

Using a Literacy Language Intervention Class
to Improve Language Proficiency of
Non-Native English Speakers

A Special Project
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Dr. Jack McPherson
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FACULTY APPROVAL


Using a Literacy Language Intervention Class
to Improve Language Proficiency of
Non-Native English Speakers

A Master's Special Project

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative, experimental research study was to determine the extent to which implementation of a literacy language intervention class (LLIC), at LCMS, assist Level 3, Non-English language proficient (NELP) transition out-of-program to Level 4, English language proficient (ELP), as assessed by the WLPT. To accomplish this purpose, a review of selected literature was conducted. Additionally, essential baseline data from the WLPT were obtained and analyzed, to formulate related inferences, conclusions, and recommendations. To accomplish this purpose, a review of selected literature was conducted. Additionally, the WLPT II was used to obtain baseline data from which related conclusions and recommendations were formulated.

An analysis of data obtained did not support the hypothesis that there would be an increase in the number of 6th grade students who transitioned from Level 3 (NELP) to Level 4 (ELP), after receiving instruction in the LLIC during the 2007-2008, when compared to the 6th graders who were not enrolled in a LLIC during 2006-2007.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background for the Project

When I attended the elementary schools as a student who was Spanish dominant, I remember my teachers always teaching the lessons through direct instruction in English. It was difficult for me to understand some of the concepts that the teacher would explain because it was done in my second language. The teacher would do all the talking. I would just be listening and trying to comprehend as much as I could. In some occasions when we were reading aloud, the teacher would constantly be correcting all the errors I would make when reading in English. I felt really sad because I was not able to pronounce the words as I should (Eva Valdez, Bilingual Second-Grade Teacher, two years' experience, teaching in an early transition bilingual program; Freeman & Freeman, 2006, p. xi).

In the above statement, Valdez called attention to a problem and situations faced by Non-native English speaking elementary school students. These problems and frustrations are faced everyday by Non-native English speakers (NNES) throughout the United States, including the Yakima School District (YSD).

August & Shanahan (2006) have addressed the issue that a large and growing number of students come from homes where English is not the primary language, along with problems associated with their low levels of literacy attainment. As stated by these authorities:

In 1979, there were 6 million language-minority students; by 1999, this number had more than doubled to 14 million students. Language-minority students are not faring well in U.S. schools... rapid increases in the number of language-minority children and youth, as well as their low levels of literacy attainment and its consequences-high dropout rates, poor job prospects, and poverty-create an imperative to attend to the literacy development of these students (p. xiii).

The above authorities and their statements have provided the context for developing literacy for bilingual students, which was the focus of the present study.

Statement of the Problem

The challenge faced by Bilingual Education educators and NNES has been captured in the following statement from Francisco, as cited by Freeman & Freeman (2006):

To be bilingual is like living in two worlds. One can speak to people in Spanish and enter into their world. Now that I have begun the bilingual education program, I can see how valuable it is to be bilingual because there are so many children that I can help in their first language (p. 1).

Faced with the challenge articulated by Freeman & Freeman, educators at Lewis & Clark Middle School (LCMS) in Yakima, Washington, believed that an intervention class for NNES was needed to help students to acquire literacy language skills and to transition

from Level 3 to Level 4 on the Washington Language Proficiency Test II (WLPT).

Phrased as a question, the problem which represented the focus of the present study maybe stated as follows: To what extent did implementation of a literacy language intervention class (LLIC), at LCMS, assist Level 3, Non-English language proficient (NELP) transition out-of-program to Level 4, English language proficient (ELP), as assessed by the WLPT?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, experimental research study was to determine the extent to which implementation of a literacy language intervention class (LLIC); at LCMS, assist Level 3, Non-English language proficient (NELP) transition out-of-program to Level 4, English language proficient (ELP), as assessed by the WLPT. To accomplish this purpose, a review of selected literature was conducted. Additionally, essential baseline data from the WLPT were obtained and analyzed, to formulate related inferences, conclusions, and recommendations.

