

Success for English Language Learners: Teacher Preparation Policies and Practices

A Position Paper of the California Council on the Education of Teachers, the California Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, the State of California Association of Teacher Educators, and the Independent California Colleges and Universities Council on the Education of Teachers; Prepared by the Joint Policy Committee

This policy paper was adopted March 24, 2000, by the Delegate Assembly of the California Council on the Education of Teachers following prior review and recommendation by the Boards of Directors of the four organizations represented by the Joint Policy Committee.

Purpose

On April 17, 1997, the Delegate Assembly of the California Council on the Education of Teachers (CCET) adopted a Policy Framework that paved the way for the organization to take positions on educational issues crucial to the training and preparation of teachers. The Joint Policy Committee was charged with initiating this process by examining legislation and/or statewide policies that the committee deemed worthy of response by the three cooperating organizations (CCET, California Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, and State of California Association of Teacher Educators). The education of English language learners became an immediate concern with the passage of Proposition 227 in 1998 and other educational policies recently enacted because of their potential negative impact on

English language learners who total over 1.4 million in California's public schools.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to establish the position of the three organizations on educational policy and regulations affecting English language learners and to recommend a course of action relative to teaching English language learners. This course of action and subsequent committee recommendations are based on the *California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP)* and the premise that these standards will guide future policies relating to the training of teachers and the teaching of California's students. In framing the issues in teaching English language learners, this paper will begin with a brief background of the *CSTP* and related policies, followed by recommendations related to each standard, and will conclude with a rationale for the recommendations in relation to their potential impact on English language learners.

Background

Recent educational policies at the state level have provided a new context from which to view the teaching process. For example, in July 1997, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and the California Department of Education adopted, and the State Board of Education endorsed, the *California Standards for the Teaching Profession*. Not only do these standards share a view of exemplary teaching practice but, also, they are the foundation of the state's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment System (BTSA). In addition, the *CSTP* are the primary pedagogical guide for the work of the SB2042 advisory panel for the Development of Teacher Preparation Standards and related assessments. This state panel is charged with writing the standards that will guide teacher preparation and assessment in the State of California.

In addition, the California Department of Education through the California Academic Standards Commission has adopted Content Standards for Grades K-12 education. These Standards set high expectations for *all* children. They are intended to guide the curriculum and to be tied to the statewide assessment of student achievement. In addition, the SB2042 Advisory Panel, and the BTSA programs have been charged with the integration of the *CSTP* and the Student Academic Content Standards into the preparation and induction programs for teachers.

Since the language and the spirit of the *CSTP* are that of inclusion, it seems natural that teachers use the language the child understands to communicate the content to be learned in schools. In addition, the *CSTP* encourage teachers to use alternative models of instruction to fit the needs of *all* children. Also, as the standard for assessment requires a tight coupling between the goals of instruction and assessment of a student's academic achievement, it was assumed the child would understand the language used for instruction

and the language used in the assessment instrument. Meaningful feedback from timely assessments was to give classroom teachers important data to improve their instructional practices. Unfortunately, current state policy makes these standards impossible to apply for many of California’s most vulnerable school children - English language learners.

Thus, within this context of high expectations and standards based school reforms, three mandates are limiting the attainment of these goals for *many* children who have limited proficiency in the English language. The combined negative impact of these policies—mandatory standardized testing in English, ending of social promotion, and the prohibition of the use of other languages to give content instruction in California classrooms—is a recipe for failure for *many* students. Together these policies become an irrational and arbitrary mixture of pressures that unnecessarily tie the hands of educators, ignore 30 years of research on English language learners, and most importantly, undermine the open access to knowledge enjoyed by fluent English speakers. Clearly, the goal of any bilingual program is grade level content mastery in *two* languages—in this case, English and the student’s native language. Yet, because of the well documented developmental nature of literacy and second language acquisition, care should be taken to select teaching strategies that reinforce students’ strengths and affirm their cultural background, rather than implementing politically expedient teaching practices.

