Mainstream First-Grade Teachers' Understanding of Strategies for Accommodating the Needs of English Language Learners

By Clare E. Hite & Linda S. Evans

In this time of high stakes testing, teachers' work with English Language Learners (ELLs) becomes itself a high-stakes teaching act. Nationally, mandated testing is increasing in the schools even as school demographics are changing. The growing numbers of language-minority students come with varying levels of English proficiency, from little or none to fluent bilingualism. Teachers find it difficult to bring all their native-English-speaking children along to an acceptable level of performance in literacy and content-area subjects; ELLs present an even greater challenge, particularly for the elementary main-stream classroom teachers who are the primary language teachers for most young ELLs, yet typically have little training in ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) methods. A National Center for Education Statistics survey found that only 29.5% of teachers of ELLs (including those teaching ESOL or bilingual classes) have any related training (NCES, 1997). It is important to note that "training" in this

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survey could have been as minimal as a single afternoon in-service on cultural differences.

What do teachers understand about how to assist ELLs in gaining language, literacy, and content knowledge? The answer to this question is particularly important in Florida, which mandates specific training for teachers working with ELLs. In 1990, Florida radically changed the way it addressed the needs of ELL students as a result of a consent decree between the Florida Board of Education and a group of eight plaintiff groups represented by Multicultural Education, Training and Advocacy (META), a law firm from San Francisco (Ariza, Morales-Jones, Yahya, & Zainuddin, 2002). The consent decree assured, among other things, that school districts would provide ELLs equal access to education by addressing six areas: identification and assessment, equal access to appropriate programming, equal access to appropriate categorical and other programs, personnel, monitoring, and outcome measures (Evans, 1997). The present study addresses two of these areas: personnel and equal access to appropriate programming.

The consent decree required that teachers with ELLs and responsibility for language arts/English instruction either demonstrate they had successfully taught ELLs before 1990 or complete 300 hours of district training or five college courses to earn an ESOL endorsement. This training or coursework aims to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to employ instructional strategies for delivering basic subject areas and basic ESOL instruction, thus allowing these students better access to curricula (Ariza, et al., 2002).

This qualitative study explores how 22 teachers at one grade level perceived the use of these instructional strategies. Recognizing that first grade is a critical year in children's language and literacy development, we chose to focus on that grade.

Theoretical Support

We grounded our investigation in the research on second language acquisition (SLA), particularly those theories most relevant to classroom teachers who are not explicitly teaching a second language in the manner of ESL teachers but, rather, focusing on both academic content and language in addition to conversational language (Gibbons, 2002).

Input-Interaction-Output (IIO) Model

Linguists have proposed several theories of SLA, particularly during the last half of the 20th century. To ground our study, we turn to a broad theory known as Input-Interaction-Output (IIO) (Block, 2003). Among the several extant versions of the model, Gass's (1988, 1997) version (apperceived input, comprehended input, intake, integration, and output) is the most developed. This theory seems to us particularly appropriate for explaining SLA in mainstream classrooms where

teachers are not so much trying to directly teach a second language (L2) as to facilitate SLA while also teaching content.

Input, the target language available to the learner, is considered the most important factor in SLA (Gass,1997). Krashen (1985) emphasizes the importance of "comprehensible input," the language that the learner is able to comprehend. He contends that students learn in stages that require the more capable speaker of the target language to provide input just beyond the learner's current level (Ellis, 1994; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). Comprehensible input alone, however, does not guarantee learners will always attend as learners exhibit input preferences, choosing to attend, or not attend, to input based on perceived value or need (Beebe, 1985).

In the intake stage, the learner must process comprehended input and match it against existing knowledge and then integrate the input, either storing it for future reference or using it for immediate production—output. While output was once seen as the result of learning some aspect of language, the current view is that it actually assists language learning in four possible ways: testing hypotheses about the structures and meanings of the L2; receiving feedback for verification or rejection of these hypotheses; developing automaticity in interlanguage production; and forcing a shift from meaning-based processing to a focus on syntax (Gass, 1997, pp. 139-140). It is "comprehensible output, the learner's attempt to make himself/herself understood, that leads to language growth"(Swain, 1985).

The Affective Filter and Acquisition-Learning Hypotheses

In addition to the notion of comprehensible input, two other contributions of Krashen's Monitor Model of SLA inform our study: the Affective Filter and Acquisition-Learning Hypotheses. Recognizing that Krashen's Monitor Model has been heavily criticized (cf. Barasch & James, 1994; Gass, 1997; Gass & Selinker, 1994; White, 1987), we nevertheless see a relationship between these two hypotheses and SLA in mainstream classrooms. The affective filter hypothesis refers to emotional and mental blocks that can impede a language learner. If the filter is up, input is prevented from getting through. The appeal of this notion is due, in part, to the confidence that mainstream teachers have in their ability to lower their students' affective filters. While they may not feel they are experts in teaching a second language, they do recognize their ability to create a non-threatening environment for L2 students.

