Preschool Children With Developmental Delays and Limited English Proficiency
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The number of children with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) in schools is increasing drastically. Included in this number are young children with LEP and developmental delays. This article provides information on second-language acquisition, details the type of programming used to educate children with LEP, and offers strategies to use when working with preschool children with LEP and developmental delays.
Familiarizing yourself with the many theories of second-language acquisition will help you better understand the process involved in learning a second language (Cummins, 1981; Krashen, 1987). Once you understand the process, you can plan appropriate educational instruction that incorporates research-based practices for children who come to school with no exposure to the language of instruction (e.g., English). After you understand the process of second-language acquisition, review the different programs necessary to appropriately educate students with limited English proficiency to determine the program most likely to be successful for children with developmental delays.

Second-Language Acquisition

Common Underlying Proficiency Theory

The most widely accepted theory of second-language acquisition is that of Cummins (1981), who incorporates psychological and cognitive factors in the language acquisition process. Specifically, Cummins (1981) hypothesized a developmental interdependence influenced by the importance of cognitive skills in the language process. Maintaining that the level of second-language ability is related to the competence of a learner in the development of his or her first language, he argued that first-language acquisition plays an important role in second-language development because of the transfer of the cognitive skills used in the acquisition of the first language to the acquisition of the second language. Cummins’ theory of second-language acquisition consists of two major dimensions: basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic language proficiency.

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills. Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) involve the informal language of conversation, often referred to as the “language of the playground” in that most children learn BICS through informal interaction with their peers. Cummins (1991) suggested that the acquisition of this level of communication takes between 2 and 3 years of exposure.

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency. Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) refers to language skills that are associated with literacy and cognitive development. As opposed to BICS, these skills are learned most often through formal instruction. Because CALP is generally gained while at school, it takes much longer to develop. According to Cummins (1991), it takes a learner 5 to 10 years to obtain CALP. Collier (1989) stated that it can take 4 to 9 years for bilingual children to obtain the CALP necessary to succeed at the level of their monolingual peers.

Although there is a conceptual difference between BICS and CALP, they are developmental in nature in that CALP is developed after BICS. Typically, proficiency in BICS is an indicator of a student’s ability to process the language of CALP. Thus, a child who has already acquired BICS can proceed to learn CALP skills, but the child who does not have BICS is unprepared to obtain the cognitive skills necessary for CALP acquisition (Anderson, 2000). In short, BICS is the foundation from which CALP develops (see Figure 1).

Krashen’s Theory of Second-Language Acquisition

Krashen’s theory of second-language acquisition (1987, 1988) consists of five hypotheses: (a) acquisition-learning hypothesis, (b) monitor hypothesis, (c) natural order hypothesis, (d) input hypothesis, and (e) affective filter hypothesis (see Figure 2).

Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis. According to Krashen (1987), there are two independent systems of second-language performance. The first is the acquired system, which is the result of a subconscious process similar to the one used to learn a first language. For this system to develop, a child needs significant contact with the second language. This interaction with the new language allows the learner to concentrate on the act of communication rather than the appropriate use of grammar. The second system is the learned system, which involves the instruction of grammar rules and the learner’s conscious efforts to learn a new language. It is important to develop the acquired system before a student develops the learned system.

Monitor Hypothesis. The monitor hypothesis is the summation of the acquisition and the learning system (Krashen, 1987). Here the acquisition system is responsible for making utterances, whereas the learner system acts as the editor or monitor. The learner develops an internal monitor of language. Monitoring aids in the planning, editing, and correcting of the new language. It is the internal voice that corrects language before the student speaks.

Three specific conditions must be present in this stage to ensure successful language learning:

1. The second-language learner must spend enough time with the second language. This amount of time varies by learner (e.g., some children will only need months of exposure yet others may need years).
2. The learner must focus on the form of the new language (e.g., when is it appropriate to use the –ed ending).
3. The learner must think about the correctness of the language he or she uses.
These conditions are assisted by the internal monitor/editor that monitors speech. Krashen suggested that the editor/monitor role should be minor in that it should be used to correct deviation and to make speech more polished. Krashen identified three types of monitors: (a) learners who overuse their monitor (monitor all of their speech or do not speak out of fear that the monitor is not correct), (b) learners who have not learned to monitor or choose not to monitor their conscious knowledge (speak before taking the time to monitor and therefore use incorrect speech), and (c) learners who use their monitor properly (thinking the sentence through and then speaking without error).

**Natural Order Hypothesis.** The natural order hypothesis involves the acquisition of formal language in a natural order. This order is predictable and encompasses the stages of preproduction, early production, speech emergence, and intermediate fluency. In the preproduction stage, the learner is obtaining information about the patterns and pragmatics of a language at a nonverbal level. That is, the student is learning about sentence structure by listening to others. Interaction with peers is very important at this stage.

The early production stage may develop quickly or may be delayed depending on the child. During this stage, input from teacher and peers continues to be important because verbalization by the learner is limited. Depending on the learner, literacy skills may begin during this stage. Usually in early production, the learner is able to answer yes or no questions, provide one-word answers, and make lists of words (Flores, Lopez, & DeLeon, 2000).

