

Omissions and Distortions from The Lexington Institute: Comments on Torrance (2006)

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The Lexington Institute has just published a paper, *Immersion, Not Submersion* (Torrance, 2006), that claims that English immersion has been a great success in California. The argument is based entirely on one finding, the increase in the percentage of English learners who score in the highest two levels of one test, the CELDT. I have responded to this claim in several places, twice in newspapers and in one case before the State Board of Education in Texas, with Lexington Institute members present.

The Lexington paper ignores:

- 1 Findings showing that test score increases are typical for the first few years after any new test is introduced (Linn, Graue, and Sanders, 1990). The CELDT was introduced in 2001.
- 2 A report from the California Legislative Analyst office (Hill, 2006) showing that at least some of the increase in the percentage of students between 2002 and 2004 at the top two CELDT levels was because of a traffic jam: Many children in these levels had been there for several years; the percentage of those moving into the advanced levels actually decreased.
- 3 Reports showing that the overall progress of children in California under English immersion is not spectacular; average gains are less than one level of the CELDT per year out of five levels, where level five means "ready for the mainstream" (Jepsen and de Anth, 2005).
- 4 Reports concluding that dropping bilingual education did not accelerate the English development of California's English learners (Grissom, 2004, Parrish, Pérez, Merickel, and Linquanti, 2006).
- 5 The well-established finding that bilingual education is typically more effective than all-English alternatives (e.g. Cummins, 1983; Willig, 1985; Greene, 1997; Rolstad, Mahoney, and Glass, 2005; Slavin and Cheung, 2005; Krashen and McField, 2006).

Lexington's reaction has been to simply ignore these reports.

In addition to these inexcusable omissions, the report also contains a number of distortions:

The claim is made that "the most successful schools (in California) have strictly limited the use of any language other than English in the classroom" (page 5). No data or citation is provided to support this claim, and it runs counter to the results of the Parrish et. al. and Grissom studies cited above, which found no advantage to dropping bilingual education.

The report claims that before 227, "most California English learners were taught for the majority of the time in their native language" (page 5). In fact, before 227 was passed, only about 50 percent of English learners were in programs that had any kind of non-English support (Han, Baker, and Rodríguez 1997).

The suggestion is made that bilingual education at that time was nearly all Spanish ("they might hear English only 30 minutes a day"). According to one study of bilingual programs in California before 227, by the time the children were in grade 3, 75% of their subject matter instruction was in English, and it was 90% by grade 5 (Mitchell, Destino, and Karan, 1997).

The suggestion was made that bilingual education in California had typically utilized concurrent translation (which of course conflicts with the previous accusation of little use of English): One teacher interviewed said that immersion students learn English better: "If they know they're going to hear it in their own language, they don't listen as carefully" (p. 6). The model in used in California was the gradual exit model (Krashen and Biber, 1988), which does not use concurrent translation at all.

Interestingly, Lexington describes with enthusiastic approval the technique of front-loading lessons with information provided in the first language, the idea of using the first language to supply background information that makes input in English more comprehensible: "Before teaching a new concept, an educator might quickly summarize it in the primary language" (p. 10).

This is precisely the core idea underlying successful bilingual education, including the gradual exit model that was used in California. The difference is that Lexington prefers the use of this concept lesson by lesson, while bilingual programs typically provide this background knowledge over an extended period of time. But the underlying concept is the same.

The report asserts that Open Court has been shown to be successful, and that intensive phonics has been shown to be superior to whole language (p. 7,8). Torrance either ignores or is unaware of publications arguing that this is not true (Garan, 2002; Krashen, 2002, Coles, 2003).

The Lexington Institute is free to disagree with the findings of other writers and researchers, but they are not free to ignore them.

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