Krashen (1985) also distinguishes learning a second language from acquiring a language. He views *learning* a second language as focusing on the rules so as to use the language. *Acquisition*, on the other hand, is a process that occurs unconsciously in situations in which language is used for real communication similar to how first languages are acquired. This is the unconscious "picking up" of a language. Viewing second languages as acquired in situations with real needs to communicate supports mainstream teachers who, with wide responsibility for many subjects and learners, cannot systematically teach an L2. What they can do,

however, is ensure that ELLs participate in tasks and activities with authentic purposes requiring communication.

Acculturation Theory

Schumann (1983) proposes that a learner is successful at acquiring an L2 to the degree that he or she acculturates into the target language culture. The modification of attitudes, knowledge, and behavior toward those of the target culture, acculturation is determined by the degree of distance between the learner and members of the target language group. This distance can be that between social groups, which affects opportunity for interaction, or it can be psychological in nature – such as experiences of cultural shock or motivation to learn. The context for learning the target language (in this study, the classroom) must attempt to reduce social and psychological distances to provide more opportunity for input, interaction, and output.

Acculturation theory suggests that ELLs will progress faster in the L2 when they are treated, and begin to see themselves, as part of the target language group. In examining differential rates of L2 acquisition among children, Wong-Fillmore (1979) concluded they were largely based on motivation to identify with people who spoke English. Reducing both the social and psychological distances will also lower the affective filter, resulting in increased intake of the comprehended input.

Having a high need for peer acceptance and approval, children seek interaction with their classmates on the playground, in the cafeteria, and in the classroom. English language learners must also have comprehensible input that they perceive as needed, opportunities to integrate the input into their developing language systems, and opportunities for output in situations requiring authentic communication.

Related Literature on Effective Teaching of ELL Students

Much of the related research on effective instruction for English language learners focuses on bilingual or structured-immersion, rather than mainstream, classrooms. Nevertheless, some of the findings seem to have bearing on the present study. A review of research on effective programs, for example, found six general characteristics: high expectations, active use of language integrated with subject matter development, concept development supported in L1, comprehensive staff development for faculty and staff, supportive school environments, and active support from school leaders (Samway & McKeon, 1999).

The importance of talk to language learning is well-established (Bruner, 1978; Ellis, 1994; Swain, 1995). High levels of teacher-student and student-student interaction are important for ELLs in bilingual and ESL classes; and where teachers adjust their language, students show greater improvement than in situations where the teachers do not adjust (Garcia, 2002; Wong-Fillmore, Ammon, McLaughlin, & Ammon, 1985). Groupwork increases opportunities for ELLs to use, and therefore learn about, language (McGroarty, 1993).

Effective teachers in bilingual classrooms spend higher amounts of time on academic learning, include the use of two languages for instruction, integrate language with content learning, clearly specify task outcomes, and use "active teaching" behaviors (pacing instruction, promoting involvement, and providing immediate feedback). Further, effective teachers incorporate aspects of the home cultures in instruction and in communication with, and involvement of, families (Tikunoff, 1983). Effective teachers of ELLs in non-bilingual settings support the students' use of their native language in learning and concept development, even when the teachers do not know that language (Samway & McKeon, 1999; Tikunoff, Ward, & van Broekhuizen, 1991). They also value and use in instruction the "funds of knowledge" ELLs may bring to the classroom (Moll & Gonzalez, 1994).

Very little research is available investigating either the use or effectiveness of accommodation strategies of mainstream classroom teachers working with ELLs. We identified four pertinent studies. Truscott and Watts-Taffe (1998) used an observation instrument developed from their model of best practice in literacy instruction for ELLs to observe four fourth- and fifth-grade teachers. They found evidence of use of schema-building, adjusting speech, giving clear directions, and holding high expectations but no use of students' culture or language, scaffolding vocabulary, emphasizing comprehension, or employing effective collaborative groups. In general, students were more often the recipients of the teachers' language rather than users of language. Penfield (1987) surveyed K-12 teachers with no training in ESL, finding they had difficulty helping these students adjust socially and academically and lacked understanding of how second languages are acquired. In a case study of three regular classroom teachers, Clair (1993) reached similar conclusions to Penfield's. In addition, she noted the tendency of the teachers to want a "quick fix" to the problems of working with ELLs.

Based on two years of observing teachers working with students transitioning from bilingual programs, Gersten (1996) developed a framework for conceptualizing effective literacy instruction for language-minority students. Effective teachers provide challenge, involve students, make efforts to ensure student success, scaffold instruction carefully, mediate student language, and provide feedback. Their classrooms respect personal and cultural diversity and provide students opportunities to engage in extended discourse in English.

Focusing specifically on mainstream classrooms, Gibbons (2002) described how good teaching for ELLs includes opportunities to learn and employ conversational language while simultaneously learning academic concepts and language. Such an approach assists students to learn language without risking their falling behind their English-proficient (EP) peers in content learning.

In summary, the research on effective teaching of ELL students, although usually situated within ESOL or bilingual classrooms rather than in mainstream classrooms, reveals features appropriate for all learners: maintaining high expectations, scaffolding learning, building vocabulary and background, using active

learning strategies; and providing opportunities for student interaction. Actions of effective teachers that are more specific to ELLs include using, or allowing students to use, native languages; incorporating home cultures in teaching; adjusting teacher's language; linking language learning with content learning; and providing students with opportunities to engage in discourse by such means as cooperative grouping.

