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Second Language Model Programming: An Examination of Co-Teaching and Pull-Out Instruction / Assessment of Second-Language Learners: An Examination of Current Assessment Practice

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and Pull-Out Instruction

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Assessment of Second-Language Learners: An Examination of Current Assessment Practice

by

Amanda M. Pearson

Starred Papers

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Nine years ago I interviewed at a small rural school district for a kindergarten teacher position. When I sat down for the interview, I was asked the question, “How would you help a second-language students if they were in your classroom?” Having prepared myself for questions like this one, I explained all the strategies I could think of that I had learned as an undergraduate. Satisfied with my reply, a second person posed the question, “What are the biggest challenges facing second-language students in our classrooms today?” I was not prepared for this question. I felt as though I stuttered through this question but arrived at the response, “I would imagine the biggest challenge would be trying to keep up academically with their peers. Hopefully though, with a strong classroom teacher and quality ESL teacher working together they would have a great deal of success.” I looked at the team of faces interviewing me and became concerned when two of them made eye contact and wrote something down. The interview ended shortly after this and I left that day feeling somewhat discouraged. The following morning I received a phone call from the school’s administrator offering me an ESL teaching position. I was taken back and expressed that I did not know the first thing about teaching second-language students. Her response to me was, “You are the quality ESL teacher we are hoping to get.”

That day is still engrained in my memory. The fear and uncertainty that swept over me that day was overwhelming. While I was excited to get my first teaching job, I was disappointed I was not going to have my own classroom. I was even more distraught at the concept of teaching to second-language students. I was not licensed, I could not speak another language, and I had no experience with second-language students. Even with the odds stacked against me, I found myself engrossed in coursework and literature to better inform myself on the teaching and carryout of second-language programming.

Looking back over the last nine years, I have had the opportunity to instruct hundreds of second-language students. I have had the chance to work in different teaching models as well. I have been able to co-teach with the mainstream classroom teacher, and I have had the opportunity to push-in to the classroom and work with students; I have also conducted a pull-out instructional program. In the latter situation, I have done both pull-out instruction that is connected to the classroom and pull-out that is not connected to the mainstream classroom. Upon experiencing these four different programming options, I have witnessed strengths and weaknesses in all these models, and it always brings to mind the essential question, "What is the best model for delivering second-language instruction?"

Providing language acquisition instruction to students of a second-language has historically been a debated subject. The manner or programming through which students should be instructed has evolved a great deal in the last couple of decades. As student achievement is closely monitored, the correlations between mode of instruction and achievement outcome have been thoroughly examined. Current research indicates that programs which utilize a co-teaching or push-in model have a stronger performance from students than pull-out programs (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010). As a second-language instructor who has experienced different methods of instruction, I have found that from an instructional point of view, each method of instruction has strengths and weaknesses when put into practice. Upon reviewing the debate surrounding second-language instruction, I became interested in asking fellow second-language instructors, their perspective on second-language programming, and determining whether there is a method that is stronger compared to another. Or, can any method of second-language instruction be successful with proper design? In this paper I will first review the literature on different second-language programs. I will describe the different programs available with a specific focus on pull-out and co-teaching programs. Within the literature review, I will describe characteristics of these programs, where they are commonly found, and which program model current research recommends. In Chapter II, I will describe the research and methodology I used to further investigate how second-language instructors felt about second-language programming models, as well as the results that research yielded. In the final chapter, I will share the conclusions that can be drawn based on the research I collected and the possible application of those results.

Review of the Literature

In 2015, the U. S. Department of Education published data that stated the statistics of second-language learners in our public school systems. The report showed that an estimated 9.2%, or roughly 4.4 million students of the total student population, are considered to be second-language learners in the 2012-2013 school year. This number is an increase from 10 years prior when the percentage was at 8.7% (U. S. Department of Education, 2015). These numbers will likely continue to climb as our country grows. This statistic is strong evidence of the changing population schools are faced with daily. The priority for schools is to design instruction that will help all students succeed. Because second-language learners have a language barrier that can make learning in the classroom challenging, there are additional programs available to assist them in gaining the English skills required.

Students, regardless of their understanding of the English language, are required to attend school just like their English-speaking peers. Because they are required to complete the same requirements as their peers, students who speak English as a second-language often struggle in the regular education classroom. In the public-school system, a requirement, set forth by law, states any student who is classified as a second-language learning student, is entitled to programming that will assist-them in the acquisition of the English language (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011). The Equal Education Opportunities Act (1974), states that English Language Learners (ELL's) participate in a program that overcomes language barriers. The law, as it currently stands, states that second-language programs must have three of the following components. First, it must be based upon sound educational theory and principles. Second, the program the school selects must be reasonable for the resources-they have available; in other words, a school cannot adapt a program that requires several English Language teachers if the school district can only have one or two on staff. The third requirement is that after an adequate amount of time has passed, the program must show that language skills are increasing and overcoming the language barrier (Echevarria, 2006).

The accountability to which schools are held to is clear: schools must provide a program for second-language students, the program must be academically sound, reasonable for the resources that are available to them, and show progress. What the law does not state is what type of programming must be used. It is clear that lawmakers cannot require a specific type of program for schools to adhere to. If schools were all required to create a "cookie-cutter" program, then the schools would more than likely not meet the requirements of the students. Since all schools differ, second-language programs must differ as well. With guidelines provided, it becomes the decision of each educational agency or school district to decide what program they would like to utilize.

Programs that focus on instruction in English can first be categorized into two primary groups: English immersion and bilingual (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999). A bilingual program offers instruction to students in both their native language as well as English. This particular type of instruction is very helpful to students who have little to no English skills and leads to the best results in terms of learning to read in English (Collier, 1995). It allows them to maintain their native language as well as gain the necessary language skills needed for success in the mainstream classroom. Within bilingual programs, there are different models that can be adapted as well. The challenging part of bilingual programs is that the teacher must be able to speak the language of the students in that school district. In a school district with 20 or more languages spoken, that type of program might be very difficult to achieve. However, in a district where a majority of the students all speak the same language, this could potentially be an ideal program.

The second type of program is an English Immersion program. English Immersion programs are taught in schools were the instruction is given in English and the student is immersed in the English language. Within the English Immersion category, there are different forms of this instruction. One of the forms is termed a pull-out program, in which second-language students are pulled out of the mainstream classroom and receive instruction in English, by a licensed English language (EL) teacher (Rogers, 2001).

A second type of English Immersion programming is known as content-based instruction. In content-based instruction, English is taught to students through academic content. Within content-based instruction, the terms, push-in and co-teaching are frequently heard. In both push-in and co-teaching, the second-language learners or ELL’s are not removed from the mainstream classroom (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999). Rather, the EL instructor goes into or “pushes-in” to the mainstream classroom and works with the ELL's. In some programs, the EL instructor co-teaches with the mainstream classroom teacher and together they use different strategies to assist in the teaching of the material. The priority of the EL teacher is to focus the instruction on the language, through the content, to the second-language students. A more detailed look at pull-out and co-teaching instruction will now be discussed.

Pull-Out Instruction

A pull-out instructional program is a form of an English Immersion program. In a pull-out program, students are removed from their mainstream classroom and taken to a separate space to be provided instruction in English acquisition. The time spent in the EL classroom differs from school to school and also language needs of the student. In some school districts, the amount of time spent in the EL classroom is dependent upon what language acquisition level the student is at It is not uncommon for a newcomer (student who is new to the United States with no English skills) to spend a majority of-their academic day in an EL classroom (Varela, 2010). As the student gains more English skills, they may spend more time in the mainstream classroom. Conversely, those students who have a higher language acquisition level may only spend a short amount of time in the EL classroom because they have developed a strong language base in English and are now beginning to use strategies to be successful in the mainstream classroom. However, some schools do not have the flexibility in their schedule to allow for leveled language acquisition instruction. In some school districts, students are pulled out of the classroom by grade-level. In situations such as this, the time spent in the second-language classroom is dependent upon the number of students in that grade and the grade level of the students. Regardless of how the students are pulled out of the classroom, the goal of instruction in the EL classroom is to aid students in gaining the necessary English skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999)..

