

Caught in the Cocoon, the Case of the Pedagogy of the English Learners

Margaret Solomon, PhD
Assistant Professor
Coordinator of Research in Graduate Studies
University of Redlands

ABSTRACT

This article presents the 40 year history of the educational policy that shaped the instructional development of English learners. The author presents this historical narration of English language instruction highlighting the tension that continues to exist between the educational policy and the educational practice and makes it a case that needs attention by policy makers and practitioners.

Introduction

If an optical illusion on the life stages of a monarch butterfly is flashed before your eyes, one would first see the Monarch emerging first from a tiny egg into a larva crawling on a leaf. Then it develops a Cocoon or Chrysalis and cages itself to experience a transformative growth, its bright green color changes to dark blue and suddenly a few days later it breaks through the walls of the cocoon as a full fledged monarch butterfly. As its wings dry, it flies to the nearest food spot. Then on, it experiences a freedom that is hard to imagine and flies away. This system of metamorphosis in a butterfly's life signifies the principles of change, growth and transformation but when there is disruption in this cycle there cannot be full growth.

Purpose of the Article

It is premised in this article that the instruction of second language learners has not reached its maturity because it has been caught between ideological panaceas of the educational policy that is influenced by various political ideologies and the instructional

dilemmas faced by teachers of English learners. It is as if the butterfly has been caught in the cocoon of policy and practice; therefore, the pedagogy of the English learners has not been set free to reach its full growth.

A High Number of Spanish Speakers in Classrooms

Valley High School is like any other high school in California beaming with a high number of Spanish speakers in its classrooms. English learners in this school are categorized into three groups on the basis of their English proficiency measured by the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). The new comers who are mostly monolingual Spanish speakers and others with beginning levels of English competency are placed in an English language development class for a 2 hour block each day with a teacher who speaks Spanish and has an aide to assist her. They spend the rest of the school day in regular content classes with some language support from an aide. The second group of students who is at the intermediate level of English proficiency receives sheltered instruction in English one hour and are in the mainstream classes rest of the day. Here too language aides are assigned to help students individually with their course work as they learn to master the academic English language. The next group is made up of students who tested out at the early advanced level in English and are on their own in the mainstream classrooms for their content courses. This school prides itself for having an instructional program that is based on college entrance standards for its EL. Teaching them with high expectations has certainly benefited the second language learners in this school.

Serrano is another High School in California and has a different type of instructional program for its ELs. Here students at the Beginning level of English receive two hours of English instruction with a teacher who speaks only English. Rest of the school day students attend regular classrooms for their content subjects with a Spanish Aide going around and helping them to do the class work. The teachers here pride themselves using Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) for their ELs. Students who are at the intermediate and advanced levels of English proficiency in this school attend regular classrooms and are taught like others. Some language assistance from an Aide is available for students who have difficulty in learning the materials taught in these classrooms. In this school the academic achievement of EL continue to lag behind that of other learners, yet serious steps are not taken to find the best ways to teach the EL.

These two scenarios speak to the educational paradox that exists in schools regarding the instruction of English learners. It is obvious that there is no congruence in second language instruction between schools. Besides, there is no philosophical clarity about the instruction of English learners. Bilingualism which promotes academic English development and native language development for school success has been beaten down by the politics of this millennium. (Krashen, 1999) Although research clearly indicates that building literacy in primary language certainly can be a short-cut to English literacy

(Smith, 1994; Goodman, 1982) educators and policy makers are unable to make that a reality for ELs in our schools. For the past forty years there has been a continuous struggle between the educational policy and the instructional practice for second language learners.

This article first discusses the inherent characteristics of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and shows how it progressed from one reauthorization to the other and finally merged into No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Federal educational policy. Then explains how during this long period of policy development pedagogical tensions and dilemmas evolved for school administrators and teachers. Overall, this article discusses how the bilingual policy progressed for the past 40 years and has not still brought a resolution to the dilemma of instructing the ELL in the U.S. for academic success.

