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# Understanding Models of Instruction for English Language Learners

Draft of one page summaries

Prepared by the New York Comprehensive Center  
in collaboration with:  
the New York State Education Department &  
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## Table of Contents

|  |             |
|--|-------------|
| <b>Introduction .....</b>                          | <b>2</b>    |
| <b>Background.....</b>                             | <b>3</b>    |
| <b>English-Only Program Models .....</b>           | <b>4</b>    |
| <b>Bilingual Program Models .....</b>              | <b>5</b>    |
| <b>Newcomer Programs .....</b>                     | <b>6</b>    |
| <b>Programs for English Learners .....</b>         | <b>7-8</b>  |
| <b>Research references for these reports .....</b> | <b>9-10</b> |
| <b>References .....</b>                            | <b>11</b>   |

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## INTRODUCTION

These briefs present information on terminology used in naming and describing programs for English learners. Three general categories of programs are presented: newcomer programs, English-only programs, and bilingual programs. A brief description of each category is presented, with a chart outlining program features. **These briefs in no way endorse or recommend any particular program model; rather they present information from the documents reviewed.**

Over the years many terms have been used to refer to children who enter US schools using a language other than English:

- English learner (EL)
- English language learner (ELL)
- second language learner
- language minority student
- limited English proficient (LEP)
- non native English speaker (the speaker's native language is not English)

In these reports we use the term **English learner (EL)**. This term includes both children who were born outside the US and speak a first language other than English and students who were born in the US and speak a home language that is not English.

We use the term **first language** to refer to the student's native language, the language the student learns at home. ELs' first language may be Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, etc. We abbreviate first language **L1**.

We use the abbreviation **L2** to refer to the target second (or third or fourth) language.

Note: The term native often appears in the literature on second language acquisition, referring not to place of birth, but to first language. A native English speaker is a person whose first language is English, regardless of where he/she was born. A non-native English speaker is a person who is learning English, but whose first language is one other than English. A non-native English speaker may have been born in or outside the US.

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### **BACKGROUND**

Current research on instructional models for English learners revolves around the question of whether and how children’s first language should be used in an instructional program. Francis, Lesaux and August (2006) addressed this question by studying the impact that the language of instruction has on the literacy learning of English learners. In their report, they stated the following: “When a child enters school with limited proficiency in English, the school faces a serious dilemma: *How can the child be expected to learn the skills and content taught at the same time as he or she is learning English?* There may be many options but two fundamental categories of solutions have predominated:

- programs that provide instruction only in English (English-only) and
- programs with some native language instruction (often called bilingual)” (p. 365)<sup>1</sup>.

Goldenberg (2008) summarized the key findings of two major reviews of the research on educating English learners: one completed by the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth, and the other by researchers associated with CREDE, the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence. Goldenberg considered these reviews to “represent the most concerted efforts to date to identify the best knowledge available...to find effective approaches to help English learners succeed in school” (p. 11)<sup>2</sup>. This report draws on Goldenberg’s summary as well as studies from the two source research reviews.

Current federal law requires that all English learners be provided with an educational program that ensures their access to the core curriculum and opportunities for English language development; however, state laws govern program requirements. Before 1974, ELs did not receive systematic assistance for their language needs, but the approach known as “sink or swim,” in which ELs were given the same instruction as their English-speaking peers without modification, was outlawed by the U.S. Supreme court as a violation of minority children’s civil rights in *Lau v. Nichols* 414 U.S.563 (1974). Consequently, state and local departments of education decide what programs to offer depending on the needs of a specific population (Moughamian, Rivera, & Francis, 2009, p. 6). To make an initial determination as to whether a child needs language support, districts and schools conduct a home language survey for each entering student. The results of the home language survey help school officials and parents select appropriate language support for the student.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, D. J., Lesaux, N.K., & August, A. (2006). Language of Instruction. In D. August, & T. Shanahan (Eds.). *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on language-minority children and youth* (pp. 365-414). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

<sup>2</sup> Goldenberg, C. (2008, Summer). Teaching English language learners: What the research does and does not say. *American Educator*.

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### **ENGLISH-ONLY PROGRAM MODELS**

English-only models are programs that offer instruction to English learners (ELs) in English; students' first language (**L1**) plays a small or no role in these programs. Classroom teachers and bilingual aides may offer support, such as giving directions in the students' **L1** to help newcomer ELs or students with few or no English language skills.

Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian (2006) found that school districts often offer English-only programs when English learners come from many different language backgrounds. These programs are often referred to as ***English language development (ELD)*** or ***English as a second language (ESL)***.