Pull-out instructional programs are most often used in an elementary school setting. In the elementary setting it is easy to take the students from their class, work with them, and then return them to their classroom. In secondary schools, Grades 6-12 for example, pulling out is a much more challenging type of model to complete. This is difficult because, at this age, students are rotating classes throughout the day. Their instructor makes changes depending on the core academic class they are participating in. It would be a larger challenge at that age to have the student removed and placed back in. While pull-out programs can still occur at a secondary level, they are not as common.

Pull-out programs are very common in school districts where there is a large variety of languages spoken. If the school district has a diverse language population, providing bilingual instruction is often unlikely. Pull-out programs provide the teacher with the opportunity to focus his or her instruction on the characteristics and culture that surrounds certain language groups. For example, it is easier to teach a Spanish-speaking student English than it is to teach an Arabic-speaking student, as Arabic and English are distinctly different. In addition to the language itself, adapting to the culture is a barrier these students must learn to overcome. Having the ability to leave the mainstream classroom and spend time in focused instruction on the English language without the distractions of peers is a major advantage for second-language students.

Pull-out programs are also often seen in districts where EL staffing is limited (Varela, 2010). Scheduling a specific time for second-language students to work with an ESL teacher, when there is a limited amount of staff, is very difficult. One or two EL teachers to cover multiple grades and students limits the amount of time the teacher can spend with each student. When he or she must meet with students from various grade levels, the logistics of achieving that successfully are challenging. A more convenient option when servicing multiple grade levels is to pull students out and work with them separately, versus attempting to work inside of multiple classrooms that a push-in or co-teaching model would require.

Co-Teaching

Co-teaching is the partnering of a general education teacher and EL teacher who work together to jointly deliver instruction to a diverse group of students, including students with second-language needs or other special needs, in a shared educational setting to meet the needs of these diverse learners (Friend, 2008; Morocco & Aguilar, 2002). It is important to note, however, that placing two professionals into a classroom does not equate to co-teaching. Successful co-teaching involves the second-language instructor and the general education teacher collaborating, sharing, and working together toward the common goal of educating the entire class of students. In the co-teaching model, there are seven different approaches a teaching team can use (Friend & Reising, 1993).

The first approach to co-teaching is the one lead teacher, one teacher teaching on purpose. In this model, while one teacher instructs the whole class, the other educator provides short mini-lessons to one student or a small group of students. These mini-lessons may focus on a specific language need or take the opportunity to pre-teach, reteach, or clarify a concept or skill, or provide background knowledge or context. Ideally, the ESL and general education teacher should alternate leading roles (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2008, 2010; Morocco & Aguilar, 2002).

A second method for co-teaching is team teaching. This is often viewed as the ultimate goal of co-teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995). When utilizing this model, both teachers provide instruction to the whole class. The teachers plan the lesson and cooperatively lead instruction in a whole group setting by lecturing, presenting opposing views, illustrating two ways to solve a problem, and other options (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2008, 2010; Morocco & Aguilar, 2002). While this would be considered the "optimal" method, this is also one of the most challenging because of the time it requires.

A third approach is called one teach, one assess. One teacher takes the lead role in presenting instruction to the whole class, while the other partner collects observational data on student behavior, academics, and participation or teacher behavior, such as who is being called on. This teacher can utilize observations, checklists, or anecdotal records. This data can provide invaluable information that is difficult to gather without a co-teacher (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010).

Another method to co-teaching is parallel teaching. In this approach, co-teachers plan a lesson together and then divide the class equally into two heterogeneous groups. They utilize the same lesson to ensure that all students are exposed to the same information, but use differentiated learning strategies to ensure that all students have equal access to the materials (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010). By learning in smaller groups, ELs have additional opportunities to interact with each other, listen to peers, and volunteer responses (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2008).

The next two strategies are different forms of alternate teaching. In the first strategy, alternate teaching: pre-teach, teachers divide students into two groups based on their readiness levels related to the content or skill. One teacher works with the majority of students, while the other works with a small group that may have limited prior knowledge of the target content. These students receive instruction to allow them to make connections to the content (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010).

The next alternative teaching approach is alternate teaching: reteach. This is a model in which one co-teacher leads whole group instruction, while the other is re-teaching content or skills to a small group. These groups are flexible, heterogeneous groups that provide students with the support they need for specific content. Group compositions can and should be modified as student needs change (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2008, 2010; Morocco & Aguilar, 2002).

The final method of co-teaching is station teaching. In this model, both teachers set up several learning stations around the room with students moving from station to station at designated points. The groups are flexible and can be based on students' skill levels, need for re-teaching, or need for extra practice. Often, one teacher coordinates one station, the other teacher coordinates another station, and the other station or stations include independent learning activities (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2008, 2010; Morocco & Aguilar, 2002). Teachers collaboratively set up several learning stations. Students at each station have specific learning objectives to complete. Each teacher is in charge of one station and there may be one or two independent activities (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010).

It is clear that co-teaching offers a large variety of approaches that allows for teaching teams to arrive at an approach that best fits their needs. The students in these classrooms can benefit from having two teachers in the classroom that will assist in the instruction of material as well as provide added support to those students who require it. Co-teaching allows for students to be instructed with their English-speaking peers and hearing the same grade-level vocabulary.

Lastly, co-teaching alleviates the academic gap that occurs when students are pulled out of core instruction.

The Shift from Pull-Out to Co-Teaching

Pull-out instruction was a very customary way to instruct students learning English (Collier, 2005). It was a common practice when the EL student population began to rise to create a program that was geared toward meeting their needs, and the most convenient way to do this was having the EL teacher pull the students out of the mainstream classroom and provide them with English instruction. Schools adapted this programming model and it was seen frequently. Much like other educational theories, over time and data collected, research started to show a negative response to the effectiveness of pull-out instruction.

The change began when experts began to notice that students who were participating in pull-out models were missing core academics when they were being pulled out of the mainstream classroom for their English instruction (Horst, 2010). Instead of these second-language students making advancements in their academics, they were struggling to catch up. Because this was a problem for students across the country, people began to question the effectiveness of a pull-out instructional model (Fu, Houser, & Huang, 2007). How truly effective is a program if the student is missing core academic classes? For example, if a first grade ELL was pulled out of the mainstream classroom during whole group reading instruction, that particular student would be missing the focused reading skill(s) of the week. In addition to missing a critical reading skill, the student would perhaps be taught in the EL classroom about how to socially ask appropriate questions, or reading a book about a giraffe. Neither of the two concepts listed above would be happening in the mainstream classroom at that time. If the EL instructor does not provide a lesson on the same reading skill the classroom teacher is, then that particular student will be missing a critical instructional skill, thus creating a gap in the education of the EL student. It is rare for a pull-out instructional program to be supporting the mainstream classroom, especially when the ESL department has a curriculum-they have adopted and are perhaps required to use. A common characteristic of a pull-out instructional program is for the EL instructor to be using an alternate curriculum when the EL students are in the ESL classroom. While the curriculum the instructor is using may be research based and designed for second-language students, it still does not change the reality of the student being placed in a separate curriculum compared to their mainstream classroom peers (Kurzet, 1997).

Pull-out instructional programs are often deemed as not effective. When research is conducted on second-language programs, pull-out programs are said to be disconnected from the regular education classroom, and expensive, and they do not provide enough time for students to gain the necessary English skills they require (Rennie, 1993).

As researchers began to closely track EL students, they began to see a startling trend. Those EL students participating in the pull-out programs were performing lower on state test scores, as well as making slower advances in the language acquisition process. When the results of students participating in pull-out programs were compared with other instructional models, it became very evident that pull-out instruction was not generating the results that the other language instructional models were able to (Collier, 2005). As a result, the education community began to take a shift from pull out programs to other instructional programs such as: bilingual education, co-teaching, and push-in models.