It has become clear that since the enactment of the Bilingual Education Law in 1968 to the passing of NCLB in 2002 as Title III program, there has been a continuous debate about the instruction of second language with controversy over whether to teach English through first language literacy and bilingual instruction or through English immersion to expedite English language proficiency causing continuous tension between the ideas of assimilation and maintenance. Those who believe in the assimilation philosophy think that immigrants who speak languages other than English must learn English as quickly as possible. The maintenance philosophy, on the other hand, opposes the systemic and definite loss of the native language and culture in ethnic children because this loss slows down the second language learning process and violates the rights of ethnic groups to their identity as defined and expressed in their language and culture (Trueba, 1976). It proposes that the second language is best learned through the use of first language and culture but the issue of how second language development occurs proficiently did not become the instrumental factor of the policy.

History of Second Language Instruction

Teaching English to students who speak other languages is not a new phenomenon to this country. Even during the colonial period when English was emerging as the main language of this new nation, people who spoke languages other than English had the freedom to learn and develop their first languages. Other languages were tolerated and allowed to exist. In the later years, there were periods when English usurped its importance over other languages including those of the Native Americans. After World War I and World War II, more restrictions on German and Japanese language were made. In the sixties due to the influence of the Civil Rights' movement the Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) as part of the ESEA Act on January 2, 1968, which later became the Title VII program (Crawford, 1995). This federal mandate for bilingual education has gone through ups and downs in the past thirty eight years until it was absorbed by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law in 2002. In the progression of the policy on second language instruction, the political and educational arenas have been daunted by two ideologies. The idea of "English only" supports the

view that the speakers of languages other than English assimilate into the dominant culture and language by achieving proficiency in English. On the other hand, “English plus” supports the idea of attaining English proficiency through bilingual instruction and maintaining first language proficiency as well. The federal law from its inception neither made it clear nor prescribed whether English only or English plus was preferred for ELs. Although this policy was named as the Bilingual Education law, this overall sweeping mandate did not endorse either bilingualism or English immersion and failed to answer the key question of whether second language learners should maintain their first language as they learned English.

The BEA initially prescribed that educational opportunities should be extended to students who speak languages other than English and specified that meaningful instruction for English language learners should be provided. Senator Yarborough, the sponsor of this bill made it clear to fellow lawmakers, “It is not the purpose of the bill to create pockets of different languages throughout the country...not to stamp out the mother tongue, and not to make their mother tongue the dominant language, but just to try to make those children fully literate in English” (Crawford, 1995, p. 40). The second language educational policy mainly provided a small but significant change in practice for teaching linguistic minority students (Ovando and Collier, 1985). It did not come as a pedagogical response to the learning needs of English learners but as a political effort to funnel federal poverty funds to the Southwest region (Casanova, 1995) to children who did not speak English as their first language. It first listed three educational purposes: “1. Increase English language skills, 2. Maintain and perhaps increase mother-tongue skills, and 3. Support the cultural heritage of the student (Leibowitz, 1980).

In essence, this law gave a jump start for developing instructional programs that would serve the needs of ELLs but did not provide a clear instructional answer to the question of how to teach English to the ELLs and if biliteracy was a definite goal. That has resulted in many tensions and dilemmas in the arena of second language instruction which had been on a tumultuous course of development from its inception. The policy did not provide the necessary support for teaching English in the most effective way. Consequently, learning English for ELLs began as a scattered instruction in various parts of the country emerging as an instructional program that did not have a clear end goal; therefore, it never achieved its full maturity.

In addition, when the Bilingual Education Act was re-authorized in 1974, amendments to the law emphasized the importance of mastery of English language skills as its main purpose. Although native language instruction was mentioned, the revised law of 1974 “provided more precise definition of the bilingual education program required in English and the child’s native language to the extent needed for the child to make effective progress” (Alexander & Alexander, 1992, p. 274). Ironically, although the structure and operation of the BEA were expanded, the amendments to the law “barred federal support for two-way bilingual programs such as the successful Coral Way model” at Dade County in Florida (Lyons, 1995, p.3).