Research Design

This qualitative study used surveys and interviews of practicing first-grade teachers to answer the following question: What strategies do first-grade teachers report using with the English language learners in their classes?

Participants

Participants for the study were drawn from 10 Title I elementary schools in a large Florida district with approximately 182,000 students in grades PK-12. Ethnic breakdowns included just under half (84,457) White/Non-Hispanic, slightly more (85,131) almost evenly divided into Black Non-Hispanic and Hispanic, and the remaining students reported as Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, or multiracial. Approximately 19,000 students had a primary language other than English, and 87,000 students received reduced-price or free lunches (Florida Department of Education, 2003).

We selected schools in both urban and rural settings, with ELL populations of 15% or greater. After receiving district approval, we contacted the school principals to request their teachers' participation. With one exception, the principals agreed. We held meetings in eight of the remaining nine schools to explain the study to the teachers and invite participation. In one school, the principal believed it important to involve all her first-grade teachers and required their participation, while in the other schools, one or more teachers declined to participate. We did not contact the tenth school as we determined we had sufficient participants. Twenty-two first-grade female teachers completed an initial survey, and 19 of them completed follow-up interviews, one having left on maternity leave and the other two being unavailable to interview in the allotted time. All participants hold Florida teaching certification for grades K-6. Table 1 shows additional data on teaching experience, including with ELL students, and on ESOL training.

Procedure

Participants completed a written survey (Appendix) designed to elicit general information about their experience, the languages spoken by their students, the physical classroom arrangement, and general instructional delivery. The second part of the survey contained three open-ended questions about how the teachers adjusted their teaching for English language learners, whether or not they created

Table 1
ESOL Training and Teaching Experience of Participants

Participant	ESOL Training*	Years of Teaching	Years of Teaching ELLs	Average # of ELLs per year
Annie	240 IS Hrs.	6	6	12
Carol	GR + 60 IS Hrs.	31	15	13
Cora	300 IS Hrs.	4	4	10
Courtney	180 IS Hrs.	2	2	15
Denise	GR + 60 IS Hrs.	38	25	10
Diana	300 IS Hrs.	4	4	1
Jenny	300 IS Hrs.	11	11	10
Judy	300 IS Hrs.	21	21	2
Kathy	300 IS Hrs.	9	7	3.5
Linda	GR	32	20	2.5
Maggie	GR + 60 IS Hrs.	43	12	18
Marie	300 IS Hrs.	12	12	3.5
Marsha	GR + 60 IS Hrs.	41	39	11
Melody	240 IS Hrs.	10	3	17
Missy	5 Courses	2.5	2	15
Mona	120 IS Hrs & 3 Cour.	4	4	12
Rona	240 IS Hours	9	3	6
Tanya	300 IS Hrs.	5	5	8
Terri	120 IS Hrs.	7	5	15
		mean = 15.34	mean = 10.53	mean = 9.91

* Note: Participants received training through either school district inservice (IS) or college credit courses or a combination of the two. Others were grandfathered (GR) in.

their own materials, and what strategies or concepts related to these students would be most beneficial for pre-service teachers to acquire.

In follow-up semi-structured interviews, we probed the participants on their responses to the open-ended survey questions. For example, after a participant commented that she had been told not to use Spanish with ELLs, we asked why she thought that advice had been given. We also asked three additional questions on the use of peers as tutors or "teacher assistants" for ELLs: (1) Do the English-speaking children in your class assist the second-language learners? If so, how do they do it? (2) If children assist one another, are the pairings spontaneous, teacher-directed, or both? Please describe a common scenario. (3) If you use teacher-directed pairings, how do you decide which children to pair? What are your criteria?

Analysis

We individually read the transcribed audiotaped interviews and the written responses to the open-ended questions several times to gain a general sense of the

data (Cresswell, 1998). We then individually developed preliminary categories using an inductive approach to delineate distinct and internally consistent categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). We met to discuss and consolidate categories, resulting in a list of 12 possible categories. Next, we arranged the data into meaningful units as recommended by Hycner (1985). We coded the unitized data by placing those that fit into the preliminary categories. As new points were made that did not fit a previously identified category, a new category was added. When categories contained few items, we reassessed them for viability, either collapsing them with a closely related category or discarding them as being non-representative. An example of a category collapsed into another was *Teacher Use of Students' L1,* which was combined with the category, *Students Offering Help in Native Language*. These two became part of the final category, *Use of Native Language*.

Findings and Discussion

Six categories emerged from the data: adjustment of teaching approach, modifications issues, parent interactions, affect and classroom philosophy, peers as teachers, and use of L1.

