESL, and study abroad) enhances the potential for teaching for a global perspective. Teachers having students with international experience or students who are ethnically diverse can conduct in-depth studies of cultures and countries that students otherwise may not have studied and draw on ethnically diverse students' knowledge and experiences to address cross-cultural conflicts prevalent in their communities. (3/3)

Students' experiential backgrounds provide a point of departure and an anchor in the exploration of new ideas. (6, 3) This seems to be particularly effective in instruction for immigrant students. (6, 4 pp)

The "socialization model" extends the attention of researchers and educators interested in plotting children's development from a focus on what children cannot do on unfamiliar school tasks, to include what children can do within the activities that make up their everyday lives. The model depicts family, community and educational sites selecting, arranging and deploying activities that, directly or indirectly, provide guidance for learning. Each site can be seen as resource-full. Each has resources that are used in guiding language and literacy. Continuity is created by the degree to which activities have properties in common. (9, 45-46)

Children, parents, teachers and other members of a child's communities bring ideas about

development, teaching and learning to literacy activities. (9, 46) At the same time, teachers become educated about diversity and the strengths a culture possesses.

TO READ WELL, YOU MUST PRACTICE READING:

Proficiency in reading increases only through more reading. (4/6) Motivation is of great importance when reading. (4/3) Krashen argues that free voluntary reading is the “missing ingredient in first language ‘language arts’ as well as in intermediate second and foreign language instruction.” (1/226)

Students learning to read English are less proficient in using both textual and contextual clues. The way to increase this proficiency, as in first language acquisition, seems to be by encouraging students with limited English to read more. A hypothesis that spelling and vocabulary are developed in second languages as they are in the first language--by reading--is, then, at least reasonable. (1/160)

Bilingual children exposed to, and encouraged to read and share, a lot of illustrated story books are consistently found to learn the target language more quickly. In this way--through books--children appear to learn the language incidentally and to develop a positive attitude toward books. (1/160)

A common concern ESL teachers share is: How does one provide students with a meaningful and authentic curriculum that will meet the needs of these second-language learners? In particular, what if some students read at a first-grade level and others read at a fifth-grade level (which is very typical of any middle school ESL class)? Implementing a free reading program into the language arts curriculum has been supported by many researchers. (1/225)

The crisis that American society faces today is that large numbers of students do not care to read. To choose to read, you must associate reading with pleasure - preferably in comfortable surroundings - with time to choose what you want to read and the leisure to read. (1/158) Free voluntary reading is an area in which families, community groups, peers, and school and public libraries can be critical. They provide the motivation, encouragement, access to reading materials, reinforcement, and excitement.

Another significant observation was the impact on students who tended to be “at risk” or “highly unmotivated to work.” A tremendous difference was observed in their attitudes and behavior during the free reading times because it was a rare but consistent time period where they “stayed on task” by simply reading what they wanted to read. (1/230) [no strings attached, no reports, etc.]

The research reviewed here strongly supports the merits of extensive self-selected reading both in and out of school. Numerous studies have documented that when children read for pleasure, reading development is promoted, and the development of writing proficiency is also influenced. (1/29)

While reading is widely encouraged in first language learning for a variety of reasons, its role has been repeatedly played down in ESL. .this perspective is quite narrow and reading has a positive, constructive role to play in second language acquisition. (1/134) Reading is perhaps considered the most important skill in language learning. Many ESL students cannot read efficiently mainly because, in Cho and Krashen's words, ESL students do not engage in free reading, ESL students assume that reading must always be hard work, the texts used in ESL classes are comprehensible but are not interesting. (4/4)

Yet extensive pleasure reading is an important natural approach for the development of second language proficiency, especially for conversational language improvement.