In the same year the landmark Supreme Court case *Lau vs. Nicholas* upheld the fact that there was no equality of treatment for the monolingual Chinese students enrolled in San Francisco Unified School District. It specified that providing same textbooks, teachers, and curriculum to students who did not understand English was an unequal

treatment; however, it did not mandate that first language be taught or used to teach English. Lau decision fell short of that and listed remedies suggested by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act prescribing proper approaches, methods, and procedures for determining appropriate instructional methods and professional standards for teachers of language minority students.

When the next reauthorization cycle of the Bilingual Education Act came in 1978, research on bilingual education had accumulated findings that were generally supportive of bilingual educational programs (Casanova, 1975). As a result, the act was amended with new goals. It specified that native language would be used to enable the second language learners to achieve competence in the English language and not primarily to maintain it. It also made sure that the Title VII program would be strictly transitional and no funds would be available for language maintenance. Later during the Reagan administration there was political opposition to bilingual education. The administration's view was well expressed in these words, "It is absolutely wrong and against American concepts to have a bilingual education program that is now openly, admittedly dedicated to preserving students' native language and never getting them adequate in English so they can go out into the job market (Democrat-Chronicle, Rochester, March 3, 1981, p. 2A).

When the time for reauthorization of Title VII arrived in 1984, the background work of the legislators and their courtship of Hispanic votes in the election propelled the bill quickly toward passage. In 1988, the BEA was reauthorized with some other changes when President Reagan signed P.L. 100-297 into law on April 28, 1988. This bill allowed funds for specific alternative instructional program specifying Transitional bilingual education (TBE) and Developmental bilingual education (DBE) to be the two suggested instructional methods for ELLs. Cubillos, (1988) defines both the programs as the following:

Transitional bilingual education programs are designed for LEP students in elementary or secondary schools. These programs offer structured English instruction combined with, when necessary, instruction in the student's native language. The student's cultural heritage and that of other children in American society are included in the curriculum. These programs must provide instruction which allows students to meet grade promotion and graduation standards. To the extent possible, students are to be placed in classes with children of approximately the same age and level of educational attainment

Developmental bilingual education programs are full-time programs designed to provide structured English instruction and instruction in a second language. These programs must help students achieve competence in English or a second language while mastering subject matter skills that allow them to meet grade promotion and graduation standards. Where possible, classes shall include approximately equal numbers of students whose native language is English and students whose native language is the second language of instruction or study. (p.

1)

The saga of second language instruction continued through the development of this policy. Secretary Bennett “stressed that learning English is the key to equal opportunity and is the unifying bond for the diverse population of the United States. He advocated removing restrictions on the amount of bilingual education funds that could be devoted to the English-only School Assisted Instructional Program. In doing so, he attempted to remove funds specifically reserved for programs using students’ native language. Although research evidence was presented to make a case against this change, the Congress went along with the administration’s recommendation and passed the bill (Lyons, 1995) against the use of first language instruction.

There was a change in the direction of the bilingual education policy during the Clinton administration. On October 20, 1994, President Clinton signed Title VII of the Elementary/Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which reauthorized the Bilingual Education Act as part of the Improving American Schools Act. This law contained significant changes and provisions to improve educational services for linguistically and culturally diverse students. For the first time, discretionary funding was provided for bilingual education through grants for capacity building in instruction, demonstration, research evaluation and dissemination, program development and enhancement projects. The most important change in the new law was its recognition of the importance of bilingualism as a program outcome. It gave priority to program applications that provided for the development of bilingual proficiency in both English and other language. However, the 104th Congress considered legislation to “repeal the law, to eliminate its funding, and under a sweeping ‘English only’ proposal to outlaw most federal government operations in other languages...appropriations were reduced to 38% between 1994-96 ...” (Crawford, 1997, p. 4). Then in 1998, the Congress passed the Riggs Bill restricting the instruction of second language in many ways then passed the Educational Excellence for All Children Act of 1999. This law not only emphasized learning English for ELL but also the need for reaching high academic standards like other regular students.

