Bilingual Education for Newcomers in Secondary School in the United States

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Many times, older students have academic, social and cultural needs that are greater and more varied than most English as a second Language (ESL) programs are able to accommodate. There are significant gaps in their literacy and cultural development. The goal of most newcomer programs is to prepare students to succeed in the district's regular language program. Bilingual education including newcomer's programs in US still needs to expand the options that unadjusted learners can go and find comfortable shelter for themselves. To meet the needs of the low-achieved academic secondary learners should be taken care of in the respect of their limited exposure time of learning and being ready for the outside of the classroom and school. I suggest that the newcomers should be taken more comprehensive approach and realms than English language aspect. It's necessary to distinguish secondary learners from children because age is one of the crucial factors for learning a second language especially for the low-developed academic skilled. To get a job or enter the college, the secondary newcomers should be offered and to choose the optimal form of the educational systems which are different from the younger children who have enough time to prepare before they come out to the society or to the college. Newcomer programs should meet the late entrants' educational and cultural needs that are not met by the regular language programs already in place where are inappropriate and can lead to low self esteem and a high dropout rate. What is needed is for teachers to become facilitators of learning through the establishment of interpersonal relationships with learners. It's followed by the issue of financial support. But in the long term, it's worthwhile to make a soft landing.

I. INTRODUCTION

For over two hundred years, the United States has been viewed as the land of opportunity for people seeking a safer and better life for themselves
and their families. Each year approximately one million legal and undocumented immigrants enter the United States. Consequently, the schools are facing the challenge of educating an increasingly diverse ethnic and linguistic population. Thousands of newly arriving Middle and High school students who enroll in U.S. school have significant gaps in their literacy development. How can the education help them out of the difficulties? Can bilingual education promote transition the immigrant students who have diverse cultural and linguistic background?

Hakuta et. al. (2000) found that English communicative ability takes three to five years to develop, otherwise it takes four to seven years to gain academic English proficiency. English learners in secondary school need the English skill to be able to advance to the exit for cognitive development in other academic area. They have the possibility to get stuck unless enough English competence in their oriented area. Lack of confidence and proficiency in English can often lead them to a stalemate. Even though the secondary learners need to learn English with clear reasons, sometimes they find themselves unfit in pull–out or immersion program. For these reasons, the older new students in US need to more options to choose their school to let them adjust well.

Many methods of teaching English Language Learners (ELL) have been practiced with varying degrees of success. And there are many variables depending on the needs of the incoming students, availability of resources, popular teaching methodologies, and political climate. Many times, older students have academic, social and cultural needs that are greater and more varied than most English as a second Language (ESL) programs are able to accommodate. For these students, their lack of English proficiency is a barrier to accessing the school curriculum and to effective school participation, and puts them at a risk for academic failure. Until a basic level of English proficiency and literacy is acquired, sitting in a conventional ESL classroom is a waste of time for these students. In order to meet these academic, emotional challenges newcomer programs have been set up in many areas of the country. According to Baker (2006), transitional bilingual education helps the learners shift from the home, minority language to the dominant, majority language. Newcomer programs are temporary transitional programs designed to meet unique needs of newcomer students in the context of a nurturing and supportive environment (Friedland, 1991, p. 4). Because the immigrant
population is subject to rapid changes in demographics, population density, and language diversity, newcomer programs are often developed rapidly and modified over time. Although there are key components common to all programs, no two programs are alike. The differing agendas behind each individual program combined with available resources has led to many variables among programs in terms of language of instruction, site location, program duration, and teaching methodologies. Studies of the newcomer programs at International newcomer Academy (Mace–Matluck, Alexander–Kasparik, & Queen, 1998: Short & Boyson, 2004), Cesar E. Chavez Multicultural Academic Center (Short & Boyson, 2004), and Falls Church Transitional High School, (Mace–Matluck, Alexander–Kasparik, & Queen, 1998), highlight how goals and resources of each school have led to differences in program development.

II. NEWCOMER PROGRAM IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

In the context of newcomer program, newcomer does not refer to an immigrant who has recently arrived in the United States. Newcomer is a term used to refer to a combination of academic level, English proficiency, and length of time in the country (Friedlander, 1991). The purpose of newcomer program is not to meet the educational needs of all newly arriving students. They are specifically designed for students with the weakest English and academic skills who enter school after the term has started, or are older learners. Some immigrant students have strong academic skills and literacy in their native languages. These students have the best chance to excel in school, and may be properly served by more conventional English learning programs already in place. For the many newcomers who are unschooled or have educational gaps due to interruptions in their schooling, a more comprehensive approach is needed to help them succeed academically. A newcomer program can provide a more intensive, individualized approach to learning while also allowing time to adjust to the social and cultural demands of a new country. Enrollment is usually limited to 1–3 semesters to ensure that the students are not unduly segregated from English proficient students in a regular school program.