With the educational stakes so high for the future of English language learners, teaching standards must explicitly guide teacher preparation institutions and beginning teachers on how to address the negative impact of the policies mentioned above. Because these standards will drive beginning teacher training and ultimately define “good teaching” for teachers—who more than likely will end up in classrooms with English language learners—it is crucial that the link between the *CSTP* and second (English) language learning be made. The Joint Policy Committee’s (CCET, CACTE, SCATE) position is that the *CSTP* must inform teachers of English language learners on how to accomplish these “links” when teaching them and that state policymakers need to reconsider the implications of current educational mandates. In an effort to establish links between the *CSTP* and English language learners, recommendations with related pedagogical rationale are provided below.

Recommendations

The discussion presented below is organized under the titles of the six *California Standards for the Teaching Profession*. Under each standard are recommendations concerning the standards as they apply to the education of English language learners.

Standard for Engaging and Supporting All Students in Learning

That State policy...

Acknowledge that the Engaging Standard needs to be interpreted as providing quality instructional practices that explicitly engage and support the language and culture of English language learners.

Support English language learners' oral language development in L1 as a bridge to literacy in both L1 and L2.

Encourage that native language knowledge and cultural experiences be integrated into the curriculum in a meaningful and consistent way.

Recognize that the language of greatest understanding be used to give increased access to academic content learning.

A key element to this standard is building on students' prior knowledge, life experiences, and interests. This involves becoming familiar with students' background - quite a challenge when this background is different from that of the teacher. More importantly, however, is the inclusion of students' prior knowledge, experiences, and interests in academic instruction - a concept totally supported by the *CSTP*. English language learners' prior experiences intimately involve their native language and culture. Additionally, for young children, oral language development is critical for subsequent literacy. The use of students' first language for learning is crucial—in fact, it is expected for native English speakers. Currently, because statewide policy demands that English be the sole language of academic instruction, this policy will not support and engage all second language learners.

Additionally, state policy mandates that all second language learners must take the Stanford Achievement Test 9 to demonstrate acquisition of academic knowledge. At the same time, school districts (e.g., Los Angeles Unified School District) have a policy of “no social promotion” based in large part on results of this test. This requires that “grade-level” academic knowledge be acquired and demonstrated, in a timely way, throughout a child's schooling. This cannot be accomplished by teaching students in a language they do not understand or by denying them access to thinking skills and content knowledge in favor of remedial or language-based instruction only. On the contrary, English language learners need to be taught higher order thinking skills and grade level content knowledge every year that they are in school (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Thus, teachers need to implement this standard in a way that fully engages English language learners in a quality education. Equitable access to grade-level content area instruction, fair tests, and promotion practices based on school achievements are inextricably tied.

Standard for Creating and Maintaining Effective Environment for Student Learning

That State policy...

Reaffirm, through this Standard and related “elements,” the crucial link between language, culture, self-esteem, and fairness in the classroom.

Ensure that non-English languages be respected and awarded status in the classroom.

Encourage the use of student’s L1 at appropriate times during classroom instruction and to include the use of L1 reading materials as well.

Issues in this standard that impact second language learners are related to fairness, respect, and promoting self-esteem. Although we are beyond the days when non-English speaking children were physically punished for speaking their native languages, distinctions of class, race, and culture still exist. Sadly, the status of most second languages is low. Even though this standard takes a proactive view of addressing bias and injustices, state policy clearly implies that non-English languages are not welcome in classrooms and should be eliminated from formal academic interaction between teachers and students. Respect for persons involves respect for their culture and language. Children’s self-esteem is affected when they are told not to speak in their native language. This admonition conveys disrespect for students, their native language, their home, and their culture.

Standards for Understanding and Organizing Subject Matter for Student Learning

That State policy...

