The Relationship between Literacy Education and Language Development within Bilingual Spanish/English Heritage Speakers

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of the study is to explore the advancements of Hispanic Spanish-Speaking children in a Saturday-School Heritage Language program with the use of Spanish and English language literacy tests to further develop teaching methods to better serve the bilingual Spanish/English speaking community. Studies have shown that an educative system for bilingual Hispanic heritage learners needs to be developed since current teaching models do not effectively meet the needs of the bilingual group. In addition, studies have identified that a lack of educational models for bilinguals are linked to the common failures in the educational system for these bilingual individuals [Tomás 2010, Gándara 2009].

INTRODUCTION

The study, En Nuestra Lengua (ENL), has been developed for students in a Spanish literacy and language Saturday program that involves Spanish Heritage Learners between the grades of kindergarten and third grade. The classes were to focus on the development of Cummins’ proposed ‘Interdependency Hypothesis’ that gives an outline to the relation between bilingualism and proficiency (Benkí et al., 2008). The test allows for placement in appropriate leveled classes without taking too much class time. Students were also tested at the end of the program to determine the success or the advancement in the programs teaching methods. The ISEL test allows for an account of the spelling and accurate phonemic nature of each language. Points for each task are given as follows:

- Test: ISEL-K-1 and ISEL/S
  - Alphabet Recognition Task: Student is asked to say each letter.
  - Story Listening Task: Student is asked nine questions on content and vocabulary.
  - Phonemic Awareness Task: Student is asked to identify matching pictures with similar phonemic sounds.
  - One-to-One Matching Task: Student is asked to read sentences and later identify words from the sentences.
  - Letter Sounds Task: Student is asked to produce the sound of each uppercase letter.
  - Developmental Spelling Task: Student is asked to spell six words.

METHODOLOGY

Snapsots of Early Literacy” (ISEL) is used to test the competency level of the Hispanic Heritage Learner. The test allows for classes to be divided not solely based on age or grade level but proficiency of tasks. Classes are based on lowest to highest competency rates (Benkí et al., 2008):
- Papagáios (penguins: not evaluated)
- Alacranes (scorpions)
- Jaguars (jaguars)
- Quetzales (quetzals)
- Delfines (dolphins)
- Águilas (eagles)

ISEL is calculated based on a point system of 100 points with seven snapshots. The test is the only one that can give a correct answer. The scores taken by ENL are compared to the published Target (50th percentile) and Watch (20th percentile) mean scores and used to determine whether the classes of ENL were effective in advancing literacy and language movements within bilingual Hispanic heritage learners. [Barr et al. 2004]

RESULTS

Table 1: Composite scores for the Fall and Spring in Spanish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Alacranes</th>
<th>Jaguars</th>
<th>Quetzales</th>
<th>Delfines</th>
<th>Águilas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ISEL-S composite score is the average of the 7 snapshot scores. The error bars are standard errors, as indicated in the y-axis label (slightly smaller than 95% confidence intervals). The published median (50th percentile/Target) scores for kindergarten fall through 1st grade spring are plotted with black dashed line for reference. [Barr et al. 2004]

All classes show progress, except for the “Delfínes”. The ISEL-S/K-1 is not very useful for advanced students. All students showed improvement in spelling. The “Alacranes” and “Jaguares” are at grade level (Kindergarten and 1st grade spring respectively). The “Quetzales” are nearly at 1st grade spring.

DISCUSSION

It is important to note the discussion that the “En Nuestra Lengua” classes were solely given on Saturdays and not a daily Spanish or Spanish and English program as with other programs.

The differences in quantity versus quality must be addressed for the ENL group. The classes were separated into groups based on ISEL results and the mastery of the language and not solely on age. However, age came into place in groups to differentiate drastic age levels separating students in different age groups that had similar mastery levels.

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