THE SUITABILITY OF IMMERSION FOR ALL LEARNERS: WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

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CARLA
RESEARCH CONVOCATION
Oct. 17, 2012
1. Why is research on at-risk students important?

2. Canadian studies on majority students in immersion:
   - low SES
   - low academic ability
   - poor L1 abilities
   - minority ethnic group (but English-speaking)

3. U.S. studies on ELLs:
   - low SES
   - ethnic background (Black, Hispanic,
   - special education

4. at-risk for reading difficulty
1. WHY?
WHY?

- **Ethical issues:**
  - Should at-risk student be excluded from these benefits?

- **Pedagogical issues:**
  - Can we identify at-risk students?
  - Are some forms of immersion more suitable?
  - Students who are identified after enrollment
  - Provision of support services for students who stay in program
  - Nature of those services
  - Competence of teachers to provide support
2. CANADIAN RESEARCH

AT-RISK IMMERSION STUDENTS

L1 outcomes
L2 outcomes
academic outcomes

AT-RISK
L1 COMPARISON GROUP
EARLY TOTAL IMMERSION

- Kindergarten
- Grade 1
- Grade 2
- Grade 3
- Grade 4
- Grade 5
- Grade 6

% time in each language

L2
L1
IMMERSION STUDENTS from DISADVANTAGED SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

- Socio-economic disadvantage puts children at risk for low achievement in any school program

- Does socio-economic disadvantage put children at greater risk in immersion than in L1 program?

Immersion Students = Non-immersion students

Genesee, 2004
Low levels of general intellectual ability put students at risk for low achievement in any school program.

Are such students at greater risk in immersion than L1 program?

**Immersion Students with Low Academic Ability**

Below average Immersion Students = Below average Non-immersion students

Genesee, 2004
Students from minority language backgrounds* are often at risk for low achievement in any school program.

Are such students at greater risk in immersion than L1 program?

**Minority Immersion Students** = Non-immersion students

* speak English=L1

Genesee, 2004
IMMERSION STUDENTS AT-RISK for LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT

- Hypotheses:

**Commonsense view:**
for children with language impairment, learning an L2 is a burden and jeopardizes L1 development

**Alternative view:**
children with language impairment have difficulty learning any language, & impairment in L1 is the same whether they learn 2 languages or only 1
IMMERSION STUDENTS with LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT


Immersion students with impairment = Non-immersion students with impairment
3. U.S. RESEARCH

- **low SES:**
  - TWI students =/> mainstream students/state norms
    (Lindholm-Leary Block, 2010; Lindholm-Leary, 2011)

- **ethno-linguistic background:** African American, Hawaiian, Latino, Asian-American
  - dual language students =/> mainstream students/state norms

- **special education:**
  - TWI spec ed = Eng-L1 spec ed on English reading and CA norms for students in spec ed (grades 4-8) (Lindholm-Leary, 2005)
CAVEAT!

ALL CHILDREN ARE DIFFERENT

EACH CHILD SHOULD BE CONSIDERED INDIVIDUALLY
4. STRUGGLING READERS

- estimated 7-10% (maybe 20%) of students have reading impairment/difficulty

- prevalent reason for switching out of immersion

- students with reading impairment may be entitled to special services

- the earlier the intervention, the better the outcomes
IDENTIFYING L2 READING DIFFICULTY/IMPAIRMENT

- L2 students are NOT at greater risk for reading impairment
- L2 students may be at greater risk for reading difficulty
- L2 students with reading difficulty/impairment are at greater risk of receiving delayed support
  - wait-and-see approach – wait until students have been in school long enough to rule out inadequate time to learn L2
  - wait-to-fail – critical additional support is delayed
McGILL AT-RISK READING STUDY
Erdos, Genesee, Savage & Haigh, 2010, in press

L1 language predictors
L1 reading predictors
control measures

L2 language outcomes
L2 reading outcomes
academic outcomes

Fall K  Spring K  Spring Grade 1  Spring Grade 2  Spring Grade 3  Spring Grade 6
predictors  outcomes

Grade 1

Grade 2

Grade 3

Grade 6
FINDINGS

- **QUESTION 1:** Can we use L1 indices to predict L2 reading outcomes & difficulties?
  
  YES: correlations of .35* to .45*

- **QUESTION 2:** How early in schooling can L1 indices be used to predict L2 reading outcomes?
  
  K-Fall predictors are reasonable, but K-Spring predictions are better.

- **QUESTION 3:** How accurately can we predict risk for reading and/or language difficulty 2 or 3 years later?
  
  Quite accurately (74% --84% accuracy)
OTHER FACTORS

- **Community**: what is the use of or need for L2?

- **Family**: what is the significance of L2 in the near and extended family?

- **School**: can the school provide the additional support child needs?

- **Parents**: do parents have the resources, energy & patience to support the child & the school?

- **Individual differences** in children’s ability to cope with their additional learning challenges
SUMMARY

- There is no evidence that students (mainstream or minority language) at-risk for poor academic performance are at greater risk in immersion than in English-only programs.

- At-risk students can become bilingual and attain levels of language and academic ability commensurate with their learning challenges.

- At-risk students’ achievement is not at greater risk in immersion than in monolingual program.

- We can identify some at-risk learners early and provide additional support early.
GAPS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- no research on children with severe cognitive, perceptuo-motor, or emotional difficulties
- research using current definitions of impairment
- research in U.S. and other settings
- long term outcome studies
- identification studies
- intervention studies
thank you