In the speech emergence stage, a learner becomes more verbal. It is at this point that academic language begins. Errors in written expression are common during this stage, and the learner benefits from modeling as a form of correction. Thus, student errors result in further learning. In this stage, vocabulary increases and errors decrease. Teachers often expect students to perform academically at the level of their oral language skills; however, it is important to remember that not all students are able to do so at this stage.

In the immediate fluency stage, the learner is more competent when dealing with academic language and producing independent sounds. This competency is seen in the fluency of oral language and written language that contains few errors. The student also develops comprehension skills in this phase and is able to debate, analyze, and evaluate information (Flores et al., 2000).

**Input Hypothesis.** The input hypothesis is concerned with the acquisition system, not the learning system of language. Learners follow a natural order when they receive input from a second language (Krashen, 1988). Thus, the language input should be one step beyond their current level of linguistic capability. If a student has mastered the present tense, information can be provided in the past tense.

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**Figure 1.** Example of basic interpersonal communications skills and cognitive academic language proficiency skills, the progression of skills that may be seen in an early childhood classroom.
The improvement and progression exhibited by the learner also follow this natural order. It is important to remember that not all learners can be at the same linguistic competence level at the same time. Krashen (1988) suggested that the natural communicative input be used to increase the student’s understanding of the second language. That is, examples of how language is commonly used in the second language are often used at the student’s level.

**AFFECTIVE FILTER HYPOTHESIS.** The affective filter hypothesis deals with the affective variables that play a facilitative role in second-language acquisition: motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. The optimum combination of these variables is high motivation, good self-confidence, good self-image, and low anxiety.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis</th>
<th>Monitor Hypothesis</th>
<th>Natural Order Hypothesis</th>
<th>Input Hypothesis</th>
<th>Affective Filter Hypothesis</th>
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<tr>
<td>Two independent systems of second-language learning performance:</td>
<td>The acquisition system is responsible for making utterances whereas the learning system acts as the editor.</td>
<td>This involves the acquisition of formal language in a natural order: preproduction stage, early production phase, speech emergence stage, and immediate fluency stage.</td>
<td>This is concerned with the acquisition system. The learner follows a natural order when receiving input in the second language.</td>
<td>Deals with affective variables that take a facilitative role in second-language acquisition. These variables are motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Acquired system is the result of processes similar to those used to learn the first language.</td>
<td>Three conditions must be present for successful language learning in this phase:</td>
<td>• In early stages the learner may be silent, and nonverbal language will be extremely important.</td>
<td>Input of the new language should be comprehensible and one step beyond the learner’s current level of linguistic capability.</td>
<td>The optimum combination of these variables is high motivation, good self-confidence, good self-image, and low anxiety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learned system is the result of instruction.</td>
<td>a) the second-language learner must spend enough time (which is individually determined) with the second language</td>
<td>• Eventually, the student will become more verbal but may not be able to complete written tasks.</td>
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<td>• The acquired system requires considerable contact with the second language to develop. The contact should concentrate on communication rather than grammar.</td>
<td>b) the learner must focus on the syntax of the new language</td>
<td>• Do not correct grammatical errors but encourage speech.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The learned system requires instruction of grammar rules and the conscious process of the learner.</td>
<td>c) the learner must think about the correctness of the language he or she uses</td>
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Figure 2. Krashen’s theory of second-language acquisition.

Impact of First-Language Development on Second-Language Development

Another important theory of second language involves the impact of first-language development on second-language development. First-language and second-language acquisition and the cognitive factors in second-language acquisition are closely tied. Ervin-Tripp (1974) studied children who spoke English as their first language. They were living in Geneva attending a French-speaking school. She found that the students made errors in the second language based on adhering to the grammar rules of their first language.

Other studies have resulted in similar findings. For example, Krashen and Biber (1988) concluded that the ease with which students attain academic achievement in a second language is directly related to the strength of their native language achievement. Further, students who have adequate schooling in their native language become more proficient in English much faster than the students with no schooling in their first language (Collier, 1989).

Literacy skills or academic skills have been found to be transferable between the first and second languages.
As a result, the better a child’s literacy skills are in his or her first language, the more likely it is that the child will become literate in the second language. This is an important aspect to remember when planning placement or assessment for bilingual children, especially for LEP children who also have developmental delays.

Language of Instruction

Many theories exist regarding the best language to use when instructing LEP children. Nationwide many program models are used to educate LEP children. The main difference among these programs is the amount of primary language used during instruction. The different programs are described below.

**English-Only Instruction**

Many types of educational programs are used with LEP students, with and without disabilities. Some people believe that the best way for LEP students to learn reading and writing in English is to be taught only in English, whereas others believe that the child must become proficient in the native language first. There are four types of English immersion: (a) submersion, (b) Canadian-style immersion, (c) sheltered subject matter, and (d) structured English immersion (Krashen, 1997).

