

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 358 740

FL 021 323

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 TITLE Proposed Research on Effective Strategies Used by Parents To Enhance Learning and Acquisition of English by Their Children.
 PUB DATE Jun 93
 NOTE 20p.; Graph may not reproduce legibly.
 PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS *Child Language; Elementary Education; Elementary School Students; *English (Second Language); Kindergarten; Kindergarten Children; Limited English Speaking; Low Income Groups; *Parent Influence; *Parent Participation; *Parents as Teachers; Research Methodology; Research Needs; Research Projects; Spanish Speaking; Time Factors (Learning)

ABSTRACT

A proposed research project focusing on the role of parents in promoting their children's learning of English as a Second Language is outlined. Specifically, the research would investigate the extent to which parental support and interaction of various kinds will enhance the learning and acquisition of English in low-income Hispanic kindergarten students. Related research is first reviewed, and the methodology for the proposed study is described. Several elementary schools would be randomly selected for their populations of varied Spanish and English literacy and verbal proficiency and for the existence of bilingual kindergarten programs. Classrooms from the schools would be randomly selected and three control and three experimental classrooms would be determined, each with a representative sampling of students. English listening and speaking skills are to be pre-tested and post-tested, and parent interviews at the end of the school year are to be conducted to determine parental support of student language learning. The parent questionnaire, the student interview format, and biographical data on the authors are appended. (Contains 16 references.) (MSE)

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ED358740

Proposed Research on Effective Strategies
Used by Parents to Enhance Learning
and Acquisition of English by Their Children

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Submitted for Publication in the

NABE '92/'93 Conference Journal

June 1993

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Proposed Research on Effective Strategies Used by Parents to Enhance Learning and Acquisition of English by Their Children

Abstract

Parental involvement has increasingly become an important means to enhancing children's education and development. Several states and universities have implemented programs to encourage this participation. This proposed research aims to identify effective interactional strategies that parents use with their children in an attempt to enhance English development. These strategies range from encouraging the children to participate with peers of the dominant culture to using English in the dominant community for survival purposes. Reviewing ESL lessons and trying to learn English from children are other areas considered. This proposed research would also consider affective areas that might effect children's learning and compound the variables.

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Introduction

A basic hypothesis of this paper is that parents can have a positive effect on their children's learning of English. The purpose is to propose a methodology for investigating the extent to which parental support and interaction will enhance the learning and acquisition of English (L2) in Hispanic elementary school students whose first language (L1) is Spanish.

Delimitations

In order to ascertain if attitudinal factors might affect the results, the children are interviewed. From the interviews, affective variables may be analyzed. Parental attitudes would also be considered, as would documentation of teaching practices that each teacher used. Lastly, if there is an extreme variation in the scatterplots, student IQ scores might be analyzed.

Review of Related Literature

History and Nature of Problem: Current bilingual education programs have been around for less than twenty years. Much has been written on the learning and acquisition of a second language. There has not been a significant amount written about the maintenance of the first language (Verhoeven 1991) and this aspect of learning is of importance, as well.

There are studies on the importance of developing L1 listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills and giving L2 instruction so that the reading and writing skills can be developed by way of transfer from the L1. Cummins (1984) developed this concept, calling it the interdependency hypothesis. (p. 387) This demonstrates the relevance for the use of bilingual education in a multicultural society where English-

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only education, in the past, has had limited success.

In non-English speaking communities it can often be found that there is limited parental access to the educational resources and to the money for obtaining them. There is also ambivalence toward what goes on in the home -- the use of the primary language, cultural transmission, and interactional styles that will empower students when in an environment where interaction with the teacher will occur (Heath, 1983). In other words, the children do not get interaction that will be conducive to communicating with the teacher. Another part of the problem, according to Ogbu, comes into play when the minority group's dominated status exposes them to academic failure (1979).

Cummins (1986) sees the relationship between the majority and minority groups as one where the power and status of the majority brings about strong influences toward performances in school. The findings from related studies (Ogbu 1978) have been explained by Cummins (1984) as a "bicultural ambivalence" where the student lacks cultural identification in both school and home. As a result, rather than being "empowered", the students become "disabled" in relation to these institutional characteristics: (1) incorporation of L1 language and culture into curriculum, (2) minority community participation in children's education, (3) student's intrinsic motivation to make active use of the language for generating knowledge, and (4) professionals become advocates for the minority students (1986).

In summary, there are several factors which contribute to the dropout rate and to the inability of students to transfer well into English. This has brought about the labeling of "at

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risk" to many, if not all, non-English speaking students. The Hispanic child from a different language and cultural background has many obstacles to overcome before being able to really play a part in developing his/her future plans on a positive and productive level here in the United States.