Students in ESL programs are served in classes separated from general education classes with a certified ESL teacher (pull-out) or in mainstream classrooms with ESL instructional support provided in the classroom by a specialist (push-in).

Other English-only programs are known as:

#### ***Structured English Immersion or SEI (Structured Immersion Programs)***

- English immersion programs seek to increase students' English fluency rapidly by teaching content in English.
- Core curriculum includes English language development and content-area instruction using strategies focused on the needs of ELs.
- English is adapted to students' proficiency level, supplemented by gestures, visual aids, manipulatives, etc.
- Students' **L1** support may be provided separately.

#### ***Sheltered Instruction Programs***

- These programs use **L1** strictly to supplement the English-only curriculum.
- Teachers modify their use of English by adjusting the language demands of instruction: i.e., they modify their speech rate and tone; simplify vocabulary and grammar; repeat key words, phrases, or concepts; use context clues and models extensively; relate instruction to students' background knowledge and experience; and use methods of language instruction such as demonstrations, visuals, graphic organizers or cooperative work.

| <b>English Only Program Models</b>   |  |                                |  |               |  |  |
|--|--|--------------------------------|--|---------------|--|--|
| <i>Program Name(s)</i>   | <i>Goals</i>   | <i>Language of Instruction</i> | <i>Participants</i>  | <i>Grades</i> | <i>Typical Length of Participation</i> | <i>Implementation Features</i>   |
| English as a second language ( <b>ESL</b> )<br>Also known as English Language Development ( <b>ELD</b> ) | English proficiency;<br>Integration into mainstream American culture             | English                        | ELs with various levels of English proficiency and varied <b>L1</b> and cultural backgrounds | K-12          | 1-3 years                              | Students are served in:<br>1) separate ESL classes or<br>2) mainstream classrooms with ESL instructional support provided in the classroom.<br>Both options require a trained ESL teacher. |
| Sheltered English instruction <b>or</b><br>Structured English immersion ( <b>SEI</b> )                   | Proficiency in academic English;<br>Integration into mainstream American culture | English                        | ELs with various levels of English proficiency and varied <b>L1</b> and cultural backgrounds | K-12          | 1-3 years                              | Language of instruction is English, adapted to students' English proficiency level by teachers trained in sheltered instruction. <b>L1</b> support may be provided separately.             |

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### **BILINGUAL PROGRAM MODELS**

In bilingual programs English learners (ELs) are provided instruction in their first language (**L1**) as well as in English (**L2**). Several types of bilingual programs exist. Program names may vary, especially from region to region in the United States.

#### **Dual Language or Two-Way Immersion programs**

- develop high levels of language proficiency and content-area academic knowledge in 2 languages; classes include both ELs and native English speaking students; instruction is offered to both groups in 2 languages (**additive bilingual environment**)
- foster an appreciation for all students’ home cultures and cross-cultural understanding
- most often offered in elementary school but may extend into middle and high school

#### **Developmental Bilingual programs**

- help ELs to develop high proficiency levels of speaking, reading, and writing in English and **L1**; classes enroll ELs; instruction is offered in 2 languages (additive bilingual environment); also called Maintenance Programs (maintaining **L1**)
- strong bilingual support throughout the elementary grades: “**late-exit**” model
- foster integration of ELs into mainstream American culture
- promote appreciation of ELs’ home cultures

#### **Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) programs**

- initially teach students to speak, read, and write in **L1**; gradually transition to English; classes enroll ELs; stress the development of English but not **L1**, (**subtractive bilingual environment**)
- usually full transition to instruction in English within 2-3 years (“**early-exit**” model)
- foster integration of ELs into mainstream American culture

| <b>Bilingual Program Models</b>  |   |                                    |   |                      |  |  |
|--|---|------------------------------------|---|----------------------|--|--|
| <i>Program Name(s)</i>   | <i>Goals</i>  | <i>Language of Instruction</i>     | <i>Participants</i>   | <i>Grades</i>        | <i>Typical Length of Participation</i> | <i>Implementation Features</i>   |
| Two-way bilingual<br>Also known as<br>Two-way Immersion,<br>Dual language,<br>Dual immersion | Developing proficiency in two languages simultaneously<br>Integration into mainstream American culture and appreciation of ELs’ home cultures | Both English & students’ <b>L1</b> | ELs (with the same <b>L1</b> ) & varied cultural backgrounds <b>and</b> students whose <b>L1</b> is English | K-12                 | 5-12 years                             | Program structure varies. Students from both language groups are integrated for academic content instruction through both English and <b>L1</b> .<br>At least 50% of all instruction is provided in the <b>L1</b> at all grade levels. |
| Developmental Bilingual Program<br>Also known as late-exit or Maintenance model              | Developing proficiency in two languages simultaneously<br>Integration into mainstream American culture and appreciation of ELs’ home cultures | Both English & students’ <b>L1</b> | ELs with the same <b>L1</b> ; varied cultural backgrounds   | Primarily elementary | 5-6 years                              | Program structure varies. Late-exit model: students receive some native language instruction throughout elementary school.   |
| Transitional Bilingual Program<br>Also known as early-exit                                   | English proficiency<br>Integration into mainstream American culture   | Both English & students’ <b>L1</b> | ELs with the same <b>L1</b> ; varied cultural backgrounds   | Primarily elementary | 1-3 years                              | Program structure varies. Students are taught primarily in <b>L1</b> and then transition to English. Early-exit model: the transition to mainstream classes takes place within the first 3 years.                                      |