Delimitations

This study was conducted in the YSD from 2006 to 2008. Student participants included forty 6th grade students at LCMS selected at random. The researcher (Ruby A. Armijo) sought to determine the effectiveness of the LLIC implemented at LCMS, during the 2007-2008 school year. To make this determination, WLPT scores of twenty 6th grade Level 3 students from 2006-2007 and twenty from 2007-2008 were compared.

Assumptions

A basic assumption was made that a NNES intervention class for Level 3 sixth grade students would improve their WLPT scores, thereby advancing them out of program to a Level 4. A further assumption was made that a random sample of forty students from 2006-2008 would provide baseline data essential for validating effectiveness of the LLIC. Finally, it was assumed that participating students gave their best efforts when completing the WLPT.

Hypothesis

The researcher (Ruby A. Armijo) hypothesized there would be an increase in the number of 6th grade students who transitioned from Level 3 (NELP) to Level 4 (ELP), after receiving instruction in the LLIC during the 2007-2008, when compared to the 6th graders who were not enrolled in a LLIC during 2006-2007.

Significance of the Project

The researcher chose the present research topic as a result of significant need within the YSD to improve reading skills of a NNES. During the 2006-2007 school year, from a total of 14,247 students enrolled, 60.9% came from a Hispanic ethnic background, the largest demographic group in the YSD. In May, 2007, 27% of the total student population was identified as Transitional Bilingual. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB) mandated that the sub-category of Transitional Bilingual Education was to receive measurable attention nationwide. Awareness of transitional needs of NNS in Yakima due to the districts unique demographics, and the pressures generated by the NCLBA to address

Bilingual Education concerns, caused educators of LCMS to implement the LLIC which was the subject of the present study.

Procedure

During September, 2006, the writer (Ruby A. Armijo) sought and obtained permission from Ms. Lois Betzing, principal at LCMS, to undertake the present study. Permission was also received to begin planning a LLIC to be implemented during the 2007-2008 school year. The researcher, along with the principal, counselor, and reading coach participated in planning. The determination was also made to utilize WLPT scores of 6th grade Level 3 (NPES) from 2006-2008 to provide baseline data needed to validate the possible success of the NNIC. Intervention classes began in September, 2007. The WLPT was administered in February, 2007, and 2008. During summer school, June, 2008, data was obtained analyzed from which related conclusions and recommendations were formulated.

Definition of Terms

Significant terms used in the context of the present study have been defined as follows:

Experimental Research. Research in which at least one independent variable is manipulated, other relevant variables are controlled and the effect on one or more dependent variables is observed

Qualitative Research. The collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data in order to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest

Level 3. A student that is Non-English Language Proficient but almost there (Advanced stage).

Level 4. A student that is English Language Proficient (transitioned out of program).

Bilingual Education. Education taught in more than one language.

English as a Second Language. When a person's Native language is not English; it is their second language

No Child Left Behind Act. A mandate delivered by

the U.S. Congress to focus attention on the special needs of student deficient in English language proficiency.

t-Test. An inferential statistics technique used to determine whether the means of the two groups are significantly different at a given probability level

t-Test for Independent Samples. A parametric test of significance used to determine whether, at a selected probability level, a significant difference exists between the means of two independent samples.

Acronyms

AYP. Adequate yearly Progress

CBI. Content Based Instruction

ELL. English Language Learners

ELP. English Language Proficient

ESL. English as a Second Language

L1. A Person's Native or First Language

L2. A Person's Second Language

LCMS. Lewis & Clark Middle School

NCLB. No Child Left Behind

NELP. Non-English Language Proficient

NNES. Non-Native English Speaker

WASL. Washington Assessment of Student Learning

WLPT. Washington Language Proficiency Test

YSD. Yakima School District

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

The review of literature and research summarized in Chapter 2 has been organized to address the following topics:

Bilingual Education

Theories of English as a Second Language

Interventions Used as Classroom Tools

Data current primarily within the last five years were identified through an online computerized literature search of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), the Internet, and Proquest.