There is a significant amount of research that focuses on the success of bilingual education, including psychological aspects, language learning processes, cognitive processes, socioeconomic factors, and a culture/content specific curriculum (Issues in English Development, 1985). Current trends for teaching non-English speaking students aim for an environment that is most conducive to learning in a meaningful and natural context. Krashen (1982) has such ideas, in terms of language acquisition and learning methodology. He has provided a theory for the L2 acquisition and proficiency, using principles of the natural order of language learning. In addition, he has taken into account the affective variables of the learning process. One suggestion is the use of the home environment for practicing the L2. This allows for more exposure and practice in the L2 to take place in the classroom.

Related Research: The Cubans of Dade County, Florida, saw their children's problems in the public school system and took it upon themselves to open private schools. They were able to develop their own bilingual program using Cuban teachers and thereby maintaining ethnic control. The "private" schools empowered learners rather than disabling them (Garcia & Otheguy, 1985; Ovando & Collier, 1985).

Today, there can be seen similar trends in the changing of

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education for the non-dominant language speaking student. These trends are reflected in studies that often focus on involvement with the native community and the learning of the L2. Verhoeven (1991) investigated areas where factors for prediction of L1 and L2 proficiency might occur. The areas involved characteristics from the child, the family, and institutional care. Findings included the relationship between the child's orientation toward cultural life and bilingual proficiency. The degree of identification in both cultures is critical to the development of bilingualism, as are the cultural attitudes of the parents and institutions.

Auerbach's study (1989) provides critical analysis of family literacy programs that provide instruction to parents so that their children may receive additional instruction at home. She discusses the dynamics of the family system, including the role reversal that occurs between the parent and child. She examines related literacy studies that reveal where indirect factors enhance students' learning more than direct interaction.

Other studies and projects worthy of mention include the Bradford Bilingual Project (Pousada 1989), which focuses on parental support and determination of appropriate goals. The University of Bradford conducted the Mother Tongue and English Teaching Project (MOTET), an experimental bilingual project to test viability of an elementary school program for Pakistani immigrant children.

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (Williams & Chavkin, 1989; Nardine & Morris, 1991) has conducted research in the south, Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and

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Texas, in an attempt to define effective activities and successful parental involvement programs. These range from home tutoring to leadership interaction.

Justification for Study: Dr. Levin's Accelerated School Project (Seeley, 1990; Levin, 1991) involves parents in a number of ways. Knowledge of successful strategies would give teachers and parents in not only Accelerated Schools, but also regular schools, valuable information for enhancing language development. With a growing number of states mandating legislation for involvement there will probably be a need for optimizing such involvement.

The new paradigm of Accelerated Schools calls for a reform in thinking and practices within a school and its community. This reform is on the part of teachers, administrators, parents, and students. Seeley also discusses the accountability needed on the parts of parents and children, as well as the need for methodology in parent/student interaction (1990).

The role of parents in the educational process has changed in many parts of the United States and it is likely to continue, not just in this country, but in other parts of the world as well. Nardine and Morris (1991) discuss state legislation where programs have been initiated to develop parent effectiveness in working with their children. Oregon currently has state-supported programs that focus on helping parents to help their children in cognitive, social, and physical development. South Carolina, in 1984, imposed the Education Improvement Act, which provides parenting classes and Massachusetts has a School Improvement Fund, which supplies grant applications for schools with three,

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or more, parents there to contribute. (p. 365) Nardine and Morris mention the lack of studies that have ascertained the levels of parental involvement. This causes a questioning of where to begin, how to implement, and what to focus on when considering the needs of students and schools. Parents' commitment and ability also must be taken into account during the time they are contributing to the future of their children and what they learn.

Auerbach's study leaves one wondering if the applications of the conclusions transfer over to the other objectives of learning, specifically in maintenance of L1 and acquisition of L2. Reading is a group of complicated skills that require competency on the parents' part before being able to supplement and enhance their children's learning. Language learning is also a complicated, time consuming task, but it may well be that children can be empowered by means of their parents encouragement and modeling.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to describe a research technique for studying the enhancement of L2 acquisition. The proposed methodology investigates the extent that children's language development may be improved by way of parent's encouragement and support at home and in the community.

Methodology/Procedure

This paper closely relates to a true experimental design, specifically the posttest only control group design. Cluster sampling would make data collection more convenient.

The proposed procedure requires random selection of several elementary schools attended by students from families of low

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socio-economic status (SES). Parents of these students would have varying verbal and literacy proficiencies in Spanish and English. The participating schools would also have bilingual pre-kindergarten programs.

Before entering the bilingual program, each subject, like all bilingual students, will have home information gathered in order that language proficiency can be assessed. A Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) determines placement into the program. The subjects that would participate in the study would not be assessed initially for English proficiency outside of LPAC questioning.