Adjustment of Teaching Approach
To Meet English Language Learners' Needs

All participants provided examples of ways they adjusted to make their lessons more comprehensible to their ELLs. Marie (all names are pseudonyms) reflected many of the teachers' thoughts: "I believe first grade instruction is set up very similar to ESOL strategies . . . ." Teachers cited a number of common strategies that they used consistently: *visuals, manipulatives, repetition, and simplification of speech*. Visuals included pictures, word/picture cards, graphic organizers, computers, books, videos, drawing or writing on the board, and body language, including gestures and role playing. Manipulatives were used for both math and language arts instruction. Simplification of speech consisted of slowing down the pace of speaking, using simpler terms, and reinforcing the spoken word by writing on the board.

Other teachers stressed *the need to watch their own use of idioms or to be aware of figurative language* in the materials they used. Judy recounted a story about the use of the book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* in her class. In one part of the book, the grandfather says to Charlie, "You must be pulling my leg. You didn't find the golden ticket." The students in the class laughed, but Miguel, one of her ELLs, looked around with some confusion, finally starting to laugh along with his peers. Judy was quite sure he had not understood what had amused the other students. This experience reaffirmed for her the difficulty ELLs have in understanding idiomatic and figurative language.

Participants often mentioned the *importance of modeling* as essential in the instruction of ELLs. Initial demonstration of concepts either by the teacher or by

students was frequently given as a basic instructional tool to enhance understanding. Attention to the learning styles of the students was often mentioned for why concepts should be modeled in different ways.

Attention to the cultural backgrounds of the students was highlighted. One teacher attempted to start her lessons with examples to which her particular population of students could relate, believing this allowed students to anchor the concept with something that was familiar and from which to build. As Jenny shared, "I started it [the lesson on fruits and vegetables] by bringing in yucca, chayote, and plantains."

Teachers also *adjusted their approach to assessment* for their English language learners, as evidenced in Melody's example:

> A lot of times I have to test them orally on a concept because even though they may understand it, they cannot tell me or they may not be able to write it down. Sometimes I have them tell another student in Spanish and then that kid can tell me what they are saying.

Finally, teachers emphasized the need to *avoid making assumptions about what students know about a given topic*. They took the approach of assuming students would not be familiar with the language of the lesson or the content, preparing their lessons to build both vocabulary and background knowledge.

These participants evidenced a high level of understanding of the importance of making input comprehensible and of ways to do just that. We speculated that their training might have heavily emphasized this aspect of teaching English language learners. Of course, we cannot say how effective their attempts were as we did not observe their teaching, but their knowledge level was encouraging and differed from that found by Penfield (1987) who surveyed mainstream teachers about their knowledge of working with ELLs, finding that the teachers revealed they did not know how to help ELLs. Our findings also differ from the conclusions of Clair (1993), who observed three teachers working with ELLs and found them lacking in appropriate strategies.

Issues in Modifications

In addition to modifying instructional approaches to make lessons more comprehensible, participants cited two other aspects of modifications: modification of instructional materials and the reaction of the child to such modifications.

Materials. Materials were modified either by changing them in some way to make them more appropriate or by creating original materials. More than half (eleven) of the teachers indicated that they both modified existing materials and created some of their own materials. Fewer than half (eight) of the participants indicated that they generally used existing materials and either modified their teaching strategies or supplemented lessons with materials such as visuals and manipulatives. No participant specifically mentioned *realia*, although it is possible that their use of "visuals" and examples given (e.g., bringing in actual pumpkins) indicated they, in fact, did use such supplemental materials.

While it may be surprising that some teachers primarily used existing materials with their ELLs, they shared various reasons for doing so. Several discussed the ways that first-grade materials are appropriate for the language development of their ELLs. Kathy explained, "As a primary teacher, a lot of what I do anyway works very well with children who speak another language." Marie summed it up this way: "First grade materials are very ESOL friendly." Others echoed these beliefs, indicating that in their daily teaching they often used many visuals and manipulatives, by far the most often-cited supplementation made to lessons. Examples given of the visuals and manipulatives included reading rods (devices which allow students to manipulate letters and letter combinations to form different words), flashcards, pictures of items in the lesson, big books, and computer programs. While big books and computer programs are not usually considered visuals, the participants considered them to play this role in language development since they frequently contain pictorial material, which, particularly with big books, can support language development.

Seven teachers indicated they created original materials to use with their ELLs, believing their students needed materials that were more stimulating or more appropriate to their level of English proficiency. Picture cards to go along with the lessons were the most often-cited materials created by the teachers. Others included word walls, writing models, manipulatives, journals with real photographs, and original worksheets and center activities. Teachers at one school mentioned pulling a variety of lessons and materials from Internet sites. Several teachers described games that they had created for their students. Missy even sent a game home with the students complete with a Spanish translation of its rules.

An interesting point made by a number of the teachers was that any modifications they made to lessons for the ELLs also benefited their English proficient students. As Judy explained, "Anything hands on works. I go over the vocabulary first…I started reading a story about a circus but first showed a video. For Halloween, I brought in pumpkins and jack-o-lanterns."

Students' reactions to modifications. As we explored the notion of modifying materials, another issue arose in the teachers' explanations of their strategies. Courtney told the story of two ELLs, Patrick and David, whose weekly spelling requirements were reduced to fewer words than the English-proficient students had to spell. She also generally reduced the amount of material required for other lessons in the class. Patrick would finish the required elements of each activity and be satisfied with his work. David, on the other hand, insisted on attempting to do the same work as the more proficient students, often ending up frustrated. The teacher had a conference with David's mother, who confirmed that he insisted on trying to complete all the elements in the homework, ignoring the teacher's directions to do only certain ones.

