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The Language, Literacy, Achievement, and Social Consequences of English-Only Programs for Immigrant Students

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The Statue of Liberty is a symbol of opportunity and freedom for immigrants who wish a better life for their families. The United States, and to a lesser extent Canada, are just behind the "golden door" (Lazarus, 1883). Opportunity is the beguiling promise of the Statue of Liberty and immigration to the United States, one often broken by the difficult reality of being a stranger in a new and unknown land.

Many immigrants will fail. Indeed, their failure is almost assured by the vast differences that exist between their needs and abilities and the teaching and learning going on in schools. Immigrants whose stories most often make the press are either criminals or incredible success stories. The morning newspapers regale us with stories about illegal immigrants, immigrants who are criminals, and immigrants who become outstanding success stories, winning spelling bees or making vast fortunes. We hear of the refugee who immigrates and becomes fabulously rich like Hassan Khosrowshahi, who after fleeing Iran, became a multi-millionaire in twenty years (Jamieson & Lazaruk, 2001). These individuals are, indeed, noteworthy, and their stories should be told. The difficulty is that the majority of immigrants will neither become criminals nor will they become as successful as Mr. Khosrowshahi. For most immigrants, life presents struggles against a number of hurdles and obstacles.

Immigrant students, on the average, do not do well in schools in North America. Cummins (1981), for instance, suggested that ESL students are two or more years behind their native English-speaking classmates by the time they reach sixth grade. Reading scores in the 1990s in California fell dramatically, and ESL students were identified as the source of the declines. Asimov (1997) for instance reported on a study conducted by *Education Week* that concluded that California's dismal results were because, in part, "vast numbers of students speak little English, and one in four lives in poverty" (p. A2).

Some authorities have thought that one answer to this pattern of failure is that immigrant students should be instructed either bilingually or in their first languages. The United States Supreme Court in 1974 concluded that all students had the right to access to educational programs in schools and that first language (L1) was a key to such access (Lau v. Nichols, 1974). Proponents of bilingual programs in the United States argue that the only effective way for students to have access to academic content is through use of their L1s, especially for students who have little or no proficiency in English (see, for instance, Moll, 1992; Ramirez, 1992; Ramirez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991; Willig, 1985).

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By contrast, some have argued that English-only is the model that should be adopted for teaching and learning, that both bilingual and first-language instructional programs are un-American. Many American states have passed English-only laws, and the group called *U.S. English* has organized to lobby for an amendment to the United States constitution that would establish English as the official language (Crawford, 1989). There are a number of difficulties with the view that English-only instruction is a viable option to bilingual education. In British Columbia, Canada, English-only instruction has been and continues to be the unwritten instructional policy. The problem is that there is little research that systematically explores immigrant students' success in English-only schools, especially for high school age students. It is unclear whether English-only is an appropriate instructional approach for immigrant students.

OBJECTIVES

A number of issues will be explored in this paper embedded in the general question, "How well do immigrant students do in English-only programs?" The focus is on secondary or high school-level students. The interesting theoretical notion that knowing how to read a first language affects in predictable ways the learning of a second language, English in this case, will also be addressed.

The Students: Immigrants as Disabled Students

This paper investigates the achievement of the 24,890 immigrant students who were enrolled in the Vancouver public schools between 1991 and 2001. The overall school population

Table 1 Mean (and Standard Deviations) Grade-Level Equivalencies by Age on Arrival on the Woodcock Word Recognition and Comprehension Measures

Age on Arrival on Arrival	Word Recognition	Comprehension	Comprehension Discrepancy
8	1.8 (1.6)	2.2 (1.4)	0.2
9	1.8 (1.4)	1.90 (1.5)	1.1
10	1.8 (1.4)	2.0 (1.4)	-2.0
11	1.9 (1.6)	2.2 (1.8)	-2.8
12	1.9 (1.7)	2.2 (1.2)	-3.8
13	1.8 (1.4)	2.2 (2.3)	-4.8
14	1.8 (1.2)	1.8 (1.6)	-7.2
15	1.7 (1.1)	1.6 (1.7)	-7.3
16	1.8 (1.4)	2.0 (2.2)	-8.0
17	1.8 (1.3)	2.1 (1.9)	-8.9
18	1.8 (1.3)	2.2 (2.6)	-9.8

was 56% ESL (English as a Second Language) in the secondary grades 8th to 12th and 53% in kindergarten to Grade 7. These immigrants spoke 158 languages and were from 136 countries.

Students on entry into Canada were administered a battery of language and math tests that included various standardized reading measures. Different tests were administered at different times during the 1990s. Of the 24,890 students, 19,041 had some measurable English language skills. Even though there are a number of reasons not to use a test that has been normed on English-speaking American children to measure the reading achievement of immigrant students, the Woodcock Reading Mastery test (1973) was used because there are no measures that could represent the vast variety of linguistic groups represented by this population. Those who were administered the Woodcock Reading Mastery test received the following grade equivalent scores, presented by the age at which they arrived in Canada in Table 1. Column 3 of the table reveals how discrepancies in comprehension grade levels and students' age-appropriate grade levels increase relative to a student's age on arrival. Thus, a grade level plateau seems to occur in term of students' comprehension scores.

The United States Office of Education (1977) operationalized learning disabilities as follows:

A specific learning disability may be found if (1) the child does not achieve commensurate with his or her age and ability when provided with appropriate educational experiences, and (2) the child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability in one or more areas relating to communication skills and mathematical abilities. (p. 65083)

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (2000) published an expanded definition of learning disabilities first developed in 1994:

Learning disabilities is a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities, but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (for example, sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance), or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, inappropriate or insufficient instruction), they are not the result of those influences or conditions. (n.p.)

It is clear that these students began their studies in Canada significantly behind their grade levels in reading comprehension. Nevertheless, they were immersed in academic courses where the language of instruction was English. It seems that, in effect, these students were institutionally disabled because of the serious discrepancy between their English reading abilities and their grade levels. This was true even though the English-only system in Vancouver had been designed to account for students' language learning needs, and support systems had been developed within an established second language or ESL framework to allow students to learn English and academic content.

Interpersonal and Academic Language Skills and the Common Underlying Proficiency Theory

One well-established belief in the second language research community is that it takes about two to three years to learn basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) but considerably longer, about five to seven, to learn the language necessary to read and learn in academic contexts (CALP) (Cummins, 1981; Cummins & Swain, 1986; see also Collier, 1987; Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002). Although there are still questions about the distinction between BICS and CALPS that need further substantiation from research, many in the second-language research community have found these categories of language skills useful in describing the task that faces the second language learner. Different levels of English support are provided in the Vancouver school district on the notion that it takes time to learn English. These take the form of special ESL support, reception classes that provide 100% ESL instruction, transition classes that meet for one or two periods a day, and in-class content-based language instruction. It has also been suggested that experience in a first language provides in various ways support for learning a second language. Older students, those who have learned to read in a first language, it is believed, bring their first-language literacy skills to bear on learning English.

Cummins (1979, 1984) and Cummins and Swain (1986) proposed a "Common Underlying Proficiency" (CUP) model based on the notion that "literacy-related aspects of a bilingual's proficiency in L1 and L2 are seen as common or interdependent across languages" (p. 82). Literacy experience in either language promotes the underlying interdependent proficiency base. This view suggests that "common cross-lingual proficiencies underlie the obviously different surface manifestations of each language" (p. 82). Proponents of this theory suggest that features of a first language affect in systematic ways the learning of a second language. Researchers, for instance, speak of orthographic distance effects. Koda (1996, 1999), for example, noted, "the development of L2 word recognition efficiency could be facilitated by the extent to which the two orthographic systems share the same structural properties" (p. 455). Research pointed to the superior performance of readers reading in their second language if their first language used an orthography that was more rather than less similar to their L1 orthography (Green & Meara, 1987; Koda, 1988).