Allow for a bi-literacy model of instruction for English language learners as a means of organizing subject matter for student learning. And, that biliteracy should be encouraged where students’ first language and English co-exist daily in the classroom to provide meaningful educational experiences.

Encourage teachers to organize language resources to provide L1 and L2 instruction and to make grade level content comprehensible to English language learners.

This standard relates to the teacher’s understanding of subject matter and student development, and the teacher’s ability to organize curriculum to facilitate students’ understanding of the subject area. When we think of student development, we include linguistic development, since oral/linguistic development is the precursor to literacy. It is clear that English language learners are more developed linguistically in their first language than their second. However, current policy suggests that the linguistic abilities in the first

language will not be considered or developed. As teachers begin to organize and plan instruction, they must determine to what extent native language instruction would be appropriate. Where teacher resources are available, native language instruction must be an option for pedagogy.

State policy should favor a biliteracy model wherein both languages, coexisting in the classroom, can support cognitive growth in both native and second language, and serve other educational purposes as well. The nature of the two languages in the classroom is developmental: where the native language is used to develop literacy in the content areas and the second language (English) is used to develop English language proficiency. Subsequently students engage the content areas in English, at no loss of content knowledge already gained in their native language, and with a higher proficiency in English to handle academic text written in the English language (Cummins, 1991; Thomas & Collier, 1997). To help this transition process, teachers can use English language development (ELD) or SDAIE (specially designed academic instruction in English) methods to connect language and content. Unfortunately, many second language learners receive only sheltered instruction with no native language support. If this standard is to ensure that students meet the rigors of grade level academic content, then teaching strategies, materials, and resources need to be accessible to all students—and included in the English language learner’s native language.

***Standard for Planning Instruction and
Designing Learning Experiences for All Students***

That State policy...

Recognize that planning instruction and designing learning experiences for English language learners explicitly consider the nature of language and subject matter goals, and, since SDAIE-only instruction prevents many English language learners from receiving grade level content, native language instruction be encouraged as a means of teaching subject matter.

As teachers plan instruction for second language learners under our current “English only” curricula, it seems they are put in the awkward position of determining at what point *not* to accept or incorporate students’ backgrounds, language, prior knowledge, and interests. Does this standard mean: *Only that knowledge that can be expressed in English?* We think not. In fact, an “element” in this standard specifically addresses second language learners by stating that teachers: “design lessons that promote subject matter knowledge and language development for second language learners.” Thus, an important feature of planning instruction for English language learners is differentiating between *language* lessons and *subject matter* lessons. This distinction between oral language proficiency and

subject matter knowledge is critical for English language learners. Studies show that it takes English learners from 3-to-5 years to develop oral proficiency in L2, and from 4-to-7 years to develop academic English proficiency in the second language (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). Yet in the post-227 era, school districts are not waiting for English learners to establish English proficiency before they are instructed or assessed solely in English.

In the absence of native language instruction, SDAIE instruction is one way to provide subject matter to English learners, but this strategy is best suited to those students who have “some” command of the English language. This method is problematic for English language learners precisely because they cannot negotiate the meaning of content without a good grasp of the language of instruction (i.e., English). Nonetheless, through SDME methods, teachers design learning experiences that attempt to connect content to English language learners by using a variety of visual and oral teaching strategies. Yet, since teachers never really communicate content through the student’s native language, it is difficult to verify if students *understand* or *learn* the objectives of the lesson. Literacy barriers are created when students must learn the language, then the content. In sum, English language learners need grade level subject matter content integrated with language to effectively compete in school and to pass high stakes tests.

Standard for Assessing Student Learning

That State policy...

Eliminate the mandate to test English language learners on English standardized tests i.e., SAT 9, until they reach a predetermined academically competitive literacy level in English and/or their native language. Furthermore, that scores on the SAT 9 or any other English standardized test not be used to retain English language learners. Finally, that test results of these measures not be included in English language learners’ cumulative school records.