It is hard to argue with the facts. Pulling students out of core subject areas such as reading and math, then not offering instruction on the same subject to these students, results in gaps in these students' education (O'Loughlin, 2003). Even if these students were learning important English skills, they would still be missing instruction in their mainstream classroom which they need as well. Especially now when students are required to complete and perform on state assessments just as their English speaking peers, creating educational gaps will have adverse effects on the students as their academic career continues.

Research also began to show that students would benefit more from hearing fluent English from their peers (Echevarria, 2006). That is, if the students were left in the mainstream classroom and a co-teaching or push-in model was offered to students, the students could benefit from: hearing native English speakers, work in cooperative groups with English speaking peers, while still having instruction from their ESL teacher, and learn the same material their classmates were. These points brought strong rationale to why it was important to have second-language students stay in the classroom and instead of having the students leave the classroom; the new suggested and recommended method was to have the EL instructor come into the classroom and work with the students. This method of having specialized teachers enter the classroom was not revolutionary. The push-in and co-teaching models were already being used in other domains of education.

Co-teaching has become a model that is very popular as a manner to instruct students. The research on co-teaching indicates that students who are EL and mainstreamed, benefit greatly from this type of instruction (Horst, 2010). The popularity of co-teaching can be seen in other specialized school services. In many school districts, special education, reading support staff, and math support staff are also being seen as entering the mainstream classroom and teaching with the classroom teacher (Collier, 2005). By all definitions, a co-teaching model appears to be one of "the best" option for schools.

If schools look to research for guidance on best practices in program design, it raised the question in my mind, how do the teachers who are delivering the instruction in our schools view these programs? When research is presented, it often demonstrates the performance of the students as examples of effectiveness, as it should. Where research often is lacking is in the opinion of the instructors who are delivering the programming. This question became of interest to me because I have had to teach in different program models over the last several years. I know what research says and I also know how the day-to-day application of theories can truly look in a classroom. An instructional practice can appear to be high quality in a book or presentation, but the real life application of the programming or practice might not yield the results it is suggested to offer.

For myself personally, I saw the advantages and disadvantages of pull-out, co-teaching, and push-in instruction. The experiences I have had made me question if other second-language teachers have similar experiences and thoughts about their current language programs. My theory is that while recommendations for programming can be made, the teachers who are delivering the daily instruction would have specific input related to the strengths and weaknesses of these programs. This input from other professionals in the field would assist in supporting the philosophy that there is not one model of second-language acquisition instruction that is superior to another. In Chapter II of this paper I will explain the methodology used for data collection and results the research generated.

Chapter II

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to look at what methods of second-language instruction were currently being used in schools and gaining the perspective of the EL instructors on their effectiveness. To complete this research, I utilized the online survey application Survey Monkey. This free-of-charge survey application allowed me to make contact with second-language instructors across the state of Minnesota. I felt that using an online survey was the most efficient way to gather information from people who are at a great distance away. This would also allow the teacher to complete the survey at-their convenience. Because educators have minimal time during the school day as well as limited time prior to and after school, I felt a survey they could complete at the time which best fit into their schedule was going to be the best way for me to gain the information I needed. Using Survey Monkey, I created a brief survey the educators could complete that would provide me with insight into how they felt about programming. The survey was five questions in length. The questions were related to their current second-language programming. The first two questions were closed and the respondents were asked to select the answers that best applied to them. The final three questions were open-ended questions that allowed for more detailed responses.

To begin, I used the Minnesota Department of Education website and went to the Title III link so I could see which schools in Minnesota were considered a Title III school. This would generate for me a base list of schools that would have a second-language program. From this point, I began looking into each school's website to locate the names and contact information for the second-language teachers in that specific district. My initial contact with each of these professionals was an introductory email explaining who I was, the purpose of the email, and permission for me to send them the link to the survey I created. I also asked if the educators were licensed EL teachers. I asked this question because I know that in specialized areas such as ESL and special education, many teachers hired for those positions are not licensed. For the purpose of this research, I wanted to use only licensed ESL educators, because I felt that in order to gain the best perspective, it would be imperative to hear back from teachers who have completed the necessary background coursework. I heard back from 83 licensed EL teachers who were willing to complete the survey.

Results/Findings

Survey results were collected from March 2015, with the last one being received June 2015. As the results came in, I recorded the results for each question in a master chart. While the Survey Monkey application does offer some form of results tabulation, I transferred that information into an Excel file that allowed me to look for patterns and calculate the data. The data from each of the questions is detailed in Tables 1-5.

The first question asked those surveyed to mark their current form of ESL programming method. The intention is this question was to determine the number of schools utilizing the different forms of programming.

Table 1

Current Second-Language Programs (N=83)

Type of Programming	Number of Responses	Percentage
Co-Teaching	41	49.3
Co-Teaching and Pull-out	24	28.9
Pull-out	8	9.0
Push-in	6	7.0
Push-in and Pull-out	3	3.6
Bilingual	1	1.2
TOTAL	83	100

The results in Table 1 showed that of the 83 respondents, almost half of those responded are in a school that utilizes a co-teaching model only. This trend would coincide with what research is recommending to schools as a method of second-language programming. The responses showed the lowest number of respondents are involved in a bilingual program.

The educators were then asked if they felt the current programming was meeting the needs of their students. I posed this question for the following reason—often decisions about programming are made without getting the opinion of the individuals actually delivering the instruction or people with the expertise. At times, students are looked upon as a test score or a number versus what daily instruction looks like for them. Sometimes the most research-based programs do not meet the needs of the actual student who is being expected to participate in them. I wanted the opinion of the instructor as to whether they felt their program was yielding the results they were looking for.

The results from the teacher opinion indicated that in all of the programming models, over 50% of teachers polled felt the students participating in that program were gaining the results the teachers were looking for (see Table 2). The question does not specify what types of results. What criteria the teacher was specifically using to evaluate the success is unknown.

Table 2

Teacher Opinion on Student Success in Current Program

Program Type	Yes	No
Co-Teaching Program	22 out of 41 or 53.6%	19 out of 41 or 46.3%
Co-Teaching and Pull-out	18 out of 24 or 75%	6 out of 24 or 25%
Pull-out	7 out of 8 or 87.5%	1 out of 8 or 12.5%
Push-in	4 out of 6 or 66.7%	2 out of 6 or 33.3%
Push-in and Pull-out	2 out of 3 or 66.7%	1 out of 3 or 33.3%
Bilingual	1 out of 1 or 100%	NA

For Question 3, I asked if the teachers could list the benefits they see for their current programming method. I left this as an open-ended question because I wanted to gather information that was exactly how those teachers viewed it. Sometimes in surveys multiple choices are offered; however, at times respondents are forced to either pick none of the choices given or pick one that is close to their thoughts. By leaving the space blank, I was able to gather the actual thoughts from the respondents.

The results from the benefit of each program are discussed in Table 3. Not all respondents noted something in the blank. I documented each of the different responses given.

Similar responses were given from several people. The benefits mentioned from the teachers are common responses heard when researching second-language instruction.

Table 3

Advantages of Current Second-Language Program

Program Type	Advantages
Co-Teaching	Collaboration, shared responsibilities, helps all students, keeps lessons focused, grade-level appropriate instruction, beneficial for when a substitute teacher is necessary, and flexible.
Co-Teaching and Pull-out	Collaboration, designated time for those students who need individual attention, newcomer specific time, aligned to mainstream classroom, and keeps students a part of the classroom family.
Pull-out	Move at a pace that is comfortable to that student, newcomer time, teach at their level, have time to work with peers of their culture, and gives students opportunity to ask questions in a “safe” place.
Push-in	Student maintains identity in classroom; material is aligned to classroom, language lessons can be aligned to grade level, and allows for frequent collaboration with classroom teacher.
Pull-out and Push-in	Individual time in ESL room as well as assistance in mainstream classroom, collaborate with classroom teacher.
Bilingual	Instruction in both home language and second-language.

In addition to asking the benefits of the types of program, I posed in the fourth question to the teachers’ questions about their opinion on the disadvantages of the program they utilize.