To explore the common underlying proficiency theory, the orthographies of the 19,041 students with measurable English skills were categorized. It quickly became obvious that categorizing orthographies is extremely difficult, if not impossible. Diringer's (1968) seminal book was used as a resource, as well as the most useful *The World's Writing Systems* edited by Daniels and Bright (1996). Information was also obtained about various orthographies from www.omniglot.com and a variety of other Internet sources. In addition, a great deal of information was obtained from family interviews.

It is traditional to divide writing systems into those that represent phonemes (alphabets), syllables (syllabaries), notions (ideographs), and objects (pictographs or logographs). In real life, however, orthographies are seldom so simple. Japanese writing, for instance, uses a syllabary, a logograph and an alphabet. Korean, according to Diringer, is "the only native alphabet of the Far East" (p. 353). He noted that some have argued that it is one of the most regular alphabets in the world. English is an alphabetic orthography that has been described as

deep because the relationships between graphemes and phonemes are not always one-to-one. Alphabetic languages could have been categorized by depth, although this would have resulted in Korean (Asian alphabet), Spanish (Roman alphabet), and Tamil (Indian semi-syllabary) being included in the same category.

Languages such as Bisaya and Bicolono historically have had their own orthographies, but since colonial days, these orthographies have disappeared and been supplanted by Roman-based orthographies. Languages such as Vietnamese have alphabets that have Indian origins for the writing done by hand, but augmented Roman alphabets are used in print. French and Spanish were developed from the Roman alphabet, whereas Russian developed from the Greek, so French and Russian are clearly alphabetic "cousins." One could argue that semantically and syntactically English and French are more similar than are English and Russian.

The purpose for categorizing orthographies was to attempt to capture in some way common underlying proficiencies. The notion was that an alphabetic language that was based on a Roman or augmented Roman alphabet would provide a learner an advantage in learning English because there was the possibility that some of the grapheme-phoneme relationships would be the same or similar. Learning to read English for students who had learned to read an alphabetic language such as Arabic would provide a learner some cues about the process of decoding but not necessarily a hint about shared grapheme-phoneme correspondences. Orthographies that were Roman-based or Roman-augmented were put into the same category. This resulted in some interesting groupings in which very dissimilar languages were co-joined such as Vietnamese and Swahili.

The history of languages and their orthographies is fascinating. In some cases, for various political, geographic and historical reasons, the orthography of choice changed. In Tajikistan, for instance, Tajik was written first with an Arabic alphabet, followed by a period in which the language was written in an augmented Roman alphabet, and finally, by a Cyrillic script as a result of the influence of Russia (Comrie, 1996). Khmer, as a different example, is a semi-syllabary system, also called an alphasyllabic system, in which some graphemes represent phonemes and some represent syllables (Schiller, 1996). This orthography is a descendent of an Indic alphabet (the Brahmi script). The difficulty, however, is that modern Khmer is not pronounced the way it was when the Khmer script was adopted. Africa has about one third of the languages in the world (Bendor-Samuel, 1996). Colonists brought both their religions and their alphabets to Africa. The Church Missionary Society in 1848 established an approach for writing different African languages using a Roman alphabet (Bendor-Samuel, 1996). In 1928, the International African Institute published *The Practical Orthography of African Languages*, thereby establishing the "Africa" alphabet (Bendor-Samuel, 1996). Today, most African languages, mostly sub-Saharan, are written using either a modified Roman alphabet or the International Phonetic Alphabet.

Table 2 represents the orthographies of the students in the Vancouver school system broken down by categories representing the underlying writing principle of their first language. The purpose for categorizing orthographies was to explore whether there were systematic advantages or disadvantages related to the learning of English as a second language. The classifications represented in Table 2 seemed adequate except in the case of students whose first

language was Chinese. For them, one feature had to be added, a consideration of instructional strategies in learning to read Chinese. Currently, students in the People's Republic of China are taught to read initially through the use of the international phonetic alphabet (i.p.a.), called Pinyin, as a method to introduce sound-symbol relationships to students. Pinyin was adopted in 1958 (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhuyin>) to replace the previous system that had been in place called *guóyǐ zìmǔ* (or *bopomofo* in Taiwan). In addition, in 1949 the People's Republic of China adopted a simplified orthography (see http://www.omniglot.com/writing/chinese_simplified.htm#simp) so that the first characters students learn are simplified from the classic form. Simplified characters are introduced with Pinyin added so that students are able to "decode" the characters. This system is used until about the third grade, with new characters being introduced with Pinyin, but not thereafter (Hudson-Ross & Dong, 1990).

In Taiwan, students are introduced to a phonetic transcription system that involves non-Roman syllables called *zhùyǎnfúhào* or *bopomofo*. Developed in 1913 by the Ministry of Education in the Republic of China, the system was originally called *guóyǐ zìmǔ* or the *National Phonetic Alphabet*. In 1986, the Republic of China (Taiwan) adapted the system to assist

Table 2 Languages Represented in Different Categories of Orthographies Among Vancouver Immigrant Students

Categories of Orthographies	Languages of Students
Alphabetic Roman	Afrikans, Akan*, Bahasa, Bangla, Bisaya, Bulgarian, Brong, Cebuano, Creole, Croatian, Czechoslovakian, Danish, Dutch, French, Fijian, Finnish, German, Harari, Huasa, Hungarian, Icelandic, Ilocano, Italian, Kanjabol, Kaijai, Latvian, Malay**, Memon, Norwegian, Pampango, Papiameto, Polish, Portuguese, Serbian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovakian, Somali, Spanish, Swahili*, Swedish, Tiv, Twi*, Tagalog, Turkish, Vietnamese, Yugoslavian, Zambuanan
Alphabetic Greek	Armenian, Georgian, Greek, Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian
Non-Roman, Non-Asian Alphabetic	Arabic, Farsi, Hebrew, Iranian, Kashmiri, Kurdish, Lebanese, Pashto***, Punjabi***, Persian, Sindhi, Urdu
Non-Roman, Asian Alphabetic	Korean
Syllabary	Amharic, Ethiopian, Oromiffa, Saho, Tigrinia, Twi
Semi- Syllabary	Assamese, Balinese, Bangla, Bengali, Burmese, Busanga, Cambodian, Chiarati, Dari, Gujurati, Hindi, Khmer, Lao, Malayalam, Marathi, Nepali, Pashto, Punjabi, Rusanga, Sanish, Sinhala, Tamil, Thai
Logographic	Cantonese, Chiuchow, Foochow, Fukien, Hainanese, Hakka, Hengua, Hockchew, Hokkien, Hopien, Hunan, Mandarin*, Pongwu, Puisze, Shanghaiese, Sunwoo, Taisanese, Taiwanese, Teachow, Toishan, Yanping
Mixed	Japanese

* i.p.a. ** Modern Malay *** Since 1947/48 writers in Pakistan have used an Arabic orthography.

learners in learning to read and write Mandarin, renaming it *zhùyǎnfúhào* (*bopomofo*). The characters/symbols are based on calligraphic forms and some are derived from Chinese characters (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bopomofo>). Students in Taiwan learn to read standard, classic Chinese characters that have not been simplified. Finally, in Hong Kong, until recently, learning to read Cantonese was by a system that involved drill and rote memorization of classic Chinese characters using a "flash card" approach that began at about age three for many students.

