Empirically-Based Strategies - The Transition of Writing from Spanish to English in Elementary ELLs

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Focus of Presentation

1. Development of writing in ELLs
2. Strategies used by ELLs transitioning from Spanish to English writing
3. Strategies used by teachers for the transition of Spanish to English writing in ELLs
Research Questions

- What has research found about writing development of bilingual students?

- What are some strategies used by ELLs when transitioning from Spanish to English writing?

- What research on instructional strategies used by teachers to help students develop writing skills have been found to be effective?
Importance of writing skills

- The National Commission on Writing states that a large majority of salaried employees in all industries are expected to write in their employment facilities (2004).

- Therefore writing is an essential knowledge all children should master successfully before entering adulthood.
ELLs and Writing

• Number of ELLs continue to increase
• Majority are Spanish speakers
• NAEP scores indicate that they are doing better in writing, but still lack behind their English-speaking counterparts.
• A growing number of teachers have at least one ELL student in their class.
• Teacher lack of specific training
Demographics in Texas

- 8.6 million Hispanics (US Census Bureau, 2008)
- Hispanics are the highest ethnicity representing students in public schools in Texas
  - 47.2% (2,193,093) and 15.5% (721,119) of the students enrolled in public schools are a part of the Bilingual/ESL education programs (TEA, 2008).
Dropout Rates

• Nationwide
  • Hispanic students: 42.1%
  • White students: 22.4%

• Texas
  • Hispanic students: 42.7%
  • White students: 23.3%

• (Diplomas Count, 2008)
Predictions

- U.S. 6,829 students dropout every day

- Texas 118,091 students did not graduate in 2007-2008 school year

- Texas 656 students dropout every day

  - (Diplomas Count, 2008)
Writing Skills of Students in Texas

- 3% achievement gap between White and Hispanic students in the 4th grade writing Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test (TAKS)
- 6% achievement gap between White and Hispanic students in the seventh-grade writing TAKS (TEA, 2008)
Need to Learn to Write

- American public opinion survey
- 84% writing—graduation requirement
- 67% writing skills needed for success in college
- 93% writing important to job success

(Belden, Russonello, & Stewart, 2007)
Writing in Workplace Study

- Participants: 120 leaders from 64 major corporations
  - Writing necessary skill for employment and promotion
  - Good writing is valued in workplace

  (National Commission on Writing, 2004)
21st Century Survival Skills

- Critical thinking and problem-solving
- Collaboration
- Agility and adaptability
- Initiative and entrepreneurialism
- Effective oral and written communication
- Accessing and analyzing Information
- Curiosity and imagination

(Wagner, 2008)
Importance of writing skills

- Writing has not received much attention (Cutler & Graham, 2008).
- For ELLs very little attention in examining the transition of writing from Spanish to English (Gort, 2006).
- Research in second language acquisition has focused in the transition of oral skills from Spanish to English (Serrano & Howard, 2007).
- Little known about how bilingual students transfer their knowledge about writing in their first language to writing in English (Gort, 2006; Serrano & Howard, 2007).
- Therefore it is important to identify empirically-based writing strategies for ELLs.
Methods

- **Search Parameter:**
  - studies conducted only in the United States, published in English, journals in the past ten years and published as peer-reviewed journals

- **Journals used:**
Results-12 studies were identified

- The studies identified were classified in the following categories:
  - writing development for ELLs
  - strategies used by ELLs transitioning from Spanish to English writing
    - Two studies (Gort, 2006; Mora, 2001). 
  - strategies used by teachers for the transition of Spanish to English writing in ELLs.
    - Five studies (Aguirre-Muñoz, Park, Amabisca & Boscardin, 2007; Graham, Harris, Mason, Fink-Chorzempa, Moran & Saddler, 2008; Graham, Morphy, Harris, Fink-Chorzempa, Saddler, Moran & Mason, 2008; Hudson, Lane & Mercer, 2005; Lipson, Mosenthal, Daniels & Woodside-Jiron, 2000).
Writing Development For Ells
• stages of writing development.
  ◦ Gentry (1982; 2000)-monolingual English children-Stages
  ◦ Ferreiro and Teberosky (1979; 1982)-monolingual Spanish children-Levels
  ◦ Children may be more advanced in one language than the other. “…becoming biliterate is not a linear process,” (p.735).
    • (Rubin & Carlan, 2005)
|---|---|---|
| Precommunicative stage  
Know the difference between writing and drawing. Write with scribbles, mock letters, and real letters unconnected to sounds. | Levels 1 & 2  
Know the difference between writing and drawing. Write with scribbles, mock letters, and real letters unconnected to sounds. | Generally the same as monolingual English and Spanish, except some children will write the same letters and symbols in both languages but read them differently in English and in Spanish. |
| Semiphonetic stage  
Letters are written to represent some of the sounds in words. | Level 3  
Each syllable in a word is usually represented by a vowel. | Generally similar to monolingual English, except some children will write the same words in both languages but read them differently in English and Spanish. |
| Phonetic stage  
Letters are written to represent most sounds in words. | Level 4  
Letters are written to represent most sounds in words. | Generally similar to monolingual English and Spanish. Some errors are made because of different letter-sound relationships in the two languages. |
| Transitional stage  
Letters are written according to common spelling patterns and include silent letters. | No corresponding level. | Similar to English monolingual stage with some errors caused by different letter-sound relationships in the two languages. Vocabulary and sentence structure become more complex. |
| Conventional stage  
Writing is generally correct. | Level 5  
Writing is generally correct. | Writing is generally correct. Vocabulary and sentence structure become more complex. |
Different stages of writing development for bilingual Spanish-English speakers’

