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Sunny Park
Trinity College

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Teaching English to English Language Learners

in 1960s and Today

Sunny Park

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Introduction:

According to the “Education in the United States: A brief overview”, a publication made by the U.S. Department of Education in September 2005, there are “approximately five million non-English speaking or limited English proficient (LEP) students who attend U.S. public schools” and they speak over 400 different languages. Among those 400 different languages, Spanish is the most popular language that 80 percent of the LEP students speak.¹ Approximately five million students in U.S. public schools struggle in academics because of their limited English skills. Even though English as a Second Language (ESL) class exists to help LEP students these days, it was not created until 1950s. LEP students who were mostly immigrant students at that time before 1950s were placed into English-only classes. Placing LEP students into English-only classes caused a large number of drop-outs of immigrant students. Some students were misdiagnosed as students with disabilities and sent to special education classrooms. To decrease the drop-out rates of immigrant students and to help LEP students academically, ESL classes were designed. The purposes of ESL classes were not only to help LEP students with English but also to improve immigrant students’ achievements on academics. Although ESL classes were originally designed for children of immigrants, as the world globalizes, ESL classes were also offered to international students these days.

There were two contrasting opinions on ESL classes since the ESL classes were created. Some believed that ESL classes were helpful not only for LEP students’ academic achievements, but also for LEP students to adjust into the society. On the other hand, the others argued that English skills of LEP students were not improving because

¹ U.S. Department of Education (2005). Education in the United States: A brief overview. p 20.

of the ESL classes. They said that LEP students relied on ESL classes, where students could use their first language, and did not try hard enough to learn English:

“Today’s immigrants refuse to learn English, unlike the good old immigrants of yesteryear (flattery for Euro-ethnics), and are discouraged from doing so by government-sponsored bilingual programs.

Language are best learned in a situation that forces one to do so—where there’s no escape from brutal necessity—unlike the situation in a bilingual classroom (reflexive appeal for ‘social issue’ conservatives).”²

Those who were not fond of ESL programs supported English-only movement in mid-1980s. They believed that forcing LEP students to use English helps them learn English better because students do not have a choice, but to speak English in English-only classrooms. The debate on the efficiency of ESL programs exists even in today. Although the views on ESL programs are different, both support helping LEP students to fit into the society.

As it is mentioned above, the purpose of ESL program is not only to teach English to LEP student but also to help them perform better in academics. As the population of LEP students increase and diversify every year, I thought that the goals and curriculums of ESL program have to modify to accomplish the purpose of ESL program. Comparing from late 1960s to 1970s and today’s ESL classes, how did the goals and curriculums of ESL classes changed?

Comparing documents from late 1960s to 1970s and today, the goals of ESL programs, which were to help not only LEP students’ English skills but also academic performances, did not change. The curriculums for LEP students did not significantly

² James, C. (2000). *At War with Diversity : U.S. Language Policy in an Age of Anxiety*. Clevedon, U.K.: Multilingual Matters Limited. p6.

change, because the transition from the first language of students to the second language of students was planned by gradually increasing the amount of English that were exposed to students during the classes in both late 1960s and today. Although the level of emphases on multiculturalism and bilingualism seemed to change, multiculturalism and bilingualism were considered as important factors in the United States where varied of racial and ethnic groups live.

Even though the ESL program started in 1950s, I decided to compare late 1960s and today. Since ESL programs were first introduced to the schools in 1950s, I considered that it would be a “trial period” until the late 1960s. Furthermore, ESL programs were enriched in 1968 when the Bilingual Education Act (Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) was passed. Therefore, my research was focused on late 1960s and 1970s, when the ESL programs were affected and organized by federal laws. The endeavor to develop ESL programs that could be more efficient to LEP students never ended. In 2002, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which also affected the funds and organization of ESL program and bilingual/bicultural program, was passed. It is significant to compare ESL programs in late 1960s to today, because it is not only possible to see the changes of ESL programs’ goals and curriculums, but also the change of the government views on the issue. Moreover, the comparison of past and present is crucial to upgrade the ESL programs, because without noticing the downfalls or advantages of the programs, it is not possible to take it to the next level.

My research focuses on the ESL programs in 1960s and today; therefore, it would be important for those who wish to study on the history of ESL programs. Since the research only focuses on documents and scholarly journals, it would be interesting to see

the benefits and downfalls of the ESL program in real classroom for the future study. I also realized that there were a number of different terms that were used to describe non-English speaking student. It would be interesting to research on how and why did the terminologies changed overtime.

