Developing an Effective Bilingual Literacy Program for Adolescents with Learning Disabilities

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Program for Adolescents with Learning Disabilities

by

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Introduction

I have worked in the Rochester City School District for the past six years as a secondary bilingual special education teacher. Over this time I have detected the need for profound literacy intervention among adolescent bilingual special education students. In six years I have encountered a high level of functional illiteracy, students who display difficulty in expressing themselves, adolescents with identity conflicts, and many who lack the interest or motivation to overcome the challenges they face. It is my belief that these problems can be surpassed by modifying traditional reading programs to meet the needs of this unique population of students.

"America’s non-English speaking student population is diverse, multicultural, multilingual, and academically challenged" (McCardle et.al., 2005, p.1). Although these students bring a wealth of culture, tradition, diverse languages, and rich heritage, they also have the highest dropout rate, lowest achievement scores, largest mobility rate, and highest poverty. (U.S. Department of Education, 2004; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2004b). Several factors influence the academic progress of English Language Learners (ELLs) with special needs, including "limited prior schooling, lack of proficiency in English, native language background, cultural expectations, and personal or family concerns" (Morrison, 1995, p.1). The task of helping ELLs with special needs to develop literacy is no small undertaking. Teachers who are charged with this responsibility need to be knowledgeable about all
of the following areas: 1) linguistic background of their students, 2) sociocultural influences on learning; 3) the process of second language acquisition and the relationship of native language proficiency to the development of English; 4) effective approaches for first and second language instruction, and 5) effective strategies for working with special needs students. In the following paper I intend to review the research available on the preceding topics and to explain how I have attempted to synthesize best practices from each area to create an effective literacy program for the adolescents and young adults that I teach.
Linguistic considerations

To understand and better serve the community of learners we face each day in our classrooms, it is important to learn more about the language they use. Though all of students I serve are placed in a bilingual program because they are Spanish dominant, it would be wrong to assume that their vocabulary skills are equivalent or that they all speak the same variety of Spanish. In school I was taught Castilian Spanish but I developed my communicative skills with friends of Mexican descent. Listening to and speaking with my Mexican friends, I quickly realized that there is a great difference between the variety of Spanish I learned in school and the variety which is spoken on the streets of Los Angeles. When I began teaching native Spanish speakers from the Caribbean (Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic), I was further exposed to the expansive variability among Spanish dialects. In the following section I provide a literature review of Spanish language change in the United States and discuss potential educational implications for students with this language background.
Spanish-speaking community

Spanglish, Tex-Mex, Chicano, Pocho Spanish and Pachuco are some of the terms used to describe the varieties of Spanish in use throughout the United States. Researchers who study these varieties of Spanish have concentrated their efforts in areas where there are large populations of Spanish speakers—southern Florida, California, Texas, New Mexico, and urban areas of the Northeast. In these areas Spanish, “isolated as it is from the broad variety of contexts and situations in which it is [normally] used, is at risk of undergoing a number of significant changes” (Valdés, 1998, p.477). Interestingly, there are many similarities in the nature and rate of change that is occurring in these locations even though they are geographically distant and composed of ethnically diverse speakers. The nature of changes Spanish is undergoing in the United States, the reasons for these changes, and the extent to which they are occurring are topics of interest to a wide range of groups.

Economic, political, and social conditions in Latin America and the United States have created an interesting linguistic situation. Since the “United States investment in Latin America is in capital-intensive rather than labor-intensive industries, there is a huge flow of profits to the United States at the same time that not enough jobs are created locally. The unemployed are therefore forced to migrate in order to survive economically” (Peñalosa, 1985, p.14). Though it is clear that the Spanish-speaking population in the United States is an extremely heterogeneous group, a majority of immigrants come to the U.S. in search of better economic
opportunities. "The linguistic repertoire of most ordinary Mexicans who emigrate to the U.S. are generally made up of mid to low registers in Spanish" (Valdés, 1998, p.477). Additionally, studies have clearly shown that the language of immigrants undergoes attrition and structural loss as speakers of Spanish shift their language use to English—the dominant language of the public domain. The new variety of Spanish that is advanced through the intense contact with English "is at least as different from Standard Spanish as Black English is from Standard English, and its educational implications are just as crucial" (Nash, 1970a, p.122).

In the United States, "the Latino population is now the largest minority group, surpassing the African-American population, and representing about 12 percent of the U.S. population" (Hurtado & Vega, 2004, p.138). Additionally, the population is projected to continue growing. As the number of Spanish speakers in the United States increases, the close contact of Spanish and English also intensifies. This interaction of English and Spanish provides a wealth of raw information to researchers concerned with language change in contact situations. Historically, sociolinguists interested in language change in contact situations have examined and debated "the interaction between internal linguistic factors and external social forces" and its effect on language change (Silva-Corvalán, 1990, p.163). The debate continues because of the complexity of these contact situations and the compounding effects of numerous social factors.
Though the views of most researchers recognize the importance of internal linguistic factors on language change, many also place great emphasis on the role extra-linguistic factors play in the process of language change. Silva-Corvalán notes:

Sociolinguists have shown that language is inherently and systematically heterogeneous and variable, and that the seeds of change lie precisely in the existence of this variation. In regards to change, therefore, one of the general principles states that linguistic and social factors are closely interrelated in the development of language change. (1990, p.162)

As indicated by the perspective in the above quotation, linguistic change is intertwined with individual variability and the historical and social context in which the change takes place. Individual social markers such as race, economic class, educational level, and language proficiency along with social factors such as immigration patterns, governmental/educational policies, and subjective attitudes towards language and ethnicity are virtually inseparable from language change (Gutierrez, 1994). In this regard, Thomason and Kaufman argue “that it is the sociolinguistic history of the speakers, and not the structure of their language, that is the primary determinant of the linguistic outcome of language contact” (1988, p.35). For instance, Peñalosa proposes that the situation of most Cubans in the United States is quite different from that of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans because of differing social and historical issues. He contrasts Mexicans and Puerto Ricans who came to the United States with Cubans, claiming that the Cubans who came to the United States before 1980 were mostly affluent middle-class professionals rather than blue-collar manual laborers, white rather than non-white, and speakers of standard rather than rural vernacular varieties of Spanish. “Thus, while Cuban and Puerto Rican Spanish
are closely related varieties of Caribbean Spanish, sociolinguistically the Puerto Ricans in the United States resemble Chicanos more than Cubans" (Peñaílosa, 1985, p.13). In this example, the emphasis placed on extra-linguistic factors suggests the effects of external social forces override the limiting impact of internal linguistic characteristics. Through a focus on the kinds of changes that take place, and the social and historical factors that influence the changes, sociolinguists are able to “contribute to the understanding of what is a possible linguistic change, and how change spreads through both the linguistic and social systems” (Sylva-Corvalán, 1989, p. 61).

Classifying Spanish language change

To help organize and make sense of the multi-layered, dynamic nature of language change, sociolinguists have adopted certain methodological procedures. Most of the literature reviewed for this paper consisted of longitudinal, comparative, cross-generational studies that reflect an awareness of the diversity of Spanish speakers in the United States. Silva-Corvalán and others propose that to study the Spanish of the United States it is important to understand that “each of us experiences society differently, multiple-group membership is normal, and both change and stability seem to be natural conditions of our existence” (1990, p.164). The situation of Spanish speakers in the United States demonstrates this ‘stable-diversity’.

To explain the range of bilingualism in high contact situations, Silva-Corvalán proposes the concept of a “bilingual continuum”. According to her theory, Spanish speakers in the United States can be arranged along a continuum of developing bilingualism. She states, “one can identify a series of lects which range from standard
or full-fledged Spanish to an *emblematic* use of Spanish and, vice versa, from full-fledged to emblematic English” (1990, p. 165). This theory is especially useful for explaining inter-generational differences in the Spanish spoken in the U.S. The most distinctive feature of the dialect(s) of contact Spanish in the U.S. is the heavy overlay of English. “As a result of this interference,” Clarkson contends, “the bilingual child’s language includes linguistic patterns alien to monolingual Spanish speaking communities” (1977, p.966). Across generations, parents transmit the English-influenced variety of Spanish to the point that, “for the child, these constructions become his model upon which to expand—as native patterns” (Clarkson, 1977, p.966). The difficulty with trying to study such diversity, as Silva-Corvalán points out, is that “studies [surveyed] differ greatly in purpose, methodology, analysis, and presentation of the data” (1990, p.168). The naming of specific language phenomena also varies significantly between studies, creating obstacles for discussing the variety or varieties of Spanish spoken in the U.S. For example, “the terms calque, semantic loan, semantic extension, loan shift, and loan translation all refer to essentially the same modeling phenomenon” (Otheguy, 1989, p.43).

The level to which Spanish in the U.S. is becoming a distinct code, only recognizable and intelligible to those who speak this variety, is highly debatable. According to Rose Nash, “Spanglish is an emerging language [that] retains the phonological, morphological, and syntactic structure of Spanish” (1970a, p.223), but derives much of its vocabulary from English. Nash asserts that Spanglish has at least one of the characteristics of an autonomous language: a substantial number of native speakers. She maintains that in Spanglish neither language contains grammatical
errors due to interference. Also, Nash, like Otheguy, makes a distinction between code-switching and Spanglish (or, to use Smead’s terminology, “lexical borrowing”). While each of the three researchers acknowledges the difficulty in distinguishing between switching and borrowing, they stress the importance of addressing such a distinction.

In his work, Otheguy employs the conceptual framework created by Shana Poplack to differentiate between transferring and switching. Poplack created a complex set of criteria to categorize instances of English overlay in Spanish. Included in this set of criteria are “level of phonological assimilation, level of social integration, and discourse function” (cited in Otheguy, 1989, p. 42). Nash offers similar ways to classify single word variations as switching or Spanglish. Once established as a Spanglish utterance, Nash categorizes the utterance into one of three groups: Type 1) “the extensive use of English lexical items occurring in their original form in otherwise Spanish utterances” (1970a, p.225), Type 2) the conforming of English words to Spanish phonology, orthography, morphology and inflections, and Type 3) “a distinctive new form of Spanish evolving under the influence of English, much as English itself was influenced by Norman French” (1970a, p.228). Robert Smead is another researcher who ascribes to a three-category typology for classifying the “lexical innovation” of contact Spanish in the U.S.

Smead’s study of English loanwords in Chicano Spanish offers characterization and rationale for “lexical innovation”. Like Nash, Smead contends that “borrowing” in Chicano Spanish is due to the intimate contact with English and the mainstream culture. Smead utilizes different terms to identify his three categories
of innovations “[1] the lexical switch, [2] the loanword, and [3] the calque” (Smead, 1998, p.1). Regardless of the terminology, the classification system set forth by Smead aligns neatly with Nash’s typology. Smead focuses on the category of “loanwords”. He describes the model source and mode of transmission for loanwords, the representation of loanwords among the lexical categories (noun, verb, modifier, and discourse marker), and the representation of loanwords in various fields such as sports, recreation, and academia. Smead and Nash present like findings for Spanish speakers who receive linguistic input in both Spanish and English. “The pressure of English words and phrases is ceaseless and ubiquitous in the public domain, and many Spanish-speakers have simply come to use what they have so often heard” (Smead, 1998, p.6). In fact, throughout these studies there is general consensus that intensive language contact is a powerful external promoter of language change, and not just in regards to the “borrowing” of English vocabulary.

**Characteristics of language change**

Many of the “universal phenomena characteristic of bilingualism and multilingualism, namely simplification, overgeneralization, transfer, and convergence, [which] are attested across different situations of linguistic stress” can be applied to the varieties of Chicano and Puerto Rican Spanish used in the United Stated. (Silva-Corvalán, 1990, p.163).

Simplification, according to Silva-Corvalán, Gutierrez, and Valdés, is the process in which a form is expanded to a larger number of contexts. Gutierrez states that, “simplification involves a greater frequency of the use of one form at the expense of another. The final outcome of simplification is the loss of forms, i.e., a
simplified system with fewer forms” (1990, p.112). Valdés illustrates the simplification process by depicting the usage of indicative versus subjunctive amongst Chicanos in Los Angeles. However, Peñalosa reminds the reader that this simplification is not isolated to Chicano speakers in Los Angeles. “It is important to note that the discussion of Chicano language usage cannot usefully be separated from a discussion of other Americans of Hispanic descent, especially Puerto Ricans, for they share a similar sociolinguistic phenomena” (Peñalosa, 1985, p.11). One pattern of simplification noticed across several studies was that the distribution of the imperfect subjunctive is being reduced, and the imperfect indicative is now taking over contexts previously reserved for the imperfect subjunctive. Silva-Corvalán (1990, p.169) provides a table to illustrate this trend:

*Figure 1:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simplification of Indicative – Subjunctive</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Categorical Contexts</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable Contexts</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the preceding table, Groups 1-3 represent bilinguals along the continuum, with Group 1 representing first generation immigrants and Group 3 representing third generation bilinguals. The lower percent usage of the imperfect subjunctive among third generation bilinguals shows a simplification of the subjunctive among this population of speakers.
What is remarkable about the manner in which the Spanish is simplifying is its regularity. Silva-Corvalán believes that, "Patterns of simplification and loss are never random but at all stages conform to a predictable trend to develop a least grammaticalized system within the constraints of universal grammar possibilities and preferences" (1989, p.60). She cites the work of several other sociologists (Mougeon, Dorian, Gal, and Trudgill) to establish parallel patterns of simplification and loss in other contact languages such as Canadian French, East Sutherland Gaelic, Austrian Hungarian, and Arvanitika. The findings of Silva-Corvalán and the others show that learners go through stages of development that are the reverse of simplification.