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### **NEWCOMER PROGRAMS**

Newcomer programs are designed for students who are new arrivals to the United States. This program design promotes two goals: the language goal of English proficiency and the cultural goal of integrating new arrivals into mainstream American life, including linguistic, social, and cultural integration. Students with no or low English proficiency levels or limited literacy in their first language frequently attend newcomer programs. Found across all grade levels, these programs frequently serve middle and high school students where intensive, specialized instruction is provided for a limited time, usually 1-1.5 years. English is generally the language of instruction; however, some programs utilize the student's first language (**L1**) and follow a bilingual approach. Others focus on sheltered instruction.

Short and Boyson (2004) surveyed 115 secondary school newcomer programs in the United States. Their findings concluded that many newcomer programs are located within the school and foster interaction between newcomers and mainstream students for at least part of the day. Effective newcomer programs plan and implement individualized instruction that creates meaningful connections between school and students' lives and cultures. Learning is scaffolded and appropriate, beginning at the students' knowledge level. The instructional materials used to teach literacy are age-appropriate and designed specifically for older students. Effective programs also include the students' parents and families, helping them learn about the school's routines and expectations.

| <b>Newcomer Programs</b> |   |  |  |  |  |  |
|--------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| <i>Program Name(s)</i>   | <i>Goals</i>  | <i>Language of Instruction</i>         | <i>Participants</i>  | <i>Grades</i>                                  | <i>Typical Length of Participation</i>             | <i>Implementation Features</i>   |
| Newcomer Program         | English proficiency<br>Integration into mainstream American culture | English (Some programs use <b>L1</b> ) | No or very limited English<br>Low literacy level<br>Recent arrivals<br>Varied <b>L1</b> and cultural backgrounds | K-12;<br>Many at middle and high school levels | 1-3 <b>semesters</b> plus ongoing language support | Provides courses to supplement or replace the regular ESL or bilingual program<br>Includes intensive attention to orientation to the school and community as well as language and literacy development |

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# Research-Based Program Models for English Learners

| <b>Program Name(s)</b>   | <b>Goals</b>  | <b>Language of Instruction</b> | <b>Participants</b>   | <b>Grades</b>                               | <b>Typical Length of Participation</b>             | <b>Implementation Features</b>  |
|--|---|--------------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| <b>Newcomer Programs</b>   |   |                                |   |   |  |   |
| Newcomer Program   | English proficiency; Integration into mainstream American culture             | English (Some programs use L1) | No or very limited English; Low literacy level; Recent arrivals; Varied L1 and cultural backgrounds | K-12; Many at middle and high school levels | 1-3 <b>semesters</b> plus ongoing language support | Provide courses to supplement or replace the regular ESL or bilingual program; Includes intensive attention to orientation to the school and community as well as language and literacy development |
| <b>English Only Program Models</b>   |   |                                |   |   |  |   |
| English as a second language (ESL)<br><br>Also known as English Language Development (ELD) | English proficiency; Integration into mainstream American culture             | English                        | ELs with various levels of English proficiency and varied L1 and cultural backgrounds               | K-12  | 1-3 years  | Students are served in:<br>1) separate ESL classes or<br>2) mainstream classrooms with ESL instructional support provided in the classroom.<br><br>Both options require a trained ESL teacher.      |
| Sheltered English instruction <b>or</b> Structured English immersion (SEI)                 | Proficiency in academic English; Integration into mainstream American culture | English                        | ELs with various levels of English proficiency and varied L1 and cultural backgrounds               | K-12  | 1-3 years  | Language of instruction is English, adapted to students' English proficiency level by teachers trained in sheltered instruction. L1 support may be provided separately.                             |