Terminology:

English as a Second Language (ESL):

An educational program that teaches English to students who are not native English speakers³

Bilingual students:

An individual with a language background other than English who has developed proficiency in his or her primary language and enough proficiency in English not to be disadvantaged in an English-only school environment⁴

Limited English Proficiency (LEP):

An individual who comes from a home in which the language used for communication is not English. The individual also has sufficient difficulty in speaking, reading, understanding, or writing in English⁵

English Language Learners (ELL):

Learners who are beginning to learn English as a new language or have already gained some proficiency in English⁶

³ Freiberg, C. (1997). *Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students*. Madison, WI: Department of Public Instruction.

⁴ August, D., & Hakuta, K. (Eds.). (1998). *Educating language-minority children*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

⁵ Gopaul-McNicol, S., & Thomas-Presswood, T. (1998). *Working with linguistically and culturally different children: Innovative clinical and educational approaches*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Language-minority students:

Individuals from homes where a language other than English is actively used, who therefore have an opportunity to develop some level of proficiency in a language other than English. A language-minority student may be of limited English proficiency, bilingual, or primarily monolingual in English⁷

Methodology:

I decided to do historical research to answer the research question. Based on Professor Jack Dougherty and Librarian Katy Hart's "Research Guide for Ed 300: Education Reform Past & Present," I visited JStor, which is one of the Trinity Online Resources (TOR) that contains scholarly journals of academic disciplines in the past few decades. I collected the data on reviews of ESL program and writings of ESL teachers that were written in late 1960s and 1970s, when were the early period of the ESL classes. These data contained the class schedules, guide lines for those how wanted to become ESL teacher, and reviews of scholarly education journals on ESL program and bilingual program in late 1960s and 1970s. These were used as primary sources of the research on goals and curriculums of late 1960s and 1970s.

For the comparison, I also collected the data on today's ESL classes. I searched for writings of teachers on different curriculums and for reviews of educational researchers on today's ESL programs. In addition, I was possible to find the scholarly journals that were continuously published in these days. Therefore, I used these sources as primary sources to compare with the past documents. I also visited U.S. Department

⁶ North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) (1995). Terminology [Online]. Available: <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/content/cntareas/math/ma7term.htm>

⁷ August, D., & Hakuta, K. (Eds.). (1998). *Educating language-minority children*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

of Education website to get information on the education laws for immigrant students. Under U.S. Department of Education, there was the Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students (OELA). On the OELA website, it was possible to get general information on English Language Learners (ELL) in the U.S., goals of the programs for ELL, and the program plans. Although No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act affected the formation of ESL classes, it is not directly related to my research question, I considered documents of NCLB as the secondary sources. For addition secondary resources, I found articles and research papers on ESL classes through ERIC, which is also one of TOR.

Analysis and Interpretation of Evidence:

In late 1950s, the ESL programs were first introduced to the school system to decrease the drop-out rates of LEP students. Yet, it was late 1960s when the ESL programs were protected under the federal government. In 1968, Bilingual Education Act, which is also called as Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, was passed. Bilingual Education Act affected the goals of ESL programs to focus only on teaching English skills but also on subject learning for the equal education:

“[Bilingual programs] help the child acquire basic skills and knowledge in subjects...rather than wait for the child to achieve language proficiency before exposing him to new learning. Before, the child waited to develop proficiency in the English language, and in the process, became retarded among his peer group. English is taught concurrently with the domestic language, and faster and more effective learning of English results whenever the domestic language is considered as asset rather than a liability.”⁸

⁸ Guerra, M.H. (1973). Bilingual and bicultural education. Cultural pluralism in education: A mandate for change. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 31.

In addition, bilingual program also encouraged students to maintain their language skills of mother tongue along with the new language (e.g. English) instead of putting their first language behind. Valencia (1969) also supported the bilingual education and said that “The type of bilingual program, the instructional strategies in the instructional scheme, and the types of materials to use must be relevant to the level of Spanish or English comprehension and usage. It is conceivable that thinking, reasoning, recalling, and other cognitive processes can be developed through the media of one or both languages.”⁹ Although the article was written in late 1960s, it was possible to find similar phrase of supporting bilingual education that are written in 2001. Valdes (2001) said that “programs designed for English-language learners, in theory, must ensure that students either “keep up” with age-appropriate academic content while they are learning English, or if they are instructed exclusively in English as a second language for a period of time, that they are given the means to “catch up” with the academic content covered by their same-age peers. It is especially important that, in either case, ELL learners do not incur irreparable deficits in subject-matter learning.”¹⁰ In both writings, they support bilingual education for the same reason, which is to help LEP students with English skills and academic achievements. Even though one was published in late 1960s and the other was published in these days, the purpose of bilingual education did not differ from one another.

