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Articulation Between Segments: Secondary to Postsecondary Programs

As a part-time instructor of English as a second language (ESL) at the community college level, I often hear complaints that high schools have not prepared ESL students for success in college-level programs. As a full-time program specialist for a midsize public school district, I hear high school teachers complain that middle schools have not prepared ESL students for the demands of high school programs. The purpose of this article is to clarify the status of ESL instruction in secondary programs so that California educators at different levels may begin the dialogue of articulation. In focusing on the problems, it is not my intent to paint a depressing portrait; reality suggests, however, that if our programs were better, there would be little need for this discussion.

In the state of California, rapidly shifting demographics have affected K–12 programs by creating both the need to augment traditional course offerings with ESL instruction, content instruction in primary languages (also called *bilingual instruction*), and specially designed academic instruction in English (SDAIE).[1] To add to the base provided by ESL classes, such special courses for English language learners have in turn created a need for teachers trained to deliver content in primary language or SDAIE (see Hawkins, in press). Much like the familiar nursery rhyme "The House That Jack Built," meeting the needs of second language learners has created a chain of events culminating in legislation establishing special certification with specialized credentials (cross-cultural, language and academic development—CLAD—and bilingual, cross-cultural, language and academic development—BCLAD) and then in additional legislation (SB 1969) authorizing local district certification for those who cannot or will not obtain state certification. Whichever path has been chosen, the state has been consistently clear on its objectives: To successfully teach English language learners, teachers require a working understanding of the language

acquisition process and strategies which will help students understand what is being taught. Since between a quarter and a third of California's students are English language learners, certification is only the first step.

In contrast to the coherent philosophy presented by the credentialing options, program options have not been mandated by the state. Consequently, the state has not promoted a single model for educating English language learners. Although the accreditation process directed by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) suggests that the results of self-study be used to improve student learning and school programs—and although the coordinated compliance review (CCR) process requires that English language learners be provided with (a) daily instruction in ESL, (b) content concepts in their primary languages, and (c) SDAIE instruction when learners have attained sufficient English fluency to profit from all-English instruction—these configurations are based more upon federal case law than upon California state statute. Daily instruction in English is mandated, yet no specific amount of time is required. Consequently, some districts provide two hours of daily ESL; other districts provide less. And although all ESL teachers are required to have appropriate authorization for second language instruction, in many instances, in a clear violation of state education code, paraprofessionals still provide ESL instruction for English language learners.

Secondary Programs

To even the most casual observer, there is enormous diversity and variety in secondary (i.e., grades 6–12) programs for English language learners in the state of California. State program goals for English language learners are these:

> To develop fluency in English in each student as effectively and efficiently as possible; promote students' positive self-image; promote cross-cultural understanding; and provide equal opportunity for academic achievement, including, when necessary, academic instruction through the primary language (California Department of Education, 1995, p. 1).

Although these general program guidelines have been provided, and although some state money for supplemental services has been allocated for some school districts, resources have generally not been widely available or extended to offer assistance to districts in terms of capacity to deliver effective instruction. Despite credentialing statutes, bilingual teachers are in short supply and few districts are able to offer a stipend to attract them. Credentialed ESL and SDAIE teachers are available, but without mentoring or extensive staff development, many are unable to implement teaching strategies which will assist English language learners in attaining academic success, let alone prepare them for the intellectual rigors of the post secondary academic environment. So, although state code and case law have established parameters within which most programs function, in addition to teacher preparation, the contemporary issues at the heart of articulation remain those of student access and program quality.

At the elementary and secondary levels, all districts are required to identify and assess the English proficiency and primary language skills of all second language speakers. Based upon the assessment, students are placed in their secondary programs. It may be helpful at this point to describe a number of state-permitted secondary program options.

ESL-only

In districts in which students are able to demonstrate success on nationally normed assessment instruments like the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), English language learners are provided with ESL instruction only until they can be mainstreamed. ESL instruction may be provided by a regularly scheduled course or by means of a pullout program. In general, students in these programs may be relatively affluent and have come from situations in which English was studied in the home country—sometimes in school and sometimes with a private tutor. Such students generally also have strong academic backgrounds allowing them to succeed in content courses in which the content and concepts are familiar and only the language of delivery is unfamiliar.[2]

ESL Plus SDAIE

This option is frequently offered by districts with large mixed-language populations. In addition to ESL instruction, English language learners are enrolled in classes taught with SDAIE methodology.[3] In the middle grades, this may be a self-contained classroom in which the teacher is responsible for ESL and SDAIE in all the content areas. At the secondary level, students may be programmed into ESL and SDAIE math, science, and social science classes, for example.