Because of these underlying differences in how Chinese reading might have been taught, the categories in Table 2 reflected whether students came from Taiwan, the People's Republic of China, or Hong Kong.

Measures and Descriptive Results

Scores from the word recognition and comprehension sections of the Woodcock Reading Mastery test (1973), from a test that measured knowledge of verb tenses (present, past, future), from measures of the ability to formulate questions, the independent production of the days of the week and counting, the recognition of numbers, letters of the alphabet, colors, body parts, school items, and prepositions, and from compositions written in the students' L1 as well as English were entered and tested using SPSS Version 11.5.

For the compositions, students were asked to select a prompt and write an essay in both their native language (L1) and in English (L2) when possible. L1 essays were assessed by trained L1 interpreters who made written comments about the grade-appropriateness of the essays, including comments about spelling, grammar, usage, and organization. These comments were evaluated by the raters and coded as (1) very poor for the grade level, (2) poor for the grade level, (3) average or appropriate for the grade level, (4) good for the grade level, and (5) outstanding for the grade level. Where possible, raters also evaluated the L1 essays themselves to confirm the interpreters' comments. Inter-rater reliability for L1 essays varied from .94 to .99. The validity of interpreters' comments was assessed by having bilingual graduate students evaluate L1 essays independently. Again, there was a high degree of reliability varying from .92 to .96. The same scale was used to assess students' English essays. Interrater reliability was high, ranging from .94 to .96.

When asked to formulate a question in English, 42.6% of the students were unable, 29.3% weak, and 28.1% able to do so. Some 65.9% were able to say the days of the week (17.4% No and 16.7% weak), while 78.5% were able to recite the names of the letters of the alphabet (4.7% No and 16.8% weak). Comparable numbers were able to count in English (62.3% Yes, 2.8% No, and 34.9% Weak) and to read numbers at random (76% Yes, 3.7% No, and 20.3% Weak). Students recognized on average 8.4 colors (s.d.: 3.4) out of 11. On average, they recognized and correctly named in English 9.1 (5.5) body parts out of 19, and 4.5 (1.9) school items out of 11. Students correctly produced on the average 3.3 (3.2) prepositions out of 9.

Students' scores on the English compositions averaged a mean of 2.10 (.95). A score of 2.00 on the holistic scale is equated to "Poor" for grade level and age. First-language compositions resulted in a mean of 2.98 (.91). For both L1 and L2 compositions, a score of 3.00 is "Average" for age and grade.

Factor Analyses

The Zumbo, Sireci and Hambleton (2003) multi-group exploratory factor analysis approach involving the variables noted above, related to letter and word recognition, English reading comprehension, English oral production, and first and second language compositions was used to explore underlying factors. It was hypothesized that there would be a common factor structure across all the orthography groups, including recognition, production, writing, and comprehension measures. However, the pattern of loadings on the four- or five-factor solutions did not match expectations. Instead, all measures seemed to load strongly on one factor.

The first Eigen value in each of the analyses accounted for 60 to 74% of the variance. The ratio of the first Eigen value to the second varied from 6.6 to 9.2, meaning one dominant factor could be used as a basis for group comparison (Zumbo, et al, 2003). Table 3 shows a factor analysis based on one dominant factor across all of the orthography groupings. Table 4 shows a ranking of the factor loadings from 1-16 for each orthography grouping to reveal which variable has the highest loading.

Table 3 Factor Loadings

Variable	Arab alpha	China	Hong Kong	Indic	Japan	Korean alpha	Roman alpha	Taiwan
WOODCOMP	.43	.27	.53	.46	.17	.23	.39	.38
WOODREC	.22	.30	.35	.35	.33	.28	.35	.37
PRES	.98	.94	.97	.97	.96	.92	.96	.93
PAST	.97	.92	.95	.97	.88	.95	.95	.94
FUTURE	.98	.94	.96	.97	.96	.95	.95	.95
QUESTIONS	.97	.93	.96	.96	.95	.94	.95	.93
DAYS	.96	.89	.95	.95	.94	.94	.94	.93
COUNT	.89	.80	.96	.94	.92	.89	.90	.89
READNUM	.94	.82	.96	.95	.93	.87	.91	.91
ALPHABET	.89	.78	.95	.93	.89	.84	.91	.88
COLORS	.93	.84	.97	.96	.90	.91	.92	.92
BPARTS	.91	.85	.97	.95	.82	.91	.89	.90
SCHITEMS	.94	.88	.98	.97	.92	.93	.93	.93
PREPS	.80	.73	.90	.81	.52	.70	.75	.70
L2COMP	.39	.41	.35	.43	.27	.36	.40	.28
L1COMP	.35	.38	.36	.33	.45	.41	.34	.39

A Principal Components analysis (see Table 5) of the ranks revealed that all orthographies except that of students from Hong Kong had a great deal of factor structure similarity. The Hong Kong data seems to have shown a second minor factor.

Thus, because there was a similar factor across groups with different L1 orthographies, these findings lend support to the notion that there is a common underlying proficiency influencing the academic success of these students.

Student Interviews

Understanding immigrant students' experiences in the Vancouver school system as well as their views on the influence of their first language in learning to read English would seem to require more than simply contemplating their scores from quantitative measures administered as they were first admitted into the school system. The next step was to interview a randomly selected sample of students. To identify possible interview participants, 1000 students were initially identified from the 1991-2001 database. School records indicated that 548 students were still enrolled in the school district. Principals of the 18 secondary schools were contacted and permission letters were sent to parents. Signed permission letters were received for 480 students. Interviews were scheduled and 412 were eventually conducted over two years by five

Table 4 Ranking of Factor Loadings for the Language Groups

Variable	Arab alpha	China	Hong Kong	Indic	Japan	Korean alpha	Roman alpha	Taiwan
WOODCOMP	4	1	4	4	1	1	3	3
WOODREC	1	2	2	2	3	2	2	2
PRES	16	16	14	14	16	11	16	14
PAST	14	13	6	15	7	15	13	15
FUTURE	15	15	10	13	15	16	15	16
QUESTIONS	13	14	11	12	14	13	14	13
DAYS	12	12	7	9	13	14	12	11
COUNT	6	7	9	7	10	8	7	7
READNUM	10	8	12	8	12	7	9	9
ALPHABET	7	6	8	6	8	6	8	6
COLORS	9	9	15	11	9	9	10	19
BPARTS	8	10	13	10	6	10	6	8
SCHITEMS	11	11	16	16	11	12	11	12
PREPS	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
L2COMP	3	4	1	3	2	3	4	1
L1COMP	2	3	3	1	4	4	1	4

Table 5 Principal Component Analysis: Rotated Component Matrix

Language Groups	Component 1	Component 2
Roman Alphabet	.892	.418
Arab Alphabet	.885	.436
Korean	.881	.343
Taiwan	.874	.451
PRC	.869	.443
Japan	.758	.470
Indic	.714	.634
Hong Kong	.288	.947

interviewers using a semi-structured protocol of 34 items. The responses of five interviewees were eliminated from the final pool because these students turned out to be native English speakers from the United States and Australia.