- **Precommunicative Stage/Level 1 and 2:**
  - Bilingual children believed that writing representation were the same in both languages (Spanish and English).
  - Ex. Children knew that the languages were spoken differently, but did not make that connection in writing.

- **Semiphonetic Stage/Level 3:**
  - Bilingual children realize letters are written to represent sounds in words. Although, some children will write the same words for both languages, but read them differently in English and Spanish.
  - Ex. Gat=gato and Gat= cat
  - Pre K, Kinder

(Rubin & Carlan, 2005)
**Phonetic Stage/Level 4:**
- Bilingual children realize that most words of Spanish and English are spelled differently and letters are written to represent sounds. Errors may occur due to language similarities in sounds and letters.
  - Ex. *Vriyando* for *brillando* -v in English sounds like the b in Spanish,(p. 733).

**Transitional Stage (no Level in Spanish):**
- Bilingual children write letters according to spelling patterns, including silent letters. Errors may occur due to language similarities in sounds and letters.
  - Ex. Spelling *house* correctly using silent e in the end.

**Conventional Stage/Level 5:**
- Spelling is more or less correct.

(Rubin & Carlan, 2005)
Defior and Serrano (2005)

- Focus: Primary school children and kindergartners learning how to spell
  - Found 7 spelling categories used to identify children’s spelling errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linear scribbles</th>
<th>general substitutive spelling</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>random letters</td>
<td>specific substitutive spellings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partial spelling</td>
<td>non-orthographic spelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conventional spelling</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
• Spelling improves as children get older

• Development of spelling is not linear, therefore it is best described in phases

• It was found that Spanish spelling development did not qualitatively differ from less transparent languages, such as English.

Defior and Serrano (2005)
Moll, Saez & Dworin (2001)

- **Focus:** How bilingual children explored writing
  - Two case studies: Two kindergartners-ELLs and a third grader (ELL)

- **Results:**
  - First case study (two kindergartners)
    - Kindergartners realized the languages shared the same letters, but only one learned that the letters would be used in a different order depending on the language.
  - The second case study (third grade student)
    - Student was observed using both languages to her advantage to learn new material in class
Francisco, Mo, Carlo, August and Snow (2006)

- **Focus:** determined whether negative transfer from Spanish to English occurred in spelling for first grade native Spanish speakers

- **Results:**
  - Students not receiving English literacy instruction would have Spanish influence in their English spelling.
  - Students receiving English literacy instruction, were able to write in English properly.
Arteagoitia, Howard, Louguit and Kenyon (2005)

- Focus: Developed a Spanish-spelling measure to assess progress of Spanish-English bilingual children from 2nd to 5th grade

- Results
  - Students had a difficult time with orthographic features
  - Frequently used words were easier to spell
  - Pseudo words (fake) were also easier to spell in comparison to real words
Spence (2003)

- **Focus:** Classroom environment promoting writing
- **Results:**
  - Students read their written story to other classmates. Classmates provided details, rich vocabulary and other ideas to improve the story.
  - Key - have a routine in place for students to become accustomed to sharing their stories.
  - For students to be motivated to write, provide them choices of what to write about.
Strategies used by ELLs Transitioning from Spanish to English Writing
Two studies were found (Gort, 2006; Mora, 2001)

Gort (2006) was a six month case study consisting of four dominant English-speakers and four dominant Spanish-speakers during writers’ workshop (WW) in first grade.

Code-switching
Code-switching

- **Definition:**
  - Code-switching is a change by a speaker (or writer) from one language or language variety to another one (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992, p.58).

- **Example:**
  - Students keeping nouns (names of places they visited, cartoon characters’ names, etc.) in the original language (Gort, 2006).
    - I went to my tia Rita’s house yesterday.
    - I went to a posada in Mexico.