**Submersion.** Submersion instruction provides no support in the children’s native language. This is a sink-or-swim type of program. The LEP students are placed into classrooms and expected to learn at the same levels as their peers with no support in their native language. This programming is appropriate only if there is no one in a school district who can provide the needed support for the child. Children who are put in a submersion environment may develop problems with both languages because of the lack of first-language development (Collier, 1995).

**Canadian-Style Immersion.** Canadian-style immersion is used with French-speaking children in Canada. These students, who are from mostly middle-class families, are taught most of their academic skills in their second language (in this case, English) at a level the students understand. This is not truly an English-only program because the goal is bilingualism, not the replacement of one language with another. In comparison, in the United States many LEP students come from families living in poverty (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2003). Children who live in poverty are at higher risk for factors that negatively affect learning (e.g., low birth weight, poor nutrition) than children who are from middle-class families. As a result, this type of programming has not been successful in the United States.

**Sheltered Subject Matter.** In the sheltered subject-matter program, children slowly work their way up to full immersion, beginning with only their electives (e.g., music, art, library) in English. Academic skills are taught in their first language, and the children are early-exited into English immersion for all subjects. In early-exiting programming, the children are given early instruction in Spanish and then placed into English-only programming as soon as possible.

**Structured English Immersion.** Structured English immersion (SEI) uses English instruction at the learner’s readiness level, and teachers provide instruction in English 70% to 90% of the time (Baker, 1998). This is not an English-only program in the true sense; however, it uses far less of the student’s native language than bilingual programming. Proponents of SEI believe that students can learn English and nonlanguage subjects taught in English at an appropriate level at the same time successfully (Baker, 1998).

**Bilingual Instruction**

The bilingual approach teaches children academic knowledge in their native language and English simultaneously. This approach may also be called the dual language approach. One of the most important features of bilingual education is the use of the first language as the instrument of instruction.

Research has indicated that continual education in both the native language and the second language (most often,
Designing Appropriate Instruction for LEP Preschool Children With Developmental Delays

Krashen and Biber (1988) found that students in well-designed bilingual programs continually outperformed comparison students. Because the design of the bilingual program is essential for success, a well-designed program should teach the subject in the native language with no translations (Krashen & Biber, 1988). Also, the program must provide comprehensible input in the second language and literacy development in the native language. Literacy development is crucial in the native language because literacy skills are transferable between languages.

A properly designed program for LEP preschool children with special needs will combine not only their native language but also their culture. The sidebar lists a series of suggestions teachers can implement.

Conclusion

The most effective education for children with limited English proficiency uses both the child's dominant and his or her second language (Collier, 1995; Cummins, 1981). This is true for LEP preschool children with developmental delays as well. In addition to second-language acquisition, preschool children with developmental delays also gain more cognitive skills, language skills, and social skills when taught in both languages.

To learn and succeed in school, LEP children must have a secure base in one language before trying to learn academic skills in the second. If provided with appropriate programming, these children may never require special education services.

Suggestions for Working With Students With Limited English Proficiency

1. Become aware of the ESL Standards for teaching pre-K–12 students, especially those that deal with Grades pre-K–3 (available at www.TESOL.org).
2. Provide stimulation in the primary language, even if you do not speak the primary language (e.g., taped stories, songs).
3. Access Web sites that provide worksheets in English and Spanish. In the case of math, even if the instructions are in Spanish, the child will still be practicing the required skills.
4. Web sites are also available for language arts. Reading comprehension and phonics can be practiced in Spanish and the skills will transfer to English. Examples of Web sites are www.primeraescuela.com, www.everythings esl.com, and www.a4esl.org.
5. Use gestures as much as possible when describing or explaining things to students. For example, when teaching big and small, use your arms to demonstrate.
6. Use manipulatives when feasible.
7. Incorporate many senses, so the child has a better chance of understanding the information.
8. Position the child close to you (for ease of reading nonverbal cues) and, if possible, close to other students who speak the primary language.
9. Provide many opportunities for the child to interact socially with children who speak the second language. The child will be able to pick up basic interpersonal communication skills in these situations.
10. Allow the child to be silent. Even if the child is not talking, he or she is still able to practice receptive language skills. Do not force children to talk.
11. Incorporate the child's culture in the classroom as much as possible. Put up a map that tells where every student is from. That way they all feel valued.
12. Know what your students can do in comparison to typically developing bilingual children. Keep good field notes and bring them to all the meetings concerning the child.

English supports linguistic and cognitive development (Collier, 1989; Ervin-Tripp, 1974; Krashen & Biber, 1988). For example, a child taught to read in the native language will learn to read in her second language faster than a child who has to learn the oral language of the second language and then try to read in the second language without any reading skills to transfer from the native language. Because oral language skills develop faster than cognitive and academic skills, it appears that bilingual children will benefit from the use of their native language during their education.

Schmitt (1994) conducted a longitudinal study of a bilingual early-childhood program with 40 LEP students. After 2 years, the students who were in the bilingual preschool scored higher on the achievement test than the control group, consisting of LEP preschool children in an English-only program. The data indicated that the effects of the bilingual preschool can be long lasting for both the native language and the second language.

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VOL. 40, NO. 4, MARCH 2005 241
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