Students' views of their first language. The relationship between L1 and L2 was explored with the question, "Do you believe that knowing how to read in L1 (your first language) helped you to learn to read in English?" If students answered, "no," the follow-up question was, "Why not?" A response of "yes" was followed up with the question, "In what ways?" There was a variety of interesting and culturally based answers, many of which were unexpected.

Most believed that knowing how to read a first language to some extent helped them with English (60%), but reasons varied in unexpected ways. It had been predicted that students from some languages, languages with augmented Roman or Roman related alphabets, would claim an L1 benefit. It had also been predicted that students from Romance languages would see the benefit not only of the predictability of the sound-symbol relationships, but also of *cognates* they could recognize in print. The views of the 60% of the students who believed reading a first language helped in learning to read English broke down into interesting categories related to orthography. Students who had learned to read languages such as Arabic, Kurdish, and Tamil, tended to view their L1s as basically unhelpful, while those who had learned to read alphabetic languages tended to view experiences with their L1s as helpful, mostly because there were "phonics" connections that could be made, as represented in the following quote:

Yes, because most of the letters in Filipino are taken from English. So I had an advantage over the Chinese because it is of no use because they got characters. I've got a bit of an advantage over the Chinese students (male Tagalog speaker, 16 years).

Readers of languages such as Chinese, Korean and Japanese were divided in their beliefs. Many thought that reading their L1 was helpful because it allowed them to access English through dictionaries, whereas others simply rejected the notion that their L1s were of any help at all, as one male Kurdish speaker, age 15, stated, "No, not much, cuz the letters are different, and the way you write is different, and the way you spell is different, and the way you read is

different." Three individuals opined that learning to read a first language had actually interfered with learning to read English.

Thus, overall, the students' responses to the question of whether they believed that learning to read in their first language had helped them learn to read English seem to support Cummins' (1979, 1984) CUP model. In addition, students seemed to believe that their ability to read in English was predictive of their success or failure, supporting the Séror and Chen (2002) finding that immigrants are convinced reading is important for success, both academically and socially.

BICS as CALP. According to the students interviewed, parents seemed to equate ability to use interpersonal language with academic language, believing that their children's ability to communicate in English was a signal that they could contend with the reading and writing requirements of academic classes, even though in many cases their reading levels were far from the students' grade level. Students often reported that their English was less proficient than their parents thought it was. Parents, in fact, seemed to mistake their children's developing ability to communicate orally as an overall estimate of their ability to cope with the English language requirements of the schools. In essence, they assumed that their children's BICS was an overall indicator of their ability to cope with the language requirements of the school curriculum. In essence, the level of BICS was a false positive sign of academic language proficiency. A typical comment was, "They think my English is okay and I should get good grades, but it is not so good and I have trouble with subjects like socials" (male Hindi student, 15 years).

IMMIGRANTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The next issue explored was the general question of how immigrant students succeed in English-only schools using school grades as indicators of success. Students in the Vancouver school district are assigned the typical school grades, from outstanding (A) to failure (F). Those who wish to attend university must take prescribed or *examinable* courses and pass end-of-grade 12 examinations. The following description is of samples of students whose grades since Grade 8 could be found and who could have graduated by the time of the study.

Grades were recorded for the major examinable subjects of English, Math, Science, and Social Studies in grades 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 using the following conversion metric: A = 4.00, A- = 3.75, B+ = 3.50, B = 3.00, B- = 2.75, C+ = 2.50, C = 2.00, C- = 1.75, D+ = 1.50, D = 1.00, D- = .75, F = 0.00, P = 1.00, and SG = 1.00, with SG used to refer to standing granted, a grade awarded for trying hard in a class but not actually passing.

A random sample of 5,000 students born in Canada was selected and their grades for English, social studies, science, and math were recorded. It is important to note that some of these students may have, in fact, been ESL students because an approximate 5% of the ESL students in the school district, according to the Supervisor of the Vancouver Reception Centre, were born in Canada (Eddy, personal communication, September 2003). As can be seen in Table 6, the students in this sample received slightly better grades than a "C" average.

There were statistically significant differences between grades and between academic subjects. Most notably, grades seemed to dip in grade 11. When asked, teachers reported that

perhaps the drop in grades was a result of an increase in the difficulty of the work in the 11th grade. During this time, students begin to study seriously for provincial examinations. Teachers also confided that they believed grade 11 teachers graded more rigorously because their students would have to take provincial examinations in grade 12, and if they had not been properly prepared, it would reflect poorly on the teachers. Thus, except in grade 11, Canadian-born students, on average, earn somewhat higher grades than expected if a grade of C represents average work.

A random sample of 5,000 immigrants was then selected. Students who had entered grade 8 on or before 1996 were selected so that they were old enough to have possibly completed secondary school by the time of the study. Overall, their achievement in the same *examinable* courses was generally higher than Canadian-born students' achievement, except for grade 11 and 12 English and math. This is a compelling finding, one that on the surface supports the notion that there are positive features of English-only instruction. If these findings were being reported in the newspapers, the headlines would read, "Immigrant Students Outperform Canadians." However, what would be easy to overlook in such a story is that on average, these students would have received two and a half years of English support, with most students losing ESL support around grade 10.

Immigrant girls outperformed boys in all subjects in grades 8 to 11. In grade 12 they continued to outperform boys, although their grade point average did decline. In math and science at grade 12, boys and girls achieved about the same, while in grade 12 social studies, immigrant boys had a slight advantage over girls. The pattern is similar for Canadian-born students. Canadian-born girls outperformed boys across the grades in all academic subjects, except grade 12 math, where their grade point averages were the same. These findings were

Table 6 Means (and Standard Deviations) of Native Born Canadian and Identified Immigrant Students' Grades* for Examinable Courses in Grades 8 to 12

Subject	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Native-born Students					
English	2.2 (1.1)	2.2 (1.1)	2.2 (1.1)	2.0 (1.1)	2.2 (1.1)
Social Studies	2.2 (1.2)	2.2 (1.1)	2.1 (1.1)	1.9 (1.1)	2.1 (1.2)
Science	2.2 (1.2)	2.2 (1.2)	2.2 (1.1)	1.9 (1.2)	2.1 (1.3)
Math	2.1 (1.2)	2.1 (1.2)	2.0 (1.2)	1.8 (1.2)	2.1 (1.2)
All Immigrant Students					
English	2.3 (1.1)	2.3 (1.1)	2.2 (1.0)	2.1 (1.0)	2.0 (1.0)
Social Studies	2.4 (1.1)	2.5 (1.2)	2.3 (1.2)	2.0 (1.0)	2.0 (1.2)
Science	2.5 (1.2)	2.4 (1.2)	2.5 (1.1)	2.3 (1.2)	2.4 (1.2)
Math	2.7 (1.2)	2.5 (1.2)	2.4 (1.3)	2.6 (1.2)	2.6 (1.3)

* Grades are valued on a 4-point scale with A = 4.0, B = 3.0, C = 2.0, D = 1.0, and F = 0

confirmed in a follow-up study and reported with alarm in the local press about boys and their performance, particularly in science and math.

Mean grades for Mandarin-speaking students are shown in Table 7 for courses in English, math, science, and social studies. These students scored significantly higher than Canadian-born students, with math averages phenomenally high. Note that their English and social studies grades decreased significantly over their high school careers, a dip that occurs at the same time as loss of ESL support. These students did well in this English-only system, generally better than their Canadian-born classmates. In fact, their grades are astounding.