Require that academic performance measures allow English language learners to demonstrate achievement of content standards. Those measures need to fairly and accurately assess what students know and can do.

Require that tests be used for the purpose for which they were developed, thus, assuring proper validity, reliability, “norming populations,” and that the language of the tests be considered when administering them to English language learners.

Perhaps the most punitive policy for English language learners is testing them in a language they do not understand. Moreover, the inappropriate use of test results furthers the injustice. These tests have little instructional value for English language learners. Yet the results find their way into the child’s permanent record or form the basis for district retention policies. For example, the extent to which scores on the SAT 9 test will be used in

social promotion policies of school districts remains to be seen. Although this standard recommends that teachers, “select, design, and use assessment tools appropriate to what is being assessed,” rarely are English language learners properly assessed to differentiate between language and content knowledge, not to mention the “opportunity to learn” issue that addresses the mismatch between what is tested and what is taught. The statewide SAT 9 testing policy—as used with English language learners—is an example of the invalid use of assessment. Educational organizations such as the AERA, APA, NCME, and the National Research Council strongly discourage the misuse of tests for English language learners (AERA, APA, & NCME, 1999; National Research Council, 1999), yet school districts, looking for an accountability “quick fix,” continually ignore these cautions.

Standard for Professionalism

That State policy...

Encourage teachers to view school staff community, and parents as partners in the education of their children and proactively seek their assistance with language resources to benefit English language learners.

Encourage school/district staff developmental programs and beginning teacher training programs to continually offer training on how to diagnose, prescribe, and assess instruction for all students—including English language learners.

Encourage teachers, schools, and community to work collaboratively to ensure that language resources are available for English language learners for academic instruction and counseling.

Support the continuance of the CLAD and BCLAD teacher credential/certificate programs as pedagogically sound ways to prepare teachers to educate English language learners.

Probably the most critical element of this standard for second language learners is the recommendation that teachers communicate effectively with parents and that they work collegially with all school staff. The standard suggests that teachers “value and respect students’ families and appreciate their role in student learning,” while also “engaging families as sources of knowledge about students’ linguistic and social backgrounds.” In many cases, English language learners live in poor communities. This, in fact, complicates their status with the school as an institution and with middle class teachers on a personal level. While trying to be helpful, many teachers tell parents not to speak to their children in their native language, but to speak to them in English only at home. This advice shows little respect for the parent’s language and it’s importance in the home and subsequent literacy development.

Furthermore, monolingual English speaking teachers must find resources to make the curriculum accessible to their English language learners. This means coming out of “isolation” and working with colleagues, school staff, and the community, to connect to their students. For example, paraprofessionals in many cases speak the language of the children, yet are seldom used for the purpose of instruction. Teachers can use them as well as other school-based strategies such as team teaching or departmentalized structures to provide a meaningful education for English language learners. Additionally, teachers must draw on their training received through the CLADIBCLAD process to continue to investigate methods for teaching English language learners. In this way, teachers are moving “beyond the textbook” to provide language resources to make the subject matter comprehensible. In the end, it does *take a village* to educate children.

Conclusion

The three organizations represented in the Joint Policy Committee have taken their charge from the CCET Delegate Assembly and CCET Board to develop a position paper on the education of English language learners. As this population of students continues to grow, it is clear that their educational levels are not improving, and statewide policies enacted to improve their achievement are misguided and potentially harmful. Using the progressive *CSTP* as a guide, the committee has developed these recommendations on how state policymakers can begin to address the issues for improving the education of English language learners, and the boards, delegates, and members of the three organizations have endorsed and adopted these positions.

There needs to be a sense of urgency to develop educational policy informed by research and practice, and not political expediency, in order to turn the tide of underachievement of English language learners before a true underclass of unprepared students—without the proper knowledge base to become productive citizens—emerges.

Note

The full text of the six standards that make up the *California Standards for the Teaching Profession* is available in document form from the California Department of Education or the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. Additional background information is also found in that document.

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