Bilingual Education

According to Essex (2008), the first state to adopt a Bilingual Education Law was Ohio in 1939 with many other states passing similar laws by the end of the century. These laws continued until World War I when many people feared the Non-English speakers. At that time the United States adopted a law designed to Americanize this population. This law provided for English-only instruction. Because of this, many students were failing classes and dropping out of high school at a significant rate. The Bilingual Education Act was passed in 1968 during the time of the Civil Rights Movement. This Act provided funding to incorporate Native Language Instruction in schools.

The Supreme Court acknowledged that leaving these students to fail in English-only classrooms was unconstitutional. The 1974 United States Supreme court case of Lau v. Nichols established the precedent that schools using federal funds were required to take to overcome language barriers. Specifically, a schools system's failure to provide Bilingual Education instruction to Non-English speaking children violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Alexander & Alexander, 2005)

The State of Washington has adopted a high-stakes test named the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). The class of 2008 was the first to be required to pass the tenth grade WASL exam in order to receive their High School Diploma. There has been a significant growth rate in minority students during the past 30 years. During that time, the number of minority students has increased from 7.51% in 1971 to 26.59% in 2001. On the fourth grade WASL, on all parts of the assessment, reading, writing, and math, there was a large discrepancy between the Hispanic and Caucasian population. In reading, 38.9% of Hispanic students did not meet the standard while only 15.9% of

Caucasian students did not meet the standard. In math 64.2% of Hispanic students did not meet standard compared to 32.1% of Caucasian students. A significant discrepancy was also present in the writing WASL where 59.7% of Hispanic students did not meet standard compared to 38.6% of Caucasian students did not meet standard. The difference found between Hispanic and Caucasian students on the WASL demonstrated high concern in light of the exam being required for graduation. Bilingual Education has become a major part of education in Washington State (<http://www.k12.wa.us>).

Theories of English as a Second Language

Krashen (2004) described a popular, learning theory for ELL students known as "Content-based Instruction" (CBI). In this program the only language spoken was English. The English speaking teacher did however have specific ELL strategies to ensure that the ELL student mastered the subject matter and made progress. In these classes students focused on basic language skills including reading, writing, speaking,

and listening. As the subject was being taught, students had a purpose learning the language. This model has also been called the Sink or Swim Model.

Another ESL theory was the Bilingual Approach, where the student received instruction in both their native language and in English within the same school day. According to Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (1994), the following bill of rights was incorporated into the Bilingual Education approach:

Every [child] has the right to: (1) identify with their mother tongue and have this identification be accepted and respected by others; (2) learn the mother tongue(s) fully, orally and in writing. This presupposes that minorities are educated mainly through the medium of their mother tongue(s), and within the government financed educational system; and (3) use the mother tongue in most official situations (including schools)...Any change of mother tongue [should be] voluntary (includes knowledge of long term consequences), not imposed. Every [child] has the

right to profit from education, regardless of what her mother tongue is (p.502).

The Bilingual Education model was a popular choice for many schools that have witnessed significant progress among ESL students.

Thomas & Collier (1997), from George Mason University, explained that the native language of the Student (L1) was deeply interrelated with cognitive development. If a child's cognitive development is inhibited in their L1 before they have reached final the Piagetan stage of formal operations "(i.e. somewhere around puberty)" they run the risk of not reaching a certain threshold of higher level thinking and the possibility of experiencing cognitive difficulties in the second language (L2). The Bilingual Education model held that it was important that students continue to develop cognitively and linguistically in their L1, at least throughout the elementary school years. This allowed the student to bridge the two languages and provided for smoother transition. Said Collier & Thomas:

When schooling is provided in both L1 and L2, both languages are the vehicle for strong cognitive and academic development (p).

Interventions Used as Classroom Tools

Freeman & Freeman (1994) believed that effective teachers implemented interactive and exploratory methods for teaching, curriculum development, learning, and language acquisition. These authorities findings also indicated ESL student reading success was enhanced when systematic skillful instruction was administered.