As outlined by Genesee (1999), there are several key components common to all programs. Each program includes courses that are different from a regular language support program. These could include classes on American
culture or how to navigate the public school system. In addition, all programs include strategies for initial literacy development. Schools without the option of a newcomer program often place students in either special education classes or in classes several grades below their age level. These methods are developmentally inappropriate and can lead to low self esteem and a high dropout rate. In order to promote core academic development and integrate language and content, sheltered and bilingual content instructional strategies should be used. Teaching staff and support staff, who are familiar with the students' native languages, are also recruited. Instructional materials are selected that are age appropriate and include modifications for the students' level of language development and knowledge.

In order to set up a newcomer program, the following criteria must be met. Newcomer programs must have enough newcomer students with educational needs that are not met by the regular language programs already in place. According to Short & Boyson (2004), 64% of students are identified and placed in newcomer programs by teachers or committees within their home school district. The remaining 36% are placed by district intake centers. Many schools rely on placement tests, such as the Language Assessment Scales (LAS), IDEA Proficiency Tests (IPT), Language Assessment Battery (LAB), and Woodcock Munoz Language Survey to assess a student's academic skill (Short & Boyson, 2004). A more thorough approach also includes reviewing transcripts and report cards carried from the home country, examining writing samples in English and the native language, and interviews with the students and parents. The goal of most programs is to prepare students to succeed in the district’s regular language program. Procedures to transition students into the regular program must be followed, and should include oversight and follow-up pathways.

All newcomer programs provide courses in English Language and many provide native literacy development. The strategies and techniques used to meet this agenda vary greatly. They can include sheltered instruction techniques such as graphic organizers, visual aids, modeling, cooperative learning groups and hands-on activities. The most common content course that is taught in newcomer programs is Math, followed by language arts, social studies and science (Boyson & Short, 2003). Four-year High-School programs provide all the instructional courses needed to graduate. Programs
of shorter duration have more limited options.

There are three models utilized for the site location of newcomer programs: programs within a school, separate site, and whole school. The most common model is a program within a school, in which newcomer students are taught at their home school designation. An advantage of this model is that newcomer students have opportunities to interact with mainstream students. This could include physical education and music classes, or extracurricular activities. Many who exit from a newcomer program within a school transition back into the regular language support program of the school. The separate site model is another option. The newcomer program is housed in a separate location. This model can conserve resources when there is not a sufficient number of identified students, qualified teachers, and materials at each individual school. Students from different districts can be bused to a separate site, and thus increase the possibility of sufficient numbers of same native language students. The least common model is the whole school model, where the students have the option of remaining in the school unit graduation. This model is advantageous to students who have experienced interrupted schooling, or are overage for their grade level.

III. MODELS OF NEWCOMER PROGRAMS

The followings are overviews of three distinct newcomer programs, their goals and what each program looks like.

The International newcomer Academy (INA), located in Fort Worth, Texas, was opened in 1993 in order to address the problem of immigrant students who were failing or dropping out of school due to overcrowding and the lack of personalized attention in the cities' secondary schools. Fort Worth is home to a large, Mexican population and to refugees from Southeast Asia and Somalia resettled by the World Relief Association. Sixteen school districts in Fort Worth operate language centers to teach English Language Learners. The INA newcomer program was established to focus on the needs of newcomer students and to transition them into these language centers. The overall goal of this program is to establish a multicultural learning environment that fosters rapid language learning, and to provide students with a foundation of real-world experiences that will allow them to pursue
their lives and educational goals successfully and become contributing, productive members of society (Short & Boyson, 2004, p. 124).

The stand alone, separate site design was chosen in order to consolidate resources and allow the INA staff to focus entirely on the needs of newcomer students. Course content, scheduling, and staff assignment considerations are based on the needs of the INA students and their families. All students enrolled at INA are beginning English learners. When they reach the level of intermediate English learners they transfer into one of the learning centers. The duration of the program is one semester to two years, depending on the proficiency of the student.