Sometimes, other students in the class influenced the modifications. Roger was held accountable for only three or four spelling words weekly, with which he was not always successful. Then the teacher paired Roger with another student, April,

described as having a "real spark." Ariel spontaneously joined April in working with Roger. April and Ariel were dissatisfied with his being responsible for only a limited number of the words, so they modified the modification and worked with him on all the words. Roger began receiving perfect scores on the tests.

The extent to which the participants indicated that they modified materials and instruction again reveals an understanding of the importance in SLA of being sure ELLs comprehend input. The use of manipulatives extends that to the integration phase (Gass, 1988, 1997), as it allows students to process the input actively. We share a little concern that participants did not really reveal that they modified instruction in order to elicit more language from the ELLs. It appears they were more focused on input than on opportunities for output on the part of the ELLs. This focus on student as recipient of language rather than producer may be related to the tendency of teachers in general to dominate talk in classrooms. We also reflected that it might be due to the central role that the term "comprehensible input" seems to play in ESOL methods material. In fact, two of the participants actually mentioned the term. Further investigation of teachers' understanding of the need for opportunities for ELLs to produce language is warranted.

Interactions with Parents of English Language Learners

In discussing the strategies they used with their English language learners, participants shared their experiences with these students' parents. All the teachers were vocal about the need to establish effective communication with parents. They found that it helped the parents understand the requirements of the classroom and the demands on the student and provided the teacher with insights into the students' backgrounds, both personal and cultural.

Teachers discussed the frustrations on the part of the school, the parents, and the student when the parents were unable to assist the student with academics due to lack of proficiency in English or illiteracy in their native language. One teacher wrote, "Many of the students have illiterate parents. It is not appropriate to expect parents to teach or reinforce certain skills."

Judy described the helplessness that some of her students and their parents felt because the parents were unable to assist their children with homework:

> Kids sense when mom and dad can't help them. It frustrates them and makes them feel unhappy. Kids know that no one can practice with them. . . . sometimes they need help but these kids can't get help. They tell the teacher that they didn't get things right when they turn in the homework. Mom tried to help but she can't. . . . I know that the students did all they could so I go over it in class. Some of my students' parents cry because they can't help. They try to get help for the kids at home. I have at least three like that this year.

Melody described her proactive approach to working with parents, sharing that it was important to communicate with parents and lower their affective filters. She

conducted an evening training, with assistance from an interpreter, for parents in strategies they could use to help their children with reading and writing

Melody also discussed other ways of communicating with parents: "With notes, I have to find an interpreter. I have a little cheat sheet to use where several statements are translated into Spanish—like 'he was off-task today' or 'wasting class time'—to let the parent know what they might want to talk to the child about . . . the parent has to sign the note and the child brings it back the next day." We are not sure whether this particular teacher sent home only negative comments, which would be disturbing, or whether she only happened to mention such comments as examples. She did go on to say that she tried to communicate with the parents so they would know she was helping out, which encouraged them to help as well. She told them to write any questions in Spanish and she would have them translated and get back to them. "Just involving the parents is important. They may want to help but may not know how to help." Melody believed that the children would move a lot faster when they had this help.

Research on effective teaching of ELLs supports the importance of communicating with ELLs' parents, using their native language when possible (Tikunoff, 1983). Building bridges between the learner's home culture and the school culture certainly serves to lower the affective filter and allows the child to identify with the target language culture without having to give up his own culture. That these participants understood the importance of communicating with the ELLs' families is clear, but we cannot be sure whether this was motivated by an understanding of the importance of it to SLA or whether the primary concern was to support academic achievement. It is notable that participants revealed interest in ensuring that parents could help with homework but did not mention adjusting homework to take advantage of the families' uses of literacy or funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992).

Peers as Teachers

All participants reported using peers to assist the English language learners, referring to them as peer helpers, peer tutors, and buddies. In the follow-up interviews, they shared information about how they selected and trained peer helpers and their perceptions of the effectiveness of such arrangements.

Generally, participants assigned children who were "responsible" and had a particular ability to be "buddies." Melody looked for "a child strong in the subject and … confident in themselves . . . just a child who had gained a good grasp and felt comfortable working with another child." Angie chose a "more fluent reader" for buddy reading. Kathy observed them carefully at the beginning of the year "to see who can provide what kind of help." Melody also did "a lot of watching at the beginning of the year to see what they can do…and to see how comfortable they are with a partner because some of them are not even comfortable accepting help…from a child." She reported that some of the students may think that the buddy "is not going to help or maybe they [the ELL] have gotten in trouble for talking too much

or the teacher has never used that as an avenue and they are not used to it and don't know it's O.K. . . . but now I see that wall coming down as they see the others helping and that is O.K." Diana shared how problems could "spread" if the children received help from a less competent peer: "Sometimes they think they know it but if they are really not proficient in the skill and they start helping … it turns into a problem. They will copy someone next to them and want to help another person and soon it becomes a circle of copying."