Finally, after President George W. Bush signed NCLB into a law on January 8, 2002, “it simplified federal support for ELL by combining categorical bilingual and immigrant education...into a State formula program...that will facilitate the comprehensive program that benefit all limited English proficient student by helping them learn English and meet the same high academic standards as other students” (Executive summary, 2001, p. 2). This national effort to educate all children to high levels of academic achievement came with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law requiring ELLs also to achieve the academic standards required for all.

...children who are limited English proficient, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic attainment in English, and meet the same challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet [NCLB, Title III, Part A, Sec. 3102. Purposes (1)]

“All students will reach high standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading and mathematics by 2013-2014. (California’s version of NCLB states, all students will attain “proficiency” in reading and mathematics by 2014,

including students with disabilities and English learners. All limited English proficient students will become proficient in English.” (Federal Register, 2002).

NCLB has shifted the focus to accountability rather than effective instruction. It now emphasizes academic achievement and adequate yearly progress rather than achieving English language proficiency. It also enforces the “quick fix” of narrowing the gap between the majority and minority students rather than quality instruction that involves gradual development to assure academic success for all learners. In other words, this federal mandate implies that English as a second language be learned mainly through English instruction bringing greater demand on all teachers because the mainstream classroom has become the common learning place for all students including the ELLs and students with special needs. The following Table 1 shows how the policy shaped the instructional program development showing an up and down trend between the use of first language plus English and the use of English only.

Table 1. Instructional Implications in the Bilingual Policy Development

Phases	Federal Bilingual Policy Stance on Instruction
Phase I (1968-78)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Began with vague and uncertain ideas of instruction but mainly as a funding source. • ESL and bilingual programs began to develop in schools • Did not provide support for two-way bilingual programs. • Transitional bilingual program was supported
Phase II (1978-88)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of teaching English skills became the policy goal and quality of service became a policy priority • After <i>Lau vs. Nicholas</i> the policy became more regulatory. More regulations for program development were tied to the funding. • Required structured English instruction in the program. At the same time encouraged transitional bilingual program. 25% of the funding was set aside for special alternative instructional programs.
Phase II (1988-2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new policy direction occurred. ELLs were given access to the challenging curriculum and same educational standards as regular students. • Brought more rigorous academic requirements for ELL’s academic achievement when it merged with NCLB as Title III. English proficiency has become a major goal making accountability not pedagogy the focus. • Schools and teachers are held more accountable for showing academic achievement • ELL were to be tested like all learners to show academic achievement and improvement

It can be summarized from this brief review of the federal bilingual policy for second language instruction that for the past 40 years the instruction of second language learners has been dominated by the federal mandate that did not give priority to the pedagogy of second language learning supported by research. Therefore, several types of instructional programs have been implemented in the schools to teach ELLs. Table 2 gives an overview of the various instructional program models that have been tried in schools to instruct ELLs. It is clear here that the issue of second language instruction has been shaped by the educational policy that did not consider the research about second language learning which implies first language proficiency as a pre-requisite to efficient second language learning (Crawford, 1995).