The results from Question 4 resonate similar problems in push-in and co-teaching models. Time and the lack of being treated as a professional are the common disadvantages as seen by the teachers who responded to the survey. For pull-out programs, a disadvantage cited was how students felt out of place from their peers. An overall disadvantage in all programs was scheduling. Incorporating time for specific language learning into a general education classroom schedule is challenging and if the teacher is working with more than one grade level team, the challenge is heightened.

Table 4

Disadvantages of Current Second-Language Program

Program Type	Disadvantages
Co-Teaching	Lack of time for planning, lack of staff development training, feeling like a paraprofessional, unorganized teaching partner, working with all students and not having adequate time with ELs, no place to call your own, ACCESS testing demands.
Co-Teaching and Pull-out	Time, scheduling, feeling like a paraprofessional in the back of the room, amount of time planning requires, disjointed schedule-moving from place to place.
Pull-out	Lack of collaboration with other teachers, students always seem like they are missing some type of instruction, scheduling, having a classroom to provide instruction, materials or curriculum.
Push-in	Lack of space in the general education classroom, other students interfering with group, needing materials that are not with you in general education classroom, other teacher evaluating ESL teacher.
Pull-out and Push-in	Scheduling, finding time to collaborate with multiple teachers, feeling like a paraprofessional when in the general education classroom, being given special education students mixed in with small push-in groups.
Bilingual	None given.

The fifth and final question asked to teachers was, what was their preferred method of second-language programming? I wanted to determine if teachers preferred the method of instruction they were using. In education, teachers have expectations from their administration and school district which they must abide by. As I gathered results, I was looking specifically at whether the answers to Questions 1-7 were similar or different.

According to the results seen in Table 5, it was clear that a push-in only model was not a preferred method by those teachers who are currently teaching in that setting. Co-teaching on its own also had a lower percentage as a preferred method. However, when combined with another model the percentages increased.

Table 5

Second-Language Teacher Preference for Current Program Model

Program Type	Yes	No
Co-Teaching Program	17 out of 41 or 41.4%	24 out of 41 or 58.5#
Co-Teaching and Pull-out	20 out of 24 or 83.3%	4 out of 24 or 16.6%
Pull-out	7 out of 8 or 87.5%	1 out of 8 or 12.5%
Push-in	2 out of 6 or 33.3%	4 out of 6 or 66.7%
Push-in and Pull-out	3 out of 3 or 100%	NA
Bilingual	1 out of 1 or 100%	NA

Chapter III

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the data collected for this research was to gain perspective from current second-language instructors and determine the current methods being used in districts, in combination with their opinions of their current program. My goal at the end of the data collection process was to evaluate the results and decide if there was a specific type of program that was viewed by educators as a preferred method. After examining the data, it was evident that a majority of those polled were participating in a co-teaching model of instruction. Since co-teaching is a recommended form of instruction, the shift to using this form of instruction is seen in the results. When combined, both co-teaching exclusively and a co-teaching with pull-out combination account for 78% of the second-language programming documented.

While co-teaching is the model used most frequently, of those teachers who are currently teaching in that program only 41% preferred to be teaching in that selected program. When looking over individual responses, those teachers who cited co-teaching as not being a preferred method of instruction also cited several disadvantages in their responses—lack of time for planning with general education teacher and, more importantly, feeling like a paraprofessional in the back of the classroom. One conclusion for these results is that if the second-language teacher was co-teaching with a partner who did not view-them as a second teacher in the room, but rather treated the second-language teacher as an aid or paraprofessional, then it would generate a feeling of frustration for the ESL teacher. If the co-teaching model was mandated by the school and lacked appropriate training for its staff, this particular model will have a lower preference rate among second-language teachers. Success in a co-teaching model requires adequate training, similar teaching styles, and common planning time. Without these basic, foundational components, a co-teaching model will be difficult.

The model with the lowest percentage of educators was the push-in model on its own. Without knowing specifically what their push-in model looks like versus co-teaching, it is difficult to make a strong conclusion. The respondents who are using a push-in model exclusively all stated as a disadvantage being treated like a paraprofessional and not having adequate time with their second-language students. These were disadvantages also cited with the co-teaching educators. Similar to the co-teaching model, if second-language teachers are placed in a model of teaching without the necessary components for success, the program will not flourish. Based on these results, it can be concluded that the districts these educators are a part of don’t have sufficient time for collaboration or with their students. This can happen easily when schools attempt to adapt a program they are not properly staffed or trained for.

The programs which showed the highest levels of teacher preference were those programs that involved a combination of models or were complete pull-out programs. Based on the advantage those teachers who are from a combination model stated, the strength they cited was having the opportunity to work individually with students as well as being a part of the mainstream classroom. The combination model offers students the opportunity to work with their peers and the EL teacher in their mainstream classroom, as well as time focused him in the EL classroom where specific skills can be focused on. This would be an ideal setting for a newcomer class.

The program models which documented 100% of approval by teachers were the bilingual model and the push-in and pull-out combination. However, the sample size for these program models was only 4 out of 83 respondents. Although this is not a large sample size to draw conclusions from, it does provide support in demonstrating advantages and disadvantages teachers in this model experience.

A disadvantage stated by all program models was a lack of time. Whether the time was for collaboration or student time, all members discussed time being a resource they were lacking. Since this was evident in all the program models, it demonstrated that regardless of the model being used, everyone struggles with adequate time for their program.

The results from this survey validated the concept that all second-language programs can be successful in the opinion of second-language teachers. The opposite can be said as well, that any second-language model can fail. Based on these results, it cannot be concluded that one model of instruction is stronger than another. In fact, the results help support the concept that any of the models of second-language instruction can be successful. In the implications and recommendations section, I plan to address how this information can be related to program model decision application.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

The research presented in this paper provides a limited look into the perspectives of second-language teachers. This particular research was a smaller scale inquiry. The sample size of 83 teachers provided a limited look at their opinions of their program. It is the beginning of educator opinion with regards to the programming schools are using. A further inquiry into more specifics would be beneficial to view.

One of the first areas I would investigate further is looking into rural versus urban school programs. Urban schools generally have a larger ESL teaching staff, which allows for more flexibility in how program delivery occurs. Rural districts often have one teacher for multiple grades and or multiple schools. In situations like this, programming models greatly differ. For this research, one of the limitations was that I did not ask the respondents whether they are teaching in a rural or urban setting. This type of information could be helpful when reviewing to see if there was a specific trend with particular models used and areas taught in.

A second limitation of the study that would open to further research is looking more specifically into the results of the student's assessment scores. The question asked to the educators was inquiring if they felt their current program was generating success. This question was very open-ended and did not address specific areas of growth. A more in-depth look could be done to ask about student success and growth on ACCESS testing, MCA IIIs, or district-specific assessments. The correlations between programming and results in these specific assessments would be a more valid indicator of success.

A further investigation I would look into would be asking specifically why educators did not like their current language programming model. In my survey, I asked teachers if their current model of delivery is their preferred method of language programming. When correlating disadvantages with those responses that disliked their current programming, those individuals stated specific disadvantages. Further research into why those particular disadvantages are problematic could provide helpful information to avoiding these problems in the future.

Implications and Recommendations

In the research and data collection for this paper, I became enthralled in literature, blogs, and videos that address the many different language models of instruction. I read about common weaknesses associated with each model of instruction as well as their strengths. I also saw the strengths discredited by teachers who could prove why it did not work and vice versa, always leading back to the question—is there a model that is stronger to use than the others?

According to the literature and data collected, I do not think it can be concluded that one program should be adapted versus another based solely on research. Each program has strengths that it provides to its students as well as limitations. Because each model has varied elements, the resolution of which model to adapt needs to be a decision that is specific to its school district. Program model adaptation has many considerations.