ESL Plus Bilingual

This option is offered by districts with large groups of students who speak the same primary language (often Spanish). In addition to ESL, academic content is delivered by teachers fluent in the primary language who

teach in the language spoken by the students. In addition to finding appropriately trained and credentialed bilingual teachers, secondary programs often have difficulty finding primary language high school textbooks to support this approach. Though textbooks are available outside the United States, locating, reviewing, and matching the content to California content frameworks is problematic.

ESL Plus Bilingual Plus SDAIE

This option combines the previous two approaches. In addition to ESL, students enrolled in such programs may have SDAIE with bilingual support or a combination of SDAIE and bilingual classes.

If we extrapolate from the several intensively studied schools described in a study commissioned by the California Legislature (Minicucci & Olsen, 1992), most California secondary programs do not provide broadly comprehensive course offerings for their English language learners. Though most districts offer some form of ESL classes, taught by an appropriately trained and credentialed teacher, offerings are not consistent. Some ESL students are served in programs separated from other language arts classes; some ESL students are served in self-contained middle school programs; some students who demonstrate ESL features are mainstreamed, that is, mixed in with native or fluent speakers of English. In such cases their needs are not served by an ESL specialist. Some ESL programs are pullout—that is, students are pulled out of a regularly scheduled class for intensive ESL lessons. Those students pulled out also differ from program to program: Some such programs serve only beginning students; others serve all those perceived by the classroom teacher as needing assistance. In pullout ESL programs, instruction should be delivered by an appropriately credentialed teacher, but it is common knowledge that some programs serve English language learners with paraprofessionals.

The lack of consistency also shows up in the SDAIE or bilingual programs as well. Due to low numbers of English language learners, some middle schools offer no SDAIE classes. And at the high school level, SDAIE courses have frequently been placed in the general track but not the college preparatory programs. This means that life or physical science may be available, but not biology or physics. Bilingual courses may offer college preparatory credit but be limited by teachers available so that a school with one bilingual social science teacher may offer U.S. history or government but not algebra or geometry. Class size also limits offerings: When courses are restricted to certain grade levels (for example, Biology for 10th grade, U. S. history for 11th and government for 12th), only a handful of students may be in need of SDAIE or bilingual courses. Staffing ratios and funding

levels may not permit using one teacher for less than 22 or so students. This explains why some high-level courses like chemistry or calculus are almost never offered in either a SDAIE or bilingual delivery mode.

Diversity is the last factor to be considered in a portrayal of secondary programs for English language learners. Even relatively small districts may contain students with more than two dozen native languages. Large urban districts may serve students from more than 50 language backgrounds. Several additional variables compound this linguistic diversity: prior schooling experience, rural versus urban background, immigrant status in the United States (documented vs. undocumented), and socioeconomic status. It is not atypical for an ESL classroom of 30 or so to contain students who represent refugee-, immigrant-, and undocumented-status families, rural or migrant farming backgrounds as well as urban-technological or middle-management, and low primary language literacy as well as well-prepared academic backgrounds. No single program option could ever serve such diversity.

Factors Inhibiting Transfer Between Segments

Trying to describe statewide secondary programs is analogous to the folktale of the blind men and the elephant: We each see the program most familiar to us. However, from the information available, some general patterns emerge.

Insufficient Secondary Courses

Although most secondary educators understand that graduation from high school marks a transition between segments and although most English language learners express a desire to continue their education, these expectations often do not match reality. If students, for whatever reasons, have not participated in college preparatory programs, they often are only eligible for minimum wage entry-level positions or study at a community college. Clearly, limited secondary course offerings affect career and post-secondary pathways for English language learners.

Lack of Rigor/Low Expectations

Some students, who have been mainstreamed or given the opportunity for SDAIE or bilingual courses may be handicapped in another way. This is a much more subtle, and sensitive, situation for it involves issues of quality. Some SDAIE courses have been taught by teachers who lack knowledge of second language acquisition processes; such teachers and others who became credentialed by passing the LDS exam may also lack appropriate strategies for delivering grade-level content. Often, these teachers are aware

that they lack strategies to make the content available, and make statements like, "I have my LDS but I still don't know how to teach my kids." For such teachers, expectations may be high—they want their students to meet the course objectives. Unfortunately, because they lack specific strategies to teach content reading, or lack understanding of how to create a cognitive scaffold for new information, they do not infuse their classes with academic rigor. Instead, they opt for time-worn patterns: Listen to the lecture, take notes, read the chapter, answer the questions, take the multiple choice or short-answer test. And, though some English language learners do succeed in such settings, many do not. More troubling, however, are those teachers who perceive their students as lacking ability. Then low expectations and lack of rigor have been translated into the "dumbing" or watering-down of course standards. Such teachers tend to blame either the victim ("Those kids can't learn"), or teachers at the previous level ("Those kids from middle school can't do the work here"). Even the use of *those* suggests a distancing. Students coming from backgrounds which had low expectations and/or lack of rigor are poorly prepared for success even at the community college level.