Generally, the earlier tense forms to be acquired are present and preterite, while future, conditional, and compound tenses are acquired in the same order in which, according to Silva-Corvalán, they are lost within the "bilingual continuum". She states, "Not only is there a large degree of correspondence regarding emergence and disappearance of tense-mood-aspect markers overall, but also with respect to the development and loss of verbal inflections with different types of verbs" (Silva-Corvalán, 1990, p.168).

Literature relating to contact Spanish in the U.S. also describes the theory or process of overgeneralization. There are many similarities between simplification and overgeneralization, the separating factor is that "overgeneralization may affect contexts where no corresponding competing form exists" (Silva-Corvalán, 1990, p.163). Gutierrez provides a study of generalization within the U.S. Spanish speaking community in regards to an extension of the meaning and use of the word 'estar'. In his study he compares similar groups of speakers from Los Angeles, California and
Michoacan, Mexico. His results indicate “the total usage of innovative estar in the entire sample from Los Angeles demonstrates the influence of the bilingual environment, since the percentage of innovative estar increases to 34%, as opposed to 16% in the total sample from Michoacan” (Gutierrez, 1994, p.117). Yet, Gutierrez warns that causality cannot be established between the bilingual setting and the increased use of ‘estar’. Rather, he believes that “we are witnessing a process of linguistic change that was initiated in the linguistic system of a monolingual variety and has likely been accelerated by the bilingual environment” (1994, p.117).

Transfer, as defined by Silva-Corvalán, “is the incorporation of language features from one language into another, with consequent restructuring of the subsystems involved” (1990, p.163). The earlier discussion of lexical borrowing as handled by Smeade, Otheguy, and Nash demonstrate the ease with which one can document lexical transfer of specific, often-times high frequency words or phrases. However, establishing patterns of syntactical transfer is not as easy. One way that Silva-Corvalán attempts to elucidate transfer in the U.S. contact Spanish is by describing “the higher frequency of use of a form in a language, determined on the basis of a comparison with more conservative internal norms” (1990, p.164). This, she claims, is the case with Puerto Rican bilinguals in New York who employ the present progressive more frequently than Spanish monolinguals.

The last “universal characteristic” that was found in this literature review was “convergence”. The definition of convergence given by Silva-Corvalán did not seem to match-up with the research on contact Spanish in the United States. Silva-
Corvalán defines convergence as "the achievement of structural similarity in a given aspect of the grammar of two or more language, assumed to be different at the onset of contact" (1990, p.164). Even Nash, who defines Spanglish as a "hybrid code", maintains that the framework and structure of Spanish has been upheld in spite of the overlay of English vocabulary. "The stabilized use of Spanish in this community is reinforced by the circulatory migration patterns of Mexican Americans between Chicago and Mexico, and by the increasing need to interact with more recent immigrants and a large population of Puerto Ricans" (Silva-Corvalán, 1989, p.64). Therefore, it seems likely that the grammar of the Spanish spoken in the U.S. will remain more similar to its heritage variety than to English.

**Implications of Spanish language change**

The importance of Spanish language shift in the United States cannot be understated, as language can be used to maintain current power structures. Clearly, certain languages and dialects of language are viewed as "more prestigious" than others. For example, students are required to study Shakespearean English, but rarely do they study Appalachian (Hillbilly) English. In discussing the Ebonics debate, author Dennis Baron asserts that language barriers are erected at social borders as well as national frontiers. He writes, "when social mobility for speakers of a language is low, dialects abound; when mobility is high, linguistic as well as other distinctions tend to disappear" (1997, B-3).
To demonstrate the impact of socioeconomic class on language proficiency, Valdés and Geoffrion-Vinci performed a study on university level students to examine the students' use of the academic register in Spanish. The investigation compared oral presentations from two groups: 1) Mexican born "monolinguals" and 2) U.S. born "bilinguals". The results of this study suggest that "although bilingual students' lexical production appears to be 'less rich' than that of their monolingual counterparts"(1998, p.494), factors such as education and social background contribute to awareness of and proficiency with various registers. Valdés and Goffrion-Vinci draw attention to the fact that BOTH groups of students encountered difficulties with the academic register if they were from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. They point out:

individuals can behave according to the patterns used by groups with which they desire to identify only to the extent that a) they can identify the groups; b) they have adequate access to the groups and the ability to study the groups' behavior; c) they have a sufficiently powerful motivation to join the groups, which is either reinforced or reversed by the groups themselves; and d) they have the ability to modify their own behavior. (1998, p.495)

The authors expand on these concepts by making reference to individuals from *las clases humildes* (the humble class) who develop a linguistic repertoire that makes them indistinguishable from members of *las clases acomodadas* (people of means). To me, the notion that distinct social groups have their own registers of speech is too frequently taken for granted; but worse, the idea that all social groups should aspire to be "indistinguishable" from the upper class is too commonly accepted.
Developing an awareness of "the characteristics of the different levels and styles of language found in the repertoires of bilingual speakers" and investigating our awareness of different registers, or levels, of language will play an important role in developing appropriate literacy programs for English Language Learners (Valdés, p. 474). In order to improve students' self-perceptions and their development of language proficiency we must heighten our understanding of the ways Spanish language is changing in the United States. Baron asserts, "teachers must learn to recognize the rich and flexible linguistic talent that students already possess, working with it as they move students not toward a monolithic, mechanical correctness, but toward increasing linguistic depth and flexibility" (1997, B-5). By developing a wider repertoire of varieties of and registers within both Spanish and English, we will be able to help our students display "a more relaxed disposition and a more positive linguistic awareness than the 'error analysis' approach, as evidenced by the visible lowering of their affective filters" (Pandey, 1999, p.103). Recognizing the difference between academic Spanish and the Spanish developing in these contact situations will help teachers to guide their students' growth in literacy. Rather than viewing dialects or registers of Spanish (or English) as bad, lazy, or erroneous, we should encourage our students to compare and contrast the various forms of language, to explore when or where it is appropriate to utilize one style over another, and how to manipulate their literacy skills to become more effective communicators and contributors to our global society.
Sociocultural Influences on Learning

Another consideration to be cognizant of when developing a literacy program for English Language Learners is how cultural and societal aspects of language affect student learning. Culture pervades every aspect of our lives, one of the most important of which is the language we use. Surface differences in language are as obvious to us as the ways we sit, eat, or build our homes. Not as easily recognizable is the fact that the way we learn and interact with language—both written and oral—is also affected by our cultural, social, educational, and economic backgrounds.

"Effective cross-cultural communication requires a knowledge of the cultural referents as well as individual and situational factors that influence how students use language in conversational and academic contexts" (Garcia & Malkin, 1993, p.56). Teachers should remember that how students process information, how they deal with conflict, and which types of communication they prefer are influenced by the cultural context that they are raised in.
Theory -- Teaching and learning literacy are social processes that are inherently culture bound; thus, how teachers organize learning environments in the classroom can either provide access or create barriers to children's learning. Addressing the reading needs of a diverse population requires examination of assumptions about literacy, as well as beliefs about and expectations for English Language Learners (ELLs) whose backgrounds may or may not be different from their teachers'.

"Stratification based on social class, gender, family or personal histories, and educational attainment have much to do with attitude, competence, and behavior a student brings into the classroom" (Pérez and Gúzman, 2002, p.9). Aspects of the sociocultural environment, including the home, the school, and the community impact how students learn. Butler and Stevens created excellent models, included on the following page (Figures 2 & 3), to represent the interrelationship of these sociocultural variables. "The models illustrates the dynamic, constant interaction among all the elements" and helps show how "the elements create a unique educational situation for each student" (1997, p.10). While some students' backgrounds correspond neatly with the expectations and culture of the school environment, other students experience a cultural clash upon entering school. For these students, the language, practices and culture of the school system may come into direct conflict with the student's childhood experience and cultural views of literacy. "Given the 'hidden' nature of many of these rules, norms, roles and expectations, our awareness of their existence develop only when they are violated and we attempt to identify the source of the misunderstanding" (Garcia & Malkin, 1993, p.53).
Figure 2. Interactive model of elements that impact academic performance.

Figure 3. Examples of variables in the student's sociocultural environment.

(Butler & Stevens, 1997, p.11)
Another explanation of this multifaceted phenomenon is offered by Cloud, the term cultural characteristics refers to students' culturally determined beliefs, norms, values, customs, and patterns of thought and behavior. These are continuously influenced by a child's primary cultural group membership, family norms, and wider societal influences. While ethnicity and nationality can affect a child's individual cultural characteristics, it is through the enculturation or child-rearing process (the cultural transmission process), as well as through interactions in the wider society, that a child's cultural characteristics are established and continuously transformed. Thus, teachers should expect cultural differences both within and between groups (Cloud, 2002, p. 107).

Students should be viewed through the lens of their cultural characteristics and approaches to teaching them should be attentive to the influence these characteristics may have on students' learning styles and preferences.

In the article, “Teacher Talk: Language in the Classroom”, Dr. S.B. Heath describes how culturally based linguistic differences, even among English-speaking children, can relate to their conduct and the type of treatment they receive from their teachers. Dr Heath notes the varied backgrounds of young children as they enter school, and explains how these background differences relate to important discourse differences in the classroom. She advises teachers not to take for granted that their language choices will be equally clear to all students and asserts that they should consciously examine the linguistic dynamics of the classroom to enhance their effectiveness as educators. Heath’s description of “teacher talk”, or the conventionalized patterns of speech that govern social interactions in the classroom,
reveals that "communication depends on shared knowledge between teacher and students—not only about the STRUCTURE of these utterances, but also about the NORMS and BEHAVIORS to which they refer" (Heath, 1978, p.351). Sensitivity to a student's cultural background requires awareness and sensitivity to the effects of register—in this case teacher talk. For example, 'You are old enough to know better than...[fill in undesirable behavior]' is a phrase commonly overheard in classrooms and reflects a basic underlying premise that many routines—and the values underlying them—should not have to be explicitly taught.

Dr. Heath also explores the ways that home literacy events relate to school success. The chart on the following page illustrates some of her findings regarding the interaction of culture and socio-economic background on a student's ability to be successful in traditional U.S. schools. Dr. Heath writes that in order "to understand students' patterns of oral and written language use and their development of communicative competence" (1982, p.51) we must understand where they are coming from. By examining literacy rituals from three different communities and comparing them to the expectations and rituals from school settings, Heath provides a clear example of how students' home culture can conflict with the culture of the school community. "In classrooms, the participation structures of English language learners from different backgrounds may vary considerably and will be reflected in how they interact with the teacher and with other students" (Butler & Stevens, 1997, p.13). Differing characteristics of discourse, elements of teacher talk, and expected values such as who holds authority, present versus future goals, management of time,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Main town</strong></th>
<th><strong>Roadville</strong></th>
<th><strong>Trackton</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• bedtime stories are read</td>
<td>• absoluteness of ways of talking about what is written</td>
<td>• written word is for negotiation and words are changing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• use of commercial games and instructions</td>
<td>• authority behind written word</td>
<td>• reading materials for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• socialized in “initiation-reply-evaluation sequences”</td>
<td>• Nursery rhymes, set, patterns, book reading focuses on letters</td>
<td>• children are viewed as “comers” of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• parents ask frequent wh-questions and encourage children to label 2- and 3-dimensional objects</td>
<td>• textual sources are rarely consulted when cooking, assembling items, etc.</td>
<td>• generally ask analogical questions which call for comparisons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• scaffolding dialogues</td>
<td>• parents are directive and do not ask many questions of children</td>
<td>• “continuously contextualized with communication”—human rich environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• turn-taking modeled in conversation</td>
<td>• analytical thinking is not a priority</td>
<td>• meaning is negotiated as a group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• encouraged to selectively pay attention to objects and decontextualize surroundings</td>
<td>• importance to obedience and adherence to norms is stressed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• start out strong but tend to fall behind around fourth grade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Heath, 1982)
recognition of specific spaces for designated functions, and generalized respect for ‘others’ can create discomfort and unease for a student who is unfamiliar with these expected behaviors or ways of communicating (Heath, 1978, 1982, 1983). Additionally, "differences in interaction styles (e.g. direct vs. indirect) and language styles (e.g. elaborated vs. restricted) can influence teacher perceptions of students as passive or lacking in cognitive ability" (Butler & Stevens, 1997, p.13). The disparity between community and family practices and school conventions can produce discord for students and lead to a lack of participation. Alma Flor Ada writes:

By failing to bridge the gap between a highly literate school, with its curriculum driven by books, and homes where literacy is not practiced, the school system disempowers parents in the eyes of their children. For these children, accepting the school curriculum often results in a sense of shame about their own language and family, but maintaining cultural identification may bring a sense of alienation from the school, a feeling that they do not belong in the kinds of classrooms that ignore or devalue their culture.