Table 2. English Language Instructional Models

Program Names	Language of Content Instruction	Language of Language Arts Instruction	Linguistic Goal
Two-way Bilingual Education or Dual Language Immersion	Both English and Native Language	English and the Native language	Bilingualism
Late-exit or Developmental Bilingual Education	All students speak the same native language. Mostly native language is used. Instruction through English increases as students gain proficiency	English and Native language	Bilingualism
Early-exit or Transitional Bilingual Education	All students speak the same native language	Both languages are used first, then a quick progression to all instruction in English	English acquisition; rapid transfer into English only classroom (Supported by NCLB)
Sheltered English SDAIE Structured English Immersion Content-based ESL	English adapted to the students' proficiency level, and supplemented by gestures and visual aids	English	English Acquisition (Supported by NCLB)
Pull-out ESL	English adapted to the students' proficiency	English	English Acquisition (Supported by NCLB)

(Taken and modified from NCELA write up on Introduction to Language Instructional Programs, http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/about/lieps/4_desc.html)

The cited list of instructional program models show clearly that the current policy context supports the latter three models of instruction in English for the content as well as learning the language arts skills at the elementary and secondary levels implying English acquisition as the language goal for the schools. Although efforts were taken on and off by school districts to use bilingual instructional process for ELLs, the educational policy has worked very much against that. In the state of California Proposition 227 barred bilingual education and pushed ELLs into structured English immersion classrooms, while in Arizona "English Only" restrictions continue to burden the school and the

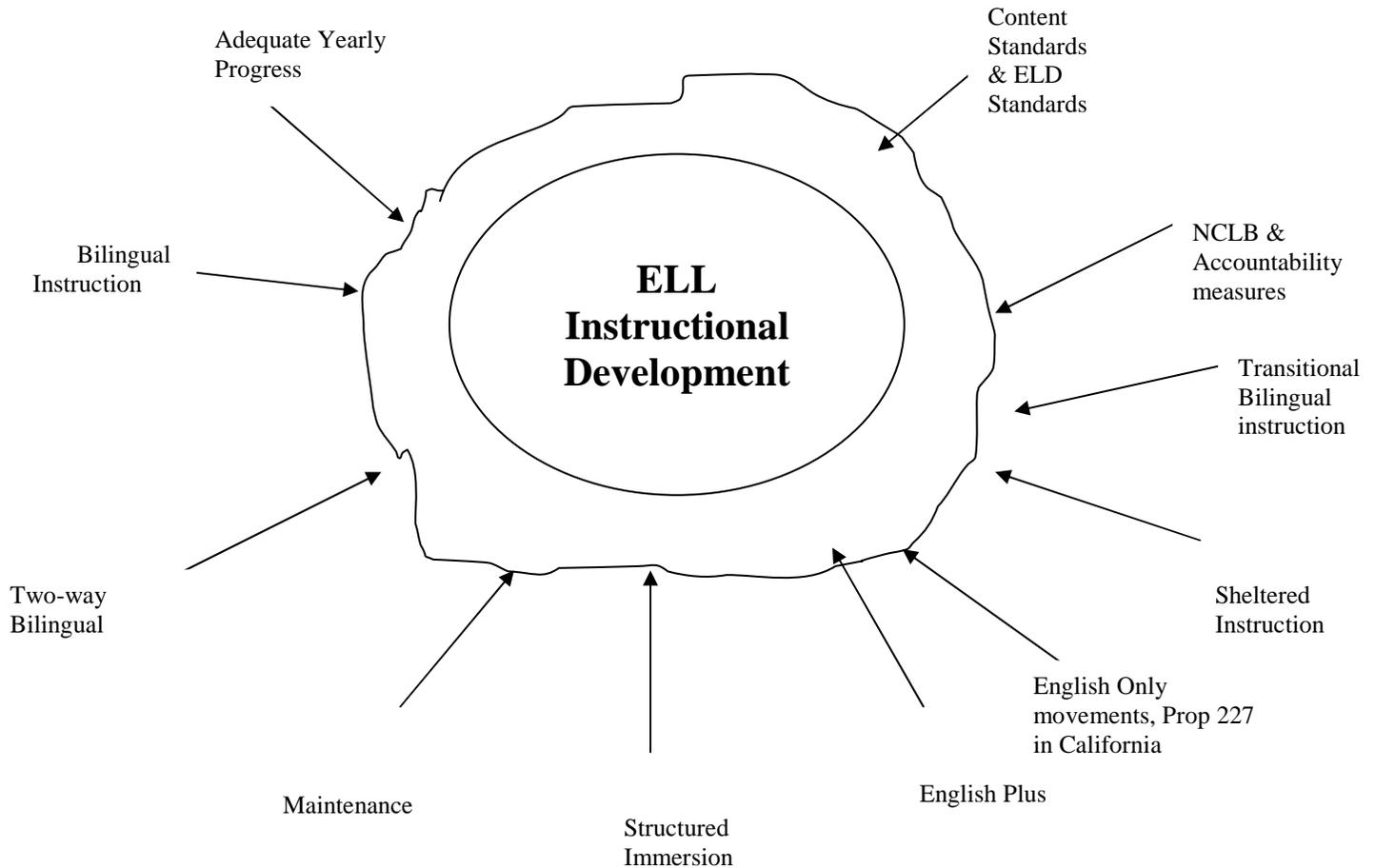
legislators refused to a budget that was equitable for ELLs (Crawford, 2006). Within this type of political milieu that is intensified by the NCLB requirements schools are taking the responsibility of educating the ELLs in the mainstream classroom.