(1/109) Overcoming affective barriers is one of the most difficult challenges faced by second-language learners on the road to fluency. . .an introduction to extensive reading in a low-anxiety environment can produce positive affective change. (1/202)

Literacy in English as a second language is acquired in much the same way it is acquired as a first language--through meaningful encounters with functional materials. (4/5)

Students must want to read in order to become good, and more importantly, habitual readers. Teachers should provide positive reading experiences. (1/156) I. Schon emphasizes the need for children to "be exposed to attractive, well written books that they can read for recreational, informational, or educational purposes." (1/28)

Certainly, materials in the student's native language are one method to encourage reading for pleasure. Yet, these are often lacking. One reference cites studies of specific schools in which Spanish language materials in school libraries were miniscule, despite high percentages of Spanish-speaking students, and primarily limited to things like dictionaries and encyclopedias. It also tracked teacher involvement in use of libraries and showed that small collections as well as teachers' lack of encouragement went along with very little usage by students. Nearby public libraries also lacked materials. (1/36-37)

Some ideas:

* The problems facing the second language acquirers may be overcome through narrow reading using light reading materials. Krashen has recommended narrow reading for language and literacy development. In narrow reading, readers read the works of one author or a few authors or works in only one genre, such as science fiction or detective novels, and a series. (1/110)

* Kaminsky discovered through observations, interviews and questionnaires that her twelve elementary ESL students did not elect to read in school when they could choose between reading and drill work, and they did not read recreationally at home. She set out to change those students' attitudes toward pleasure reading by encouraging parents to read with their children, reading to her students during class time, allotting time in class for self-selected sustained silent reading, and allowing students to take books home. (She) reported dramatic improvement in student attitudes by the end of the school year, as evidenced by the fact that a majority of the students said they would choose reading over television watching in their free time. (1/195)

* SAFE DATE for sustained silent reading:

Staff training, Appeal of books, Follow-up activities, Environment, Direct access to books, Accountability, Time to read, Encouragement. [notice that at least five of these are ones that librarians can directly impact].

. . .[acquaint staff with philosophy underlying the theoretical underpinnings of SSR and practical steps to implement it. Appeal includes self-selection of materials. Follow-up includes things like interactive or sharing activities, student newspapers, book-and-author lunches, etc. Encouragement = staff, peers, parents. Accountability = absence of any required performance level and therefore the lack of any type of assessment or accountability.] (1/137-141) Janice Pilgreen

Studies of ESL/ELA students using free voluntary reading showed growth in standardized test scores. (1/232) One teacher said, “My attitude has changed from teaching District objectives to teaching my students. (1/171)”

(Insert? Models of extensive reading, free voluntary reading and classroom library (see photocopies)

FAMILY INFLUENCES:

Families should be seen as part of a cultural group as well as constructing a personal culture within the collective. (9, 50)

The 1997 amendment to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates an increase in parental involvement. While this requirement is to be applauded, unfortunately mandates do not automatically insure or guarantee that all parents are accorded equal opportunities to become involved. Many multicultural parents have a history of negative experiences with the school and consequently are reluctant and/or intimidated to take advantage of their legal rights. For those multicultural parents, a “neutral” mechanism is needed to help them become knowledgeable about their rights and then exercise them. (10/210) [local significant community resources may serve as a conduit, can encourage, train, empower parents]

An extensive and growing literature documents the importance of school and family connections for increasing student success in school and for strengthening school programs. For example, when teachers make parent involvement part of their regular teaching practice, parents increase their interactions with their children at home, feel more positive about their abilities to help their children in the elementary grades, and rate the teachers as better teachers overall; and students improve their attitudes and achievement. (2/289)

Important linkages appear to exist between school programs and teachers’ individual practices to involve parents. . . Other variables include teacher efficacy (feelings that one is an effective and capable teacher). . . study found parents and principals rated teachers higher in overall teaching ability and interpersonal skills if the teachers frequently used practices of parent involvement. (2/301) Administrative and management policies of

school district, school board, Department of Education, even media coverage can impact public perception as well as teachers' sense of personal efficacy.