Cantonese speakers were the largest immigrant group in this database, comprising about 9,600 of the 25,000 immigrants (Table 7). Their grades in Social Studies and English were higher than those of the Canadian-born students until grade 11, after which they were lower, and they were lower than the Mandarin speakers' grades. There was a decrease in grade point average, most significantly in English, social studies, and math. Their averages in English and Social Studies in grade 12 were both 1.7, between a D+ (1.5) and a C- (1.75), perhaps reflecting the loss of ESL support at this time.

Vietnamese speakers' grades in English, math, science, and social studies are illustrated in the third panel of Table 7. These findings appear encouraging because they show rising

Table 7 Means (and Standard Deviations) of Mandarin-Speaking, Cantonese-Speaking, and Vietnamese-Speaking Students' Grades* for Examinable Courses in Grades 8 to 12

Subject	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Mandarin-Speaking Students					
English	2.8 (.8)	2.7 (.7)	2.5 (.8)	2 (.8)	2.1 (.8)
Social Studies	2.9 (.8)	2.8 (1.0)	2.5 (.9)	2.4 (1.0)	2.3 (.8)
Science	2.9 (1.1)	2.8 (1.0)	2.7 (1.0)	2.6 (1.0)	2.7 (.7)
Math	3.3 (1.0)	2.9 (1.0)	3.0 (1.0)	3.1 (1.1)	3.0 (1.2)
Cantonese-Speaking Students					
English	2.3 (1.0)	2.3 (1.0)	2.2 (1.0)	2.0 (1.0)	1.7 (1.1)
Social Studies	2.4 (1.1)	2.6 (1.0)	2.4 (1.1)	2.0 (1.0)	1.7 (1.7)
Science	2.6 (1.2)	2.5 (1.1)	2.6 (1.1)	2.3 (1.2)	2.3 (1.3)
Math	2.9 (1.0)	2.7 (1.2)	2.5 (1.2)	2.6 (1.2)	2.4 (1.4)
Vietnamese-Speaking Students					
English	1.7 (1.4)	1.8 (1.1)	1.9 (1.0)	2.2 (1.3)	--
Social Studies	1.5 (1.3)	2.3 (1.1)	1.9 (1.2)	1.6 (1.1)	--
Science	1.5 (1.5)	2.2 (1.1)	2.2 (1.2)	2.2 (1.2)	2.5 (1.8)
Math	1.2 (1.5)	1.6 (1.5)	1.9 (.9)	2.3 (1.1)	2.7 (1.2)

* Grades are valued on a 4-point scale with A = 4.0, B = 3.0, C = 2.0, D = 1.0, and F = 0

scores. The difficulty is that the number of students decreases dramatically from grade 8 to 12 and the means reported in science and math were calculated on only five students in grade 12 math and four in grade 12 science. In one case, a Vietnamese girl received nearly a perfect 4.00 average across the five grade levels. In all respects, she was an example of a resilient student, one who succeeds against great odds. We often hear of students like her winning national spelling bees and prestigious fellowships. Educators should be aware of the research base on educational resilience suggesting that some resiliency features can be successfully taught (see Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003, for a good review). None in the sample of 221 Vietnamese students took grade 12 social studies or English. These results suggest that, as a group, the Vietnamese speakers were educationally at risk in this English-only school system if success was indicated by enrollment in examinable courses.

Immigrants from India received the grades shown in Table 8. While the numbers enrolled across the grades remained relatively stable, their grades declined significantly, with the largest decrease in math. This particular group of immigrants was predominantly from northern India and from families from agricultural backgrounds. Vancouver's English-only system seems to have failed them. As ESL support disappeared, students' achievement faltered.

Table 8 Means (and Standard Deviations) of Indian, Philippino, and Spanish-Speaking Students' Grades* for Examinable Courses in Grades 8 to 12

Subject	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Indian Students					
English	2.8 (1.2)	2.8 (1.3)	2.1 (1.3)	1.7 (1.2)	2.0 (1.2)
Social Studies	2.6 (.5)	2.4 (1.2)	1.9 (1.3)	1.8 (1.4)	2.0 (1.3)
Science	2.3 (1.0)	2.4 (.4)	1.9 (1.3)	2.2 (1.0)	1.5 (.8)
Math	2.3 (.9)	2.4 (.8)	1.4 (1.1)	1.6 (1.0)	1.0 (.8)
Philippino Students					
English	2.3 (1.0)	2.3 (1.2)	2.0 (1.4)	1.8 (1.1)	1.5 (.7)
Social Studies	2.5 (1.1)	2.2 (1.1)	2.1 (1.4)	2.3 (1.2)	1.0 (00)
Science	2.2 (1.2)	2.1 (1.3)	2.5 (1.2)	2.0 (1.4)	1.0 (00)
Math	2.4 (1.0)	2.4 (1.0)	2.0 (1.3)	2.0 (1.4)	1.0 (00)
Spanish-Speaking Students					
English	1.2 (.7)	1.5 (.8)	1.1 (1.0)	1.4 (.8)	1.0 (00)
Social Studies	1.2 (.8)	.9 (.8)	1.4 (1.0)	.9 (1.4)	--
Science	1.1 (1.0)	1.4 (1.1)	1.6 (1.2)	1.4 (1.2)	--
Math	1.4 (1.2)	1.4 (1.3)	1.6 (1.2)	1.3 (1.2)	--

* Grades are valued on a 4-point scale with A = 4.0, B = 3.0, C = 2.0, D = 1.0, and F = 0

The second panel of Table 8 reports grades for students from the Philippines. The significant dip in grade 12 seemed associated with a significant decrease in number of students. Many teachers thought students from the Philippines were, in many respects, model students. They worked hard, attended class, attempted to do their homework, and appeared to be "happy." It was not until these results were communicated that teachers began to remember that fewer and fewer students from the Philippines actually took examinable courses. This English-only school system was not meeting the needs of these students. Indeed, as the ESL support net disappeared, so did the students.

There are a number of distressing elements about the Spanish-speaking students' grades displayed in Table 8, bottom panel. Their overall grade-point averages were extremely low, and the fluctuations seemed associated with the instability of the number of students at each grade level. The most distressing finding was that in the random sample of 380 selected for this study, only one Spanish-speaking student had taken any of the examinable subjects in grade 12, and that individual enrolled in grade 12 English completed it with the grade of "D." The implications are both significant and serious, indicating that the Spanish speakers in this sample were at risk. Earlier, it was noted that immigrant students seemed to be doing somewhat better than Canadian-born students and that such a result might be taken as evidence that English-only instruction was effective. Such a conclusion would seem incorrect as, instead, it seemed that "Almost every child left behind!"

Finding that some immigrant student groups received higher grade averages than Canadian-born students was surprising. Finding that differences in achievement were associated with linguistic and national groups was also surprising. Further analyses revealed that linguistic and national groups differed systematically in important ways. Mandarin speakers did not earn better grades than Spanish speakers because of their language. They did not do better because they had greater innate intelligence or aptitude for learning. Instead, one could argue that they did better because of a combination of other factors, to be discussed next.

The first systematic difference associated with linguistic groupings was socio-economic. Canadian policy gives points to potential immigrants based on their professions, their economic status, their educational backgrounds, and the importance of their professions to the Canadian economy. Because of the demographics of immigration to Canada during the 1990s, the Mandarin-speaking group was largely composed of socio-economically advantaged students from Taiwan. They had the largest percentage of "entrepreneurial" class families, nearly one third. Entrepreneurial immigrants agree to invest at least \$500,000 in Canada as a requirement for immigration and, as a result, are allowed to avoid immigration waiting lists. Spanish speakers, on the other hand, were largely from refugee families who had come from Central America or the United States. Students in this group often had experienced interrupted or no schooling, physical and psychological trauma, and extreme financial and familial hardships.