According to a report that came out of “The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University” in February, 2005 the NCLB law has certainly brought many challenges for ELLs and the schools they attend because the law fails to acknowledge the research evidences that support first language proficiency as an important element in achieving second language proficiency. In addition the varied cultural background characteristics and the language proficiency of students do not match the assessment characteristics of the standardized tests which were not normed for them. Besides, because of the resource inequities that exist between schools, those that serve a great number of ELLs do not have adequate instructional materials or efficiently trained teachers to serve them. In spite of these challenges, NCLB has a sweeping influence on schools with many unintended consequences. One of them is the synergetic efforts to submerge ELLs into the English dominance of the mainstream classrooms and work on meeting the AYP (adequate yearly progress) and other accountability measures of the NCLB.

“Caught in the Cocoon” Phenomenon

The described historical account of the educational policy for English learners fits the “caught in the cocoon” metaphor. If we look at the educational program development of ELLs, it is obvious that this development has been paralyzed by unresolved issues related to student placement in the available instructional programs, methods of instruction, and ways of monitoring their progress. Thus, the educational process for ELLs has been paralyzed by policy regulations and mandates that are not supported by research on second language learning. Therefore, the instructional development for ELLs has not reached its full maturity. The progress is very slow and it seems like the butterfly is unable to get out of the cocoon. The following diagram visually captures this dilemma:

EL Instruction Caught in the Middle



Although the Bilingual Education Law was authorized six times before it immersed with the NCLB, the theory and practice for second language instruction have been questioned and efforts are continuously taken to discredit its necessity. This checkered history has contributed to the current ambiguous status of this field. Thus, a lack of consensus about the philosophy, goals and expectations for instructional programs continues to haunt this field.

Concluding Remarks

The current reforms have also called for increased accountability requiring all students to have access to general education curriculum by including the English learners and special needs students in the statewide and district level testing programs. To make it worse, in California, English only tests are given to ELLs who still do not have English proficiency for academic success. Similarly, many States are establishing annual achievement objectives for all schools to measure the progress of all students and to hold

schools accountable and increase graduation rates without making special considerations for the English learners. The standards reform, NCLB, the Proposition 227 in California, and other inclusion movements have raised the achievement bar sharply by placing the responsibility of teaching the ELLs with all other students in the regular classroom without grade level English language proficiency. However, the dilemma of how best to deliver instruction that will contribute to English language development of ELLs remains unresolved. Consequently, it has become totally the responsibility of the school leaders and teachers to provide an education that would assure EL academic achievement in English and the content knowledge. Like a monarch butterfly that got stuck in the cocoon, the instruction of English learners is stuck within the system of educational policy and practice and is suffocating!