The evidence is that without shared understanding about activities, parents from diverse language and cultural communities do not necessarily act consistently with professional educators' ideas about literacy activities. . . parents in a minority language community did not adopt the ways of reading to children the researchers assumed they would. . . The evidence for the significance of shared understanding about community practices is persuasive. Teachers who are more effective with children from diverse cultural and language groups are likely to know more about specific attributes of their students and their communities. (9, 55)

Three general strategies have been deliberately adopted to optimize the transition for children from diverse communities. . . a number of interventions have been developed for modifying family literacy practices to better match the skills and behavior needed for success at school (reading styles, etc.). . . A second strategy has modified classroom practices to better match community practices. (vernacular, topics of discussion). . . A third strategy is doing both through shared understanding of practices in each setting. (discourse patterns at home and school, extensive collaboration between communities and schools in designing ways of teaching and learning at home and at school). (9, 42-43)

Teachers' general attitudes about parent involvement are important: if they expect success, they get it. If they have strong, positive attitudes about parent involvement, they get it. (2/293) Teachers of language arts (compared to teachers who did not teach the subject) emphasize the importance of helping parents become involved in several types of learning activities at home. (2/297)

But what really defines "parental involvement?" A study of parents of 14 parents of Colorado parents of valedictorians (and near-valedictorians) to collect information about beliefs and behaviors that may have contributed to their students' success. Demographics, gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity varied, as did parental education levels. The traditional involvement of the parents in school-based activities ranged from very little to significant amounts of times. Shared attitudes and practices included:

- 1) Parenting style was authoritative (rather than authoritarian or permissive).
- 2) Parents willingly spent many hours being involved with their child. Shared family time was a priority.
- 3) This involvement began with entry to kindergarten if not before and continued, albeit in different ways, throughout elementary, middle and high school.
- 4) There was positive engagement on the part of parents who genuinely enjoyed their children and took pleasure in being a part of their school life.
- 5) Parents demonstrated their commitment by sacrifice/modification/delay of their personal financial goals.
- 6) Parents expected children to do their best and trusted their children to meet their

personal responsibilities. Many were available as facilitators and mentors. (8, 3)

What does “parental involvement” mean? Just as a student is not a passive receptacle into which we pour knowledge, so, too, parents vary in their interests, abilities and cultures. And while a parent may be motivated to position a child for school achievement, he may not be accustomed to the role which we of the mainstream believe a parent plays.

The study suggests that parents’ most effective involvement is personal. Consistent, during and loving encouragement/support at home is likely to maximize student success even if direct parental involvement at the school level is not present. (8,4)

Parent involvement is not attached to a particular behavior. . .it is not the activities that were significant but the time devoted to the child. By parents maintaining consistent involvement the child developed an understanding that what they were doing was interesting and worthwhile. . . the children drew their strength and confidence from their parents’ genuine interest in their activities. (8, 73)

Earlier studies suggest five major types of involvement are part of schools’ comprehensive programs to share responsibilities with families for the education of their children:

1. Basic obligations of families--providing for children’s health and safety, parenting skills to prepare and maintain health child development, positive home conditions that support school learning.

2. Basic obligations of schools include communications with families.

3. Involvement at school includes parents and other volunteers who assist, attend, support.

4. Involvement in learning activities at home

5. Involvement in decision-making, governance, advocacy.

Although any school can choose to pursue efforts to involve parents more, some conditions seem more conducive to this:

- * School level (earlier grades vs. high school)

- * Classroom organization: self-contained classes are more conducive to parental involvement than teamed or departmentalized

- * Fewer teachers for a child

- * Academic subjects (language arts = more)

- * Perception of teachers that they share similar beliefs with parents

(2/299-300)

(Article includes steps to maximize success, questions to ask in the process. (2/302-303)

COMMUNITY TIES [THIS IS THE WEAKEST SECTION; I NEED MORE SUGGESTIONS]

In addition to the five major types of involvement that are part of schools’ comprehensive programs to share responsibilities for the education of children is a sixth--collaboration and exchanges with community organizations. (2/290-291)

Intense pressure on schools to improve test scores privileges activities that have a direct impact on academic achievement. The resources of schools are finite, and their traditions are firm. As schools are currently configured, they cannot take on all of the work that is essential to supporting academic achievement. Students who do not have that support must find it elsewhere or flounder. Partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs) and other organizations help to broaden the base of support for language minority students. .Supporting school success may require tutoring in the student's first language, or it may require services that have traditionally been viewed as secondary to academic achievement--for example health care and advice on pregnancy prevent. .parent education programs, etc. (7, 16)

