

the United States could be schooled in their native language for an average of 50 to 75 percent of the time from K-12 as an appropriate means to promote their normal academic achievement, high levels of English language proficiency, adequate psychosocial adjustment, and satisfactory native language development.

4. In formal schooling contexts, additive forms of bilingualism are best achieved through the separate use of two languages. That is, as students are instructed in both their first and second languages, steps are taken so that students are exposed to each language at different times and for distinct purposes.

5. To avoid cognitive confusion and greatly increase learning efficiency, program staff should provide initial literacy instruction in bilingual settings in a sequential manner. That is, basic literacy skills should be developed through one language before reading instruction is introduced in the other language.

6. Underachievers and students with learning disabilities seem to experience no detrimental effects from bilingual instruction. When such children receive bilingual schooling, their academic achievement and native language development are similar to those of their counterparts in monolingual programs.

7. Formal second language instruction, even when provided under optimal conditions, appears to be insufficient to develop all of the language skills needed by second language acquirers. Some amount of exposure through natural social interaction is also required. □

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Response to Santiago

RUSSELL GERSTEN AND JOHN WOODWARD

Empirical data support the use of structured immersion with Hispanic and Asian students in the U.S.; can Santiago claim the same for transitional bilingual education?

We disagree with Santiago on several points. First, there were four studies other than the St. Lambert study, all of which involved children from working-class families. The results of structured immersion with these students were comparable to those found with the middle-class children in the St. Lambert study. Second, our range of measures was not as narrow as Santiago suggests; our achievement battery included science and language as well as reading and math. Further, we provided data showing improved high school attendance, fewer retentions,

and a reduced dropout rate. Our studies included a measure of student adjustment and achievement after transition into a regular English language classroom had been made, and one study (Becker and Gersten, 1982) followed the students for seven full years—the criteria suggested by Santiago as a sign of true effectiveness.

The results we presented seem to demonstrate that structured English immersion, when sensibly implemented, is, a worst, not harmful to low-income Hispanic or Asian students. We urge researchers and educators to focus more attention on what is happen-



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“The results we presented seem to demonstrate that structured English immersion, when sensibly implemented, is not harmful to low-income Hispanic or Asian students.”

ing in the U.S.—in Uvalde and McAllen, Texas, in Dade County, Fairfax County, and San Diego—and do less extrapolating from the Canadian research. Attention should be paid to Ramirez’s ongoing longitudinal research on immersion in the U.S. We believe that evaluation of these projects suggests that structured immersion should be considered as an option to transitional bilingual education, *especially when parents specifically request an English immersion approach*. Currently, this is not the case, since no more than 15 communities in the U.S. offer it.

We are the first to acknowledge that more comprehensive research is necessary, but we believe that structured immersion led to lasting effects because the majority of the students could read English with some fluency,

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and thus, could make some sense out of the demands made on them in junior high and high school. Consequently, 5th and 6th grade performance levels were higher and high school dropout rate lower. We have personally seen abrupt, disorganized transitions between Spanish instruction and English language instruction for 4th and 5th graders, and witnessed students’ confusion and frustration.

Santiago provided many citations, well-intentioned ideas, and philosophical statements, but we fail to see any empirical evidence of bilingual students taught in Spanish ever catching up after a seven-year period. Our question to Santiago is, “Where’s the data?” □

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