- **Why?**
  - Some students think this adds meaning to their writing or there was not a proper translation (Gort, 2006).
Other factors for applying code-switching

- Strength of students’ primary and/or secondary language
- Bilingual development
- Linguistic context
- To whom they were speaking

Gort, 2006
Mora (2001)

- Focus: case study with three fourth-grade bilingual students in a transitional bilingual program; purpose was to describe their process in learning to spell in two languages.

- Students used “invented spelling” when they related the spelling rules and patterns from their native language.
Inventive Spelling

Definition:
- Students use “invented spelling” when they related the spelling rules and patterns from their native language.

Example:
- a student spells likes – laks

Why?
- In Spanish the long /i/ sound does not exist; student “invented” the word from how it would sound in Spanish.

Mora, 2001
Research on effective instructional strategies used by teachers to help students develop writing skills

- Seven studies (Aguirre-Muñoz, Park, Amabisca & Boscardin, 2007; Graham, Harris, Mason, Fink-Chorzempa, Moran & Saddler, 2008; Graham, Morphy, Harris, Fink-Chorzempa, Saddler, Moran & Mason, 2008; Hudson, Lane & Mercer, 2005; Lipson, Mosenthal, Daniels & Woodside-Jiron, 2000).
Graham, Harris, Mason, Fink-Chorzempa, Moran & Saddler (2008)

- Teachers first teach handwriting
- Direct instruction is important
- Most common modifications for students:
  - Extra encouragement
  - One-on-one instruction
  - Extra time
Graham, Morphy, Harris, Fink-Chorzempa, Saddler, Moran & Mason (2008)

- Teachers need to teach spelling in a meaningful way and allow plenty of practice.
- Teachers may help struggling spellers by doing the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modifications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Modified spelling lists</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
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<tr>
<td>Procedures for teaching spelling</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Students with poor spelling tended to write less in their story.

- provide meaningful topics for students to write.

- Providing prompts for students to complete may restrain their flow of writing.
Aguirre-Muñoz, et. al., 2007

• Teachers may help students improve clarity in writing by providing feedback on their linguistic resources for academic language.

• Teachers may give feedback on “expanded noun phrases, conjunctions and transitions, as well as clausal units to examine thematic progression,” (p308).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coordinating Conjunctions</th>
<th>Correlative Conjunctions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>and</td>
<td>both . . . and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but</td>
<td>not only . . . but also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or</td>
<td>either . . . or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nor</td>
<td>neither . . . nor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for</td>
<td>whether . . . or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>so</td>
<td>just as . . . so too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lipson, Mosenthal, Daniels & Woodside-Jiron (2000)

- Teachers and the writing process

- Four groups
  - Curricularist
  - Inquiry-process
  - Polytheoretic
  - Minimalist
- **Curricularist**: controls topic selection and students go through writing process at the same time and focused on grammar and not meaning.

- **Inquiry-process/ polytheoretic**: strong child-centered activities and interaction in classroom, writing process not linear, more writing time allowed and held conferences every day.
Minimalist: did not use aspects of writing process, little to no feedback to students’ writing. Students wrote for enjoyment, but not for a particular purpose.
Graves and Rueda (2009)

- What makes successful writers:
  - cognitive needs (explicit strategy instruction, teaching writing as a process, and making effective use of students’ existing prior knowledge)
  - varied cultural understandings and practices;
  - language needs (scaffolding to make tasks and materials more comprehensible);
- motivational needs (authentic, personally relevant, and challenging writing tasks);

- social interactions (strategic grouping practices, creating opportunities for student autonomy, and building a learning and writing community);

- community and institutional needs (a supportive, safe, and welcoming learning environment for students) (p. 234).
Conclusion

Findings

- the developmental stages of writing for bilingual children (Rubin & Carlan, 2005).

- Learning of spelling and writing is not linear (Defior and Serrano, 2005)
Conclusion Cont’

- strategies used by ELLs when they are transitioning from L1 to L2:
  - inventive spelling (Mora, 2001)
  - code-switching (Gort, 2006)

- strategies to utilize when helping ELLs transition from their native language to English writing:
  - teaching handwriting and spelling
  - Encouraging expressive language, etc.

- Teachers of ELLs should be able to understand the specific needs of their ELLs and know how to scaffold them to the next level.
Future Research

- More experimental studies need to be conducted. No experimental studies were found for the time period examined
  - Population sample: Hispanic, low SES
- More studies need to be conducted to validate the information provided by Rubin and Carlan (2005)
- More studies identifying the issues faced by ELLs as they begin their transition from Spanish to English writing
- More research is also needed to better understand what are effective strategies utilized by teachers when helping ELLs transition from writing in Spanish to English.