In order to encourage rapid English language learning, the International Newcomer Academy program uses an intensive ESL approach with bilingual support when possible. Classes are taught in English using sheltered strategies. All students take an ESL class and an ESL lab each day, along with English reading class, math, geography and an elective. Students who are struggling will also have the native language support of an aid or tutor in class. Students with low literacy may substitute a native language literacy class in Spanish or Vietnamese for English reading. Class periods are extended if a student requires extra time in a subject. Student volunteers are assigned to newly arriving students to ease their transition to the school and to encourage them to use the English they acquired.

The curriculum used at INA is based on the Texas State Essential Elements for ESL and the state’s Reading Improvement Program, but also relies on language-experience activities, cultural enrichment and tactile and visual learning. INA stresses the value of real-world experiences in educating ELL students. All students partake in collaborative academic projects with native English speakers. In addition, students at INA participate in a program called Vital Link, in which students shadow employees in local businesses for a week. This allows students the opportunity to gain insight into real work experiences. The Fort Worth School District and the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil rights have executed an agreement to involve INA students in collaborative projects with other schools and the English-speaking community. The agreement requires INA to provide planned activities that students would have access to in the regular school program and to provide field trips that connect the students at INA to their community (Gaffney, 2002).
A very different program design is demonstrated in a case study by Short & Boyson (2004). Cesar Chaves Multicultural Academic Center in Chicago is a bilingual, newcomer middle school program that serves mainly Spanish speaking immigrant students. It is a three year program located within the Cesar Chavez public school. A major goal of the program is to have students become bilingual in both English and Spanish. Another goal is to bring each student's academic achievement as close to grade level as possible. Content areas are taught in Spanish and use Spanish language textbooks. The Cesar Chavez program is able to accommodate the goal of educating bilingual students because of the three year duration. The use of educational strategies such as looping, which allows a class of students to remain with the same teacher for longer than a year, and using a 'team' approach for grouping teachers and students provides the students with continuity in their learning.

Students finishing eighth grade have several options for continuing their education. Those still requiring intensive literacy training can transition into a ninth grade newcomer program at Chavez. Graduating eighth graders have the option of transitioning into a neighborhood, transitional bilingual program or mainstream ESL program.

Falls Church Transitional High School is an ESL program designed to educate students who are 17 years and older, and who are beginning English Language Learners. It is a newcomer program located within Falls Church High School in Falls Church, VA. The goal of the program is acquisition of sufficient English language and literacy skills to allow students to achieve their personal goals (Gutstein, 2002). It also strives to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of older English Language Learners. An ESL program for language learning, using English as the language of instruction, was chosen instead of a bilingual program because of the great language and cultural diversity within the school.

Students are taught content classes using a program called Concept Courses. Concept Courses is a sheltered English program providing instruction in Math, Social Studies, Science, and Language Arts. Fall Church also provides career, vocational education, and computer classes.

Most students at Falls Church work at jobs while they are attending school. This program is a viable option for older learners because classes are offered from 3:00 pm to 9:30 pm each day. This also allows students to attend regular classes at Falls Church High School during the day (8:20~2:30) and
the newcomer program in the afternoon and evening. In order to meet the practical, career needs of the students, Fall Church has an annual career night with preparatory and follow-up activities developed by the guidance counselors and staff. Efforts are made to use materials (i.e. trade books) that have a practical application in the real world after high school.

Students can attend Falls Church up to two years. To successfully complete the program, they are required to meet the ESOL proficiency requirements for oral language, reading and writing. After that time they can transfer to a regular or alternative high school to finish their high school studies.

These three newcomer programs are a very small sample of the many variations that exist in the United States today; the newcomer programs can vary as much as the student themselves. Newcomer programs can look very different from each other in terms of the agenda, languages of instruction, student demographics, site location and duration of the program. The goals of each program have led to variations in program design and implementation. INA chose an ESL instructional approach with bilingual support to encourage rapid English language acquisition. Teaching methodologies, such as a Vital Link, were chosen to promote concrete life experiences for each student. In comparison, the main goal of the Cesar Chavez program is to produce students who are bilingual in both Spanish and English. Bilingual education is a gradual process, which is reflected in the program design at Cesar Chavez. The three-year duration of the program and longer school year, along with the option of transferring into a 9th grade newcomer program if necessary are consistent with this goal. Fall Church Transitional High School is targeting a different student: one who is older and may age out of a conventional program before gaining literacy skills. This program does not strive to provide all the courses necessary for High School graduation.