The research calls for random selection of classrooms from the schools that would participate. Initially, permission letters would need to be sent to school districts, followed by permission letters to principals and teachers. Participating teachers would receive additional information and guidelines for the school year that the study is implemented.

Two groups would be established, the control group and the experimental group. Each group would contain a sampling that is representative of the general population, including schools from Levin's Accelerated Schools Model. Three classrooms would be in each group.

Guidelines for English-as-a-Second-language (ESL) and documentation of procedures used by teachers would contribute to the validity of the proposed research. For example, the possibility of one approach being more effective than another could be controlled by using the same approaches in each thematic unit. Documentation by teachers could reveal if possibly one

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unit of instruction was more elaborately done than another. Limiting instruction to 45 minutes each day and using instruction such as that suggested by Proficiency Oriented Instruction (Omaggio, 1986) could contribute to controlling type and quality of instruction. Topics for thematic units would be provided to participating teachers in the experimental group. These would include self and family, colors, foods, animals, Christmas, weather and seasons, clothing for different seasons, and counting.

A parent questionnaire (Appendix I) would be administered during the end of the year parent conference. After the conference, the parents would be informed that they had been part of a research project. They would also be given some general information about the study. De-hoaxing should involve only this explanation and mention that the students would have no side effects from the study. The parents would not be informed of the project until after the fact, in order to eliminate the John Henry effect.

A student interview (Appendix II) would also be used, so as to ascertain student attitudes toward school, native culture, ESL, and having parents interact with the student. It would be beneficial to take into consideration the negative responses that a student might have.

This proposed research requires that a pilot study be conducted to ascertain the validity of interview and questionnaire items. The questionnaire and interview items would be reviewed by two experienced researchers and then samples sent to a group of teachers. They would try these items and respond with critical

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comments.

Sampling: Approximately 132 Hispanic children from pre-K programs would be used for this study. Six pre-k classrooms would be used and the students in them would be coming from backgrounds that, most likely, have little or no English.

These children would have also have varying levels of Spanish proficiency, as well as various countries of origin. The subjects would speak Spanish as their native language. However, all these children would come from a low SES background and would be considered "at-risk".

Instrumentation. The proposed research would make use of the Pre-LAS English Form A test for measuring English listening and speaking skills in the students. This is an approved oral language proficiency test in the state of Texas. Level I is used to correspond with grade levels K-5. The students in this project would be assessed at the end of the school year to ascertain language learning for the year.

Analysis and Treatment of Data

Data organization would consist of listing the Pre-LAS scores with the results of each quantifiable variable from the parent questionnaire. The student's Pre-LAS score would be correlated with each one of the parent's responses and would then be plotted on a graph. With these scattergrams the multiple regression technique would be performed, using the linear squares technique.

In the hypothetical regression study which follows, a linear regression analysis has been completed. Hypothetical data are presented for responses to one of the proposed interview

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questions. The data presented is the LAS score, the dependent variable, and the response to one of the proposed interview questions, namely the number of minutes per week that parents read to their child, the independent variable.

The Regression Output can be seen from the sample spreadsheet. The Lotus spreadsheet program was used to perform the linear regression calculations. Predicted scores can be obtained using the Constant, plus the X Coefficient, times the number of minutes read to by parents. This technique could also be used to correlate the LAS score to more than one independent variable.

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Hypothetical Regression Study -- Spreadsheet

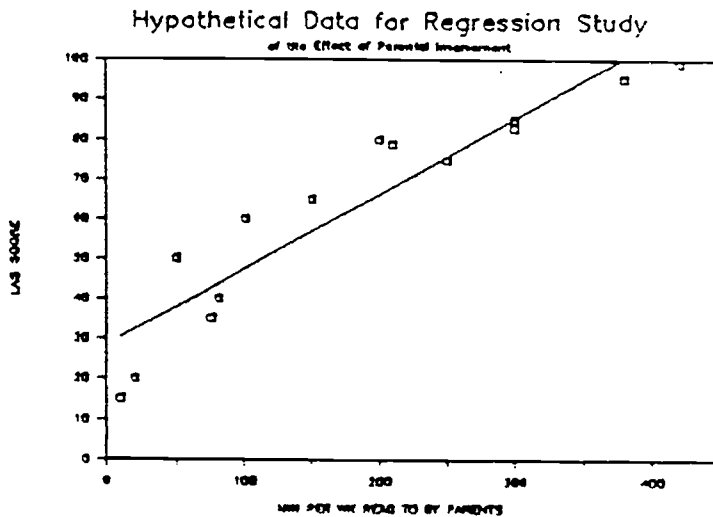
Hypothetical Regression Analysis of the Effect of Parental Involvement
in Learning English in Hispanic Children