(Perez & Gúzman, 2002, p. ix)

This gap is further increased when students do not know the dominant language the school, or when they speak a different dialect of the language used for instruction. "Although not in itself a negative, this disparity adds an additional burden to the student who must learn a different set of literacy skills and new ways of interacting and making meaning when communicating with peers and adults" (Butler & Stevens, 1997, p.15)
Practice—Currently, many schools operate under a subtractive approach to literacy development. From this perspective students are encouraged to abandon "bad" language habits and "incorrect" pattern usage. Though teachers may view their judgments of students' language "errors" as a necessary component of learning "proper" forms, they are forcing student to change something that the students view as essential to their nature. Language and identity are closely linked, and an attack on language may be interpreted as a personal attack. For these students the linguistic dilemma has produced "a generation of students who feel inadequate with their Spanish, uncomfortable with their English, and guilty about their culturally unacceptable Spanish" (Nash, 1970b, p.232). The subtractive approach to literacy can cause students to disidentify from the educational process. This practice not only affects LEP students, but any student whose language background is different from Standard English. Consider the following quote from a teenaged girl:

Your schools have been operating on the theory that everyone is the same beneath the skin. I realize that you were thrust into a new situation too. You have tried, in your way, to do what you thought was best. I'm only asking that you look a little deeper- see me as I am: I'm one of you but yet, I'm still me. My way of communicating may be different from yours but it fills my adaptive and emotional needs as I perform it. Why should my 'at home' way of talking be 'wrong' and your standard version be 'right'?... Show me...that by adding a fluency in standard dialect, you are adding something to my language and not taking something away from me. Help me retain my identity and self respect while learning to talk 'your' way." (Heath, 1983, 329)
The relationship between culture, language, and identity are so intricately woven together, that we must be ever mindful to maintain their balance.

According to Bartolome the preoccupation with methods, and even methodological theory, without a critical analysis of the sociocultural and historical context of the teaching/learning environment serves only to perpetuate the miseducation of poor minority students. She states that:

a myopic focus on methodology often serves to obfuscate the real question—which is why in our society, subordinated students do not generally succeed academically in schools. In fact, schools often reproduce the existing asymmetrical power relations among cultural groups...By taking a sociohistorical view of present-day conditions and concerns that inform the lived experiences of socially perceived minority students, teachers are better able to comprehend the quasi-colonial nature of minority education. By engaging in this critical sociohistorical analysis of subordinated students' academic performance, [teachers] are better situated to reinterpret and reframe current educational concerns so as to develop pedagogical structures that speak to the day-to-day reality, struggles, concerns, and dreams of these students...Command of a content area or specialization is necessary, but it is not sufficient for effectively working with students. Just as critical is that teachers comprehend that their role as educators is a political act that is never neutral. (1994, p.179)

Goldstein, too, describes how bicultural development is "enmeshed in the cultural relations of power between the subordinate and dominant culture" and how bicultural students are forced to deal with two different cultural realities (Goldstein, 1995, p. 464).
Helping students learn to construct their own identity within two languages, while strengthening their abilities to successfully maneuver the language demands of the mainstream educational and business worlds is definitely a challenge. Students may be reticent to relinquish features of their previously acquired communication styles. As Sandra Savignon points out, “differences not only in the code itself but in the semantic meanings attributed to these different encodings contribute to identification with a speech community or culture, the way a speech community views itself and the world” (2001, p.24). In my experience, students’ fear of losing their identity by changing their language patterns is a very real phenomenon that can create resistance to learning. Some students are more comfortable maintaining an informal voice with their friends, but due to cultural norms may not be comfortable speaking freely with an adult. A diary entry of a Japanese learner of English offers the opposite perspective and great insight into the matter of identity:

I just don’t know what to do right now. I might have been wrong since I began to learn English; I always tried to be better and wanted to be a good speaker. It was wrong, absolutely wrong! When I got to California, I started imitating Americans and picked up the words that I heard. So my English became just like Americans. I couldn’t help it. I must have been funny to them, because I am a Japanese and have my own culture and background. I think I almost lost the most important thing I should not have. I got California English, including intonation, pronunciation, the way they act, which are not mine. I have to have my own English. (Preston, 1981, p.113)

Incorporating teaching methods that allow students to utilize both their heritage language and English and which place value on their prior experiences are essential
components to helping them gain traditional literacy skills. The skills and knowledge that students bring to school, regardless of the native language they speak, cannot be underestimated. It is in utilizing the students' background knowledge that a more effective and efficient transition to acquiring Academic English can best be accomplished. The more teachers learn about their students' development and uses of literacy and the diverse sociocultural experiences of their students, the better prepared they will be to create appropriate environments for literacy learning; however, awareness and sensitivity to diversity is not equivalent to a framework for teaching. The following sections of my project contain a review of methods and theories presented by experts in the field of literacy education for bilingual students.
Second language acquisition and bilingual education

Language acquisition is a complex process. Researchers have found a very consistent order in the acquisition of language structures by children, but the same consistency has not been established for the acquisition of a second language. For years researchers and politicians have struggled to come to a consensus on best practice for teaching English to speakers of other languages. While English proficiency for all students in the United States is a commonly agreed on goal, the argument arises as to which pedagogy best achieves that goal. In this section I explore bilingual education, its history, and its benefits.
History of bilingual education—New and ambitious state and federal standards have posed a serious challenge for schools charged with educating Limited English Proficient (LEP) students who lack the requisite skills to complete a standards-based lesson. While teachers intend to teach to the standards, they may not have the training to do so successfully.

The tale often told in studies of compensatory education is about the curriculum that never gets covered. Conventional methods of teaching unprepared students—for example, extended skill drills and engaged but unfocused conversation—may not efficiently lead to achieving standards. Programs that actually help Hispanic students achieve high standards give students lessons that take into account not only their starting points but also the finish line. Schools that effectively accommodate differences in culture and language do not dilute or defer academic experiences but enrich opportunities to learn by closing the gap between what students know and what they need to know. (US Department of Education, 2000)

Finding a balance and developing programs for LEP students is a difficult task, and one that is made harder by the politicized nature of bilingual education. While the majority of researchers and practitioners in language-minority education feel that the most effective manner to build student literacy is through the use bilingual education, national and international events greatly affect United States' policy regarding bilingual education. "Strictly speaking, the United States has never had a language policy, it has had language policies—ad hoc responses to immediate needs or political pressures (Crawford, 2004, p.55). Changes in the political climate have resulted from various court decisions, legislation, immigration trends, elections of new political majorities, border changes, and other sources. The United States' history with bilingual education is as long and diverse as the history of the United States itself. At
times, the American government has vowed to protect heritage language rights, while at other times it has vehemently fought to suppress these rights.

In the 1950's and 1960's, an increased focus on civil rights drew attention to the theme of bilingual education. Accusations of neglect and inequalities against Limited English Proficient students eventually led to the passing of the Bilingual Education Act (BEA), as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). When Lyndon B. Johnson signed the BEA, also known as Title VII, into law in 1968 it "authorized resources to support educational programs, train teachers and aides, develop and disseminate instructional materials, and encourage parental involvement" (Crawford, 2004, p.107). Essentially, it was a commitment by the government to assist LEP students, although it did not make clear whether the goal of this assistance was bilingualism or to speed the transition to English. The law explicitly states that, "districts must take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open its instructional programs to these students" (Crawford, 2004, p.110). Soon after Title VII was enacted, steps were taken to enforce the new policy.

Lau v. Nichols was a landmark court case filed in 1970 in San Francisco, California. The lawsuit alleged that San Francisco schools were neglecting the needs of Chinese-background students. The ruling by the Supreme Court in 1974 caused widespread change in the U.S. policy regarding bilingual education. Sink-or-swim instruction was outlawed and Congress passed the Equal Educational Opportunities
Act (EEOA) making the Lau decision part of U.S. Code. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) was called into action to monitor compliance of the Lau Remedies--a set of guidelines that "told districts how to identify and evaluate children with limited English skills, what instructional treatments would be appropriate, when children were ready for mainstream classrooms, and what professional standards teachers should meet" (Crawford, 2004, p. 113). In addition, the Lau Remedies established a timeline for meeting these requirements. Such sweeping changes to regulations, not surprisingly, caused a backlash against the bilingual education movement.

The lack of clarity in the original wording of the Bilingual Education Act created a window of opportunity for those opposed to bilingual education. Capitalizing on the ambiguity of Title VII and unfavorable research results, a new political administration called into question the effectiveness of bilingual education. In the early 1980's, the Reagan administration sought out alternatives to bilingual education. They used the "widely publicized research literature by Keith Baker and Adriana de Kanter" to criticize and limit bilingual education (Crawford, 2004, p.125). The Lau Regulations were withdrawn by the Reagan administration in 1981; called "harsh, inflexible, burdensome, unworkable, and incredibly costly" (Crawford, 2004, p.126). Efforts were made to pursue more flexible programs, including partial and limited immersion, and other programs that emphasized English instruction rather than native language instruction. Proponents for these programs cited fear of "civil strife" and the use of native languages as "a tool of cultural assertion" that could cause "a struggle for supremacy" as reason to oppose bilingual education (Crawford,
So strong was the English-only movement that U.S. English, an organization to champion the English-only cause, was founded in 1983.

U.S. English "was an instant media sensation" (Crawford, 2004, p.136). They realized "the necessity of developing ties with key journalists, having a list of experts on call, organizing media training, circulating talking points for members, framing news stories and suggesting them to reporters, commissioning policy-oriented research, and generally keeping abreast of developments that require comment or provide opportunities to [mis]educate the public (Crawford, 2004, p.373). Utilizing celebrity endorsements and Hispanic supporters, such as U.S. English president Linda Chavez to fight accusations of racism, U.S. English was able to disseminate their beliefs and to influence public opinion. Their goal is clear: to uphold the dominant status of English in the United States. They believe in Americanization and assimilation by eliminating the use of native language instruction in favor of intensive English instruction. "Concerned by the growing influence of this movement, in 1985 the League of United Latin American Citizens and the Spanish American League Against Discrimination (SALAD) launched a campaign known as English Plus" (Crawford, 2004, p.138). The foundation of English Plus in response to U.S. English's power is typical of the reactive nature of change in bilingual education.

Policy regarding bilingual education continued to change throughout the 1980's and 1990's. In 1988, Congress reauthorized Title VII, diverting up to twenty-five percent of funding for all-English programs. Under the Clinton administration,
the pendulum swung back in favor of bilingual education. In 1991 the U.S.
Education Department released the Ramírez study that touted the superior academic
outcomes in developmental bilingual education, and in 1993 the Stanford Working
Groups recommended bilingualism for ALL American students. In 1994 Congress
reauthorized Title VII for the last time, giving funding priority to programs that
cultivated English learners' native languages (Crawford, 2004, p.147). With the
passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the Bilingual Education Act was
repealed--drastically changing the outlook for bilingual education once again.

Clearly, the United States' bilingual policies reflect the fluctuations of national
and international attitudes and events (ie. September 11 Attacks) which influence
these attitudes. The ebb and flow of discrimination and accommodation of
immigrants can be traced back to the influx of different immigrant groups throughout
American history. Japanese containment camps of World War II, McCarthyism, and
distrust of Russians during the Cold War help to illustrate that policy is often driven
by power fear and misunderstandings. Similarly, this trend is evident in the United
States' treatment of bilingual education.

Perhaps due to the political interference that influences bilingual education
policy, defining bilingual education can be a complicated task. The term is used to
refer to a great variety of educational models, but, generally speaking, describes an
approach in which two languages are used to give instruction to the same group of
students. Within many educational systems that use bilingual education as a means of
teaching ELLs, the nature and proportion of each language varies according to the program type, instructional goals, and various social-political contexts (Crawford, 2004). As evidenced by shifting mandates and policies, there is considerable debate among educators as to the most effective way to meet the educational needs of LEP students. The high numbers of educational models that have been employed in the past illustrate the lack of consensus in this area. Submersion, ESL pullout, Structured English Immersion, Transitional Bilingual Education, Developmental Bilingual Education, and Two-Way Bilingual Education are a few of the models described by Crawford (2004). Additionally, there are variations in how each of these programs is carried out. To evaluate the effectiveness of any of these models requires an in-depth investigation of the available research. However, much of the research in bilingual education is plagued with methodological problems. Many of the "...studies have either included no comparison group or have not used controls for pre-existing differences among subjects. Several have failed to distinguish between Limited English Proficient students and heritage language learners who are English-dominant. Some have involved very small samples, while none have solved the problem of selection bias" (Crawford, 2004, p.300). Given the highly charged political atmosphere surrounding bilingual education, I am skeptical of research from both sides of the debate. Still, results from longitudinal studies and findings from language acquisition research seem to indicate that certain models are more effective than others for educating ELLs.
Language acquisition theory and models of bilingual education

The theoretical research on language acquisition thoroughly substantiates the benefits of an "additive bilingualism" model. According to theorists such as Jim Cummins and Stephen Krashen, fostering native language skills "enhances children’s thinking skills" and "will result in higher ultimate reading achievement in English" (Crawford, 1999, p.169). Additive bilingualism is a form of bilingual enrichment that promotes proficiency in two languages and views language as a resource instead of as a problem. Additive bilingualism can be contrasted with subtractive bilingualism, or "an effort to 'wean' [language-minority students] from their mother tongue as quickly as possible" (Crawford, 1999, p. 217). Additive and subtractive bilingualism can be clearly described in terms of their educational goals, but even within each category there are a variety of formats. Still, an additive bilingual approach necessitates native-language instruction and a conscious effort to nourish and develop the native language as well as the target language.

Some may ask, "How can children acquire English, their second language, while being taught in their first language?" According to Stephen Krashen this occurs for two reasons:

First, when we give a child good education in the primary language, we give the child knowledge, knowledge that makes English input more comprehensible...And more comprehensible English means more acquisition of English. Second, there is strong evidence that literacy transfers across languages, that building literacy in the primary language (L1) is a
short-cut to English (L2) literacy. The argument is straightforward: If we learn to read by understanding the messages on the page, it is easier to learn to read if we understand the language. And once we can read, we can read: The ability transfers to other languages.  
(Krashen, 1999, p.111)

Krashen substantiates his first claim through studies that show correlations between literacy development in the first language and the second language are high (Krashen, 1996). Also, the concept that universal aspects of literacy occur in all languages and that "the reading process will be similar for all languages with variations to accommodate the specific characteristics of orthography used and the grammatical structures of the language" is supported by many researchers (Office of Bilingual Education, 2001a, p.12). Researchers in the area of reading development show that the reading processes of sampling text, predicting, and confirming are similar in different languages. Essentially, the skills used to process and comprehend the written word can be transferred from one language to another. Jim Cummins, an expert in second-language acquisition illustrates this "underlying cognitive/academic proficiency which is common across languages" with an iceberg analogy (Office of Bilingual Education, 2001a, p.11-12).