Lack of Teaching Strategies

As suggested previously, the lack of teaching strategies appropriate for second language speakers is a common problem at the secondary level. Like many of us, including our mainstream and SDAIE peers, some bilingual teachers were credentialed before preparation programs or staff development began to focus on strategies designed to build academic knowledge. These teachers may still favor a transmission mode of instruction. Students coming from this model may have little experience with collaborative projects, with classroom interactions (such as partner or small group discussions), or with presentations or exhibitions of learning. Teachers may be unfamiliar with the role of peer discussion in building academic understanding, with the use of visual organizers to reformulate textual knowledge, or with the *how* of making students responsible for their own learning (i.e., teaching them how to take notes, how to organize a class folder, how to keep track of assignments, or how to prepare for class sessions and examinations). It is not unusual for students to graduate from high school never having read a book independently all the way through. Though students may have the ability to do so, they have simply never been given the opportunity because their teachers lacked the strategies to make content accessible through avenues extending beyond the transmission mode.

Varied Exit Criteria

Background factors like those discussed are critical to the success of students who transfer between schools or between program segments—from middle to high school, from high school to community college, state college, or university. Since all public programs have an assessment process to assist in accurate placement of students, particularly in language and mathematics classes, it is common for a student to exit ESL classes in one segment and to reenter them at the next. In addition to damaging self-esteem, in the minds of students this forward/backward movement lends an arbitrary air to solid programmatic decisions. "I don't belong here/know why I'm in your class. I graduated from ESL at my other school" are familiar phrases to many teachers in high school, community college, and even university programs.[4] Though many districts have begun the process of internal articulation to define ESL program exit criteria, no uniform statewide standard exists.

Another problem, related to varied exit criteria, is the recognition that some students officially identified as fluent English speakers (FEP) are still English language learners in need of language development classes. It is not unusual for mainstream secondary classrooms to contain students who lack English literacy skills despite their "fluent" label. Background investigations often reveal one or more of several scenarios: redesignation in the primary grades (K–2) based on oral English fluency only; early mainstreaming in all-English programs before the child has learned to read and write in the primary language; early identification as "remedial" in English with subsequent placement in remedial programs designed for native speakers of English; no consistent program of English language development or ESL in the elementary grades. Elementary grade reports forwarded to the high school usually depict average students; teacher comments often note such characteristics as *hard worker, cooperative, friendly.* Students in this category become and remain orally fluent in their elementary programs but all too frequently have never developed the academic skills necessary for success in secondary programs. Consequently, this is an at-risk population.

Diverse Educational Backgrounds and Preparations

The difficulty of program uniformity is compounded within each segment by students who come to California with strong educational backgrounds in their home countries. Such students often have had opportunities to participate in challenging academic and college preparatory programs—their superior background knowledge often contributes to positive stereotyping—and a consequent negative labeling of their classmates who have been schooled in United States settings or arrived less well prepared.

Some students, particularly at the postsecondary level, may have arrived in late adolescence. Although public high schools can enroll students who have not passed their 18th birthday, many high schools turn 16- and 17-year-old students aside into adult or vocational programs. And although public schools by statute can continue to serve students past their 18th birthdays, some will force out even well-performing ESL students by telling them that they must go to adult programs after their 18th birthday.

Imagine for a moment a hypothetical classroom. Some students have moved into the class because they have succeeded at the previous level. Others have been placed by an assessment instrument which measured their oral production and syntax. When students complete the first writing assessment, they present a range of writing abilities—from words and phrases to organized paragraphs; when students speak, they exhibit a similar range of oral proficiency. As time progresses, some students demonstrate a great amount of world knowledge and others, very little; some students have been well-schooled in their own countries and some have been in California for four or five years. At the end of the course, which students are likely to be perceived as more successful and better prepared to move on? The issue of educational background and life experiences reverberates at every segment of public education.

Factors Which Improve Access and Movement Between Secondary and Postsecondary Programs

From all that has been said, several observations emerge. Access to postsecondary opportunities is improved when students have been well-prepared by their secondary programs. Three factors stand out: sufficient numbers of courses, well-developed curriculum offerings, and adequately trained teachers.