Because the No Child Left Behind Act requirement that schools must meet Average Yearly Progress (AYP), selected curriculum interventions have not always aligned with preferred teaching methods and materials for ESL students (i.e. building language acquisition groundwork through background knowledge and existing skills) (Walqui, 2000). This authority suggested the best activities for language acquisition provided learning opportunities that were intrinsically motivated to learners when they were engaged in studies related to their interests, values, and cognitive

challenges. Further, systematic training in Kindergarten phonological skills should be implemented to enable students to develop reading success. Walqui's findings also indicated that explicit phonics instruction should be implemented. For phonics proponents, the definition of reading stressed that decoding was the means to gain understanding from the text. Conversely, Nelson et al. (2000) explained that whole language advocates believed the reader "constructs" meaning to the text by a complex process while reading. These phonics advocates focused on students' interpretation of meaning as opposed to the author's intended meaning.

Krashen (2004) observed how students perform better in reading and talking when allowed involvement in relevant material. This language theorist advocated introducing language in a comprehensible context with rich conversations in natural situations that were highly interesting and meaningful. Krashen also found that "deductive methods," which teach rules first and then allow for practice are somewhat more effective

than audio-lingual (i.e. hearing/speaking) for adults as compared with children. Krashen concluded that "substantial quantities of comprehensible input will do better than any of the older approaches" (p.143).

According to Chanot & O'Malley (1996), "Well developed programs encompass language development across the content areas as well as through discrete ESL instruction" (p. 163). In response to recent policy, California high schools began to substitute reading intervention programs for ESL students with focused ESL curricula. This policy made it possible to compare the effect of a reading intervention program to one that focused on ESL students. Students enrolled in this comparison cohort earned higher achievement test scores than the reading intervention program cohort due to reading levels beyond the program exit levels. According to these authorities the importance of curricula that meet students at their linguistic and academic level cannot be understated.

Summary

The review of selected literature reported in Chapter 2 supported the following themes:

1. A school system's failure to provide Bilingual Education instruction to Non-English speaking children constituted a violation of federal law.
2. When schooling is provided in both L1 and L2, both languages are the vehicle for strong cognitive and academic development
3. The importance of curricula that meet students at their linguistic and academic level cannot be understated.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Treatment of the Data

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, experimental research study was to determine the extent to which implementation of a literacy language intervention class (LLIC), at LCMS, assisted Level 3, Non-English language proficient (NELP) transition out-of-program to Level 4, English language proficient (ELP), as assessed by the WLPT. To accomplish this purpose, a review of selected literature was conducted. Additionally, essential baseline data from the WLPT were obtained and analyzed, to formulate related inferences, conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter 3 contains a description of the methodology used in the study. Additionally, the researcher included details concerning participants, instruments, design, procedure, treatment of the data, and summary.

Methodology

A quantitative, experimental methodology was used to determine the extent to which implementation of a LLIC, at LCMS, assisted Level 3, NELP, transition out-of-program to a Level 4, ELP, as assessed by the WLPT. A t-Test for independent samples was used for data analysis to determine significance following the WLPT II tests in 2007 and 2008. All students were administered the test in February of their 5th grade school year (pre-test) and 6th grade school year (post-test). The tests were then assessed to determine any significant improvement in Language Proficiency.

Participants

Participants involved in the study included a total of forty Level 3, NELP, students from Lewis & Clark Middle School (LCMS). The control group consisted of twenty 6th grade students during the 2006-2007 school year and the treatment group included twenty 6th grade students from the 2007-2008 school year. Control and treatment groups included randomly selected both boys and girls who primarily represented Hispanic ethnicity.

Instruments

The Washington Language Proficiency Test (WLPT) was utilized for administering pre- and posttests to determine significance. The WLPT was the approved testing instrument by YSD and Washington State to assess students' language acquisition levels.

Design

Pre- and posttests for participating Level 3 students at LCMS were organized as follows:

Control group (X): Twenty Level 3 sixth grade students participated in mainstream classes only.

Experimental group (Y): Twenty Level 3 sixth grade students participated in the LLIC.