![Figure 5: CUP The Iceberg Analogy](image-url)
The illustration in Figure 5 shows two icebergs, representative of first language (L1) and second language (L2), that are separate above the surface. Underneath the surface the two icebergs are merged, demonstrating how both languages operate through the same central processing system. Based on this research, it is not surprising that additive bilingual models such as "dual-language" or "two-way bilingual" programs offer promising results.

"Two-way bilingual education—also known as dual immersion, dual language, bilingual immersion, and two-way immersion, among other labels—could provide the experience of additive bilingualism for both groups (language-majority and language-minority)" and represents the educational method believed to be the most effective (Crawford, 2004, p.290). Though studies on two-way models have been criticized, their findings offer an optimistic view for dual language bilingual programs. For example, the Case Studies Project and Oyster School Experiment found improved achievement for students in two-way programs (Crawford, 2004). However, for a dual-language program to be an effective model, it should meet research-based criteria such as those set forth by Kathryn Lindholm in the Directory of Bilingual Immersion Programs (Crawford, 2004, p.297). Some of the characteristics identified include:

- Provide literacy instruction in the first language
- L1 instruction for subject matter
• Standard-based content instruction comparable to English-only classrooms
• Clear goals
• Comprehensible English input via sheltered classes
• Frequent monitoring of student performance
• Flexibility in instructional approaches
• Dedicated staff with a commitment to bilingual education.

One component not clearly delineated in these guidelines was the proportion of time to be dedicated to the development of each language, nor how long a student should remain in a bilingual program, which can lead to confusion as various models exist.

Transitional models of bilingualism are generally classified as subtractive programs because, as their name suggests, their goal is to transition students to a monolingual English educational program. When the students have gained proficiency in English, they enter English-only classrooms. "LEP students in transitional programs have more success in school than those who have no support in their native language, but transitional programs are not additive and do not have the benefits of programs that develop a child's first language as well as English" (Lessow-Hurley, 1991, p. 42). In the push to transition students into a monolingual English setting, educators may confuse a student's ability to manage day-to-day situations with readiness to complete more complicated school-related tasks. Language acquisition researcher Cummins classifies language proficiency into two separate categories: 1) Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS), commonly referred
to as social language, conversational language, or playground language, and 2) Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) or academic language (Cummins, 1981, 1989). From his perspective a student may be proficient in BICS, but lack the CALP required to complete the academic demands of the classroom--see Figure 6.

**Figure 6: Social Versus Academic Language**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Simpler language (shorter sentences, simpler vocabulary and grammar)</td>
<td>• Technical vocabulary; written material has longer sentences and more complex grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Usually face to face, small number of people, informal settings</td>
<td>• Often lecture style communication or reading a textbook; little situational context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Precise understanding is seldom required</td>
<td>• Precise understanding and precise description/explanation is required; higher-order thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Usually simpler, familiar topics (movies, friends, daily life, etc.)</td>
<td>• New and more difficult to understand topics; knowledge is often abstract; cognitively complex; student often has less background knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Many clues from expressions, gestures, social context</td>
<td>• Fewer clues, most clues are language clues such as further explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Many opportunities to clarify (look puzzled, ask questions,)</td>
<td>• More difficult to clarify</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once the difference between these uses for language is understood, it is easier to understand how an additive bilingual approach would allow students more time to build sophisticated language skills necessary for educational endeavors. Native-language instruction allows those students time to develop CALP without losing ground academically. According to Cummins' research, the average length of time it takes a student to cultivate CALP is five to seven years, which reinforces the need for developmental, gradual, or late-exit bilingual programs. If students are meant to transition from a bilingual program to a monolingual program with heritage language classes, it is crucial to confirm that they have developed a strong enough English proficiency to maintain academic success. The use of students' native language for content areas is recommended to avoid the threat of focusing on literacy development at the expense of building other academic skills. "English language learners have been shown to be at risk of remaining at low levels of literacy in both language or of feeling incompetent if they do not establish a threshold of competence in their home language first" (Cloud, 2002, p.118). If the research on second language acquisition is not persuasive enough to support the use of bilingual education, perhaps a review of the benefits of bilingual instruction would be more convincing.

"Considerable research data suggest that for minority groups who experience disproportionate levels of academic failure, the extent to which students' language and culture are incorporated into the school program constitutes a significant predictor of academic success" (Cummins, 1989, p. 116). Achievement test scores of students enrolled in additive bilingual programs uphold the beneficial claims of these
programs. State testing in California has shown that "graduates of bilingual education programs out-scored native English speakers in most subjects in most grades" (Asimov, 1998, p.C-1). Again, these results should be viewed cautiously and the implications may not be broadly applied, as they are representative of one kind of bilingual program; but they demonstrate that, when thoughtfully carried out, bilingual education is likely the best pedagogy for instructing LEP students. "In addition to the personal and future employment advantages of proficiency in two or more languages, there is considerable evidence that subtle educational advantages result from continued development of both languages among bilingual students" (Cummins, 1989, p. 116). Many benefits of knowing two languages have been studied including: "improved overall school performance and superior problem-solving skills...high academic achievement...enhanced knowledge of English...personal fulfillment, mental discipline, and cultural enlightenment" (Center of Applied Linguistics, 2003, p.1). Additionally, the Center for Applied Linguistics highlights societal benefits of having a linguistically diverse population. On the basis of this extensive list of benefits, bilingual education warrants serious consideration as the best method for educating language minority students.
Approaches to literacy and language instruction.

Reading and writing are the basic tools of access to education. The written word allows the construction of knowledge, guards the personal and collective memory, and establishes communication and dialogue. Without the ability to read and write, in essence to attain an education, people find it difficult to act in society, to contribute to their communities, to exercise their liberties, or to improve the quality of their lives. It is clear, then, that cultivating readers and writers needs to be a priority. To accomplish this task, it is necessary to develop strategies that will help convert the written word into something meaningful, not purely functional, for its learners.

Educational decisions that are informed by the language backgrounds and needs of special education students who are ELLs are particularly necessary when their primary education needs are in language-demanding areas such as reading. For most students with learning disabilities, as many as 80%, the primary educational needs are related to their reading difficulties. (Vaughn, et.al., 2005, p.58)

A focus on developing biliteracy for ELLs is crucial to helping these students attain academic success. This section of my paper concentrates on literacy and language instruction approaches, methods, and practices for ELLs.
Defining literacy—"Literacy is a relative term. Its meaning depends on individual needs and values and the norms and expectations of the social group of which the individual is a part...Reading and writing are not so much skills as they are reflections of values and life-styles" (Winterwood, 1989, p. 29). Just as language, society, and culture influence the way we experience learning, they also impact our perception of what it means to be literate. A broad spectrum of literacy exists, sensibly, since literacy is a developmental and fluid state of being. The questions "what is literacy?" or "who is literate?" are not easily answered, because defining literacy is difficult to accomplish.

"According to the guidebook for America Reads, basic literacy is considered to be the fourth grade reading level. The guidebook notes that this is the point at which the curriculum in public schools changes from learning-to-read and becomes reading-to-learn" (Fraser, 2000, p.19). Thus, if a student is not reading by fourth grade, he or she may also fall behind in other subjects because reading is the medium for most instruction. Of course, many would argue that literacy cannot be delineated by a single factor such as grade level of text. Indeed, there exist a great many kinds of literacy--from multicultural literacy to computer literacy. Anderson and Irvine (1993) offer three primary perspectives of literacy: functional, interpretivist, and critical. Using these "categories" or perspectives of literacy can help to understand its multi-layered nature. They define functional literacy as the technical ability to decode print, interpretivist literacy as more of a "relative" literacy--viewed within a construction of societal values, and critical literacy as the ability to understand "how
current social constructions are the product of unequal social relations and conflicts of interest" (p. 92).

**Critical literacy**—Critical literacy is important to bear in mind when working with marginalized or minority students because "school is not a neutral objective arena; it is an institution which has the goal of changing people's values, skills, and knowledge bases" (Heath, 1983, p.278). Teaching students to be literate does not mean teaching them to follow the status quo. The goal of literacy should be to help students become life-long learners who have the ability to find information they need, analyze that information, and utilize their findings as they see fit. Comprehending written material is not a useful skill if what is read is emptily accepted as truth. A strong supporter of teaching students critical literacy, Goldstein offers the reminder that "literacy is not just a set of decoding skills or the ability to read a newspaper. It is the ability to examine and critique the printed word in order to identify the origins and assumptions behind the ideas presented" (Goldstein, 1995, p.465). She urges teachers to create a critical educational program that builds students' abilities to challenge, analyze, and critique assumptions and helps them to develop confidence in "their legitimate right to voice their honest reactions to the world" (p. 465). Goldstein presents a list (Figure 7) of practices that support a "critical pedagogy" because of their interactive nature and their ability to promote "viable and transformative education experiences for all students" (2002, p. 176). Learners need to understand the social and cultural context in which language is used. They need to understand the roles of the participants, the information being shared, and the function of the
interaction—whether spoken or written. “Participants in multicultural communication are sensitive not only to the cultural meanings attached to the language itself, but also to social conventions concerning language use, such as turn-taking, appropriacy of content, nonverbal language and tone of voice”; and for many bicultural language-minority students, these meanings and conventions need to be explicitly taught (Savignon, 2001, p.18).

*Figure 7:* (Goldstein, 2002, p. 177)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices in Critical Pedagogy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Literature-based reading curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Writers' workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Language experience approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dialogue journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Instructional conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reciprocal reading and conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mediated learning experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Centers and choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Multimodal instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discovery and hands-on learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mini-lessons for explicit skills-based instruction as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Language charts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Culturally and linguistically affirming instructional materials and classroom environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emergent curriculum (as opposed to scripted curriculum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student-generated topics for discussion, writing, and connections to reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Group projects and action research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Literacy instruction for English language learners—For ELLs, the question of literacy is further complicated by the fact that these students must manage two languages. As noted in the linguistic considerations section of this paper, many ELLs are not "proficient" in their heritage language. While these students speak a dialect of Spanish, often times their ability to read and write in the academic register of Spanish is not fully developed. Since most, if not all, textbooks are written using the academic register, students may find the content difficult to comprehend even if the books are published in Spanish. Proponents of bilingual education contend that to better develop proficiency in English, students must first develop literacy in their native language. The professional literature underscores the need to use the home language as a basis for second language learning. "Instruction is first provided in the child’s stronger language to facilitate general language learning mechanisms (e.g. attention, perception, and comparison), which in turn support future first and second language learning. According to this design, students are taught in their first language for a predetermined period of time before the second language is introduced" (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p.117). This type of sequential language learning serves "to extend, rather than limit, the child’s linguistic resources" (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p.117). Ultimately, the goal for bilingual students is to develop biliteracy, the faculty to negotiate two languages.

The abundance of textbooks and courses available on the topic of “Methods in Teaching” is indicative of the vast variety of styles and opinions that exist in this area. This pattern of diversity among teaching methods and theories equally applies to the
field of Second Language Learning. However, among the multitudes there are nine broad and widely-used approaches:

1) Grammar-Translation
2) Direct
3) Reading
4) Audiolingualism
5) Oral-Situational
6) Cognitive
7) Affective-Humanistic
8) Comprehension-Based
9) Communicative  

(Celce-Murcia, 2001, p.5)

These approaches developed in response to differing theories on language development and opinions related to the function of language learning. The various approaches demonstrate a range of foci including strict adherence to grammatical rules, importance of ‘correct’ pronunciation, emphasis on reading/writing or listening/speaking skills, or simply to develop isolated vocabulary. Some of the approaches offer more radical or comprehensive goals. For example, the Affective-Humanistic approach utilizes a learner-generated curriculum while the Communicative Approach employs real-world tasks and authentic material to design language courses (Celce-Murcia, 2001). While each approach has its own group of supporters, many teachers struggle to determine which approach is best suited for helping ELLs improve their literacy.

The integration of several of the literacy approaches listed above presents another possible way to help students learn a second language. By recognizing the importance of various aspects of language development including rule formation,
affect, comprehension and communication, such an approach would incorporate key elements of each style to view the learner as a person who thinks (Cognitive), feels (Affective-Humanistic), understands (Comprehension-Based), and wants to express something (Communicative) (Celce-Murcia, 2001). An integrated method acknowledges the “general acceptance of the complexity and interrelatedness of skills in both written and oral communication and the need for learners to participate in the negotiation of meaning” (Savignon, 2001, p. 15).