The participants also reported spontaneous pairings. Melissa described how Jimmy (EP) and Javier (ELL) started working together on their own. At the time of the interview, late November, she reported, "They cannot be separated." Marie usually selected particularly responsible buddies, but offered, "It will end up inevitably that any kid in the classroom will sometime become a peer helper – whether walking in line, in the lunchroom, at P.E., I see it. Whoever is next to the kid, they recognize a need and just help."

Participants emphasized how they had to train the children in appropriate techniques of helping. They did this by role-playing how to help and by frequent reminders, stressing "helping" the student and not "doing the work" for him or her. Melody instructed an EP buddy, "You can help him, but do not show him the answers." Several teachers encouraged strategy use when the buddy listened to the oral reading of the ELL. Diana recounted how she urged, "Listen to them and make sure they sound it out. Ask if it makes sense." Jenny had "three dependable young ladies who partner with the ESOL kids. They finish their work and take the bilingual students and work with them . . . at two tables in the back of the room." She reminded them not to "give them the answers" and found that ". . . the girls are able to ask the students questions, and mimic the teacher very well…I showed them how to use the step board, tell the letter, model it. They do what I taught them to do when working with their buddy." Mona directed buddies to "give them time to think…do a lot of chunking…find parts they know…emphasize phonemic awareness." Jenny had a set of rules for helping, including they "must hear [the ELL] try to sound out a word three times before they can tell them," and to "be positive, don't get frustrated."

In our conversations, it became clear that children helping children was a common activity in their classrooms, although there was a sense that they were particularly alert to being sure the ELLs received appropriate help. As Melody responded to a question about whether or not she had seen any of her ELLs respond negatively to help, "No, because in my room, everyone is giving and receiving help." They recognized that, by having EP children receive peer help, too, it reduced the possible stigma for the ELLs. Notably, our data does not evidence ELLs assisting native-English speaking students. This point is of concern as it may position ELLs as not possessing knowledge or ability of potential benefit to L1 English speakers.

As has already been established, ELLs have more opportunity to receive comprehensible input and to produce output when working in small groups. The participants' comments lead us to think, though, that their use of EP peers may not

necessarily encourage output by ELLs. We question whether their training emphasizes how to use peers to elicit output from ELLs. The emphasis seemed to be, still, on input to the ELLs.

Classroom Philosophy and Affect

As a group, these participants reflected a student-centered, rather than teacher-centered, philosophy of learning. They understood that learning occurs in many ways besides through direct instruction by the teacher. The heavy use of peers reflects the belief that peers can scaffold peers. Further, these teachers understood that a capable peer is a more effective language model than the teacher. As Marie said, "The kids [EP] are a great help. The children in regular conversations help them learn language." She went on to add, "Kids help kids remarkably well. Even when I would get frustrated trying to get something across . . . who knows what it is they say or do but they manage to get it across." Angie shared, "If you get the other children involved [EP students helping the ELLs], they learn the language faster."

Other evidence of the learner-centered nature of these classrooms could be found in the very arrangements of the desks, as described earlier. Students did not sit and work in isolation in these classrooms; they had multiple opportunities to work and learn together. Some of the teachers specifically employed Kagan seating, heterogeneous seating of children with structured techniques for interacting (Kagan, 1986). Kagan suggests these arrangements and techniques as particularly beneficial to ELLs as they promote interaction and employ predictable routines.

Another philosophical thread woven through these interviews and conversations is that of the importance of high expectations. Not a single participant exhibited what has been called the *el pobrecito* syndrome, referring to the misguided belief that since children from poverty or other disadvantaged backgrounds already have difficulty, the schools should not expect too much of them (Garcia, 1987). Comments from these teachers reveal that they believed their ELLs could and, in fact, did achieve. Although her ELLs often started in the lower groups, Maria found, "We usually see these kids move up very quickly once they get the language down. They are quick learners. Those children just amaze me at how quickly they come up to speed." Asked about what pre-service teachers should be taught to effectively work with ELLs, Kathy commented, "Of course, a good teacher will have high expectations . . ." of them.

These participants generally emphasized building a learning community in which all children were included and valued. Judy made special efforts to help new ELLs become included in the class. She tried to "get them socially with a partner who will play with them, work with them, do things with them." Kathy had obviously succeeded in establishing a positive climate in her class, observing, "The L1 children nurture the L2s and want to see them succeed." Melody reported that they want all the students to help each other: "That's something that we try to foster at the beginning of the school year."

The teachers exhibited a real concern that the ELLs felt comfortable and were successful in their classrooms. Judy designated herself to be Raul's "study buddy." Since she knew his parents could not help him with his homework, she met with him every morning before school (except when she had bus duty) to guide him through his homework. She delightedly reported that, "He is eager to learn. He has perfect attendance so far this year." She also made a point of using multicultural literature "where the children see themselves reflected." Melody ensured that the ELLs received support from the other children to minimize the fear that comes with being a new child, especially one who might be overwhelmed by the new culture and language. She emphasized the importance of doing whatever was necessary to lower the ELL's affective filter, "like a pat on the back, a smile, or a hug. Letting them know you are there for them and it is O.K. to make an attempt." She recognized that "a lot of them want to shut down if they feel you are not going to be friendly."

