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Article review

Forging a Knowledge Based on English Language Learners with Special  
Education: Theoretical, Population and Technical Issues

By Alfredo J. Artiles and Janette Klingner

This article begins by stating a great proportion of ELLs are failing in schools across the country. How can practitioners differentiate between ELLs who have a learning disability from those who have difficulties in the language acquisition process? Part of the problem is that little experimental research on ELLs enrolled in Special Education has been conducted. The studies available are faulty (small sample sizes, no control group, unspecified data collection). More research is needed to understand the language acquisition process and literacy attainment and instructional practices that promote learning. It is necessary to have qualitative and quantitative research that yields similar or identical findings. We need to understand more about “valid and reliable identification and classification practices (ELL and ELL/LD), normative developmental trajectories of ELLs language and literacy skills and understanding effective instructional practices for those ELLs experiencing academic difficulties”.

Since each state and school district uses different criteria classification for ELLs and FEPs, it is hard for researchers to draw a clear picture of the nationwide performance. Also, it is impossible to build longitudinal data when ELLs data are kept for only 2 years after the student is classified as FEP. According to the author, it is important to understand what factors distinguish ELLs who start to receive special ed and has a

subsequent recovery and those who remain below grade level. Furthermore, longitudinal studies must give a more accurate and complete picture of the original sample.

Researchers should use standardized measures for consistent interpretation and replication.

There is lack of understanding as to whether students experiencing difficulties have had enough exposure to effective practices and the cause of lack of academic achievement (learning disability or lack of proficiency?). It is not the type of program that should be discussed but the specific instructional techniques and interventions that make the most impact.

This article helped me understand part of the problem we experience in my high school. Our ELL students who are referred to Special Ed evaluation rarely go through due to lack of bilingual personnel who can test them. Second, schools leaders believe it to be a language problem rather than disability. Besides these issues mentioned, I now realize that the problem also stems from lack of consistency amongst scholars, states and districts. The problem is worsened by state level ideology and politics that implement practices of inferior quality compared with that of native speakers. The article truly shed some light on issues I thought limited to the school administration.