According to Celce-Murcia, “since the 1980's we have witnessed a gradual movement away from rather narrow language teaching methods toward broader integrated approaches in language teaching, approaches that encourage the teaching of all four skills within the general framework of using language for learning as well as communication” (2001, p. 301). Content-based language teaching, literature-based approaches to language learning and those that use the learner's life experiences to form a basis for meaningful language development and use are a few examples of integrated approaches to second language learning. One example of an integrated literacy approach is called the "interactive or experiential model". This model empowers students to assume greater control over setting their own learning goals. Jim Cummins is an advocate of the interactive or experiential model for literacy instruction. He defines the characteristics of this model as:

1) Genuine dialogue between student and teacher in both oral and written modalities. 2) Guidance and facilitation, rather than control of student learning by the teacher. 3) Encouragement of student-to-student talk in a collaborative
learning context. 4) Encouragement of meaningful language use by students, rather than correctness of surface forms. 5) Conscious integration of language use and development with all curricular content, rather than teaching language and other content as isolated subjects. 6) A focus on developing higher level cognitive skills, rather than factual recall. 7) Task presentation that generates intrinsic, rather than extrinsic, motivation. (Cummins, 1989, p. 116).

The interactive/experiential model, then, provides a framework for engaging students in language learning. By embedding language content in contextualized and meaningful interactions, this method allows the student to practice their new language skills in a natural setting, similar to the way they acquired their first language. "The approach reflects what cognitive psychologists such as Piaget and Vygotsky have emphasized about children's learning for more than half a century. The stress on action (Piaget) and interaction (Vygotsky) contrasts with behavioristic pedagogical models that focus on passive and isolated reception of knowledge" (Cummins, 1989, p. 116). From this perspective learning is viewed as an active process that is enhanced through interaction and student input. The interactive/experiential model may be better understood when opposed with a "transmission model" of pedagogy. The basic tenet of the transmission model is that "the teacher's task is to impart knowledge that he or she possesses to students. This implies that the teacher initiates and controls the interaction, constantly orienting it towards the achievement of instructional objectives" (Cummins, 1989, p. 115). A teacher oriented approach does not take into consideration the cultural characteristics of the students it aims to serve and may impede the learning process.
Culturally responsive teaching—Given the extent to which culture influences language and language use, it is imperative to evaluate and reflect on the role of culture in the development of a literacy program. In writing about culturally responsive teaching, Nancy Cloud focuses on five major areas: curriculum and materials, classroom interactions, teaching approaches, resource management, and parent outreach efforts.

Culturally responsive teaching uses curricula and materials that take into account students’ cultural backgrounds; accommodates learner differences in interpersonal interactions; selects approaches that are most compatible with learner preferences and prior experience; uses time, space, and staff in student sensitive ways; and provides services that are cross-culturally appropriate (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p.24)

Culturally responsive curriculum and materials, “acknowledge the life experiences and background knowledge of the students, [allowing] instruction to be built on a solid foundation” (Cloud, 2002, p. 109). Even within prearranged curricula, materials and instruction can reflect and build upon students’ prior knowledge. Culturally relevant materials can strongly support the development of literacy. “When students read materials with familiar content, their comprehension is enhanced because they can make accurate predictions” (Cloud, 2002, p110). There are many ways for teachers to learn about their students’ skills and interests—such as free-writing, interviews, questionnaires, collages, etc.

Effective teachers choose approaches that are compatible with the individual students who sit in front of them each day. Literacy programs for ELLs should strive to achieve a balance, developing both social and academic language, paying careful
attention to plan lessons that allow students the chance to practice new skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Techniques that have been found to be successful for English language learners with disabilities include the following (Cloud, 2002, p.113):

- New vocabulary to develop a deep understanding of concepts
- Visuals to reinforce new concepts and vocabulary
- Rich language to keep students engaged and challenged
- Cooperative learning and peer tutoring methods
- The native language, especially when students are floundering
- Formal and informal opportunities for learners to use English
- Feedback adapted to the learner’s level of language development

Common sense dictates that comprehensible instruction be the primary focus in the development of any literacy program. One way to realize this objective is to integrate content area and language instruction.

Thematic teaching—Integrating literacy and content instruction is an effective method for ELLs because it provides them repeated opportunities to practice and utilize their new language skills. Thematic units present one method for melding several disciplines, content, and language. Cloud (2002) offers a framework for designing a thematic unit that focuses on four aspects of literacy development: 1) linguistic, 2) communicative, 3) content, and 4) learning strategies/study skills. Her model unit on weather (figure 8) demonstrates how integrated learning can allow ample occasions
for students to apply new vocabulary and to build social and academic language skills.

Figure 8 (Cloud, 2002, p.121):

| **Linguistic:** To learn the terms sunny, windy, cloudy, rainy, foggy, hot, dry, humid, clear, warm, cold, nice; the phrases "What's it like outside?", "How's the weather today?", It's __________.", "I like/hate it when it's ________ "; and grammar focus: adverbs/adjectives, present tense of the verb to be, wh- questions, when clauses, contractions

**Communicative:** to describe weather conditions in terms of temperature, amount and type of precipitation, humidity, wind velocity, and visibility, orally and in writing; to request or supply information about the weather; and to express likes and dislikes about the weather

**Content:** to learn the scientific causes of weather conditions (cloud cover, types of precipitation, air pressure, wind velocity, temperature, humidity, weather fronts, and sever weather conditions); to learn about weather forecasting and weather forecasts, to identify differing climates and the effects on culture

**Learning Strategies/Study Skills:** to use the newspaper, radio, TV, and the Internet to locate information about the weather in various parts of the world; to produce tables, charts, graphs, and maps to illustrate local weather conditions; and to work effectively with others to record and report weather conditions.

Another reason thematic units benefit ELLs is because they provide context-rich learning. Cummins identifies two dimensions of language, its cognitive demand and its context embedddness (Office of Bilingual Education, 2001a). He demonstrates how the addition of context supports the students' understanding of classroom language demands and explains how these demands can be made more understandable with the addition of context clues. For example, "Directions given orally with gestures are more easily understood than the same words spoken over the telephone without the aid of gestures" (Webb-Johnson, 2007, p.2). In addition to
thematic units, use of visual aids, multi-modal presentations, and gestures are some strategies for helping to add context to content.

**Balanced literacy**—Utilizing the literacy learning models described above along with thematic units of study will provide a theoretically sound basis for the development of a literacy program for bilingual special education students. However, given the students' diverse needs and limited literacy skills, additional support may be necessary to facilitate student achievement. Balanced literacy is a framework for teaching literacy based on the research of Marie Clay, Irene Fountas, and Gay Su Pennell. Balanced literacy consists of reading and writing instruction with varying levels of teacher support. A balanced literacy approach is generally used at the elementary levels but could be very effective with secondary students who struggle with reading and writing or who are LEP. "The model is grounded in Vygotsky's developmental theory, which posits that learners can operate at a higher level of functioning with assistance or scaffolding. With this assistance, children can operate in their 'zone of proximal development', the area in which a student who cannot do something independently can do the task with assistance" (Rhodes & Duley-Marling, 1996, p.91). This model allows teachers to demonstrate reading and writing strategies and helps move students toward becoming stronger readers. In balanced literacy, there are four kinds of reading and writing—as shown in figure 9—each representing a different level of teacher support. This scaffolding, also known as a "gradual release of responsibility", makes content available to students who may not
be ready to access it on their own, while maintaining the end goal of moving students towards independence.

*Figure 9: (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p.27)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Kinds of Reading</th>
<th>Levels of Support</th>
<th>Materials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading Aloud</strong></td>
<td><em>Teacher provides full support for children to access the text.</em></td>
<td><em>Individual book for teacher.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The teacher selects and reads a book or other text to the children. Texts rich in meaning or language and class favorites are read again and again, and are used as a base for other activities</em></td>
<td><em>Children respond to picture, meaning and language.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Reading</strong></td>
<td><em>They may join in but usually do not focus on features of print.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The teacher introduces and reads an enlarged text or a small text of which each child has a copy. On refrains and in multiple readings, children join in, reading in unison</em></td>
<td><em>Teacher provides high level of support.</em></td>
<td><em>Large-print charts.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Guided Reading</strong></td>
<td><em>There is some group problem solving and a lot of conversation about the meaning of the story.</em></td>
<td><em>Big books.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The teacher selects and introduces a new text.</em></td>
<td><em>Readers support each other.</em></td>
<td><em>Individual copies.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Children read the whole text to themselves</em></td>
<td><em>Some teacher support is needed.</em></td>
<td><em>Easel.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent Reading</strong></td>
<td><em>Reader problem-solves a new text in a way that is mostly independent.</em></td>
<td><em>Pointer.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The children read to themselves or with partners.</em></td>
<td><em>Little or no teacher support is needed.</em></td>
<td><em>Individual books.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The reader independently solves problems while reading for meaning.</em></td>
<td><em>Easel and chart paper.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Big and little books.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Classroom library.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Large-print charts.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Writing displayed in the room.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Writing tasks are similarly arranged in a balanced literacy approach. The four kinds of writing are: 1) shared writing, 2) interactive writing, 3) guided writing/writer
workshop, and 4) independent writing. Like Figure 9 illustrates for the reading tasks, each writing task calls for varying degrees of teacher support. "Unlike the rigid scaffold used in the construction of a building, educational scaffolds are fluid, dynamic, and interactive. They can be used to temporarily assist English language learners as they develop knowledge, understanding, strategies and skills" (Santamaria in Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p. 135). Specific materials used in balanced literacy are leveled reading books which are commonly associated with the guided reading technique and which vary in format, print size, vocabulary, number of words, difficulty, etc. Strategic teaching is also an integral component to balanced literacy. Teachers model strategies (such as predicting), guide students in their practice of the new strategies, and encourage them to employ these strategies during independent reading/writing.

With the advent of the No Child Left Behind act, balanced literacy is the U.S. Department of Education's prescription for bringing together the best of reading research from both philosophies. Balanced literacy employs the fundamentals of letter-sound correspondence, word study and decoding as well as holistic experiences in reading, writing, speaking and listening to create one integrated model that addresses all the facets of literacy (McKenzie, 2002, p.1).

The balanced literacy approach is compatible with the aforementioned models of literacy instruction and, in conjunction with them, can help to satisfy the recommendations set forth for ELLs. "Children with special needs will also benefit from this type of interaction, but they may require more explicit instruction and more intense guidance for longer periods of time" (Goldstein, 2002, p. 173). Still, one must
remember that literacy development is a complex process that is bound by sociocultural influences, linguistic background, and personal characteristics.

There is no single method or single combination of methods that can successfully teach all children to read. Therefore, teachers must have a strong knowledge of multiple methods for teaching reading and a strong knowledge of children in their care so they can create the appropriate balance of methods needed for the children they teach. (Office of Bilingual Education, 2001a, p.21)

The unification of many different approaches and teaching methods presents the best strategy for reaching a varied assortment of students. Further consideration should be used when determining which approaches should be combined to meet the needs of English language learners with special needs.
**Strategies for working with special needs students**

Although the population of students who are both handicapped and Limited English Proficient is relatively small, it continues to grow proportionately with the increasing number of language-minority students in general (particularly of Hispanic language background). While the need for preparation to serve this population of students has been documented for some time (Figueroa, et al. 1989), little is known about the availability of services or the value of specific approaches within this field. “Given the complexities of bilingual education caused by students learning to speak a second language while simultaneously developing academically in both their native and second languages, it is surprising that research with LLD (language and learning disabled) students included in bilingual education is virtually nonexistent” (Fletcher, et.al, 1999, p. 81). The need for services, instructional materials and accommodations for Spanish-dominant students with special needs is abundantly clear to those of us who work with this unique population. Particularly, finding age- and level-appropriate instructional materials for bilingual adolescents with special needs is a considerable challenge.
Challenges of teaching ELL's with special needs—According to the Census 2000 Brief, nearly one in five Americans speak a language other than English at home and the proportion of language-minority individuals in the United States grew by nearly fifty percent during the past ten years. Among the non-English speakers in the United States, the Spanish-speaking community is the largest, with a population of over 39.4 million (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2004a). Given the extraordinary increase of language-minority individuals in the United States over the past decade, it is not surprising that non-English speaking students are the fastest growing group of children among public school students, with a yearly increase of about ten percent (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2003). Of the students whose first language is not English, eighty percent speak Spanish (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2003). “Just like their non-language minority peers, some ELL students qualify as having a disability as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)", but the statistics regarding this dually-labeled group of Learning Disabled-English Language Learners (LD-ELLs) are not easily accessible.

Until recently, the prevalence of LDs in children with ELL in the public school system had been unknown. Despite the fact that these estimates are somewhat compromised because neither a method for accurate identification nor a consistent definition of LDs across states and school districts exists, the figures available do offer some sense of the magnitude and complexity of this important but neglected issue... National data reveal that ELLs are underrepresented overall on special education rosters... However, a frequently recurring interview comment was that district personnel found it challenging to distinguish language differences from disability as the source of academic difficulties for
ELLs. They reported not having the tools, procedures, or qualified staff to adequately identify these students. Despite these limitations, the study estimated that, insofar as they report the number of students currently being served in special education, there were 357,300 LEP students designated as requiring special education services in grades K-12 in school year 2001-2002, representing 9 percent of all LEP students in U.S. public schools, compared to an overall 13.3 percent of English speaking children enrolled in U.S. public schools in 2000-2001. (McCardle, et.al, 2005, p.2)

While the complex, multi-layered nature of studying bilingual special education students as a group creates many issues for researchers, similar complications arise in attempting to teach this group.