Not only the goals of the ESL programs but also the guild lines for teacher were similar. In 1970, The English Journal published an article on “National Council of

⁹ Valencia, A.A. (1969). Bilingual/bicultural education: A prospective model in multicultural America. *TESOL Quarterly*, 3(4), 322.

¹⁰ Valdes, G. (2001). *Learning and not learning English: Latino students in American schools*. New York: Teachers College Press, 14.

Teachers of English (NCTE) / Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) summaries & sources: Bilingual education.” The article reported that “teachers must be alert to the differences in language, values, customs, and the cultural heritage of their students. They must understand their students’ feelings, attitudes, and emotional responses.”¹¹ The report emphasized on how teachers should consider students’ backgrounds and should try to understand the students. Valdes (2001) also mentioned how school should plan to create friendly environment for the ELL students: “to make good decisions about how best to educate English-language learners, school personnel must also be concerned about teacher expectations, classroom traditions, new standards, and statewide achievement testing in a political climate that has become increasingly hostile to immigrants.”¹² Both report in 1970 and today addressed the importance of building friendly environment for ELL students and growing the intimacy between students and the school.

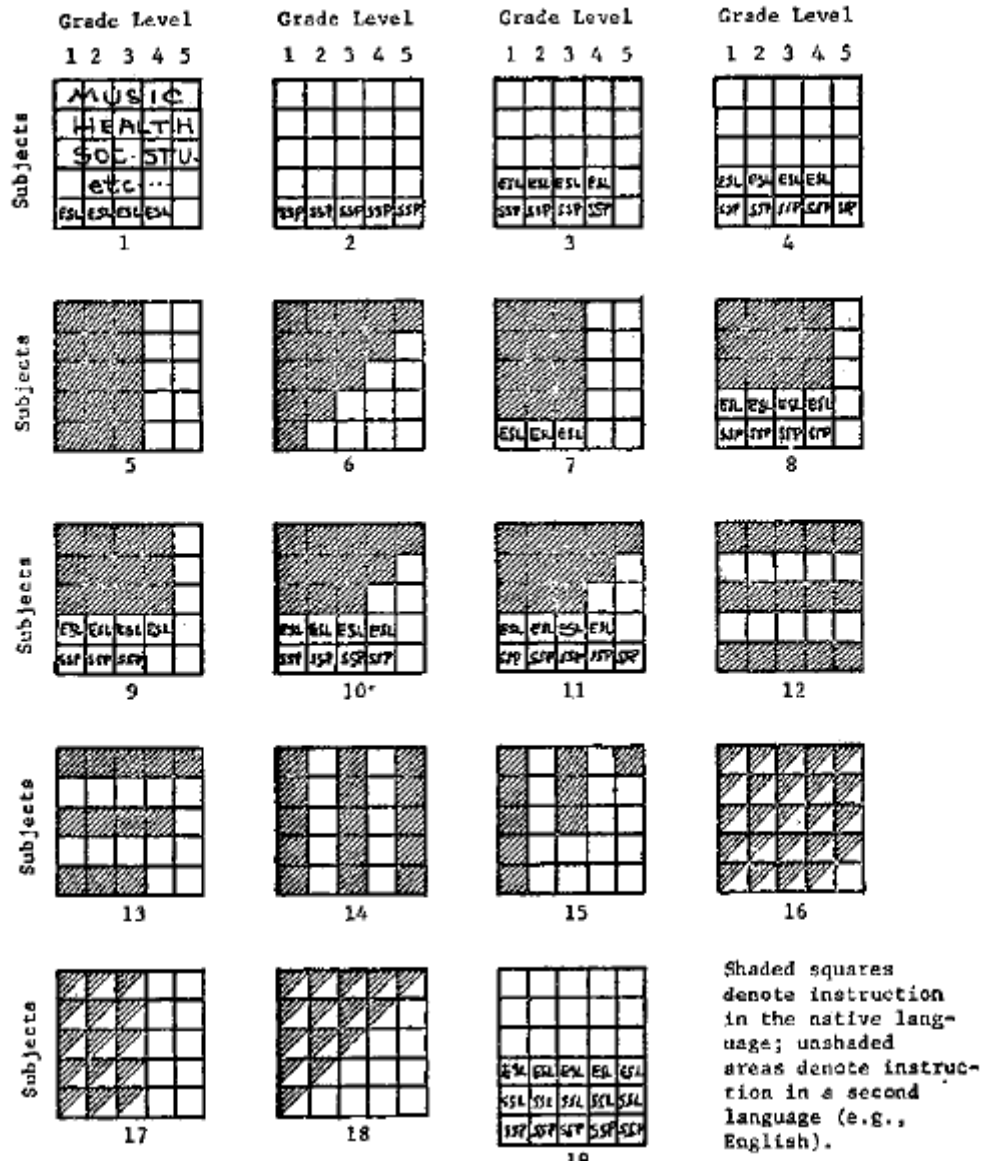
The curriculum models for ESL programs were also similar. The curriculum models were built on the transition from students’ first language to the second language (e.g. English). Figure 1 is the curriculum model of bilingual classes of 1968. In figure 1, there are 19 models and the horizontal axis represents the grade level and the vertical axis represents the subject. In addition, un-shaded boxes stand for lessons taught in second language (e.g. English) and shaded boxes are for lessons that are taught in first language of the students. The first four models of the figure 1 suggest teaching all lessons in