References

- Abedi, J. (2004) The No Child Left Behind Act and English language learners: assessment and accountability issues. *Educational Researcher*, 33(1), 4-14.
- Alexander K. & Alexander, M. (1992). *American public law*. New York, NY: West Publishing Company.
- Batt, L., Kim, J. & Sunderman, G. (2005). Limited English Students: Increased Accountability Under NCLB. *Policy Brief*. A Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- Crawford, J (2006). NABE 2006 in Political Context. *Language Learner*, 1 (4), 2.
- Crawford, J. (1995) *Bilingual Education: history, politics, theory and practice*. Los Angeles, CA: Bilingual Educational Services.
- Crawford, J. (1997). *Best evidence: Research foundations of the bilingual education act*. Washington D.C.: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- Casanova, U. (1995). Bilingual education: politics or pedagogy? In O. Garcia & C. Baker (Eds.), *Policy and practice in bilingual education*. Philadelphia PA: Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, J. (1986). Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention. *Harvard Education Review*, 15, 18-36.
- Cummins, J. (1996). *Negotiating identities: Education for empowerment in a diverse society*. Los Angeles, CA: California Association for Bilingual Education.
- Darling, Hammond, L. (2004). From “Separate but Equal” to “No Child Left Behind” *The collision of new standards and old inequalities*. In D. Meier and G. Wood (Eds.), *Many children left behind*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Democrat-Chronicle*. Rochester, March 8, 1981, p. 2A.
- Fuchs, D. & Fuchs, L. (1994) Inclusive schools movement and the radicalization of Special education reform. *The Council for Exceptional Children*. 60(4), 294-309.
- Goodman, Kenneth. (1982) *Language , literacy, and learning*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- Gottlieb, M. *Evidence-Based Teaching Strategies for Achieving Academic English and Content...The Theory Behind the Research*. Illinois Resource Center & WIDA Consortium.
- Introduction to Language Educational Programs @ <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/about/lieps>
- Kirk, S. & Gallaher, J. (1983). *Educating exceptional children*. Dallas, TX: Houghton Mifflin Company Boston.
- Krashen, S. (1999). *Condemned without a Trial: Bogus arguments against bilingual Education*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann
- Leibowitz, A. (1980). *The bilingual education act: A legislative analysis*. Rosslyn, VA: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- Lyons, J. (1995). The past and future directions of federal bilingual-educational policy. In O. Garcia & C. Baker (Eds.) *Policy and practice in bilingual education*. Philadelphia, PA: Multilingual Matters LTD.
- Merrit, S. Clearing the hurdles of inclusion. *Educational Leadership*, 59(3), 67-70.
- Ovando, J. & Collier, V. (1985). *Bilingual and ESL classrooms: Teaching in multicultural contexts*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Poplin, M. & Weeres, J. (1992) *Voices from the inside: A report of schooling from classroom*
- Rhodes, W.C., and M. Sagor. 1975. Community perspectives. In N. Hobbs, ed. *Issues in the classification of children*. Vol. 1. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Rosen, M., G. Clark, and M. Kivitz, 1976. *The history of mental retardation*. Baltimore: University Park Press.
- Sacco, J. (2002). Special-Needs Solutions. *Instructor*. 114(4), 16.
- Smith, Frank. 1994. *Understanding reading*. Fifth Edition. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Taylor, G. & Harrington, F. (2003). *Educating the disabled*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Education.
- Trueba, H. (1986). *Raising silent voices: Educating the linguistic minorities for the 21st century*.
- Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: U.S. Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Wallin, J. (1924, *The education of handicapped children*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Weintraub, F. (2005). The evolution of LD policy and future challenges. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 28(2), 97-99.
- Winzer, M. (2002). *The history of special education*. Washington D.C.: Gallaudet University Press.