In 1997 a bilingual/ESOL special education survey and needs assessment was conducted at a special conference on the limited English proficient handicapped child (Collier & Baca, 1999). The sample was made up of the special educators, bilingual educators, and administrators who attended the conference, and these participants were from many different communities throughout the United States, with highly concentrated representation from California, Colorado, and Florida. The largest group 43 % were from urban areas, 29 % were from rural communities, and the remaining 21 % were from suburban areas. When asked if their district had a cross-cultural bilingual/ESOL instructional component in their special education program 35 % said yes, and 65% said no. From the group who said they did not have a cross-cultural bilingual/ESOL special education program 18% reported that their district was planning to establish such a program within the next two years, but the remaining 82 % did not report such a program was being planned (Collier & Baca, 1999).
In response to the questions about availability of services, most respondents listed the following services as being very difficult to impossible to locate or hire: bilingual audiologists, bilingual speech/language specialists, bilingual school psychologists, bilingual counselors, bilingual special educators, and bilingual educational diagnosticians. Curricular plans for bilingual special education, instructional materials for bilingual special education, and appropriate measures of intellectual ability for linguistically and culturally different children were also ranked as very difficult to locate (Collier & Baca, 1999). The scarcity of materials, personnel, and educational support for bilingual special needs students underlie the difficulties of planning and implementing effective programs to meet the needs of this population of students. Particularly, there is data that shows "English language learners in secondary grades receive less language support than their counterparts in elementary grades...and are the most overrepresented in programs for students with mental retardation, learning disabilities, and language and speech impairments" (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p. 9).

Meeting the needs of ELL's with disabilities—While it is evident that there is little known about the identification and treatment of learning disabilities in ELLs, there is a substantial knowledge base about the identification, assessment, and intervention of learning disabilities in native English-speaking students. Therefore it is important to explore how we can build upon this knowledge to inform future work with ELL students, while keeping in mind the unique circumstances that impact ELLs. For example, the effects of "acculturation (the process of adapting to a new cultural
environment)" may result in behaviors which are very similar to those exhibited by
appear to be indicators of a disability can actually be related to acculturation. These
include locus of control, confusion, anxiety, poor self-concept, withdrawal, stress-
related behaviors, unresponsiveness, fatigue, code switching, distractibility, resistance
to change, and disorientation" (Oregon Department of Education, 2001, p. 7).
Teachers and assessment professionals must be careful when analyzing student
performance to consider all aspects of the child before making a decision.
Unfortunately, one tendency among school districts is to prevent possible
misdiagnoses of English-language learners by delaying evaluation of them for two or
three years. “Districts take the safe position and say, ‘If we wait until the student
speaks enough English, we’ll be better able to evaluate him or her.’ But if the student
truly has a disability, we’ve wasted two or three years of valuable intervention time”
(Zehr, 2001, p.23). Until more efficient and accurate diagnostic assessment and
procedures are developed, providing support services to ELL students from the onset
can help prevent loss of instructional time.

Another common mistake educators make is reasoning that because English
language learners with disabilities will have difficulty mastering English skills, the
amount and intensity of English instruction should be increased.

because they believe that bilingual instruction will be
confusing to students, they remove them from bilingual
education programs. Such reasoning ignores the
relationship between native language proficiency and
English language acquisition. If students have not acquired the language of their parents, there is little likelihood that they will develop high levels of proficiency in English. If they have not benefited from instruction in their dominant language, there is no reason to expect that they will make greater progress when instruction is presented in their weaker language (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p. 83).

Based on the extensive research of experts in the area of second-language acquisition, providing comprehensible instruction in students' native language should serve as a cornerstone for any program meant to help meet the needs of ELLs with or without learning disabilities.

Though comprehension in any language is affected by learning disabilities, second language learners with special needs do present additional educational challenges. As explained in the previous sections of this paper, teachers of ELLs with special needs should consider the sociocultural, developmental, and first language background of the learner. Additionally, individual student characteristics play an integral role in determining what services, supports and accommodations a student may require. Some of these variables include "age, gender, and length of time in the U.S.; stability factors such as immigration status, frequency of moving and changing schools, the socioeconomic status; and affective factors that are more difficult to define and measure, such as motivation, learning styles and attitude" (Butler & Stevens, 1997, p. 14). If these personal characteristics are viewed out of context "the educational system within which the child is experiencing learning difficulties becomes immune from critical scrutiny" (Cummins, 1989, p.111).
Diversity in the classroom—Compounding factor upon factor adds to the complication of educating LD-ELL students, who each enter the classroom setting with wide-ranging ability levels and varied cultural experiences. It is typical to have students with differing levels of proficiency in Spanish and English, differing backgrounds in literacy education, and differing disabilities. Meeting such diverse student needs necessitates that teachers have the ability to differentiate instruction, an example of which can be seen in a case study Zehr presents.

During 1st period on a recent school day, she (Lourdes Negrón, bilingual special education teacher) and a bilingual teacher’s assistant are guiding 10 students in a variety of learning tasks. Ms. Negrón helps three students—who all read and write in English—get started in taking a test. Her assistant reviews spelling words with several other students, who are making the transition this school year from reading and writing in Spanish to English.

“¿Qué quiere decir ‘black’?” the assistant asks the students in Spanish. What does black mean?

“Negro,” the students reply, and then she adds in English, “You want to write it down so you don’t forget.”

Another boy, who can’t read in Spanish or English, is studying colors. He has colored a dog brown and a pig pink on his worksheet. Yet another boy, a recent immigrant who arrived at the middle school level without any schooling, is writing simple sentences in Spanish and showing each one, after completing it, to Ms. Negrón. (Zehr, 2001, p.24)

Beyond the discrepancies in ability and aptitude, special education teachers also need to take into account individual learning styles such as learner modalities. Students
display strengths or needs with various channels of input—auditory, visual, kinesthetic—and teachers need to be mindful of these preferences when developing lessons for their students.

Research suggests that those characteristics that mark a highly effective general education and bilingual program are also manifest in classrooms that are effective for children with learning disabilities. Those characteristics include:

- the incorporation of students’ experiences, background knowledge, authentic tasks that are meaningful to the students, and student interests into the teaching/learning process
- an emphasis on meaning rather than form
- an emphasis on creativity and divergent thinking rather than correctness
- dialogical teacher/student interactions
- assessment that compares the students’ unassisted performance with their assisted performance in authentic tasks

(Goldstein, 1995, p. 463)

Admittedly, these suggestions are quite general, and are nowhere near inclusive of the immense collection of teaching methods and practices available for special education students. To create a thorough compilation of special education methods and practices specific to each disability would be virtually impossible.

There is a wealth of resources available for teachers and parents of special needs' students, resources that encompass the full assortment of disabilities. By definition, IDEA states: "the term 'child with a disability' means a child—(i) with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance
(hereinafter referred to as 'emotional disturbance'), orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and (ii) who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related service" (IDEA, 1990). Given the breadth of this definition, an attempt to address best practices for meeting the specific needs of individual students with these diverse disabilities would be extremely cumbersome. Additionally, within each category of disability there are varieties or sub-categories of the disability that better distinguish how a student's disability may impact their learning. For example, a teacher could have two Spanish dominant students with learning disabilities. If one is classified as learning disabled in the area of receptive language (i.e. auditory processing) they would require different supports than the other who may experience visual perception problems (i.e. dyslexia). The spectrum of special education services and practices is as wide-ranging as the needs of the students with disabilities, and specific resources should be sought based on a student's individual characteristics.

Inclusion—With the passing of the "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) legislature, there is a growing trend to include students with disabilities in the general education classroom, "Federal policy has advanced 'inclusion' as recommended practice and has expended significant funds for training, research, and demonstration purposes" (Sailor & Roger, 2005, p. 504), and this trend is mirrored in bilingual classrooms as well. "Despite recent efforts to develop and assess inclusive education, the movement has been noticeably silent about the plight of minority students in general and ELLs in particular, who happen to be overrepresented in special education programs" (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p. 18). For the ELL-LD child in an inclusive classroom practices that
are useful in a monolingual inclusion class, such as seating students by more capable peers and using flexible grouping, cooperative learning, and peer assistance, can help the ELL-LD student be successful as well. Likewise,

planning for the individual differences of all learners is important in terms of expectations, assignments, and grading modifications. Second, considering the unique challenges of ELL students with LD emphasizes the importance of contextualizing teaching and learning and infusing the child’s native language and culture while considering the nature and severity of the disability. Third, it is critical that time be allotted to plan and collaborate with other teachers and specialists and that there be ongoing professional development to support effective practices. (Fletcher, et. al., 1999, p.90).

If an ELL-LD student is mainstreamed in a bilingual general education class, the support of a special education teacher with background knowledge in the unique needs of ELLs is important. If collaboration in the form of team-teaching is to take place, the special education teacher needs to understand the rationale for and invest in the practice of native language instruction. Undoubtedly, a special education teacher would be even better prepared if he/she were fluent in the student's native language, but the scarcity of such dually-qualified staff decreases the likelihood of accomplishing that match. More research on the inclusion of LEP students is critical to determining the best way to meet their needs.

Parental involvement--Lastly, parental involvement has long been recognized as a beneficial component to helping students be successful in school, but as Zehr points out involving non-English speaking parents in their child’s education can pose an
additional challenge. “Sixty percent of the parents [of bilingual special education students] are illiterate in their own language. English skills among parents are nonexistent...Many parents of special education students who are English-language learners haven't had much exposure to special education. In Mexico, the country of origin of many Clark County immigrants, special education is nonexistent in many communities and isn't comprehensive in others” (Zehr, 2001, p.24). Learning ways to make parents feel comfortable with and understand the process of identifying and supporting special needs students often becomes the responsibility of the classroom teacher. As discussed previously, the role of the family and its members and childrearing practices may come into direct conflict with the expectations of our school system. "For example, the expectation that parents have the right to disagree with school personnel may conflict with the belief that group harmony takes precedence over individual rights, leading parents to be silent during meetings or even to give consent despite their concerns" (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p. 93). Similarly, lack of parent participation is not necessarily due to lack of concern or interest. For many cultural groups, this practice is often not part of their cultural experience. Also important to consider are "cultural norms associated with what is public and what is private" (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p. 97). Often when gathering information for assessment purposes or to help students apply for services such as VESID (Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities) I am surprised by the extent and type of information I am asked to gather. The nature of the questionnaires "may lead to parental reluctance to disclose certain types of
information or details that are routinely gathered during assessment but are considered private in the family's culture" (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p. 97).

Helping parents to understand the special education processes and the role they can play in supporting their children's education requires many of the same considerations as developing appropriate programs for the students. "While the law views families as partners with the school in their children's education, it offers few explicit guidelines to help educators and the families accomplish this partnership" (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p. 87). Standard special education procedures dictate that parents receive written notification of program development meetings, upcoming evaluation, service plans, and placement information to insure equitable access to special education. However, these prescribed formula letters may not be the best way to achieve informed consent. Problems of miscommunication may arise even when the forms letters are translated into the parents' native language, "since translation is generally problematic" (Butler & Stevens, 1997, p.7). If parents do not have an understanding or underlying knowledge of the content of the letters, language aside, they will not comprehend the meaning. Additionally, the letters are written using a distinctive register and jargon specific to special education law and regulations.

Examining the legal provisions from a cross-cultural perspective begins with the recognition that both schools and families are influenced by their cultural contexts. This approach emphasizes the need to go beyond a focus on the family's cultural and linguistic characteristics and to identify the underlying personal, professional, legal, and organizational values and beliefs that guide school personnel in evaluating students. (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p.91)
Telephone calls, home visits, or other face-to-face meetings can eliminate some of the confounding effects of sociocultural and linguistic variables that impact parents' ability to communicate with school officials. Providing them with supplementary background information and connecting them with community resources are two more ways to help parents learn about special education in the U.S. "When educators involve minority parents as partners in their children's education, parents appear to develop a sense of efficacy that communicates itself to children--with positive academic consequences" (Cummins, 1989, p. 117).

If LD- ELLs are to make progress, a comprehensive examination of special education services needs to take place. According to Artiles & Ortiz, "after 3 years of special education intervention, Spanish-speaking students with learning disabilities actually lost ground. Their verbal and full-scale IQ scores were lower than they had been at initial placement, and their achievement scores were at essentially the same level as at entry" (2002, p. 16). Often, low-performing students spend most of their school day together, "which results in de facto tracking or segregation" (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p.39). The lack of knowledge and information about how to support ELLs with special needs is negatively impacting their ability to succeed. Examination and reformation of current practice is necessary to overcome the lack of academic gains and to improve student outcomes.
Applications and Evaluations

Introduction—When I began working on this project in 2005, my intention was to formalize a literacy program for the bilingual special education students that I teach. I wanted to utilize what I had learned in my graduate classes along with the information I acquired through a vast literature review to create a systematic approach for building literacy. I planned to incorporate action research to complete this project, practicing the strategies and applying the theories to demonstrate how such a program could be successful in meeting the needs of this unique population. What I encountered were many of the same obstacles that researchers in this field describe in their work. Problems such as lack of appropriate assessment tools and instructional materials posed a significant challenge to developing a literacy program for my students; but worse were issues related to student turnover, lack of administrative support, inflexible scheduling, intensely prescribed curricular expectations as determined by state testing requirements, and inadequate staffing, among other issues.

Participants—Initially, the demographics of my class were nicely aligned with my expectations for this project. The class was composed of Latino students who were identified as native Spanish speakers, but who represented the multiplicity of Latino culture described in this paper. The length of time my students had been in the United States varied and their educational backgrounds were also quite diverse. They ranged in age from 14-17 years old, but their literacy proficiency covered a much broader spectrum. In the Rochester City School District, (RCSD) new entrants are
required to complete a home language questionnaire and language placement tests when they register. There are two different kinds of placement tests that are used in the RCSD: 1) Language Assessment Series (LAS) and 2) Language Assessment Battery-Revised (LAB-R). The scores of the LAS and/or the LAB-R are used to determine a student's eligibility for bilingual or LEP instruction. The chart below reveals the demographic breakdown of the students enrolled in my class in spring 2005 (Note: names have been changed to respect student confidentiality).