Several factors must be considered when deciding a second-language program. Factors such as size of school district, size of second-language population, rural versus urban schools, resources available to school, and types of languages spoken are all critical pieces for schools to consider when adapting a second-language program. One of the obstacles that schools will encounter when researching second-language programs is seeing and hearing the negative research that falls upon particular programs. It becomes extremely easy to adapt a program to model what other successful schools may be doing. What schools must be careful about is remembering that each district is unique in their needs. Remembering to consider this is critical in the long term success of their second-language students. Districts need to truly know and understand their clientele to know how to best serve their students. The design and nature of a second-language program is one of the critical components to making it a quality experience for second-language learners (Horst, 2010). Program design must go beyond the model being adapted. It must also include ways to address the common weakness so that the program model adapted does not fall under the same scrutiny. Secondly, it involves aligning the program model selected with appropriate and adequate materials and training. A co-teaching model will only be successful if it is followed in the manner it was designed. Pull-out instruction can work if the instruction is designed appropriately and with general education teacher collaboration.

The ultimate goal is to assist second-language learners in gaining the necessary English skills to be as successful as their English speaking peers. In order for this to happen, schools need to make careful considerations for what is best for the students, and make decisions which reflect the goals they have for their students. Selecting and designing a program model that aligns with the goals the school has for its students will ensure program success.

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Assessment of Second-Language Learners: An Examination of Current Assessment Practice

by

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

On a Friday morning in Ms. Keltgen's* fifth-grade class, the students are settling themselves into their desks to get ready for their weekly reading assessment. Every Friday morning, the class takes a 20-point assessment about the story they read during their reading block. The story the student read for that week is written at a fifth-grade level. Along with this story, are 10 vocabulary words the students are responsible for learning. On the weekly assessment, the students are expected to answer 10 multiple choice questions related to application of the vocabulary words learned that week. The remaining 10 questions of the test are comprehension questions that are meant to check for understanding of the story the students read as well as apply specific reading skills to the story the students just read.

The students are allowed as much time as necessary to complete the test. I was watching 11-year old Mario* take this assessment. Mario's reading level is equivalent to a mid-third grade level. He has been speaking English for four years. When Mario arrived in first grade from Texas, he spoke no English. Reading is a subject area that is he struggles with. Mario started taking the test by completing the questions he was familiar with. He flipped through the pages answering the questions where he recognized particular words or concepts. On the remaining questions, he started looking around the room. It was beginning to appear from an observation perspective that he no longer had the knowledge he needed to complete the remaining portion of his test. He began filling in circles on his test to answers without reading through them anymore. Mario then began to notice other students in the class getting up from their desks and turning in their assessment. After the fifth student stood up, Mario began scanning through his test and marked a choice for each one without reading. He stood up, turned in his test. This behavior was typical for Mario, as well as a few of the other second-language students in Ms. Keltgen's room.

The teacher voiced her concern to me that she struggles with the second-language students in her room because each week they are failing their weekly reading tests. The poor scores on weekly assessments began to have a negative effect on their reading grade, causing them to fail reading. Some of their parents were showing concern and wondering what else could be done. The principal began asking Ms. Keltgen why these children were failing and how she was going to correct this because failure is not acceptable. As a second-year teacher, Ms. Keltgen felt at a loss. She did not have a strong background with second-language learners and was not sure what her next plan of action should be. She requested that I watch the students during class and during their reading test to see if I could offer any suggestions. I expressed that I would be more than willing.

Ms. Keltgen's instructional strategies for the second-language students were exceptional. The strategies she used to introduce vocabulary and reinforce it throughout the week were innovative. She often worked with the second-language students in a small group and spent a large amount of time discussing the reading story with them so they could clarify specific elements of the story. These second-language students were in a very supportive classroom with a teacher who took the time to work with them and, contrary to her personal belief, she was knowledgeable of how to work with second-language students. So why were the students struggling?

After watching the assessment day, I asked Ms. Keltgen what their scores were typically after a test. She explained that a majority of the time they earned less than half the points, earning a 50% or less on their tests. I asked to look at the test to gather a deeper understanding of the assessment they were taking. The elementary school had purchased a new reading curriculum that year, and I was not aware of how the assessments for the new reading series were written. Upon looking over the test, I asked Ms. Keltgen if on Monday I could pull a couple of the students and look over the test with them and discuss what they had incorrect. Ms. Keltgen explained that she already was going over the reading test as a class on Mondays to discuss with her students but was interested into what insight I could provide by meeting with these students.

I examined the assessment prior to the meeting with the two lowest performing students. I immediately noticed the large amount of knowledge of academic vocabulary students taking this assessment would need to be successful. By this statement, I am not solely referring to the vocabulary necessary for the section which tests vocabulary, I am suggesting that the level of vocabulary required to complete any of the questions on this test was difficult. As a second-language teacher, I have become attuned to terminology that will cause trouble for second-language students. Before meeting with the students, I had a strong theory what had happened to them.

Monday morning I sat down with Mario and Fernando.* We read through a question that both boys had wrong. I then asked the boys, what does this question want you to do? Neither of them could answer. After a couple of other inquiries, I knew my theory was correct—these two boys could not understand the words in the question to demonstrate their knowledge of the material. To further detect where the boys struggled the most, I handed them each a highlighter. I asked them to highlight in the question which words they did not know the meaning of. Out of 12 words in one of the questions, Fernando did not know six of them and Mario was unsure of seven of them. For each of the boys, they did not know what half of the words meant. Without the appropriate knowledge, it is not possible for these students to pass their assessments. The boys and I talked through the question and I reworded the question into terminology these boys were familiar with. Once the question was restated, both boys were able to answer the question without hesitation. I finished my session with the boys and returned them to class.

Ms. Keltgen was anxious to meet with me. She was looking forward to any suggestion and help she could get. As we talked, I explained to her the difficulty the boys had with understanding the test. I showed her their tests and, when she saw the words they highlighted, she sat back in her seat and realized the problem. Ms. Keltgen looked at me and said, “Wow! I wouldn’t have ever imagined they did not know what all those words meant. A few of them, obviously, but that many! What should I do?”

This situation is a common challenge faced in classrooms. Second-language students are required to complete assessments similar to their native English-speaking peers. It is very typical for second-language students to have a lower performance level than native English speakers. Second-language students are inundated with new terminology and vocabulary during the course of an academic school-day. A day in the life of second-language students must be exhausting. The amount of stress they are under to learn the language and perform at the same level as their peers is immeasurable. For many of these students, assessment is a frequent reminder to them of what they are not able to do. I would believe that after multiple failures these students would begin to feel a sense of failure within themselves and began to wane in their efforts.

Assessment performance of second-language students is problematic. The assessments students are participating in are written with vocabulary, literary terminology, and a bias that makes success on an assessment a challenge for these students. While schools are at an impasse about what they are able to do about state-mandated assessments, teachers do have options related to the assessments they administer within their classroom.

Classrooms use summative assessment techniques to evaluate their students' understanding of the academic material taught. Summative assessments have been present within the classroom for generations. The shortcoming of this type of assessment, however, is that it does not provide second-language students with the opportunity to show their knowledge if they are struggling or confused with the manner in which the assessment is written or the academic language used in the assessment. Summative assessment has a place in classrooms, but a more beneficial form of assessment for second-language students would be the use of formative assessment. The next section of the paper will review specific logic of why second-language students have difficulties with summative assessments. The third section of the paper will look more specifically at formative assessment and how it can be integrated into the classroom for second-language student success.

* Names have been changed for data privacy.

Chapter II

THE DIFFICULTY WITH CURRENT ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Education today is filled with assessment. Throughout the school day, teachers are performing formal and informal assessments to determine whether their students are grasping newly taught concepts. During the course of a student's academic career, they will complete countless assessments to demonstrate their comprehension and application of material. It would come as no surprise to current educators that the changing demographics in our classrooms yield a challenge in both instruction and assessment. It is a fact that educators are often left brainstorming about it. Following assessment, many teachers review the scores of their second-language students and know their performance is not where it needs to be, it leaves teachers with the knowledge that there is a defined gap in the assessment outcome of their students. For teachers, this can be a frustrating aspect of the job. However, a comprehensive look at the results of the students' performance provides opportunity for change in both future instruction as well as assessment (Bachman, 1990).

Assessing students who have a primary language other than English becomes a fine line between: assessing their ability to understanding the question and testing their ability to explain the concept actually being tested (Young, Steinberg, & Stone, 2008). The introduction to this paper illustrated this specific problem. If the wording and vocabulary used within the assessment are beyond the level of language that the L2 can understand, they will not be able to prove their knowledge of the content being assessed, a common shortcoming for L2s with summative assessments.