In general, participant teachers reported very deliberate efforts to build supportive, inclusive classrooms in which their ELLs, indeed all their students, learned. They showed a high level of awareness of the importance of affect in SLA and in the need to keep the affective filter low so as to increase comprehensible input.

Use of Native Language

Participants frequently mentioned using another child with some proficiency in both English and the ELL's L1 to provide assistance, particularly in translating. Denise shared how her "fluent Spanish speakers try to explain it to other students in Spanish. I don't even have to ask them. I had a student who didn't know what a water fountain was. So another ESOL student automatically started to translate the word into Spanish." As mentioned earlier, teachers also used student translators in testing situations to gain a more accurate assessment of the ELLs' content knowledge.

Several of the teachers mentioned the need to learn a few basic phrases in the child's native language, but only one in the group actually spoke another language (Spanish) well enough to be considered reasonably fluent. In this case, she expressed concern that she was violating accepted principles or policies when she used Spanish to assist students, which she had been warned against in her 300 hours of ESOL training and by her first-year mentor teacher. As Diana explained, "I have also had different people tell me not to use Spanish. My peer teacher also said that to me. And I never really agreed with it, because I think it helps." She also went on to express a wish that she " knew a little Haitian Creole" because her school was starting to enroll Haitian children. Clearly, this teacher found knowing a student's native language an asset.

Very few participants mentioned encouraging the English L1 children to learn the ELL student's native language, although four of the teachers revealed that all of their students had a half hour of Spanish instruction three times a week. Marie reported on her students picking up some of the language informally. One child

learned the Spanish word for bathroom, *baño,* and subsequently questioned a new ELL several times a day, "Baño? Baño?"

Three participants reported encouraging the use of the L1. Marie encouraged her ELLs to share their language with the class and recognized that they enjoyed doing so: "I ask them to count to 10 in their language or ask what they call something in their language." It also revealed to her that they had the concepts of numeration and seriating, albeit not in English. When confronted with a language barrier, Missy might encourage her ELLs to communicate responses or questions to their bilingual peers. As she said, "Even though they may not know a lot [of English], all together they can figure out what I am trying to say and how to say it or figure out what the student is trying to say to me. I tell them, 'You guys have to help the teachers, too.'"

Research supports the value of encouraging ELLs to use their native language in learning and concept development, even when the teachers do not know that language (Samway & McKeon, 1999; Tikunoff, Ward, & van Broekhuizen, 1991). Yet, only three of our participants mentioned giving such encouragement. We cannot be sure whether the failure of the others to do so is a result of their having been exposed to the outdated notion that children learning English should be discouraged (indeed, prohibited) from using their native language or whether the course of the interviews simply did not lead them to talk about this theme. It is also possible that the use of the L1 by ELLs was so common in these classrooms as not to seem noteworthy.

Limitations

We recognize two limitations of this study. Readers cannot generalize results to other groups of teachers who may differ from our participants who, as a group, had more training than the average mainstream teacher (NCES, 1997). Further, they had an average of 10.5 ELLs per year, which suggests considerable opportunity, and need, to develop accommodation strategies. Also, first-grade teachers' classrooms may be more supportive of SLA due to the small-group interaction, use of concrete materials and visuals, and the emphasis on language learning for all. Therefore, our findings cannot be extended to higher grade levels.

The other limitation is that, with the exception of one of the nine schools, one or two teachers from each school chose not to participate. While this choice might have been due to any number of reasons, such as lack of interest or time constraints, it is also possible those who chose not to participate did so out of a lack of confidence in their knowledge of teaching ELLs

Conclusion

Our study leads us to three major conclusions. First, the strategies for teaching literacy and content material to first-grade students—developmental, meaning-based, inter-disciplinary, experiential approaches—are compatible with strategies

for teaching language, literacy and content to ELL students. First-grade teachers may be more versed in making language comprehensible to all learners. Use of manipulatives and visuals, making language "comprehensible," and varying activities are typical of first-grade classrooms. However, though some believe that strategies for teaching ELLs are "just good teaching," these teachers demonstrated that such instructional approaches and attitudes are instead a springboard for the strategies specifically suitable for their ELLs. Teachers took typical first-grade teaching strategies a step further to enhance instruction for their ELLs through acceptance, use and encouragement of native languages; appreciation of home cultures; adjustment of teacher's language; linking language learning with content learning; and providing opportunities to engage in discourse by such means as cooperative grouping. Further, the developmental nature of first-grade materials provides teachers with options for modification, from creating new materials to using existing materials and supplementing or modifying their instructional approaches. Higher grade teachers may not be as comfortable with, or experienced in, using accommodations as they may not have that natural baseline of strategies and materials from which to begin.