IV. MORE THAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Acquiring bilingual skills is a gradual developmental process. New comers' quantitative exposures in new comer's school promote to shift to the qualitative change through the bidirectional influence between their heritage language and English. Newcomer program allows the secondary learners with low literacy skills to transfer their quantitative input to qualitative change.
Even though there's no one-size-fits-all bilingual education, what is needed for bilingual educators is to become facilitators of learning through establishing interpersonal relationships with students. Newcomer programs can be an alternative that help the students have better access to the educational system and better opportunities for accomplishments. On the other hand, the range of abilities across the late entrants in US is wider than among other learners. According to the Urban Institute (2006), half of immigrant children are considered "low income," one-third of parents of immigrant children do not have high school diplomas or equivalent education, and half of immigrant parents do not speak, speak limitedly, or have extreme difficulties with English. This study illustrates how limited English proficiency directly correlates with poverty. To complicate matters, immigrant students exhibiting limited English proficiency are often placed in low-track classes and, as a result, receive insufficient instruction to learn academic English necessary to acquire adequate education to break the cycle (Callahan, 2008).

Schools need to be set-up to recognize and accept and deal with the fact that the students are coming from poor backgrounds. Medina (2009) discusses how children might drop out because they are poor, not because of the language problem. Another significant factor negatively impacting immigrant student learning is that they have often 'interrupted' school lives. This means that frequent moves, the need to take care of family affairs, and other life events have prevented them from attending school on a regular basis. Although a student may be attending high school, the student might not have gone to middle school. Some districts will 'promote' students to higher grades based on their age and not academic achievements. Students who have incomplete schooling and are placed at higher grade levels experience even more educational hurdles. Only 28 percent of students with these patterns of 'interrupted' schooling graduate high school (Medina, 2009).

Therefore, schools need to address these issues specifically. The schools need to look beyond just language learning and encompass the whole reality of the students background. Students need more than just language training focusing on real-life issues. They need life training and special attention. Language skill development goes beyond the classroom and into the cultural realm, so an advisor or a teacher can help with this. One positive example of a school are international high schools. These schools are dedicated to assisting
students become part of their new culture through both classroom-based language skill development and practical work in their new culture. These program have proven successful. For instance, the nine international high school in New York City "have graduated 65 percent of their students in four years, compared to 33 percent for the English Language Learners in regular schools" (New American Media, 2008). These students have the same advisors through their four years of school. Students need mentoring, so the concept of an advisor is critical to developing language skills. Dedicated special schools are helpful because, in the public schools, teachers and administrators are too often overworked, and students can "fall through the cracks." This is demonstrated by higher drop-out rate than in other cases.

Cultural knowledge is another primary goal in the newcomer's schools and students need to explore target cultures and compare them with their own culture. Students need a bridge that makes the connection between the two languages and the gap between native culture and target culture as certain ideas are completely foreign. Teachers need to integrate language and culture in the curriculum in learner friendly way. The newcomer's schools need to be set up to recognize the wide array of difficulties that immigrant students face and English skills are one problem. The newcomer schools should be designed with this idea in mind. Programs for ESL students in the regular public schools generally are not so well developed. As a result, the dropout rate there is much higher. It is essential to get the students on the path to college to prevent them from having a life of unfulfilled dreams.

V. CONCLUSION

Unlike younger children who have enough time to prepare before they go out into society or attend college, secondary learners have limited time to acquire English before they finish their school. They are running out of time and they need to learn English more quickly in order to maximize their chances to get a job or enter the college. Secondary students need English skills to be able to advance linguistically and to develop cognition in other academic area that, ultimately, allows them to come nearer to age-appropriate competence in two languages. They have the potential to get experience difficulties unless they have enough English competence in their desired area. Lack of confidence and
proficiency in English can often lead them to a stalemate when they feel have no options. For these reasons, new older students in the US need more options to choose their school to help them adjust well.

Adjusting well to a new home and new culture is dependent on the individual. It will be easy for some and not for others. For new immigrants and their children, acquiring linguistic skills necessary for daily survival is often difficult. Not only must these newcomers learn a new language, they must learn a new culture. The current bilingual education in the US in a deficit model in that it places students in educational situations that prevent them from acquiring the linguistic, academic, and cultural skills necessary to become successful members of their new society. Current deficit models need to be changed in order to foster the immigrant children’s abilities to learn. Teachers cannot simply function in a linguistic capacity; they should also provide these newcomers with safe environments where learning about both the language and culture is possible. These instructors need to build and foster close interpersonal relations with their students. Only through programs that allow these caring, instructional relationships between the teacher and late entrants, programs similar to those international high schools found in New York, can allow students to succeed emotionally, socially and financially in their new land.

REFERENCES


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