Summative Assessment

Summative assessment takes place after the learning of the content material has taken place, and provides feedback about the level of understanding the student has about the material that was taught to them. Summative assessments are used to evaluate student learning, skill acquisition, and achievement at the conclusion of an instructional period. These types of assessments take place at the end of a project, unit, course, program, or semester. The results from summative assessments provide for educators a score or percentage that tells them the success rate of the student who completed the assessment. Examples of summative assessment are: state assessments, end-of-chapter exams, end of unit exams, end of semester exams, final papers, assessments that generate a score of accountability purposes, and final projects. A key component of summative assessment is that it is an evaluation at the end of learning to demonstrate the level of knowledge at the completion of the learning process (Cheng, Rogers, & Wang, 2008).

Summative assessment results are often recorded as scores or grades that are then factored into a student’s permanent academic record, whether they end up as letter grades on a report card or test scores used in college admissions process. Because L2s struggle with performance on summative assessments, less-than-average scores on these forms of assessment can lead to failing course grades as well (Cheng et al., 2008).

A major drawback for summative assessment is that the learning for that particular area is now complete. A less-than-average or failing score on the assessment informs the teacher the students have not mastered the material in which they were instructed. Again though, the unit or subject matter has now been taught and the class will now be moving forward with instruction in another topic or concept. The teacher is left with only results and no longer the opportunity to reteach that material. For L2s whose results from summative assessments are lower percentages, this does not necessarily equate to a lack of knowledge in the content that was just assessed. It is the design of summative assessments which make completing them effectively difficult for L2s. Not including state-mandated assessments, schools administer summative assessments often on a weekly basis. These assessments are often provided through the school's curriculum resources.

Schools spend thousands of dollars on curriculum supplies every year. An enticing feature of textbooks and other curriculum sources is an assessment piece that coincides with the curriculum and textbooks. Textbook companies advertise the efficiency and research-based assessments their package offers, which is very tempting to classroom teachers who are already pressed for time (Young et al., 2008). Because of the rigor of the Common Core Language Arts standards, school districts are looking for complete packages of materials that not only are aligned to the standards, but also have all the necessary support for educators. If educators have the tools they need, then they can spend their valuable time working with students and not worrying about creating assessments and practice materials.

A majority of commercially designed assessments are created for teacher convenience. While student achievement is a consideration, teacher convenience is a larger consideration since teachers are the audience the companies want to appeal to (Read & Chapelle, 2001). Frequently the test types which are written include a majority of multiple-choice and fill-in-the blank assessments. Some matching questions and one or two essay questions complete the design of the test. Test makers know and understand educators want an assessment that can quickly be graded and provide immediate feedback of how the student performed.

These assessment components while convenient for educators are not conducive for L2s (Bachman, 1990). Often these types of assessments carry a bias and are not designed with L2 students' needs in consideration (Cheng et al., 2008). Factors such as cultural bias, vocabulary usage, and linguistic complexity are all factors that make forms of summative assessment invalid indicators of their comprehension of the material that has been taught to them.

Cultural bias in testing arises when one group of students consistently has a significantly different score compared to other groups. Cultural bias has been frequently debated by researchers and scholars. The theory from researchers is that an assessment that is developed based on a normative population cannot compare its results to other ethnic populations. The reliability and validity of an assessment is called into question when the ethnic group being assessed was not a part of the standardization group. In the creation of summative assessments, companies construct assessments that align to the content material and standards, consideration of ethnic groups as well as diverse language populations are not the focus for their assessments (Schleppegrell, 2001). While cultural bias is a point of concern with L2s and assessments, it is not the largest challenge. The primary challenge for L2s is the vocabulary and linguistic complexity that these types of assessment present.

As language-learning is taking place, second-language students are working to put meaning to newly acquired words, accurately use the new vocabulary in their own speech and writing, and apply newly taught academic skills to their limited vocabulary. For instructors of L2s, a common area designated as where L2s struggle is vocabulary. L2s do not yet have a high level of English language proficiency, hence meaning their comprehension of material being taught to them is limited. This difficulty is not only a hindrance in their learning of material, but a limitation for assessment (Schleppegrell, 2001). While lack of knowledge of word definitions and meaning is often the cited reason for poor test performance, it is not the only aspect of language learning that obstructs L2s. Vocabulary knowledge is necessary for success, but having the ability to apply this vocabulary in multiple linguistic settings is even more critical to the success of the comprehension of the written text.

Linguistically complexity refers to the amount of discourse (both written and oral), grammatical structures, organization of ideas, and higher levels of language proficiency (Cheng et al., 2008). Examples of linguistic complexity are the following:

- *Idioms*: Idioms are phrases in which the words are not meant literally.
- *False cognates:* False cognates are words that are similar in form or sound in two different languages, but have two completely different meanings.
- *Overuse of synonyms/indefinite pronouns/missing or unclear antecedents:* It is considered a feature of good writing not to use the same words over and over again. But a test of the writer's effort to infuse lexical variety into test items may result in confusion for English language learners. Synonyms like table, chart, and matrix should not describe the same thing on the same page. Using indefinite articles and substituting pronouns like *some* and *any*, are some of the potentially confusing ways we avoid repeating nouns.
- *Long phrases in questions:* Complex question types might have an opening phrase or clause that either replaces or postpones the question word. For example: According to the passage above, where do sea turtles lay their eggs?

- *Complex sentences:* A complex sentence contains a main clause and one or more subordinating (dependent) clauses. Subordinating (dependent) words include *because, when, after, although, if,* and *since.*
- *Compound sentences:* A compound sentence consists of two or more clauses of equal importance. A coordinating conjunction *(and, or, but, so, for, yet, nor*) often connects the two clauses. Sometimes a conjunctive adverb *(however, therefore, moreover, nevertheless, as a result, accordingly*, etc.) combines the two ideas or begins a new sentence. When combined with other clauses or complex features, combining ideas in this way further complicate the language since it adds the consideration of relationship to comprehension.
- *Logical connectors*: Logical connectors are adverbial expressions that allow a listener/reader to infer connections between two structures. They mainly include dependent words (subordinating conjunctions—see above).
- *Unfamiliar tenses:* These include perfect tenses and modal auxiliaries; they are among the most difficult structures English language learners must interpret. Perfect tenses use a helping verb and a past participle: *had gone, will have gone*:
- *Long noun phrases:* Nouns sometimes work together to form one concept, such as a pie chart or bar graph. Sometimes adjectives and nouns work together to create meaning: *high school diploma, income tax return*. To further complicate interpretation, strings of adjectives and nouns create subjects and objects: *freshwater pond, long-term investment, new word processing program.*

- *Relative clauses:* A relative clause is an embedded clause that provides additional information about the subject or object it follows. Words that lead a relative clause include *that*, *who*, and *which*. Note: Often that is omitted from a relative clause. *Prepositional phrases:* Prepositional phrases work as adjectives or adverbs to modify nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, or adjectives. When they occur before question words, between the subject and the verb, or in strings, they can be especially confusing to English language learners.
- *Comparative construction comparisons:* are made using *greater than, less than, n times as much as, as . . . as—as well as* by using certain verbs. Even though structures such as these are useful and widespread in mathematical discourse, studies have shown that comparative structures are difficult for students to comprehend.
- *Long problem statements/unnecessary expository material:* When the problem context set-up is long, students do not perform as well.
- *Abstract vs. concrete presentation of problem:* Respondents show better performance when survey questions are presented in concrete rather than abstract terms. Information presented in narrative structures tends to be understood and remembered better than information presented in expository text.
- *Passive voice:* In active voice, the subject is the one performing an action. In passive voice, the one receiving the action is in the subject position; often the “actor” is not stated.
- *Complex arrangement of parts of speech:* At times the traditional subject-verb-object word order of English may be altered for expressing focus and emphasis.

- *Negation:* Several types of negative forms are confusing to L2s.