Procedure

Procedures employed in the present study evolved in several stages, as follows:

1. During September, 2006, the writer (Ruby A. Armijo) sought and obtained permission from Ms. Lois Betzing, principal at LCMS, to undertake the present study.

2. Permission was also received to begin planning a LLIC to be implemented during the 2007-2008 school year.
3. The researcher, along with the principal, counselor, and reading coach participated in planning.
4. The determination was also made to utilize WLPT scores of 6th grade Level 3 (NPES) from 2006-2008 to provide baseline data needed to validate the possible success of the NNIC. Intervention classes began in September, 2007.
5. The WLPT was administered in February, 2007, and 2008.
6. During June, 2008, data was obtained analyzed from which related conclusions and recommendations were formulated.

Treatment of the Data

A t-Test for independent samples was used along with the windows STATPAK statistical software program that accompanied the Education Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications, Sixth Edition text (Gay,

Mills, and Airasian, 2006). The t-Test allowed the researcher to compare WLPT scores for treatment and control groups essential for assessing the hypothesis. The following t-Test formula was used to assess independent samples:

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{\left(\frac{SS_1 + SS_2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2}\right)\left(\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2}\right)}}$$

Summary

Chapter 3 provided a description of the research methodologies employed in the study, participants, instruments used, research design, and procedure utilized. Details concerning treatment of the data obtained and analyzed were also presented.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

This experimental study sought to determine the extent to which implementation of a Language Learning Intervention Class (LLIC), at LCMS, assisted Level 3, NELP, transition out-of-program to a Level 4, ELP, as assessed by the WLPT.

Description of the Environment

Educators at Lewis & Clark Middle School (LCMS) in Yakima, Washington, believed that a LLIC for Non Native English Speakers (NNES) was needed to help students to acquire literacy language skills and to transition from Level 3 to Level 4 on the Washington Language Proficiency Test II (WLPT). Accordingly participants involved in the study included a total of forty Level 3, NELP, and students from LCMS. The control group

Summary

The review of selected literature reported in Chapter 2 supported the following themes:

1. A school system's failure to provide Bilingual Education instruction to Non-English speaking children constituted a violation of federal law.
2. When schooling is provided in both L1 and L2, both languages are the vehicle for strong cognitive and academic development
3. The importance of curricula that meet students at their linguistic and academic level cannot be understated.

consisted of twenty 6th grade students during the 2006-2007 school year and the treatment group included twenty 6th grade students from the 2007-2008 school year. Control and treatment groups included randomly selected both boys and girls who primarily represented Hispanic ethnicity.

Hypothesis

The researcher hypothesized there would be an increase in the number of 6th grade students who transitioned from Level 3 (NELP) to Level 4 (ELP), after receiving instruction in the LLIC during the 2007-2008, when compared to the 6th graders who were not enrolled in a LLIC during 2006-2007

Results of the Study

Table 1 displays the WLPT II pre- and posttest results for the 40 participating L3 students. Pre-test scores were obtained in their 5th grade year, and posttest during their 6th grade year.

Table 2 has provided a summary of results of the t-Test for independent samples, using the WLPT II scores from the students' 5th and 6th grade years and

the distribution of t with 38 Degrees of Freedom for each year. Significance was determined for $p \geq$ at 0.05, 0.001, and 0.001 levels.

Table 1

Pre- and Posttest WLPT II Results for L3 Students *

<u>Student #</u> <u>Group X</u> <u>(control)</u>	<u>Pre-</u> <u>test</u> <u>2006</u> <u>WLPT</u> <u>II</u>	<u>Posttest</u> <u>2007</u> <u>WLPT II</u>	<u>Student #</u> <u>Group Y</u> <u>(treatmen</u> <u>t)</u>	<u>Pre-</u> <u>test</u> <u>2007</u> <u>WLPT II</u>	<u>Posttest</u> <u>2008</u> <u>WLPT II</u>
1	679	696	1	654	722
2	676	703	2	643	693
3	670	676	3	658	700
4	688	712	4	658	682
5	692	689	5	663	690
6	692	730	6	668	705
7	685	712	7	673	719
8	695	705	8	673	713
9	699	714	9	649	695
10	685	687	10	665	700
11	654	691	11	656	700
12	682	700	12	654	710
13	688	698	13	685	688
14	663	683	14	662	719
15	699	714	15	658	697
16	682	700	16	665	682
17	688	693	17	660	705
18	679	712	18	665	716
19	685	708	19	660	675
20	660	691	20	660	710

