

Teaching Reading to Bilingual Students

“Reading and the Bilingual
Student: Fact and Friction,” by
James Cummins

Relevant Issues

- Bilingual Education programs - *when* to transition children from NL to English
- Testing that overshadows effective instruction
- Reading instructional methods at the heart of the controversy
- Reading comprehension and English language proficiency - the connection?

Three Dimensions of Language Proficiency

- Conversational fluency (BICS) - takes most young students a couple of years;
- Discrete language skills - non-English speakers learn phonological awareness and decoding skills in English rapidly;
- Academic language proficiency - encounter complex vocabulary, syntax, abstract language in cognitively demanding contexts.

BICS & CALP

BASIC INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS & COGNITIVE
ACADEMIC LINGUISTIC PROFICIENCY

- A. Social & Contextualized
- B. Social & Decontextualized
- C. Academic & Contextualized
- D. Academic & Decontextualized

Research

- Polarized views between phonics instruction and whole language
- Extensive reading and literate environment immersion strongly correlated with reading comprehension
- Phonemic awareness and phonological knowledge a direct or indirect causal factor(s) in reading
- Effective instruction combines meaningful exposure to print and systematic instruction in phonics (the appropriate dose)
- English decoding skills for non-native speakers are not transferable to oral proficiency in English

English Language Learners - Learning Language and Literacy

- Test demands push students to English prematurely
- Transfer of NL literacy skills to English
- Goals of phonics instruction should include helping students with the process of decoding that helps them become independent learners
- Cultural identity is a major issue in bilingual education (literacy instruction)
- Acquisition of phonological knowledge and skills varies in degree and rate in each child

Predictive Reading Indicators and the “4th grade slump”

- Home - amount of voluntary reading; frequency of borrowed library books;
- School - amount and variety of reading materials; sponsoring reading initiatives;
- Classroom environment - reading in class; library center;
- Teacher methods - explicit teaching of comprehension skills; emphasis on literature; phonics teaching

Academic Language

- Academic language of texts draw heavily from Greco-Latin origins; everyday language draws more from Anglo-Saxon-based roots;
- Greco-Latin words tend to be 3 - 4 syllables long; high frequency words of Anglo-Saxon-base tend to be 1 - 2 syllables in length;
- The study of prefixes, suffixes, stems may be an effective way to study these; and used in meaningful listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities.

Four Groups of Vocabulary (Nation, 1993)

- High-frequency words. 2000 word families, 80% of most written text
- General academic vocabulary. 800 word families or 8-10% of academic text
- Technical or specialized vocabulary. 2000 words, 4-5% of academic text
- Low-frequency words. 123,000 low frequency word families (requires substantial amount of reading)
- Using words is key.

Exposure to Vocabulary

- One-time exposure to new vocabulary amounts to 10 - 15% learning;
- Repeated exposure increases incrementally;
- Learners need 95% “lexical coverage” in order to readily infer the meanings from contexts
- The knowledge of cognates facilitates ELLs; morphological structure knowledge helps all students
- Reading from a wide variety of genres.
- Thematic units as curricular vehicles.

THE END