As the above section demonstrates, linguistic complexity has multiple components to it. Construction of assessment questions involves thorough consideration to avoid confusion for L2s. Much as the introduction of this paper presented, a lack of the necessary vocabulary makes comprehension of the question being posed difficult. While the introduction of this paper demonstrated difficulty at a fifth-grade level, the following description demonstrates that even at a second-grade level, this same type of misunderstanding can occur.

A second-grade reading basal series published by Harcourt Publishing offers an assessment piece to each of the stories read in the book's series. The test is broken into three parts. The first section is a vocabulary assessment which includes five or six multiple choice items; with each item there is a sentence where the learner is responsible for selecting the correct word choice from the multiple choice circles. The second section of the exam includes 10 comprehension questions; all of these questions are in multiple choice format. The third and final section of the test is an essay piece which includes two essay style questions. The learner is responsible for writing a response to the question. At first glance, one might suggest that a test of this design is reasonable for second-grade students. The test is brief, assesses the vocabulary associated with the story studied, asks students to apply the reading skill which had been the focus of instruction, and tests a student's comprehension of what occurred in the story. By all accounts, the format of the test appears to meet the needs and match with the instruction already given. It is not until an L2 student attempts to complete the assessment that we find the difficulty that lies within in.

This example models a reading test that would be appropriate for a second-grade student to take. The piece that makes a majority of second-language testing difficult is the terminology the test was written in (Carrier, 2006). To demonstrate this argument, the following is an example from the second-grade reading test:

What does Thomas place on the box?

a. His rock

b. The note from his mother

c. The small top he found at the lake

d. A quarter

The answer for this question is “b,” the note he got from his mother. At a quick glance, this question should not pose much difficulty to an L2 student. The question is brief; the choices are short phrases: why do L2 students struggle with this question? Two word usage problems that consistently give L2 students difficulty. The first is with the word “place.” Throughout the entire story, the student never hears that Thomas “places” an item on the box. Instead, the story indicates that Thomas “put” the note from his mother on the box. Many L2 students become confused with the meaning of the word “place” as it appears in the sentence. The second area of difficulty stems from the preposition, “on.” L2 students especially beginners and intermediates struggle to gain command of their prepositions. It is a particularly challenging part of speech for some students to grasp. In the story the students read, Thomas has a rock in his box. To no surprise of second-language teachers many L2 students select “a” as their answer to this question. The reasoning is quite easy, young L2 students frequently get on and in missed up in their speech. In addition to this part of speech confusion, some students do not understand that “place” means to put an object somewhere. The question above is one which would be located in the comprehension section of the test. While this question is not aiming to assess vocabulary knowledge, the underlying make-up of the question does, without trying to make the question a vocabulary assessment question.

This example has been provided not as a discredit to the company who created it but as a demonstration of how what appears as a simple question, can really be an issue for an L2 student. With the increase of L2 students inundating our schools, educators cannot assume that the quick tools they have at their disposal for assessment will be appropriate for all the students in their classroom. Teachers need to be familiar with common L2 assessment difficulty so they can determine if the test they are about to bestow upon their students is an appropriate measure or not. The purpose in evaluating assessment validity is not to “water down” tests for L2 students (Cheng et al., 2008). The underlying goal is that the assessment will be a better match to a student’s language and vocabulary knowledge (Cheng et al., 2008).

An additional consideration with regard to vocabulary is the correlation of second-language students and socioeconomic status. There is a high correlation between lower socioeconomic class and second-language families (Young et al., 2008). Reasoning for this can be tracked to many second-language families not having high paying jobs. Many second-language families work blue-collar jobs. Factory workers, farm hands, and other lower paying positions are the options for L2 families when they arrive in America with limited or no English skills. Several L2 students are members of families with limited income. Much of the research surrounding lower socio economic students and vocabulary shows that students from these homes have a smaller vocabulary base versus students from a higher socioeconomic status. For those L2s who have a lower vocabulary base in their native language, building an English vocabulary base without a first language to draw from increases the difficulty of retention of the word as well as application of the word (Young, et al., 2008)..

A second challenge for lower socioeconomic students is that many of them lack background knowledge and experiences. L2s can also have this challenge. For L2s who are both lower socioeconomic as well as language learners, a lack of background knowledge to draw prior knowledge and connect newly taught material with makes the learning process at times incomprehensible. The lower socioeconomic connection has a stronger implication for instruction; however, those students will struggle with the assessment of the material as well. This struggle will be present in both classroom assessments but especially on state-mandated assessments.

State-Mandated Tests

We currently exist in an educational system where student growth and success is associated with student achievement on high-stakes tests. The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCAIII's) is one such test. Every spring students beginning in grade three through grade eight are required to complete an MCA in both reading and math. Tenth-grade students are mandated to take a reading test, while 11^{th}-grade students are required to take the MCA for math. These high-stakes tests carry a lot of importance for schools. Lower performing schools can have sanctions placed against them based on student's not meeting the standards on these tests.

State-mandated assessments consistently see a lot of criticism for the manner in which they are written (Holmes, & Duron, 2000). The level of rigor and difficulty associated with the common core and MCA III's has generated voices of angst amongst schools with lower performing students. Schools with large populations of L2 students are often exasperated with not only the complexity of the skills required to pass the test, but the level of questioning associated with the test. Linguistic complexity and vocabulary knowledge are two of the biggest struggles for L2s on MCA III's.

For this paper, the focus is on classroom assessment rather than high-stakes or state-mandated assessments. While a deeper look and discussion of MCA III's and second-language students could easily be examined, the purpose for this paper is to take a closer look at the assessment practices that occur within the classroom. There is belief that by utilizing alternate assessment techniques and formative assessment techniques, L2 student achievement could improve, which perhaps may carry out eventually to higher stakes assessments.

Chapter III

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVED ASSESSMENT

Chapter II presented and discussed specific structures of assessment that make valid assessment for L2s troublesome. Identification of these structures is only a beginning point for possible change. To truly address the challenge which assessment brings for L2s, educators need to have a shift in their current practices and thinking. For example, do teachers need to use the commercially created assessments that accompany their purchased curriculum? More importantly, could teachers involve themselves in a paradigm shift from summative assessment to formative assessment? Making accommodations and modifications to current assessments will also be discussed in this section; however, a larger recommendation will be focused on making the shift from current assessment techniques to utilizing formative assessment techniques.

Alternatives for Assessment

The key question teachers need to ask themselves is if the assessment they are administering is properly assessing their L2 students' knowledge. Assessing L2 students' vocabulary and concepts does require additional thought and planning by the classroom teacher. However, if educators match their assessments with their instruction, the results will be more valid indicators of student understanding (Read & Chapelle, 2001). Because the underlying purpose of assessment is to provide teachers with results of student understanding, it can be assumed that proper assessments and assessment techniques need to be in practice for this to successfully occur.

Designing additional assessments does not have to be a grueling and time-consuming project. For many teachers, the thought of designing an assessment seems troublesome and overwhelming to know where to start. As Nation (2004) pointed out, the start to creating a quality assessment is knowing what information the teacher wants to assess. An important aspect of selecting an appropriate assessment is also matching the student’s language acquisition level with the assessment. A newcomer or beginning student would not be ready for studying affixes and parts of speech. An appropriate assessment for these students would be saying a vocabulary word and asking the student to point to the word. Or, if word production is the goal of the assessment, a picture prompt could be given to the student and he or she would have to produce the word. For a classroom teacher who does not possess a great deal of knowledge about what acquisition level their students are at, they should consult the specialist in their building with that sort of information. For an English as a Second-Language (ESL) teacher, the language levels of their students would be information they have at their disposal. The assessment being used, should match the developmentally appropriate characteristics of the student’s acquisition level.

It is a good measure of word knowledge if the assessment covers more than one strand of language acquisition. When teachers are deciding upon what they want to assess, both a productive and receptive format to the test produces a quality indicator of whether or not the student can apply and comprehend the meaning of the word (Bachman, 1990). All of these decisions can be traced back to Nation’s (2004) original pointer of deciding what is to be assessed. Once the teacher makes the decision of what he or she wants to assess, the second step is deciding the format or type of test the teacher is going to be using.