*Figure 10: Demographics of a bilingual special education class*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Years in U.S.</th>
<th>Educational Background</th>
<th>Area of Disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roberto</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sp.Ed.</td>
<td>L.D./OHI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomás</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gen.Ed.</td>
<td>L.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lidia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gen.Ed.</td>
<td>L.D./E.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Dominican Rep.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>little formal</td>
<td>L.D./OHI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sp.Ed.</td>
<td>L.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José 1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sp.Ed.</td>
<td>L.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José 2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Gen.Ed.Bil</td>
<td>L.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sp.Ed.</td>
<td>L.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sp.Ed.</td>
<td>M.R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javier</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>interrupted</td>
<td>M.R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>little formal</td>
<td>L.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STUDENTS WHO ARRIVED AFTER STUDY BEGAN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Years in U.S.</th>
<th>Educational Background</th>
<th>Area of Disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sp.Ed.</td>
<td>L.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricardo</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sp.Ed.</td>
<td>L.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sp.Ed.</td>
<td>OHI/L.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marisol</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Dominican Rep.</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>interrupted</td>
<td>M.R.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of these students were functioning significantly (at least 3 years) below grade level in reading and written expression—both in English and Spanish. Some had been placed in general education bilingual classes and were referred for special
education services during the school year, while others had received special education
instruction in their native land. All students had an individualized education plan
(IEP) with a variety of goals in the areas of study skills, reading, writing,
mathematics, speech/language, social/emotional/behavior, basic cognitive/daily living
skills, and career/vocational/transitional. Their abilities and needs were very diverse,
as was the curriculum I was expected to help them learn.

Setting and challenges--My classroom was designated a 12:1:1, self-contained,
bilingual setting--meaning that the students qualified for a 12 student-to-one teacher-
to-one paraprofessional ratio. My assignment was to instruct them in their core
subject areas (following New York State and RCSD curriculum guidelines) while
working towards meeting their individual goals. This was an especially daunting task
as the students fell into two grade-level categories, ninth and tenth; meaning that I
was to differentiate instruction within a limited time frame to provide the ninth
graders access to the material necessary to meet the goals of the state exams at the
ninth grade level, while simultaneously providing tenth graders access to a
completely different set of information. My job was further complicated by the fact
that the content area textbooks available to me in Spanish were written at a much
higher reading level than my students were able to process. In fact, a few of my
students lacked the literacy skills necessary to write their own names.

The exceptional demands placed on me as the classroom teacher were
overwhelming, and definitely created a barrier to meeting my objectives. At times,
the number of students placed in my class exceeded the ratio set forth in the students' IEPs. Being over capacity generated more problems, especially since a few of the students qualified for even smaller class ratios of 6:1:1 or 8:1:1 due to more complex needs. Though RCSD was out-of-compliance by placing more than the designated number of students in my class, the State of New York (NYS) granted a waiver to allow for the discrepancy due to a lack of qualified personnel and an unexpected increase in the fluctuation of bilingual students. RCSD, like the locations described in the literature I reviewed, faces many of the same challenges inherent to meeting the needs of LEP special education students. In an attempt to resolve some of the challenges they face, RCSD officials are constantly trying to improve their bilingual services.

One of the main challenges I face is negotiating the demands of administrators and other governing forces. As mentioned earlier in this section, a huge stumbling block to achieving my goals was the narrowly defined and expansive curriculum guidelines set forth by NYS and RCSD. My students' IEPs specifically state that the students will receive "modifications to the pacing and content of the general education curriculum", but there is no modification to the pacing or content of the standardized tests. The students receive testing accommodations, such as the use of a calculator or word processor, and bilingual administration of exams, but they do not have the option of postponing the exam until they have fully mastered course content. Particularly in the text-rich, vocabulary laden study of world history, students with limited literacy skills require a great deal of teacher scaffolding to build their
comprehension. Teaching techniques that work (such as hands-on activities, structured notes, re-writing of textbooks by students, vocabulary development, etc) take more time than do traditional methods (such as teacher lecture and note taking or the assignment of a reading passage and comprehension questions). Time constraints and unrealistic expectations conflict with the objective of biliteracy for ELL-LDs.

Another challenge that I faced in finishing this project was the changing demographics of my class. Many students exited my class before I could attain good data. Some left to work, others were arrested, and a few left to raise a family. Several of the families I worked with exhibited circulatory relocation patterns, moving back and forth from the states to Puerto Rico, or from state to state, while others simply moved within the city. Constantly changing classroom dynamics added a stressful component to this project, because I did not feel that I could maintain the integrity of my research. I was frustrated by my lack of data despite my best efforts, and eventually decided to change my methodology. Here I present my findings as a qualitative description rather than quantitative results.

Rationale and assessment—From the time I began teaching in the September 2000 until June 2005 I held the same position, complete with the same job expectations and the same classroom. To me, one of the best aspects of my situation was that my students "looped" with me. Since I taught both ninth and tenth grade, if a student successfully met the promotion criteria for ninth grade, they would still remain in my class for their tenth grade year. Retaining the same students for two or more years
allowed me to get to know them very well. I was able to build relationships with my students and their families, and to get to know their abilities and needs intimately. Faced with students who demonstrated significant delays in reading comprehension, writing mechanics, handwriting, information processing, and social development, I felt that a focus on literacy development would be crucial to helping them attain any kind of educational success. My rationale for starting this project was anchored in my belief that building my students' literacy skills was the most important undertaking I faced.

To begin, I sought to accurately assess my students' language proficiencies in Standard English and Spanish. I explained to them that the evaluations were to help us determine where each student's strengths and weaknesses were, so that we could better plan their instruction. Through Developmental Reading Assessments (DRAs) and running reading records I was able to establish a starting point for each child. To establish a baseline for written expression, I had each student provide a writing sample. They also completed an interest inventory for reading and identified when and for what purposes they used writing in their lives. Unfortunately, given the time constraints and organization of the school day, this process took a great deal more time than I anticipated. Early on in my attempt to complete this project I realized that time would be a dominating factor; I wanted to start literacy assessments in January 2005, but was unable to obtain elementary level DRA kits until after mid-term exams. In February 2005 I began administering the reading assessments, and Winter Recess snuck up before I could complete them. I finished gathering initial literacy
proficiency data in early March 2005--just as two new students entered my class. My next step was to determine the best approach to raising the levels of proficiency for each of my students.
Results

Most all of the teenagers in my class required frequent clarification on tasks, exhibited a low frustration threshold, and rarely finished tasks in designated time. They had difficulty organizing their thoughts and expressing ideas in oral or written form, and they displayed many of the affective characteristics described in the research I reviewed. Though the class size was relatively small, distinct patterns of behavior could be discerned among the students. I noticed different kinds of learners in my class; informally, I could classify them into 5 main groups:

1) The first group consisted of students who would not attempt any work on their own. These students wanted constant attention and teacher feedback. When asked to read a passage, they spent more time staring at my face in search of affirmation than at the text they were supposed to be reading. I believe this group of students demonstrated "learned helplessness, a lack of persistence at tasks which realistically could be mastered." (Luchow, et.al., 1985, p.470).

2) The second group of students would only complete specific kinds of learning activities. This group of students loved looking up vocabulary words in a dictionary and copying the definition in their notebooks. They thrilled to copy notes from an overhead, or to complete rote memorization and study drills. This second group only wanted to attempt work that they knew they could be successful with, and they were fearful of trying anything new. Also included in this group were the very
shy, quiet students who were too timid or uncomfortable to participate in interactive class activities.

3) The third group consisted of students who rebelled and refused to do anything. The students in this category would typically be classified as troublemakers. They scoff when asked to read, lash out when given an assignment, consistently interrupt the educational process with verbal and physical outbursts, or simply ignore the adults in the room.

4) The next group of students was composed of the kind of learners a teacher dreams about. Hardworking, polite, eager and active participants, this group of students, albeit not the most highly-skilled, wanted to learn and would do their best every day to make progress.

5) The final style of learning behavior was more ambiguous. Students who I identified with this group of learners exhibited a wider range of responses to classroom activities. They were tentative students, who were willing to put forth effort, but hesitant to fully apply themselves. Often students in this group displayed strong preferences for certain subject matter over others, and their behavior was directly related to their interest or perceived aptitude in each discipline.

Based on the research I had done, I recognized that the learner characteristics I observed needed to be examined and interpreted "in relation to the nature of language proficiency and intellectual development, the sociology of dominant-subordinate
group interaction, and models of teaching and learning" (Cummins, 1989, p. 111). In order to engage my students in the classroom and to foster a sense of responsibility and motivation for their own educational achievement, I realized that I would have to challenge "broader patterns of societal discrimination...to empower students by promoting their linguistic talents and confidence in their personal identity" (Cummins, 1989, p. 112). For example, "children who exhibit learned helplessness have acquired this habit of not trying as a consequence of having repeatedly experienced failure" (Luchow, et.al, 1985, p. 470). It seems that students who have a history of failure sometimes develop the attitude that it is a waste of time to try because they will not succeed anyway. Given the fact that the students I served were placed in a self-contained special education class, I could safely assume that all of my students had experienced some level of academic failure in the past. I knew that I would have to work hard to combat the negative impact caused by my students' prior experiences. In each group of students I detected low self-estees and negative self-concepts, though they were conveyed quite differently. My "trouble-maker" students had learned to salvage some of their pride by asserting their independence and refusing to work, my "dream-kids" strove to prove that they were worthy, while the "quiet students" lacked the confidence to put forth an effort or to participate. "Studies comparing children who persist at academic tasks with children who lack persistence have shown that persisters took significantly more personal responsibility for both success and failure outcomes than did notpersisters." (Luchow, 1985, p.471). In order to help my students reconnect with school and to bolster their self-esteem, I wanted to engage them and teach them to take responsibility for their learning.
Revised Methods—To accomplish my goals, I planned to create a democratic, accepting, and nurturing classroom environment. The first step was to issue the students a bill of rights, delineating what they were entitled to as members of OUR class. We used these rights as a springboard for a class discussion on responsibilities and how rules relate to responsibilities and serve to protect individual rights. The students and I worked together to come up with a list of rules that would serve to uphold the classroom bill of rights. Additionally, we worked within my grading system to establish consequences for infractions of the rules. If the students were to follow classroom rules and understand the importance of participation, I needed them to invest in our environment. By encouraging them to participate in the design and decision making procedures, I hoped that they would develop a vested interest in and sense of belonging to our classroom. "A central proposition..." to Cummins' theoretical framework for bilingual special education students (1989) "...is that minority students are disempowered educationally in much the same way that their communities are disempowered by interactions with societal institutions" (pg. 114). Empowering students, in my mind, means sharing control with them and advocating for them to take back the control and direction of their education.

The pedagogical approach I favor in my class is the "interactive or experiential model". Recent research on effective teaching strategies for bilingual students with disabilities supports the adoption of interactive or experiential models of pedagogy (Cummins, 1989).
Academic activities associated with the most intensive and prolonged levels of task engagement drew heavily upon, and encouraged expression of students' experiences, language background, and interests. They also fostered feelings of success and pride in accomplishment, gave children a sense of control over their own learning, and included peer collaboration or peer approval. Furthermore they were holistic in nature in that they did not involve learning or drilling of isolated, decontextualized segments of information (Cummins, 19989, p.117).

Utilizing the interactive/experiential model helped me to empower students by allowing them choose a course of study. While the majority of the school day was taken up by meeting pre-established curriculum standards, I engaged the students in planning the direction for classroom reading instruction. Students were provided with choices not only in the content of their reading program, but also in teaching styles, materials, and expectations. For example, I offered "courses" (reading groups) in Human Interaction (HI), Teen Issues (TI), and Preparing for the NYS Driving Permit Exam (Drivers Ed.).

Students pursuing the Human Interaction curriculum reviewed literature from the fields of psychology and sociology. They used scientific methods to develop social experiments (with school staff as "guinea pigs") and created written reports of their findings. We utilized scholarly journals, textbooks, magazines, television programs, greeting cards, toys, the Internet, and personal observation journals as reading materials to support our investigations and the students presented their learning in a variety of ways. This line of study allowed students to examine cultural differences in relationships and interpersonal interaction. Students sought to explore
how people communicate through personal space, gestures, volume/tone of voice, etc. They also felt it was important to investigate family and how children learn about culture. Questionnaires, family trees, and stories of traditions and customs were some of the products created by this group.

The Teen Issues group explored topics that they brainstormed as important in their lives and the lives of their friends. They read trade books that dealt with issues such as teen pregnancy, gang life, and drug abuse. They read teen magazines and discussed the impact of technology (chat rooms, etc) on teens' lives. This group worked in collaboration with the school’s health center to promote student awareness of sexually transmitted diseases and the dangers of smoking, and wrote and acted out plays based on real-life situations. Students brought in informational pamphlets, video taped television programs, newspaper articles, and personal stories to contribute to our study. This group made great strides toward improving interpersonal communication, anger management, and conflict resolution while increasing their literacy proficiency and expanding their vocabulary.