*WLPT - Washington Language Proficiency Test

*L3 - A student that is Non-English language proficient

Table 2

t-Test for Independent Sample's WLPT II Scores for 5th
and 6th grade students

Levels of Significance	<u>0.05</u>	<u>0.01</u>	<u>0.001</u>
t-Value 5 th Grade	2.042	2.750	3.646
t-Value 6 th Grade	2.042	2.750	3.646

Findings

From an analysis of data obtained, the following was apparent. Data presented in Table 1 indicated 19 of 20 (95%) participants improved their WLPT II scores for the pre-test (2006) to the posttest (2007). All 20 participants (100%) in the treatment group improved their WLPT II scores from the pre-test (2007) to the posttest (2008). One may conclude from these results there was no significant difference in WLPT II results

after implementation of a Language Learning Intervention Class during 2007-2008.

Table 2 identified the extent to which implementation of a literacy language intervention class (LLIC), at LCMS, assisted Level 3, Non-English language proficient (NELP) transition out-of-program to Level 4, English language proficient (ELP), assessed by the WLPT. The degrees of freedom was 38 for both years. Accordingly, the determination was made there was no significant difference between the treatment and control groups at $p > 0.05$, 0.01, and 0.001 levels.

From these data, the researcher concluded that students who received the language intervention class transitioned similarly to those that received no extra class.

Discussion

Data was collected at only one Yakima School District middle school. The question as to whether or not a different instructor might have achieved a different outcome with the LLIC curriculum at the same

middle school remains unanswered and may provide a basis for further study.

Summary

Chapter 4 provided a review of the environment, hypothesis, results of the study, findings, and discussion. An analysis of data obtained did not support the hypothesis that there would be an increase in the number of 6th grade students who transitioned from Level 3 (NELP) to Level 4 (ELP), after receiving instruction in the LLIC during the 2007-2008, when compared to the 6th graders who were not enrolled in a LLIC during 2006-2007.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this experimental research study was to determine the extent to which implementation of a literacy language intervention class (LLIC), at LCMS, assist Level 3, Non-English language proficient (NELP) transition out-of-program to Level 4, English language proficient (ELP), as assessed by the WLPT. To accomplish this purpose, a review of selected literature was conducted. Additionally, essential baseline data from the WLPT were obtained and analyzed, to formulate related inferences, conclusions, and recommendations.

Conclusions

From the review of selected literature presented in Chapter 2 and the analysis of data in Chapter 4, the following conclusions were reached:

1. A school system's failure to provide Bilingual Education instruction to Non-English speaking children constituted a violation of federal law.
2. When schooling is provided in both L1 and L2, both languages are the vehicle for strong cognitive and academic development.
3. The importance of curricula that meet students at their linguistic and academic level cannot be understated.
4. The hypothesis that there would be an increase in the number of 6th grade students who transitioned from Level 3 (NELP) to Level 4 (ELP), after receiving instruction in the LLIC during the 2007-2008, when compared to the 6th graders who were not enrolled in a LLIC during 2006-2007 was not supported.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions cited above, the following recommendations have been suggested:

1. To assure compliance with federal law, public schools should provide Bilingual Education instruction to Non-English speaking children.
2. To provide a vehicle for strong cognitive and academic development, schooling should be provided for both native and non-native English speakers.
3. Educators responsible for student language development are strongly encouraged to instruct students at their linguistic and academic level.
4. Schools/school districts interested in the implementation of a literacy language intervention class for non-native English speakers, may wish to utilize information contained in the present study or, they may wish to undertake research more suited to their unique needs.

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