HW 3.2: Article - School Level Identification, Assessment and Placement of Language Minority Students

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Introduction

The United States Office of Civil Rights (OCR) mandates that all students have equal access to the curriculum no matter their language background. This federal mandate initiates a needs assessment process for every student new to a school. This process begins in identification of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, requires evaluation of a student's English language proficiency, and results in appropriate educational placement within the school's program alternatives. This reading reviews the identification, assessment, and placement process to focus on what information this process does and does not provide mainstream teachers working with language minority students. Its purpose is to build mainstream teachers' ability to effectively use placement information in planning, teaching, and assessing ESL students in their classes.

Process Overview

Identification

The first step in the assessment process is to identify students who come from a non-English-speaking background. These students are the most likely to need additional English language support. Normally at the same time a student registers at his or her neighborhood school, he or she is given a home language survey. The survey typically asks questions such as "What language do you speak in your home?" or "When you first began to talk, what language did you use?" If the student is identified as understanding or speaking any language other than English, the law requires that the student's English proficiency be tested. At this stage, students are only identified by a label, such as English as a second

language (ESL), English to speakers of other languages (ESOL), English language learner (ELL), limited English proficient (LEP), second language learners (SLL), English Learner (EL)or language minority student or Emergent Bilingual (EB). Of course, the home language survey, while vital, provides very little useful or actionable information to a classroom teacher.

Assessment

When children are identified as non-native speakers of English, a formal proficiency test is given. In Utah, this test comes from WIDA and is titled ACCESS. Other states may use different tests, but ACCCESS is used by most states for this purpose. Some districts also administer other English proficiency tests to help them more immediately with placement. ACCESS allows educators to identify students at 6 levels: Entering, Emerging, Developing, Expanding, Bridging, and Reaching. Students must be provided with services when they are identified at the Entering, Emerging, Developing, or Expanding levels. Teachers and schools monitor their progress and continue to evaluate ELs as they move through the Bridging level and the Reaching level. At these levels they are considered fluent; however, student proficiency with academic language should always be a concern with English Learners regardless of placement. All students identified as Entering, Emerging, Developing, or Expanding (scoring 1-4.9) must be in an ESL class with an ESL endorsed teacher working directly on language development in English. The students who reach a level of 5 or higher are considered fluent in English (or reach the Bridging and Reaching levels). At this point, while they exit ESL programs they remain on monitor status for 4 years; but are not required to take the ACCESS assessment during those four years. The school or district may use other appropriate data and evaluation and team-based problem solving if teachers feel reclassification is necessary. It is desirable to have these students in content classes with ESL endorsed teachers as much as possible.

Testing items on English proficiency tests generally focus on general content rather than on any specific content area. These exams thus provide more information about conversational language abilities (BICS) than on academic knowledge or language (CALP). As a quick reference for mainstream teachers, information about preparing students for the ACCESS test can be found at https://edtechbooks.org/-uAU . There is also information teachers can provide for students at https://edtechbooks.org/-zzk

The purpose of ACCESS and other language proficiency assessment is to provide educators with a means of identifying how adept a student is in using the English language. This measurement facilitates the student's placement in an appropriate language program. Once a student has been formally evaluated and has received a language proficiency designation, the student is then referred for appropriate placement. A student either enters a language support program or is mainstreamed (and monitored).
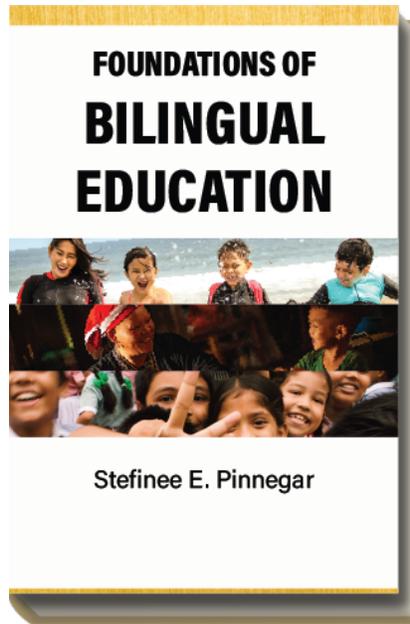
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