¹¹ Malkoc, A.M. and Roberts, A.H. (1970). “NCTE/ERIC summaries & sources: Bilingual education: A special report from CATE/ERIC.” *The English Journal* 59 (5), 722.

¹² Valdes, G. (2001). *Learning and not learning English: Latino students in American schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

English. Yet, model 1 is focused on subjects that do not require English proficiency such as music, health, and social studies. In addition, ESL classes were taught at the end of the classes to help them. Table 1 is another curriculum model that is suggested by Crawford (1989). As the models of 1968, non-English proficient students are placed in English-only classes for the subjects that do not require English skills such as, arts, music, and physical education. Moreover, ESL classes are also offered the model of 1989. Both models that are created in 1968 and in 1989 present curriculum plans that mainly focus on the transition from second language to the first language by increasing the amount of English that ELL were exposed to.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION MODELS



ESL: English as a Second Language
 SSL: Spanish as a Second Language
 SSP: Spanish for Spanish-Speaking Children

Figure 1. Bilingual Education Models¹³

¹³ Valencia, A.A. (1969). Bilingual/bicultural education: A prospective model in multicultural America. *TESOL Quarterly*, 3(4), 324.

The Case-Studies Curriculum Model

Phase	Spanish	Sheltered English	Mainstream English
I. Non-English-Proficient (K-grade 1)* (SOLOM 5-11)	Language Arts Mathematics Science/Health Social Studies	ESL	Art Music Physical Education
II. Limited-English-Proficient (grades 2-3)* (SOLOM 12-18)	Language Arts Social Studies	ESL Mathematics Science/Health	Art Music Physical Education
III. Limited-English-Proficient (grades 3-4)* (SOLOM 19-25)	Language Arts	Transitional Language Arts Social Studies	Art Music Physical Education Mathematics Science/Health
IV. Fully-English Proficient (grades 4-6)* (SOLOM 25+)	Language Arts (extended Spanish activities)		Art Music Physical Education Mathematics Science/Health Social Studies Language Arts

*Typical grade level for each phase

Table 1. *The Case-Studies Curriculum Model (1989)*¹⁴

Conclusion and Implications:

Comparing documents of late 1960s to 1970s from today's reports, the ESL programs for ELL students did not change significantly. The goals to help ELL students not only on English skills but also on academics remained the same in late 1960s and in these days. In addition, the guild-lines for teachers to consider students' background and understand students' feelings to create the intimacy between students and the school existed in both documents of late 1960s and today. Furthermore, the curriculum models of the ESL program were almost identical. Especially the idea of placing ELL students into English-only classes that did not require high level of English skills, such as arts,

¹⁴ Crawford, J. (1989). *Bilingual education: History, politics, theory, and practice*. New Jersey: Crane Publishing Company, Inc., 133.

music, and physical education, was the common factor that I recognized from both documents of late 1960s and today. In that way, ELL students are exposed to their second language—English—and not fall behind in academics. The curriculum models had smooth transitions.

I was surprised to see how ESL programs of 1960s and those of today were extremely similar. Yet, why did the goal of ESL programs remain the same? Is it because those goals were not reached in the past? Did the curriculum models work in real classrooms? Did the transition curriculum help ELL students' academic achievement? For the future study, it would be interesting to see assessments of ELL students in ESL programs to observe how the ESL programs affected ELL students.

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