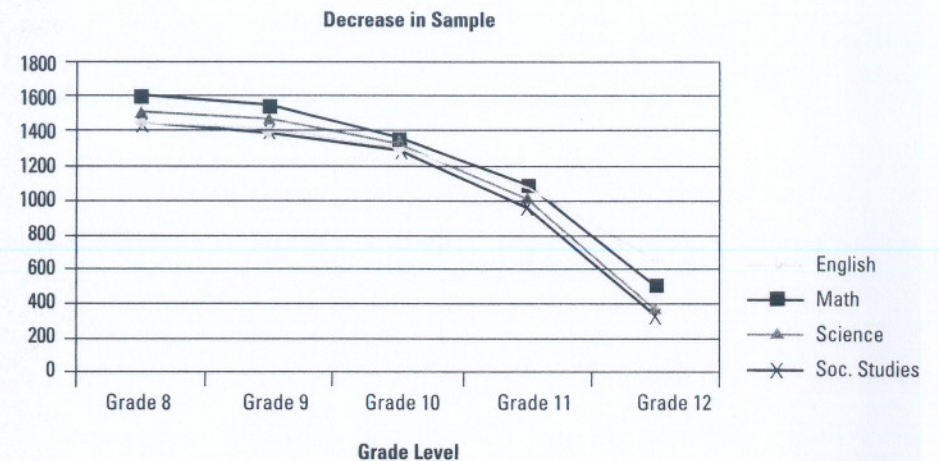
A breakdown of the populations of the 18 secondary schools in this study is shown in Table 9. The Fraser Institute in British Columbia ranks and publishes results of the grade 12 examinations for the 275 secondary schools in the province. In the table, the data are ranked by percentage of ESL students enrolled, beginning at the top with the school with the fewest ESL students, ending at the bottom with the school with the most. The next column represents

rankings on the provincial examinations so that School A, for example, was ranked 8th out of the 275 high schools in the province, it enrolled 1,521 students, and had an average parental educational level of 16.00, the equivalent of a bachelor's degree. *High, low and mid* listed with each school's identifier in the first column refer to the socio-economic status of the neighborhoods in which the schools were located. A school's location predicted generally how well students performed in examinable courses and, of course, how likely students were to attend university. For the data reported in Table 9, there was a correlation of 0.78 between the percentage of ESL students and school rankings. The greater the percentage of ESL students, the lower the school performed on the provincial examinations and the less likely students from that school were to attend university. The relationships among socio-economic status, percentage of ESL students, and ranking of schools on provincial examinations are compelling. Schools in poor neighborhoods are grouped together with the most ESL students and the worst

Table 9 Secondary School Rankings, Percentage of ESL Students, and Parental Educational Levels

School	% ESL	BC Bank	Total Enrollment	Parents' Education
High A	14%	8	1,521	16.0
High B	18%	3	427	17.4
High C	28%	34	989	16.0
High D	28%	68	1,112	17.0
Mid E	30%	104	1,844	12.7
High F	31%	6	1,308	16.6
Low G	32%	179	523	N/A
High H	37%	8	1,292	16.1
High I	44%	22	1,999	14.7
Mid J	50%	45	1,605	14.9
Mid K	52%	45	2,032	13.4
Low L	53%	115	970	12.2
Low M	53%	233	1,414	12.4
Low N	55%	250	1,220	13.0
Low O	56%	166	1,196	12.6
Low P	56%	166	1,861	12.3
Low Q	75%	241	1,412	12.4
Low R	85%	239	1,423	12.8

Figure 1 The Disappearance Rate of Immigrant Students



provincial rankings. In addition, there was a fairly robust relationship between mean parental education and socio-economic status.

A disturbing finding is that the number of students enrolled in examinable courses decreased significantly from grade 8 to 12. The overall decrease was 60%. This disappearance rate varied dramatically from school to school, from 35% to nearly 100%. It also varied dramatically by socio-economic status. Consider the disappearance of students after ESL support is withdrawn (Figure 1). It seemed clear that support systems for students varied according to socio-economic status. Economically advantaged immigrant families have been known to employ multiple tutors. For example, it is not unusual for a family to employ a math tutor, a social studies tutor, and an English tutor. For students who could not afford tutors, the loss of ESL support had a significant impact on their grades.

As a point of comparison, although few American studies have reported statistics specifically for ESL or immigrant high school students, Rumberger (1995) noted that immigrants in the United States have a higher dropout rate than native-born students. Hispanic students have alarmingly high dropout rates varying from 14% to 30% (Zehr, 2003). In Canada, Radwanski's (1987) Ontario study revealed that 53% of the ESL high school population left early, while Watt and Roessingh's (2001) study showed a 73% dropout rate in Alberta. It seems ironic that the majority of researchers involved in such studies are not from education but rather from economics and psychology. Pirbhai-Illich (2003) concluded that both American and Canadian studies have indicated that students likely to drop out:

come from families from low socio-economic backgrounds, are from various ethnic and linguistic groups, perform poorly academically, perform poorly on standardized tests, demonstrate signs of disengagement, have been retained at grade level, take on adult roles prematurely, work more than 15 hours out of school, have family structures that are not stereotypically middle-class, and have at least one parent who has not graduated from high school. (pp. 38-40)

In sum, students who drop out of school are likely to be from socio-economically disadvantaged circumstances. And, as indicated by the study reported here of Vancouver immigrant students, the more subtle measure of enrollment in “academic stream courses,” courses students must take to be admissible to a university or college, confirmed that immigrant students were “disappearing” from such courses as well, reducing their chances for higher education and all the benefits that come from such.

FIRST LANGUAGE, BILINGUAL AND ENGLISH-ONLY INSTRUCTION

Gunderson (2000) argued that, “If secondary teachers do not take interest in students’ languages and cultures, ESL students will continue to fail to learn” (p. 692). Taking interest in students’ home languages and cultures would seem a natural lead-in to the question of whether bilingual education is a viable alternative to English-only instruction. In what follows, the research on the value of bilingual education is reviewed.

Ovando (2003) provided an informative historical background of bilingual education in the United States. He noted, “The rebirth of bilingual education also owes a great debt to Fidel Castro’s Cuban revolution of 1959” (p. 7). Before this time, immigrant students were enrolled in mainstream classrooms following a “sink or swim” English-only policy. As a result of the revolution, thousands of Spanish-speaking students immigrated to Florida and systematic bilingual programs were developed in the 1960s. Early bilingual programs were designed to be transitional in that the use of the first language was used to support students until their English skills developed and they could learn in English. In this model, the majority of students’ early education is conducted in their first language with a daily “period” reserved for English instruction. Students begin to transition to English after they have attained a degree of English proficiency. At this point, they are taught to read and learn academic content in English. These programs have come to be known as *transitional bilingual education* or *TBE*. To bring clarity into the discussion of current bilingual education programs, Ovando (2003) provided labels according to the amount of L1 involved: structured immersion programs; partial immersion programs; transitional bilingual programs; maintenance or developmental bilingual education; and, two-way immersion programs.