Sufficient Numbers of Courses

Course offerings must serve the needs of students in the school. Schools should reexamine prerequisites for courses. If a high school has only 30 limited-English Spanish speakers, why must grade level be the criterion which determines who is eligible for U. S. history or government? Why can only 10th grade students take biology? Why is the reading score on a nationally normed test like the CTBS used as the sole criterion for entrance into college preparatory classes? Pushed by changing demographics, some schools have responded by collapsing offerings rather than carefully examining existing courses and their prerequisites. Teachers and program administrators need to ask challenging questions: Why is only the general track offered in SDAIE? If we have three ESL classes, why is each one multilevel? If we have a significant population of newcomer Spanish speakers with low primary language literacy, why can't we have courses to develop their literacy skills in this language well?

Well-Developed Curriculum

Complementing the notion of a sufficient number is that of the right kind of courses. The foundation for school success is the ESL course: Good programs recognize a student's developmental needs in the language acquisition process and meet these needs at various levels. Most of us agree that those new to the language need a program which offers an opportunity to develop oral survival skills and a foundation for English literacy. Those whose oral English has emerged need a program which builds the vocabulary and skills necessary for academic success. The upper levels of such a program should concentrate on reading—both content and literature—and writing for different purposes and audiences. In most programs, English language development is narrowly perceived as the province of the ESL classroom. In reality, for English language learners, language development is the responsibility of the entire school program. This means that descriptions of SDAIE courses should not merely mirror the content objectives of the mainstream but instead prioritize the content objectives and reflect the academic skills which will be developed. This means that English teachers whose classes are filled with second language speakers who have exited the ESL program need to examine the textbook selections as well as the strategies they use. Language development does not end with ESL. An adequate secondary program recognizes that second language students need courses which will move them to advanced levels of English language proficiency in all the content areas.

Ability to Convey Concepts to L2 Learners

The final factor pertains to staff development and status. Though the state has determined appropriate credentialing for English language development and SDAIE teachers, the ability to convey concepts depends upon strategies. It is through strategy that theory becomes application. Once sufficient appropriate and rigorous ESL, ELD and SDAIE courses are offered, it becomes imperative that programs assume the responsibility of ensuring that teachers have the support and skills to deliver the concepts. Though support and skills are integral to the success of programs for second language learners, it would be misleading to limit support to staff development and appropriate textbooks or materials. Staff development brings teachers with similar needs together and provides the setting and opportunity to work out common instructional problems and solutions.

Appropriate textbooks are chosen by those who will use them as resources and are provided as part of the base program of the school. The needs of second language learners require audiovisual materials to supplement strategies and textbooks. These all contribute to the ability to convey subject matter to English language learners. But support also means acknowledging the knowledge and skills of bilingual, ESL, SDAIE and ELD teachers. Support also means providing equal access for teachers and their students to facilities like the computer lab and library. Support also means recognizing the contributions of English language learners to the school community—and including them as a part of the fabric of school life. When neither the courses, nor the teachers, nor the students are marginalized, all these complex factors work together to propel students toward academic success.

When students have been given access to a broad spectrum of courses and engaged in challenging work appropriate to their level of English proficiency, then access is improved and barriers to movement between levels are lowered or removed.

Efforts to Improve Access

Each individual school or program is capable of making efforts to improve access. To go forward, a school must know where it is and who it serves.

Data

Data are essential. Apocryphal stories and anecdotes are one form of data, but desegregated data, of the sort collected by every educational institution are much better. Data programs should have the ability to sort information by gender, ethnicity, nationality, first language, prior schooling, length of time in the United States, as well as grade-point average (GPA), attendance, and so forth—so schools could (for example) analyze the GPA of all students from Vietnam and compare recent arrivals with Vietnamese students here for more than four years; or examine the number of Spanish-speaking students programmed into remedial courses and analyze the factors which may be contributing to performance; or collect rates of absenteeism among Cantonese-speaking males from Hong Kong and compare the rate to general rates of absenteeism. Desegregated data provide a platform for asking questions, identifying problems, and brainstorming solutions.