Secondly, these teachers held very positive feelings about, and high expectations of, their ELL students. We found no evidence that any expected less of their students due either to low opinions of the students' abilities or to the *el pobrecito* syndrome. The research on expectations and student achievement in general supports the importance of high expectations. ELLs will achieve more when teachers send the clear message that they can, and will, succeed (Garcia, 1987; Samway & McKeon, 1999), as do these participants.

Our third conclusion is that teachers clearly found benefits from student-student interaction, even though they report spending a significant amount of time in whole-class instruction. The participants reported providing considerable opportunities for the ELLs to use language in authentic natural ways by using pairings, small-group instruction, and cooperative groupings. Research on SLA emphasizes the importance of appropriate language models (Cazden, 1988). For a first grader learning English, native-speaking peers provide such models. Thus, classrooms in which ELLs interact with EP peers will support L2 development better than those in which the teachers do most of the talking. As mentioned earlier, though, the amount of whole-group instruction (over 50%) reported is large enough to raise concern that the ELLs might have been cast too frequently in the role of language recipients rather than language producers.

These participants did not explicitly address certain aspects of language teaching and learning. Though keenly aware of comprehensible input, they did not account for the importance of output as a planned-for, measurable instructional outcome. Further, while language development is critical for all first graders, the language developed in a content or literacy lesson for EP students will be quite different from that for ELLs, for whom each lesson is not only about learning a skill

or the subject matter but is also the vehicle for learning English (Gibbons, 2002). Teachers reported developing language for conceptual knowledge rather than for other critical linguistic features such as the structural and pragmatic knowledge essential to expressing oneself in a language. Teachers did not report attention to dedicated language instruction for their ELLs, a component often missing in mainstream classrooms with ELLs.

Finally, though the teachers recognized that parents could not always help with homework and attempted to communicate with parents about homework and how to help, none of them mentioned adjusting homework assignments; thus, the value of homework as a home-school connection was not operationalized, though they were clearly sensitive to the role of parents. Moll and Gonzalez's (1994) work with Tucson's Latino community illustrates how the rich experiences and knowledge of families can be used to enhance the literacy and academic achievement of ELLs, both in class and in related homework assignments.

This study leaves us with several questions. What accommodation strategies do teachers use to account for the difference in the language-learning needs of their ELLs and their English-proficient first graders? What is the effect of these strategies on the ELLs' achievement in both English and content areas? How often and when do teachers use these strategies? What is the nature of the help provided to ELLs by their EP peers? What manner of language-dedicated instruction is provided to ELLs? Would an examination of strategy use by teachers in the upper grades reveal differences in the kind and extent of accommodation strategies compared to the present investigation's findings? Finally, are these strategies differentially effective according to the language level of the ELL? This last question was prompted by a participant's statement that beginning teachers would benefit from working in a school with a self-contained ESOL class. When probed, she expressed a sense of inadequacy in working with Level 1 (little or no knowledge of English) students. We recognize that the majority of the students served by our participants had more developed English skills than would Level 1 students. It would be interesting to compare our findings with a survey of kinder-garten teachers, more of whom would be expected to have Level 1 students as kindergarten is the usual entry point into school.

By 2026, language minority students are expected to comprise 25% of the school population (Garcia, 2002, p. 23). In some schools and districts, that proportion will be, indeed already is, even greater. Only about 15% of second-language learners receive special assistance in ESL (Garcia, Montes, Janisch, Bouchereau, & Consalvi, 1993). Their academic success will depend largely on the abilities of the regular classroom teachers to address their academic and linguistic needs. The answers to the questions posed above may serve a valuable role in informing the preparation of pre-service and in-service teachers to meet the needs of these students.

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Appendix

Survey

Part I

1. What training have you had in the area of working with second language students? (Check all that apply.)

_____ 300 hours of inservice training   _____ 60 hours of inservice training
_____ Grandfathered for ESOL certification   _____ University coursework
_____ Other (please describe)

2. How many years of teaching experience do you have? _____

3. How many years of experience do you have in working with second language students?
   _____

4. How many second language students do you typically have each school year?_____

5. How many do you have this school year?____

6. What languages are spoken natively by your second language students? (Check all that apply.)
_____ Spanish   _____ Haitian Creole   _____ Vietnamese
_____ Other (please list) _____

7. Which of the following would best describe your physical classroom arrangement?

_____ individual desks in rows   _____ individual desks grouped together

_____ tables with multiple chairs   _____ learning centers

_____ a combination or other (please explain) _____

8. What percentage of the day would you estimate that your second language learners spend in the following instructional delivery models?

     whole class instruction   _____ %

     small group instruction   _____ %

     individualized instruction   _____ %

9. For small group and individualized instruction, who typically delivers the instruction?

_____ Classroom teacher   _____ Paraprofessional

_____ ESOL teacher   _____ Volunteer

_____ Other (please list) _____

Part II:

Please answer the following questions with as much detail as possible

1. How do you adjust your teaching to help second language learners understand your lessons?

2. If your adjustment is in the types of materials you use, do you tend to create your own materials or modify existing curricular materials? Can you give an example?

3. As an experienced teacher, what strategies or concepts would you recommend that a pre-service teacher be taught about working successfully with first grade second language children?