A number of researchers some 20 years or more ago suggested that students’ initial reading instruction should be in their “mother tongue” (Gamez, 1979; Gutierrez, 1975; Hillerich, 1970; Kaufman, 1968; Lewis, 1965; Mackey, 1972; Modiano, 1968; Rosen, 1970; Yoes, 1975). Some early researchers, particularly those who looked at French-immersion students who were native English-speakers enrolled in French immersion classes in Canada, thought that students did not necessarily learn to read best in their first language (Barik & Swain, 1973; Tucker, Lambert, & d’Angeljan, 1973). Andrew, Lapkin, and Swain (1978) noted, “While it is not clear that the superior performance of the immersion centre students in these academic areas is due to the language environment of the immersion centres, it is clear that a French language environment in these schools has no detrimental effects in the achievement of the immersion students in any of the academic areas tested” (p. 27). This early research into French immersion was viewed as supporting the notion that students did not necessarily need to learn to read in their first language. However, what was generally true is that the English-

speaking French immersion students in these early studies were from families in which both English and French were highly valued and the dominant language was English. Auerbach (1993) concluded that “whereas research indicates that immersion programs can be effective in the development of language and literacy for learners from dominant language groups, whose L1 is valued and supported both at home and in the broader society, bilingual instruction seems to be more effective for language minority students, whose language has less social status” (pp. 15-16).

Proponents of bilingual programs have argued that the only effective way for students to have access to academic content is through use of their L1s, especially for students who have little or no proficiency in English (see, for instance, Moll, 1992; Ramirez, 1992; Ramirez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991; Willig, 1985). Generally, such researchers have suggested that, because it takes considerable time to acquire general and academic English language skills, students immersed in English will not acquire the academic skills their English-speaking peers are learning. And further, it is likely that they will lag further behind their peers in academic development as they concentrate on English (Lucas & Katz, 1994). As Lucas and Katz (1994) concluded, “given the right circumstances (i.e., sufficient numbers of students who speak and are literate in the same native language and qualified bilingual staff), the development of native language skills and native language instruction in academic content areas give learners the best hope for building a solid foundation in content and cognitive development and support the growth of their self-esteem and the English abilities” (pp. 539-540). Thus, a review of the bilingual research literature reveals quite opposing views and a great deal of contention.

The language wars. Members of the National Reading Conference are no strangers to “reading” or “paradigm wars.” In many respects, however, the contention surrounding English-only versus bilingual debates has been even more bitter and vituperative. Miriam Amada Ferguson, known as Ma Ferguson, and the first woman governor of Texas some 70 years ago, became involved in a debate about which languages should be used in teaching Texas schoolchildren. Her basic argument was, “If English was good enough for Jesus Christ, it’s good enough for me” (Cooley, 2001). Issues relating to the use of languages other than English in the United States have continued to be politically charged. Many American states have passed English-only laws, and the group calling itself *U.S. English* has organized to lobby for an amendment to the United States constitution that would establish English as the official language (Crawford, 1989). In 1998, 63% of the voters in California supported an anti-bilingual proposition called Proposition 227, and Arizona has also passed a similar law (Zehr, 2001).

Yet, the passage of the law in California did little to quiet the debate and acrimony concerning bilingual education. Crawford (1999) noted that the major advocates for Proposition 227 attacked bilingual research by calling it “utter garbage” (p. 3). In addition, he noted that the popular press focused uncritically on the findings of studies that reported negatively on bilingual education. He identified what he believed was “the most significant of these studies,” a review published by Rossell and Baker (1996) of 300 studies of bilingual education. These researchers concluded that only 75 were “methodologically acceptable studies,” and these revealed, “... no consistent research support for transitional bilingual education as a superior practice for improving language achievement of limited English proficient children” (p. 21).

They also concluded that “seven percent of the studies show transitional bilingual education to be superior, 64% show it to be inferior, and 29% show it to be no different from submersion-doing nothing” (p. 22). They added, “Altogether, 93% of the studies show TBE to be no different from or worse than doing nothing at all” (p. 22). Their most damning comments included that “one cannot trust an author’s conclusion to be an accurate representation of the data on which it is supposedly based,” whether the study was “done by supporters of bilingual education” or “by its critics” (p. 25).

However, other researchers criticized Rossell and Baker, sometimes quite vociferously. Greene (1998) noted, “It is clear that Rossell and Baker’s review of studies is useful as a pool for a meta-analysis, but the lack of rigor and consistency in how they classify studies and summarize results prevent their conclusions from being reliable” (p. 8). In addition, he argued that “unfortunately, only 11 of the 75 studies identified as acceptable by Rossell and Baker actually meet their own criteria for an acceptable study” (p. 4). Greene concluded, however, that “despite the relatively small number of studies, the strength and consistency of these results, especially from the highest quality randomized experiments, increases confidence in the conclusion that bilingual programs are effective at increasing standardized test scores measured in English” (p. 9). Greene (1998) asserted that scores on standardized tests were higher when children with limited English proficiency were taught using at least some of their native language than when only English was used to teach similar children. He also concluded that “the limited number of useful studies, however, makes it difficult to address other important issues, such as the ideal length of time students should be in bilingual programs, the ideal amount of native language that should be used in instruction, and the age groups in which these techniques are most appropriate” (p. 6). Finally, he noted that “the results from the 5 randomized experiments examined here clearly suggest (emphasis added) that native language instruction is useful” (p. 6). These five randomized experiments were among the 11 methodologically acceptable studies from the Rossell and Baker review. Thus, Greene’s response to Rossell and Baker’s review identified many problems, a critique that was echoed, if even less politely, by other authors (e.g., Crawford, 1999; Cummins, 1998; Krashen, 1999).

In another study, Gersten, Woodward and Schneider (1992) compared the achievement of students enrolled in transitional bilingual classrooms to that of students in bilingual immersion programs. Bilingual immersion programs were designed “to rapidly introduce minority students to English in a meaningful fashion during the early years of school by sensitively integrating second language instruction into content area instruction” (p. 5). A simple view of their results is that immersion students showed an early significant advantage in achievement at grade four that disappeared by grade seven. However, there were a number of methodological problems with the Gersten, Woodward, and Schneider study, some of which the authors themselves acknowledged. They noted that they had not adequately described the degree to which the two programs were implemented in the study. They also noted the difficulty of the use of standardized tests with second language students. Most problematic in their view, however, was that the design did not involve a random selection of students but included only those students who remained in the programs over the four years of the study. In the end, they noted that

neither the bilingual immersion program nor transitional bilingual education brought its students up to the national norms, especially in the areas of reading (23rd-24th percentile for the bilingual immersion program and 21st percentile for the transitional bilingual education program) and vocabulary (16th and 15th percentiles respectively by the seventh grade. (p. 29)

Finally, a claim that “research on the most effective forms of bilingual education (usually in terms of English achievement) suggests two way programs may be the best” (Cazabon, Nicoladis, & Lambert, 1998, p. 2) needs to be explored because it is surrounded with as much controversy as other research comparing different forms of bilingual education programs. The basis of the claim by Cabazon et al. is a study by Thomas and Collier (1997). It is not clear, however, that this conclusion is a valid interpretation of the study.

Thomas and Collier (1997) reported on findings of their study of “700,000 language minority students, collected by five participating school districts between 1982 and 1996, including 42,317 students who have attended our participating schools for four years or more” (p. 30). Unfortunately, they did not identify or describe any of the demographics related to the school districts nor provide enough information to allow the reader to evaluate whether or not their results are valid, reliable or accurate. The study does not appear to have been published in a refereed publication, so it has not received critical independent blind review. In addition, its dissemination by the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education adds the possibility that it was more a political document than an independent research effort. Thomas and Collier indicated that they only recorded data from “well-implemented programs in school systems with experienced, well-trained staff” (p. 28), but no data were presented to substantiate such claims. Although they themselves criticized other reports of studies of language minority education as frequently more “pseudo-scientific” than scientific, they did not provide enough information needed for the reader to judge whether or not they themselves had been rigorous in the application of what they called scientific methods. On the basis of their cryptic report, one that focused more on the methodology than on the details of their research results, it is difficult to conclude whether they have provided strong evidence to support their claims.