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Rivera  
May 2010

| Program Name(s)   | Goals  | Language of Instruction                      | Participants   | Grades               | Typical Length of Participation | Implementation Features   |
|---|--|--|--|----------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>Bilingual Program Models</b>   |  |  |  |                      |                                 |   |
| Two-way bilingual<br><br>Two-way Immersion<br><br>Dual language<br><br>Dual immersion | Developing proficiency in two languages simultaneously;<br>Integration into mainstream American culture and appreciation of ELs' home cultures | Both English & students' first language (L1) | ELs (with the same L1) & varied cultural backgrounds <b>and</b> students whose first language is English | K-12                 | 5-12 years                      | Program structure varies. Students from both language groups are integrated for academic content instruction through both English and L1.<br><br>At least 50% of all instruction is provided in the L1 at all grade levels. |
| Developmental Bilingual Program<br><br>Also known as late-exit or Maintenance model   | Developing proficiency in two languages simultaneously;<br>Integration into mainstream American culture and appreciation of ELs' home cultures | Both English & students' first language (L1) | ELs with the same L1; varied cultural backgrounds  | Primarily elementary | 5-6 years                       | Program structure varies. Late-exit model: students receive some native language instruction throughout elementary school.  |
| Transitional Bilingual Program<br><br>Also known as early-exit                        | English proficiency;<br>Integration into mainstream American culture   | Both English & students' first language (L1) | ELs with the same L1; varied cultural backgrounds  | Primarily elementary | 1-3 years                       | Program structure varies. Students are taught primarily in L1 and then transition to English.<br>Early-exit model: transition to mainstream classes takes place within the first 3 years.                                   |

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### **RESEARCH REFERENCES FOR THESE REPORTS**

The research reviewed for this report did not recommend one particular program model over another for ELs at particular grades or English proficiency levels. Overall, research showed either equal or improved levels of performance in English for ELs who participated in bilingual programs as compared to ELs in English-only programs.

Baker & de Kantner (1981), and Rossell and Baker (1996) found that instruction delivered with some degree of first language (**L1**) use was no more successful at improving ELs' outcomes than English-only instructional programs.

Slavin and Chung (2005) reviewed 17 studies comparing bilingual and English-only reading programs for ELs and found that despite the small number of high-quality studies, evidence favored bilingual approaches, especially paired bilingual strategies that teach reading in **L1** and English at different times each day.

Genesee and Riches (2006) looked at 14 studies examining the short-, medium-, and long-term impact of **L1** instruction on reading. They reported that long term, ELs who receive some reading instruction in **L1** in the primary grades equal or out-perform in **L2** reading ELs of similar linguistic and cultural background who received literacy and academic instruction in English only. Several studies noted that it takes a number of years for ELs to catch up to their English-speaking peers; but the studies found little to no support for the argument from opponents of bilingual education that time spent learning **L1** detracts from the acquisition of **L2**.

Francis, Lesaux, and August (2006) reviewed 20 studies comparing English-only and bilingual reading programs with measures of reading in English as the outcome. While some studies were found to have weaknesses, the authors concluded that bilingual education has a small to moderate positive effect on English reading outcomes. As for ELs experiencing reading difficulties, one study found dramatically higher achievement gains for children transitioned over a 3-year period from Spanish to English than for those taught only in English. Overall, for students in both elementary and second grades, studies showed "no negative effects and, in many cases, positive effects of bilingual approaches to instruction" (p. 398)\*. The authors stated that it is difficult to distinguish which elements of bilingual instruction (e.g., amount of first language instruction, transition time to English) are more effective than others. Tivnan and Hemphill (2005) found that the level of implementation and the quality of instruction influence outcomes.

Some research reviews focused on the transfer of language skills from **L1** to **L2**. Restrepo and Gray (2007) found that phonemic awareness skills transfer more easily if **L1** and **L2** have similar alphabets, roots, orthography, and phonemes. They also found that **L1** reading comprehension skills enhance reading skills in **L2**.

Some reviews expressed concern about transition from bilingual instruction to mainstream English classrooms. De la Rosa and Maw (1990); Gersten and Woodward (1995); and Natriello, McDill, and Pallas (1990) found that ease of transition depends on students' skill level in both English and **L1**. ELs often show decreased academic outcomes during the transition year. Difficulties are most pronounced when transition occurs during middle and high school grades. ELs need continued assistance in **L1** and further support in English language development from their mainstream class teachers. Students in the secondary grades particularly need to transfer and further develop **L1** academic language and literacy in English.

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### ***RESEARCH REFERENCES FOR THESE REPORTS continued***

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