Programming

Schools must pay attention to programming. In some schools the master calendar is constructed without regard to student needs. For instance, although projected fall enrollment for beginning ESL may consistently suggest a need for three classes, year after year only two are scheduled. Students who enroll in mid-September often sit in the cafeteria until an enrollment formula is met. (Because of state funding requirements, a sufficient number of students at each level must enroll/appear to permit the addition of a class or classes at the level in question.) Sometimes assessment information is disregarded by those who determine student programs. For example, a student who has low primary language literacy and whose assessment profile indicates a need for primary language support may not be programmed into the appropriate classes because of space limitations, scheduling conflicts, or misunderstanding of the purpose of bilingual support. Some counselors acquiesce to parental requests for "status" courses (and unwittingly foster the perceived low status of ESL and bilingual programs); in the process they also deviate from an assessment-based program sequence. Attention to programming assures that all students will obtain access to the classes which they need to meet graduation requirements and post-secondary goals.

Articulation

Articulation within and across segments can improve these situations. At the school level, those responsible for programs (teachers and administrators) need to examine the needs of second language learners, the course offerings, and the delivery of subject matter. This should be an ongoing process based on a commitment to academic success for all students. Based on the analysis of data, program changes can evolve. Program goals and standards should be clearly described to students and their parents in the language of the home so that parents will understand how academic success is developed in their children. For example, some secondary schools hold a separate parent night for incoming ninth grade English language learners and provide translators to answer questions about high school curriculum and policies. Some secondary schools also host a college night for parents of 11th and 12th grade English language learners, again providing translators to ensure the comprehensibility of this opportunity to understand both academic qualifications for entrance and support through financial aid.

Because counselors are responsible for programming students, it is crucial that they be included in any articulation program so that they will be aware of course standards and offerings. Too often, high school counselors

assume that English language learners must attend community college before moving on to the university.

Efforts to improve articulation occur across the levels. Because secondary graduates who are English language learners are often ineligible for the state university systems, community colleges are often impacted with high school graduates who have no recent ESL background. When these students take placement examinations, some are referred to community college ESL programs, others to remedial classes. Some students perceive a loss of status in a movement "back" to ESL. Others are poorly served by remedial programs designed for native speakers. Secondary schools and some colleges have begun to dialogue, to learn about one another's programs and how they can collaborate for the benefit of students.

Some examples: In the fall of 1996, Pasadena City College (PCC) hosted a Saturday miniconference for teachers within its attendance area for the purpose of articulating its program and developing a dialogue between teachers in various high school districts.[5] For a first effort, attendance was broadly distributed through PCC's service region; both groups of educators learned from one another. PCC followed up by hosting the UCLA Teaching Analytical Writing Project on the PCC campus (see Peitzman, this volume).

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) programs have been established throughout California. AVID programs, which identify underachieving students most underrepresented in California post-secondary institutions, have demonstrated a rise in both college preparation for under-represented students as well as college applications.[6]

Various other innovations also exist. An expanded Title VII program between Mission High School in San Francisco Unified School District and San Francisco State University continues to provide opportunities for underrepresented students to prepare for college enrollment through a focus on academic reading and study skills.[7] All of us can learn of articulation efforts and programs by attending national, statewide, and local conferences. Regional and state CATESOL conferences continue to provide critical opportunities to articulate between segments.

In the last 20 years, rapidly changing demographics have posed an amazing challenge to California high schools. In general, schools have met that challenge well, gradually adding ESL, bilingual, and SDAIE classes in response to the needs of their students. Many did this willingly, advocating for and empowering their students. The challenges for the next decade will of necessity involve more than merely providing courses: The challenges are to focus on a broad range of courses which meet the needs of English language learners and to develop quality within each program of instruction.

No one segment can successfully meet this challenge alone. It is through articulation and working together that we will improve our programs for the benefit of all. ■

Endnotes

1. SDAIE classes, sometimes called *sheltered*, are offered to second language speakers who have reached oral fluency in English. For a more complete description, see the CATESOL position paper on specially designed academic instruction in English.

2. Please note that recent policy changes in the California Department of Education permit the ESL-only option to be used more frequently than it may have been in the past.

3. SDAIE methodology consists of strategies to make content comprehensible through an emphasis on the use of visuals, collaborative strategies, graphic organizers, and cognitive scaffolding.

4. For a discussion of case histories of ESL students at UCLA, see Brinton, D., & Mano, S. (1994) in F. Peitzman & G. Gadda, (Eds.) *With different eyes: Insights into teaching language minority students across the disciplines.* (pp. 1–21). White Plains, NY: Longman.

5. For information, contact Ginny Heringer, ESL coordinator at Pasadena City College.

6. For AVID information or to visit an AVID program, contact the AVID Center, San Diego County Office of Education at (619) 291-3559 or a local county office of education.

7. For information on this program, contact Kate Kinsella, STEP to College Program, San Francisco Unified School District.

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