The third group, Driver's Ed., concentrated on reading and mastering the NYS Driver’s Manual. They worked together to identify challenging vocabulary (Spanish & English) and built personal dictionaries to use as reference. My classroom quickly filled with student-made street signs, categorized by function, along with the masking tape streets and pavement markings that covered the floor. Matchbox cars and rolling chairs were used to recreate driving situations from the manual, and the
students utilized strategies such as visualizing and sketching to increase their reading comprehension and map skills. Another preferred activity for this group was testing themselves on the NYS Department of Motor Vehicles' interactive web site. The Driver's Ed. group also borrowed videos and DVDs from the public library to supplement their learning and deepen their awareness of the dangers of driving under the influence. The majority of students from this group went on to take and pass their Permit exam (in English), and since, I have had requests from the parents of my new students to study Driver's Ed. with their children.

"This approach to teaching, and specifically to reading, uses the students' knowledge and experiences as the context for the development of vocabulary, content knowledge, oral language skills, and writing" (Goldstein, 2002, p. 161). While each of the reading groups focused on different themes, they had many features in common. Each group employed reading strategies that had been explicitly taught and modeled. Though the groups were not reading the same materials, they all used methods that we learned as a class for locating and choosing resources. My goal was to create a skill-based classroom that promoted the interconnection of skills from one discipline to the other. Skills such as reading, writing, communication, research, and interpreting data cross content lines. The rationale focusing on skills was "to liberate students from dependence on instruction in the sense of encouraging them to become active generators of their own knowledge" (Cummins, 1989, p. 115). Teaching in a self-contained classroom benefited my goal of building a skill-based classroom because as the students' primary teacher I was able to highlight skills and strategies
across content areas. Unfortunately, the exams my students must take do not assess thinking skills, but discrete knowledge of facts and information as set forth in the curriculum. For classroom purposes and to track academic progress and literacy development, I find a portfolio to be a much more useful assessment tool than state exams. In the students' portfolios I can include work samples, anecdotal notations, teacher observations, and checklists. I have even included video and audio tapes to demonstrate students' progress. Sharing student portfolios with parents also seems to be a more effective method for communicating performance levels.

Engaging Parents--Recommendations to engage parents in their children's education can be found throughout educational research, and the benefits of parental support in the classroom are well established, too. Lack of parental support or involvement in school is often viewed by teachers as the parents' lack of interest, or poor parenting skills. My own experience has taught me that "in reality, most parents of minority children have high academic aspirations for their children and want to be involved in promoting their academic progress" (Cummins, 1898, p. 116). For many of my students' parents, they came to the U.S. to offer their children opportunities that were not available in their homeland. Often parents will work several jobs to earn enough to support the family while their children attend school, but in doing so they may be forced to miss parent/teacher conferences or special events. Is parental sacrifice and hard work then to be connoted with indifference or laziness? I have also learned that some of my students' parents feel that questioning their child's teacher shows a lack of respect for the teacher, their education, and their qualifications. For these parents,
lack of involvement is a way of supporting the teacher and demonstrating their confidence in the teacher's skills and decision making abilities. In my opinion, it is the educator's responsibility to reach out to parents and build bridges between home and school.

Facilitating open communication between school and home and encouraging parental involvement can be achieved in many ways. In the course of time that I have been working on this project, I have developed strong relationships with my students' families. For parent teacher conferences, my department meets in a central location for "Café con Leche". To achieve a high level of parental involvement, department staff begin by sending a flyer home and calling parents several weeks before the scheduled conferences. In our experience, parents are more likely to participate if (like students) they are engaged and contributing something to the event. We invite parents to bring a dish of food, music, beverages, or paper products to the meetings. On the day of the event, our teachers dress the tables with cloths and set up the room to create a socially conducive environment. Each teacher has a space, marked by a table tent, to meet with parents in private, but meetings are not scheduled at specific times, as "time is used in American classrooms in rather exacting ways, whereas in other cultures, time is viewed more flexibly, according to the needs of circumstances or participants" (Cloud, 2002, p. 114). In these meetings I have learned the importance of creating a balance between professionalism and accessibility. For parents who do not have an extensive educational background, I try to simplify my speech patterns without patronizing them or eliminating important information. For
example, rather than using the word "syntax" I might say "word order" and offer an example of the point I want to express. Through "Cafe con Leche", we have greatly increased the number of Latino parents who attend parent-teacher conferences.

In addition to Cafe con Leche, I have attempted to build strong home-school relationships by maintaining close contact with my students' parents. Before the school year begins I make my first of many home visits. Another focal home visit I make takes place prior to Annual Review meetings, where I can meet with several family members at once. At these meetings I bring the student's portfolio to illustrate what we have been working on in school. Over the years, I have grown close with many of my students' families; as evidenced by my inclusion in special occasions like birthday parties (quinceañeros) and weddings. I also make an effort to be visible in the community by attending events like Puerto Rican Festival or special feast days at one of the Spanish-speaking churches. Connections can be made, too, by familiarizing oneself with customs of the community. Many of my students parents shop at the public market (La Plazita), eat at or own ethnic restaurants (El Jibarito, El Conquistador, Paola's, etc.), read Spanish-language newspapers (El Mensajero, etc.), and watch Spanish-speaking television stations. By acquainting myself with the culture of the community, I am better able to relate to and value my students and their families. "Though efforts to include other family members in the process may exceed legal requirements, such efforts demonstrate the school's [teacher's] respect for cultural and linguistic diversity and its sincere desire to accommodate the needs of all families in the assessment process" (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p. 95).
Conclusion

Cultivating and building on students' home culture is a widespread recommendation among ELL researchers. In class I attempted to situate and contextualize lessons within students' experiences, to use the students' home culture in explanations and discussions, and to integrate students' native language and dialects—using them as a resource for building my own dialectical repertoire. To negotiate differences in dialects amongst my students I employ a strategy recommended by Clarkson. He suggests "that gradual compilation of contrastive vocabulary lists of local Spanish, textbook Spanish, and standard English be an important classroom activity" (Clarkson, 1977, p.965). The reasoning behind this activity is that through constant comparison and contrast, students can learn to move from the vernacular to the standard and back, and their control over a variety of dialects or codes serve as an advantage. Methods such as contrastive analysis help to foster student esteem and encourage their voices via their own writing. Other techniques I use in class are designed to strengthen my students' Spanish literacy while developing their proficiency in English. I want to support their emerging language, communication, and academic abilities in a safe and caring environment, as suggested by the research.

My practice has been shaped and guided through the writing of this paper, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a comprehensive description of everything I have done in my class over the past three years. The characteristics of
my class, including size, age range, distribution of disabilities, and student expectations, have changed drastically over the past two years. Currently, RCSD is phasing out the bilingual program at my school site, so we are not receiving any new Spanish speaking ELLs. With the program shift, my assignment has also changed. The students I had been working with were absorbed into the upper-level (11th and 12th grade) bilingual general education inclusion class, and the decision was made that I would work with more severely disabled bilingual students. The new students I was assigned are classified as mentally retarded and are slated to receive an IEP diploma as opposed to a Local or Regents diploma. This new group of students presents a different set of challenges; however, the research I executed is still relevant and applicable to their education. In addition to the small group of Spanish-dominant students in my charge (four students), I also have a small group (five students) of monolingual English speakers in my class. For the first time since I began teaching, I am able to employ a dual-language bilingual model in my class. Also, since the students are working toward an IEP diploma, I can create a curriculum that reflects the students' needs, rather than state/district expectations. This year I have attempted to create a learning environment that allows for thematic, integrated, experiential, project-based learning with opportunities for rich interactions among peers with differing linguistic backgrounds.

A major difference between my new class demographics and my old class is the age of the students. In developing a curriculum for LEP mentally retarded young adults ages 18 to 21, a key focus needs to be on transition. While certain researchers
have indicated that "instruction can emphasize content-based and cognitive learning for students with mild and moderate disabilities, and lifeskills and vocationally related English for students with more severe disabilities", I believe that both groups benefit from strategic and skill based learning (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p.118).

Actually, the only elements of my teaching style that have really changed are related to content and flexibility of scheduling; otherwise, I continue to strive to teach in a culturally responsive way as outlined by Cloud in Figure 11.

**Figure 11: Characteristics of culturally responsive teaching**

- Create an accepting and predictable environment by using structured activities and letting students know what is expected of them.
- Maximize opportunities for language use by asking carefully constructed questions that students can answer.
- Create opportunities for student dialogue in a supportive environment.
- Encourage active participation. Give students responsibility for their own learning, use discovery processes and cooperative learning, make learning relevant to the students' experiences, use thematic teaching, and design activities that promote use of learning strategies and higher order thinking skills.
- Support understanding by guiding and facilitating learning efforts, adapting speech to students' proficiency levels, using multimodal instruction (e.g., visuals, realia, and graphic organizers) to ensure understanding, offering peer support, and using the native language (e.g., through the use of instructional aides and students who speak the language) to clarify meaning or to expand learning.

In addition, teachers can use the following:
- Vocabulary guides, semantic webs, concept maps, advance organizers, and structured overviews to help students develop the vocabulary and background knowledge needed to understand the academic content
- Guided reading strategies with English textbook or select materials that are linguistically appropriate for students' stages of language proficiency
- Strategies (such as guided questioning, prediction, and graphic aids) that support reading comprehension
- Structured study guides, information organizers, chapter outlines, and short summary notes to record key concepts
- Reciprocal teaching techniques to help students acquire key concepts and related academic language (Cloud, 2002, p.123)
Last year, with my students' input, we decided to open a coffee shop in our classroom, a converted home and careers room. This endeavor provided us with a common purpose and meaningful real-life interactions. Together we needed to research, plan, and problem-solve to bring our idea to fruition. With guidance, the students were able to research, determine, and locate what equipment we would need to get started. They utilized math and reading skills to calculate how much money we would need for start-up. They used their writing and editing skills to create a business plan for school administrators, and their communication skills to defend their decisions. Working as a group, they came up with a name for our business—Café Gasolina—and a slogan, "Fuel for your day". The students worked together to locate suppliers for coffee and cups, and visited local coffee shops to interview owners/managers about their businesses. After working out all the logistics last year, we were able to open Cafe Gasolina in September 2006.

This year the students have continued to grow and learn from their work in Cafe Gasolina. They are in charge of all aspects of daily business including: ordering, stocking, and preparing coffee; balancing our finances and paying bills; keeping track of inventory; weekly shopping in the community; customer service; advertising; deliveries; and all other aspects of running the coffee shop. Together, the students work through problems and determine policies. As a group they decided to use the profits from the Cafe to plan a trip. Once again, they were able to apply reading, writing, computer, research, math, and problem solving skills to decide where to go, when to travel, and how much money we would need. Following school
policy, the students wrote a field trip proposal explaining where they want to go and what the educational value of the trip would be. In May 2007 our class will travel to Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida. According to Goldstein, "projects that result in a product are completed in cooperative working groups, with everyone being invited to contribute to the group effort" demand that "students discuss their topic formulate and decide upon their questions, identify their research sources, come up with an action plan, and divide the work" (Goldstein, 2002, p. 178). By engaging students of differing language and cultural backgrounds in this type of research, my students learn so much more than problem-solving and academic skills. They learn to negotiate meaning and cross-cultural communication. Working together has taught my students to value the skills and abilities of each individual as they contribute to the success of the group as a whole.

Though the Cafe governs how we manage the majority of instructional time in the school day, we still have time to pursue other educational goals. Again this year we are working on the Driver's Ed. course of study, along with career exploration, job hunting skills (resume writing, interview skills, etc.), personal money management (bank accounts, credit, etc.), map skills, health and human body, and, of course, literacy development. Having read that "ideal instructional activities for English language learners allow genuine dialogue between teachers and students and among students as they work on assignments that encourage them to question and discuss" (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p.40), I try to encourage dialogue, while engaging the students in multisensory teaching, with scaffolding. The students also benefit from cross-
language peer tutoring and other cooperative learning that allows each child to be "both second language learners and language experts", working together to develop their language proficiency (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p. 144).

By following the principles and theoretical underpinnings described in this paper, I have been able to create a classroom environment that supports literacy development for bilingual adolescents with a range of special needs. In short, I attempt to: "1) work collaboratively with students, 2) develop language and literacy across the curriculum, 3) connect school to students' lives, 4) develop complex thinking, and 5) teach through conversation" (Cloud, 2002, p. 140). I seek to guide and assist students in their quest to achieve their academic goals, all the time encouraging them to become more independent. I consider myself, as Goldstein writes, a "critical educator":

Through a process of dialogue, reflection, and action, the Freirean [critical] approach to literacy instruction seeks to transform policies, practices, laws, and structures that contribute to illiteracy and social, economic, and political oppression and disempowerment. In contrast to the banking model of education, in which the teacher deposits knowledge into the heads of students to be withdrawn later during a test, the Freirean approach creates a community of learners in which teachers and students enter into a dialogue. The dialogue produces themes, vocabulary, and ideas based on student interests that in turn become the basis for the curriculum. Proposed actions that evolve from the discussions are critiqued and examined, an the ensuing literacy activities are based on real situation that students must face. (Goldstein, 2002, p. 163)
I continuously work with administrators to try to improve our school programs and advocate for services that will truly benefit students, rather than adopting the status quo "one-size-fits-all" method of teaching. I make an effort to teach from a child-centered perspective, and I believe that my students' progress can be attributed to their sense of belonging, acceptance, safety, and worthiness. Differentiating instruction through the use of one-to-one or small group conferences along with individualized mini-lesson allows me to work with students on the specific skills that they need addressed. I invite parents to our classroom, to view what their children are doing (or, this year, to have a cup of coffee!). I am very proud of the work my students and I have accomplished over the past few years, and I hope to continue building and fine-tuning my literacy program. With the changing face of bilingual education at my school-site, I am not sure whether or not I will remain a teacher in the bilingual program, but I am confident that I will always work as an advocate for language or dialectal minority students.
References


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