Community involvement is described as consisting of "the actions that organizations and individuals take to promote student development." Involvement may center around four basic processes:

1. Conversion-Turning the [misguided] student around via powerful messages.
2. Mobilization-Complex activities, such as legal action, citizen participation, and neighborhood organizing that target change in institutions.
3. Allocation-Actions to increase students' access to resources, alter the incentive structure, and provide social support for students' efforts.
4. Instruction-Actions that support social learning and intellectual development.

Collectively, community involvement with the school can be viewed as an effective catalyst for improving the physical conditions and resources available, the attitudes and expectations within the school and the community, and the formal and informal learning opportunities for both children and adults. (10/213)

Research has established the benefits of outside support for students and schools. Working alone, schools and families may not be able to provide every student with the support needed for academic success. Language minority students, in particular, may face obstacles resulting from a mismatch between their language and culture and the language and culture of school, and from the school system's difficulty in addressing their academic needs appropriately. Some schools are using community-based organizations to help get services, forming partnerships for tutoring, presentations, classroom volunteers, and resources. (7, 1)

Recommendations:

- * Partnership: assure that potential partners are fully committed to the partnership; maintain communication;
- * Program recommendations: ensure strong leadership at the program level; start small and build carefully; look for opportunity. (7, 15-16)

As you consider involving community groups, be aware they function differently from the education system. Unlike schools, which operate in a context of regulation and tradition, school/CBO partnerships tend to be very fluid. Very often, organizations come together to develop a single projects. .may add new projects or programs after success. .modify, change. (7, 5) At preschool and elementary level, partnerships often focus on

parents and families. parenting classes, ESL, health, Even Start, etc. (7, 6)

Like any program, community partnerships need management and support. Components for program success include (7, 10)--

- *resources, staff, funding, space and supplies;

- * flexibility

- * responsive program design--appropriateness, accessibility, building on abilities

- * Evaluation (7, 11-14)

Can these efforts really produce results? One study saw mobility fall from 40% to 10%, test scores and attendance rise from among the lowest to the highest in the cluster, after a parent center was organized in the elementary school. Pacoima Urban Village, Pacoima CA. (7, 3)

[Insert examples? Also overview of managing volunteers]

A final note, volunteer organizations, businesses, and churches are excellent resources for illustrating how local communities and economies are connected to other peoples and nations. (3/3)

LIBRARIES: RESOURCES RIGHT AT HAND:

As stated above, proficiency in reading increases only through more reading, and motivation is of great importance when reading. Free reading and silent sustained reading are two methods to provide motivation and time. There is evidence that many children obtain a significant proportion of their free-reading books from a library. (1/23)

Informal library use demonstrably can help student achievement. In a small test group, students who attended the library regularly [and had FVR] improved their scores by an average of 17%. [this after only 6 weeks, test was a SAT pre-test]. . The students who attended the library also performed better on their classroom final exams. Twenty-three percent of the students in the subject class received excellent grades, compared to an average of 4% to 6% in the other classes. There was another unexpected result of constant library attendance. . an increased desire to go to the library on their own. (1/235) Seventy-eight percent . .said they now read more often [compared to 3% of the others].

However, there are many barriers to successful use of libraries among minority individuals. One of these barriers is lack of knowledge of the services the library provides. (1/71) Library understanding and use, like literacy, varies among cultural groups. One (small) study of high school students showed the ELA students found out about the school library from a teacher or someone familiar with the library, a friend or relative, NOT a librarian. They see the library as a resource for school, get sent to it as a punishment. They didn't know they could get magazines and recreational reading there and they were not familiar with public libraries. They also view libraries (public and

school) as places that are quiet and study, to improve English. The students didn't think their parents should or could go to a public library because they didn't know English well enough. In a library setting, the students don't feel comfortable using non-English. (1/56-66)