There are several different types of tests a teacher can design. One of the most common types of assessments is multiple-choice tests (Nation, 2004). Multiple-choice testing is easy to construct and can be simple to administer. Another advantage of multiple-choice testing is the versatility of what it tests. Because there are numerous ways a multiple-choice test can be created, teachers can use this method for any of the areas they wish to assess. The key to a successful multiple-choice test for a L2 student is the manner and language that is used in the writing of the test. Teachers should make sure they use words the student will be familiar with and understand (Young et al., 2008). If the student is intermediate to advanced in their language levels, the questions and choices written for them can increase in difficulty. Multiple choice testing would be considered a test of the student's receptive skills (Bachman, 1990).

Another receptive test teachers can design is a test that incorporates the students' listening skills. An example of this test is giving the students a set of pictures and asking them to point to the word they are told. The teacher could keep track of responses on a separate documenting sheet. For students who are advanced and transitional in their language levels, the student might be asked to listen to a prompt and then construct their response in writing. An example is giving the student a vocal prompt to construct an example of a specific vocabulary word. The student would have to accomplish two skills. The first would be for the student to comprehend what the question or request was; the second would be to produce the answer in written form. A test like the one just described requires little to no preparation and can be administered under the supervision of the teacher.

A second commonly used format for vocabulary assessment is matching. In this format, two separate lists of prompts are generated, with the intention of asking students to match items within a group to each other. There are various ways matching can be constructed. One such way is matching single words with individual definitions. A second way is having sentences constructed that are missing one term. The student being assessed is trying to find the correct word to match with the sentence it best fits into. Matching assessments can be relatively easy to construct, with the largest challenge being sure there is distinct enough differences among the choices. A challenge frequently encountered in matching tests for L2 students are when the matching options have similar meanings. Often, L2 students struggle to make a distinction between the two options (Bachman, 1990). This particular factor is especially true for intermediate and most advanced level students.

Switching the format from testing receptive knowledge to assessing productive skills aims at creating a test that allows the student to either write or speak. When testing speaking, the amount of preparation required is not as demanding. In fact, asking students about their word knowledge and having them explain information to the teacher provides teachers with immediate feedback of what students knows and what they require additional instruction in. Nation (2004) described an option of having interviews with students to assess their understanding of word knowledge.

A second type of productive assessment is having students produce the words in writing. This type of test can be as simple as writing the word in a sentence or as complicated as constructing a story where the student must incorporate all the words they are being tested on. The teacher could also create some sort of prompt, written or pictorial, for the student to respond to. An advantage of this type of assessment is the information it provides teachers. Educators would be able to determine if the student can appropriately place in the word in context, if the student assigns the correct part of speech to the word, and if the student makes necessary affix adjustments to the words depending on the construction of the context. The development of an assessment like this would be simple to do because a majority of the assessment would be the student's response. The disadvantage to this type of assessment is the grading of the test. Writing is a very subjective type of testing where one person's scoring of the test can be very different from the next person's. Detailed and specific criteria would need to be established before the test is administered to decide how the test will be graded.

Several testing formats have been discussed thus far. Any of these assessment formats would be appropriate in designing a test that will assess student vocabulary knowledge as well as content knowledge. Once a teacher knows what they want to assess, and the type of assessment they want to use to, they can begin to construct the test. The language used within these tests needs to be consistent with the instruction they have been receiving (Read & Chapelle, 2001). Writing a test with terminology that is unfamiliar to the student does not yield the results the teacher will be looking for. In addition to making sure the terminology matches the student's language acquisition levels, teachers should also design tests where the requested action matches a skill they have already performed. For example, it is not appropriate for a teacher to ask students to write a sentence with the vocabulary words, if they have not practiced using the words in sentences during instruction. Matching instruction to assessment is critical component of L2 success with assessment (Young et al., 2008).

It is true that designing specialized testing for L2 students does require additional work from teachers. The test is not something that can be quickly reproduced from a master copy purchased from a publishing company. Accurately testing L2 student vocabulary knowledge is a large task to complete. However, if teachers take into account the reasons why commercially created assessments might not be the best indicators of vocabulary knowledge or overall academic knowledge, it may encourage them to take the necessary time to create or design assessments that are more appropriately aligned to their instruction (Carrier, 2006).

Educators, who wish to make their instruction reflect the success of their students, need to consider the adaptation of their assessment to allow student success. Providing modifications within the testing process or creating alternate summative assessments are one option teachers have to assist the L2s in the classroom have a higher level of success. Another form of assessment, which would aid in the closing of the achievement gap as well as raise summative assessment scores in the future, is the use of formative assessment.

Formative Assessment

The goal of formative assessment is to provide ongoing feedback throughout the course of a unit of study. Formative assessment allows teachers to monitor student progress and adjust or improve instruction before the conclusion of the unit. Using formative assessment supports learning while learning is taking place. A key component to formative assessment is specific teacher feedback to students. The belief behind formative assessment is that the students will use the feedback they receive from their teacher to assist in moving the learning process forward (William, 2010).

There is documented evidence that formative assessment for L2s improves self-esteem and self-motivation. The relationship that formative assessment cultivates between student and teacher allows the student to feel more confident in the classroom setting. Students who are in are classrooms where the teacher uses formative assessment see students poised for responding to questions, but not withdrawn if their response is not the answer the teacher was expecting to elicit (William, 2010).

For second-language learners, frequent feedback from their teacher about the learning process is critical. L2s need feedback from their instructors during the learning process to clarify misunderstandings and apply or connect other concepts they may be unaware of. Following are listed some of the simplest forms that can be utilized in any classroom.

One form of formative assessment involves using summaries and reflections. To do this, students would stop and reflect, make sense of what they have heard or read. They would apply their own personal meaning to newly taught skill. These require that students use content-specific language as well. Not only does this double as a great exercise in writing practice for L2s, it also provides the teacher with a better indicator of who can articulate the skills (Pinchok & Brandt, 2009).

A second form is through the use of lists, charts, and graphic organizers. Students will organize information, make connections, and note relationships through the use of various graphic organizers. Instead of completing closed worksheets that suggest one answer for students to complete, graphic organizers require students to user higher order thinking skills to apply the knowledge they just learned (Pinchok & Brandt, 2009).

A third form is using visual representations of information. Students will use both words and pictures to make connections and increase memory, facilitating retrieval of information later on. This "dual coding" helps teachers address classroom diversity, preferences in learning style, and different ways of “knowing” (Pinchok & Brandt, 2009).

Lastly, collaborative activities give students the opportunity to move and/or communicate with others as they develop and demonstrate their understanding of concepts. The teacher moves around among these groups of students and listens to their discussions to determine which students understand the material and which students require clarification or perhaps re-teaching of the skill (Pinchok & Brandt, 2009).

The activities mentioned above are suggested daily activities that can be done within the classroom during the learning process. One key piece to these activities as well as any other form of assessment is the feedback students receive from it. Feedback is not only a score. For any student to learn from their mistake, they must be informed of what mistakes or misconceptions they currently have and how to correct their misunderstanding. Too often students are given a worksheet or test back with a percent on the top. They will know which questions they had incorrect, but no understanding of why those questions were wrong. To move the learning process forward, feedback is an essential piece to the learning process, even with assessment.

Concluding Thoughts

For educators of L2s, assessment performance is often the center of discussion and collaboration. Lower performing L2s are frequently deliberated about because teachers are aware of the learning gap that exists between L2s and native English speakers. Identification of this condition yields no benefit to L2s if the educators they work with are not willing to make the necessary changes that lead to academic success.

Summative assessment practices are a permanent practice in education. High -stakes assessments are present for accountability purposes, and we cannot ignore them. Educators are unable to change the fact that these types of assessments must be given. Classroom assessment practice, however, is where teachers do have the choice. Through the use of formative assessment practices and making necessary adjustments to summative assessments in the classroom, educators can assist the second-language students in their classroom to having a higher level of achievement. It is hopeful that educators will view this information as a stepping stone to more successful assessment practices within their own classroom.

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