MINUTES PER WK READ TO BY PARENTS	Actual Predicted LAS LAS SCORE SCORE

10	15 30.46787
20	20 32.35748
50	50 38.02825
75	35 42.75030
80	40 43.63510
100	60 47.47431
150	65 56.32233
200	80 66.37034
210	79 68.25995
250	75 75.81836
300	83 85.26638
300	85 85.26638
380	55 100.3832
420	55 107.5416

Regression Output:
 Constant 28.57827
 Std Err of Y Est 10.13444
 R Squared 0.863287
 No. of Observations 14
 Degree of Freedom 12
 X Coefficient(s) 0.188969
 Std Err of Coef. 0.021152

Hypothetical Regression Study -- Graph



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APPENDIX I

Parent Questionnaire

Circle yes or no and fill in blanks when necessary

1. Do you tell your child to speak only Spanish at home?
(yes or no)
2. Do you tell your child to hurry and learn English?
(yes or no) If so, how many times per week? _____
3. Do you encourage your child to speak English at home?
(yes or no) If so, how? _____
4. How many times per week, on an average, do you tell your child to speak in English with brothers and sisters?

5. Do you encourage your child to teach you English at home?
(yes or no) If so, how many times per week? _____
6. Do you speak, read, or write English? _____
If so, which one? _____
7. How many minutes per week do you model your English proficiency at home with you child? _____
8. Do you play a part in helping your child develop friendships with English-speaking peers? (yes or no)
If so, how? _____
9. Do you and child read/look at books in English? (yes or no)
10. How many minutes per week do you read in English to your _____
11. How many times per week do you ask your child to tell you the name of something in English when looking at books?

12. How many minutes per week do you spend in the library with

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your child, looking for and at children's books?

13. Are you involved with your child's school related activities? (yes or no) If so, how many minutes per week?

14. How many minutes per week do you volunteer to help out at school? _____

15. Do you spend time each day with your child in reviewing what was learned in ESL that day at school? (yes or no)

16. How many minutes per week do you remind your child of the name of something he/she learned in English? _____

17. Do you expand on his/her learning by providing learning experiences which relate to a subject area recently studied at school? (yes or no) If so, how many hours per week? _____

18. When your child learns a skill in English do you encourage your child to make use of it in public? (yes or no) If so, how many times per week? _____

19. Do you feel positive about the majority group which surrounds the community? (yes or no)

20. Do you interact with English-speaking peers on a friendly basis, in front of your child? (yes or no)

21. Are you comfortable in an environment where only English is being spoken? (yes or no)

22. What else do you do with or tell your child when you are focused on his/her learning of English? _____

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APPENDIX II

Student Interview

(This interview is to be conducted in the subject's native language.)

1. Do you like going to school? (yes or no)
2. Do you like learning how to speak English? (yes or no)
4. Do you enjoy reading in Spanish? (yes or no)
5. Do you like your teacher? (yes or no)
6. Do you like the subjects you studied in ESL? (yes or no)
7. Did your parents help you to learn English? (yes or no)
9. Do you like for your parents' help when you study?

(yes or no) If not, why not? _____

10. Do you enjoy speaking English? (yes or no)
11. Do you enjoy celebrating the holidays of Americans?
(yes or no)
12. Do you like playing with children who cannot speak Spanish?
(yes or no)
13. Do you talk and play with English speaking children very
much at home? (yes or no) At school? (yes or no)

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Biographical Data

Ivy Linsley was born in Chicago, Illinois, but has been in Texas for 30 years. She began studying Spanish in elementary school and continued for several years. In 1985 she began studying Spanish again and decided to pursue a teaching career. She received her Associate's degree from Galveston College in 1985, her Bachelor of Arts from the University of St. Thomas in 1989, and her Masters of Education in 1992 from Houston Baptist University. Since 1989 she has taught in first or second grade bilingual classrooms at Hollibrook Accelerated Elementary School.

Jerald Linsley, a native Texan, received his B.S. from Texas Tech University and his Ph.D. from Rice University, both degrees are in Chemical Engineering. He is currently a Senior Process Engineer for Simulation Sciences Inc., a firm which provides computer process simulation software for the petroleum and chemical industries. He has fifteen years of industrial experience and ten years of academic experience. Previous industrial employers include Dow Chemical, Union Carbide, Getty Oil, Exxon, Univac, Phillips Petroleum, Brown and Root, and Gulf Oil Co. Previous universities where he taught graduate and undergraduate chemical engineering courses include McNeese State Univ., Prairie View A&M Univ., and the Florida Institute of Technology. He has done research in space applications of chemical engineering, chemical engineering computing, and field inversion gel electrophoresis. Dr. Linsley is a specialist in the application of computers in chemical engineering and education.