It is essential, then that librarians and educators take a primary role in encouraging and mediating library use and understanding among cultural and language groups. With cultural knowledge concerning the benefits of the library, the classroom teacher is in a pivotal role in introducing and promoting libraries. . . the classroom teacher has a strong and dominant role in determining library use or non-use. . . In the case of the bilingual learner, "instruction in library and information skills with a bilingual/bicultural program" is necessary. Optimally, this bilingual/bicultural program is a joint project between teachers, bilingual specialists and librarians. (1/58)

Library policies and collections, whether in the classroom, serving an entire school, or an adjacent public facility, help determine the amount of use by ELA students. For example, students who are allowed to take their school library books home enjoy reading more and want to visit the library more. They choose pleasure reading over other activities more frequently, and have a better idea of many uses of libraries.] (1/240) Successful library programs targeting linguistic minorities are extremely user-friendly. Bilingual signage . .bilingual written instructions. . .bilingual library card applications, etc. (1/72) Schools in which teachers work closely with school media specialists provide plenty of opportunities for students to visit libraries, both during class and during non-school times.

However, resources are often limited, particular in languages other than English. One study reported, if students and resources at these schools (in the study) are representative of others in Los Angeles and elsewhere, then the condition of school libraries is extremely inadequate. (1/41) When looking at school libraries, Haro (1970) found that Mexican-American students had limited access to information and received poor library service. (1/58) The ELA instructors have an especially strong position in serving as advocates for adequate school and public library collections and services for their students.

Among the principles of effective instruction for immigrant students. (6, 4 pp) are two that apply to library/classroom interactions:

- * Complex and flexible forms of collaboration maximize learners' opportunities to interact while making sense of language and content. (6,4)
- * Students are given multiple opportunities to extend their understandings and apply their knowledge.

Libraries play a vital role in ensuring that all children have opportunities to succeed, especially since students with access to books are among the best readers in school. By providing all children access to libraries--public, school, and classroom--we are making their opportunities to achieve literacy more equal. (1/236)

?? Spanish-language collections in Colorado schools and public libraries? Are there policy restrictions on acquisition of books in non-English languages?

RESOURCES AND FOOTNOTES:

1. "Literacy, access, and libraries among the language minority population," edited by Rebecca Constantino; The Scarecrow Press, Inc.; Lanham, Md., London; 1998.
2. "School Programs and Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement in Inner-City Elementary and Middle Schools," Joyce L. Epstein, Susan L. Dauber, John Hopkins University; The Elementary School Journal, Vol. 91 #3, 1991, the University of Chicago, 289 - 305.
3. "Practical Suggestions for Teaching Global Education", Howard Eugene Taylor, ERIC Digest, June 96, EDO-SP-95-1
4. "Reading and the ESL Student," Yukiko Inoue, The University of Guam, Foundations and Educational Research, College of Education, Guam; through ERIC
5. "Ten Common Fallacies about Bilingual Education," James Crawford, November 1998, Center for Applied Linguistics, ERIC Digests, EDO-FL-98-09
6. "Strategies for Success: Engaging Immigrant Students in Secondary Schools," Aida Walqui; ERIC Digests, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Wash DC, June 2000, EDO-FL-00-03.
7. BROADENING THE BASE: SCHOOL/COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS SERVING LANGUAGE MINORITY STUDENTS AT RISK,; Adger, Carolyn Temple, and Locke, Jennifer; Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence; Educational Practice Report 6; 2000; University of California, Santa Cruz.
8. THE MAKING OF A VALEDICTORIAN: A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN ACADEMIC SUCCESS; Laura Hensinger; M. A. in Education thesis; University of Colorado at Boulder; 2001
9. "Co-constructing expertise: the development of parents' and teachers' ideas about literacy practices and the transition to school," McNaughton, Stuart; University of Auckland, New Zealand; JOURNAL OF EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY; pp 40 - 58; 2001; Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks CA, New Delhi.
10. SPECIAL EDUCATION, MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION, AND SCHOOL REFORM; edited by Utley, Cheryl A., and Obiakor, Festus E. Charles C. Thomas Publisher, Ltd.; Springfield, Illinois; 2001.