Rossell (1998) is less kind. In a review of Thomas and Collier (1997), she noted that “the methodology of the study is unscientific, as is the case with all of Virginia Collier’s research” (p. 1). Crawford (1999), a proponent of bilingual education remarked that, “unfortunately, for reasons that remain unclear, Thomas and Collier have thus far declined to release sufficient data to support these findings” (p. 11). He added, “so, when asked about the Thomas-Collier study, bilingual education researchers usually respond that, while the early reports are intriguing, this remains *unpublished research* [emphasis in the original]” (p. 12). Thomas and Collier (2002) published a subsequent study through the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence at the University of California in Santa Cruz. This more recent effort focused on data collected between 1985 and 2001 in five sites, but again, the data are not easy to interpret, and the report has not been subjected to the rigors of a blind review.

Thus, the claims that one instructional approach is superior to any other appear to be founded on limited or questionable evidence. At best, inferences about best approaches appear to have limited empirical support. As Ovando (2003) concluded, one reason it has been difficult to derive a clear view of the effectiveness of bilingual education programs is that often program

evaluation research and basic research have been confused, and "much of the adverse publicity for bilingual education stems from a set of poor program evaluation results" (p. 15). Especially in terms of its effect on secondary-age immigrant students, the research on bilingual education is inconclusive about its effects.

Student views of bilingual education. For all the controversies being aired in the literature, there has been remarkably little input from the students most closely affected by these programs. Researchers, educators and politicians have had much to say; students, particularly immigrant students, have been silent. One aspect of the study of immigrant students enrolled in Vancouver's secondary schools reported here was that a group of 407 were interviewed about their views of the value of bilingual education, thereby allowing a rare point of view into the debate.

And, in their opinions, bilingual programs were not always regarded as viable alternatives. Here, 281 students out of 407 responded that bilingual classes would not help them and that they wished to learn academic material in English because their grade 12 examinations were in English. However, about 70% commented that it would be helpful if they could receive help with their work from someone who knew their first language who could translate a difficult word or explain a difficult concept to them in their first language. As one Mandarin young woman of 17 years stated, "It would be good if we can ask for explanations in Chinese, especially the difficult things." The outdated notion that L1 use is something to be avoided still seems to exist in the 21st century, as revealed in this comment:

You get trouble from teachers if we speak our language. It would be good for people to be able to ask somebody for a word in English in your class. Just one word might help and what's wrong with that? But not whole class in Polish. (male, Polish, 17 years)

There were two nearly universal complaints. Students believed their academic problems were due to their inability to read English, and they felt their English development suffered due to the shortage of native English speakers available with whom to practice their English. It seems ironic that students in an English-only school system were complaining that they did not have access to enough native English models.

To many of these immigrant students, the future seemed grim because of their difficulties in school. Students understood well the advantages associated with higher socio-economic status. For some, the stress of adolescence was experienced within the context of social alienation and stress. As a young woman (17 years old) from Vietnam stated,

ESL students work so hard. Even if you do really well, you just get an ordinary job. They have no future, that's why so many drop out. Kids have to work to make enough money for comfortable life, no, not even comfortable life. In school, there's gangs, there's drugs, oh, it's horrible thing, and school's so small, it's unhealthy. I have a few cousins, they all drop out. There's no future, so what's the point? You pay extra to go to better class. Money is so important. Most parents can't afford it.

In addition, there were serious and significant differences in views of teaching and learning that tended to represent cultural differences. Some students and parents were

concerned that teachers were not providing the right kind of instruction because students were not being asked to memorize facts or assigned enough hours of homework each day.

In Hong Kong, all we do, memorize, memorize, memorize, day and night, 5 hours homework every day. In Vancouver, all we do is think, think, think, nothing more. It's hard to think when the teacher doesn't tell you what to do. (female, Cantonese, 18 years; Gunderson, 2000, p. 695)

A number of studies have reported on how cultural differences have an important impact on the teaching and learning of immigrant students (Anderson & Gunderson, 1997, 2001; Gunderson & Anderson, 2003).

CONCLUSION

It has been argued that learning to read and write is fundamental to becoming a fully contributing, participating member of society. Many view learning to read and write as prerequisite to both native-born and immigrant students' participation in school, socialization into society, learning, and academic and professional success. Some are convinced that the learning of English should be a basic requirement of citizenship for immigrants, their democratic responsibility.

Olson (1992) noted that some have proposed the "somewhat overblown" notion that "learning to read and write is not only necessary to permit one to participate in literate society, but also necessary for the full development of one's intellectual resources" (pp. 18-19) and that "literacy has come to be seen as an interesting problem in its own right rather than being seen as the solution to every other problem" (p. 19). Regardless of whether the claim is overblown, what seems clear is that reading, and specifically learning to read English, is important to students' potential for success in schools and in society in Canada and the United States. Students' success in the English-only program described here differed according to the socio-economic status of their families. As ESL support disappeared, achievement declined and students "disappeared" from the courses they needed to be eligible for post-secondary education. There was a direct relationship between their disappearance and their families' socio-economic status.

It takes time to learn the language skills to enable one to read and learn from academic texts, especially for those who immigrate at age 15 or older. Students enter English-only academic classrooms with all of the characteristics of learning-disabled students. The disappearance or drop out rate is eloquent testimony to our failure to provide appropriate literacy education. It is eloquent testimony that we as literacy researchers have also failed. Many proponents of English-only instruction ignore the need for research and rely, instead, on political views. Systematic phonics instruction, for example, would not have helped the secondary students described in this study to contend with the demands of academic classes.

English-only instruction has serious limitations. Immigrant students need more than three years of English support. English-only instruction works best for those students whose families have the economic resources to supplement their learning; for those who do not, it is generally a disaster. English-only instruction has the potential to widen the social and economic gaps that

already exist in our schools and in our societies. We need content-area reading research focusing on immigrant students. We need to consider the research on student resilience and we need to explore bilingual research that focuses on secondary-level students.

As educators we must strive to assure that students will have a chance to learn and to participate, not to drop out, not to fail, not to lose the promise that we believe learning to read and write offers.

The Statue of Liberty welcomes immigrants, and Emma Lazarus' poem beckons to the world with the promise of freedom and opportunity. Literacy alone is not necessarily enough. Literacy does not automatically guarantee participation in society, equal opportunity, or equal access. Literacy does not mean that marginalized students will have easy access to the center. Literacy researchers must be concerned about social justice, about poverty, about politics, and about social responsibility. This is true for both Canada and the United States. As Berliner (2001) noted:

The unpleasant reality is that the United States runs separate and unequal schools and neighborhoods. The conditions of the schools and neighborhoods for our poor, African American, and Hispanic youth are not designed for high levels of literacy in reading, mathematics and science. We accept poverty, violence, drugs, unequal school funding, uncertified teachers, and institutionalized racism in the schools that serve these children and in the neighborhoods in which they live. (p. 2)

Our failure to be concerned about and to act on such issues has dire consequences for a rapidly growing segment of our school population.

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