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Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding **research on grouping ELL students in mainstream classrooms, especially research in favor of clustering similar language level proficiency students in a mainstream classroom.** Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 regional educational laboratories (REL) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. It provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations on research-based education questions.

Please note that REL Southwest has not done an evaluation of the resources themselves, but offer this list to you for your information only.

Question

I am trying to find some research on grouping ELL students in mainstream classrooms. We are wondering if there is research that is in favor of clustering similar language level proficiency students in a mainstream classroom (2-5 students per cluster)?

Brooks, K., & Thurston, L. P. (2010, Fall). English language learner academic engagement and instructional grouping configurations. *American Secondary Education*, 39(1), 45-60. *Although we typically limit our referrals to publicly available resources, based upon the abstract, we determined that this resource may be of interest to you. It may be found through university or public library systems.*

From the ERIC abstract: This study used an ecobehavioral approach to investigate the conditional probability that English language learning (ELL) students would engage in academic tasks in urban middle school content area classrooms within different instructional grouping configurations. These configurations included whole class, small group, one-to-one, and individual instruction. The participants in the study included 28 native Spanish-speaking students who were all identified as being English language learners (ELL). The findings of this study indicate that participants were most likely to engage in academic tasks during small group and one-to-one instruction. They were least likely to engage in academic tasks during whole class and individual instruction.

Cho, R. M. (2012, October). Are there peer effects associated with having English language learner (ELL) classmates? Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K). *Economics of Education Review*, 31(5), 629-643. *Although we typically limit our referrals to publicly available resources, based upon the abstract, we determined that this resource may be of interest to you. It may be found through university or public library systems.*

From the publisher's abstract: Over the past decade, several state and federal policies have directed schools to mainstream English Language Learner (ELL) students into English-only instruction classrooms. While there is mixed evidence on the effects of these immersion policies on the ELL students, research examining potential peer effects on their non-ELL classmates is non-existent. This paper begins to fill in this gap by using a nationally representative longitudinal

sample of children in early elementary grades. Results indicate that having an ELL classmate during kindergarten and first grade is associated with lower test score gains in reading but not necessarily in math for non-ELL students whose primary language is English, controlling for unobserved fixed school characteristics as well as individual characteristics. The negative peer effects on reading test score gain are sensitive to the frequency of within classroom ability grouping usage, gender, and household income level of non-ELL children.

Gottfried, M. A. (2014, September). The positive peer effects of classroom diversity: Exploring the relationship between English language learner classmates and socioemotional skills in early elementary school. *The Elementary School Journal*. 115(1), 22-48. *Although we typically limit our referrals to publicly available resources, based upon the abstract, we determined that this resource may be of interest to you. It may be found through university or public library systems.*

From the publisher's abstract: Recent federal, state, and district policies that have mainstreamed English language learner (ELL) students into general, English-only elementary school classrooms have raised questions among educational stakeholders about the widespread effects of these policies. Most research has focused on the outcomes of ELL students; almost nothing is known about the effects of these mainstreaming practices on non-ELL classmates, and no empirical research has evaluated their effects on socioemotional outcomes. The purpose of this study is to fill these research gaps by using quasi-experimental methods on a large-scale data set of kindergarten and first-grade students to examine the effects that mainstreamed ELL students have on 5 socioemotional scales for their classmates. The findings indicate a positive effect: kindergartners and first graders with a greater number of ELL classmates have lower problem behaviors and higher social skills. These findings are differentiated by individual characteristics and classroom contextual factors. Implications for policy and practice are addressed.

Ingerson, T. (2011). *Helping English language learners (ELLs) achieve success (passing grades) in the mainstream classroom* [Online submission from ERIC database]. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED518704.pdf>

From the author's abstract: Our world is globalizing at a rapid rate right before our eyes. The world as we know it is becoming much more diverse and colorful. The population of school-aged English language learner (ELL) students in the USA has steadily and markedly increased over the past decade with projections indicating that this trend will continue. If the trend continues, by the year 2050, forty-nine percent of the population will be other than "white." The implications of this trend are that our schools will have higher populations of ELL students and the needs of these learners will be programs that teach English and then content material. It will be the responsibility of educators to teach these students English before expecting them to master content area knowledge and become productive citizens in our communities. The research done in this study investigated current attitudes toward ELL students by faculty, staff and administrators as well as suggestions ELL students had to offer about what would help them achieve success (passing grades) in the mainstream classroom.

Ivey, P. S. (2011). *Overcoming language and cultural barriers in school: Helping Hispanic students acquire success in elementary school* [Online submission from ERIC database]. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED519664.pdf>

From the author's abstract: Research shows that Hispanic second language students are not as successful as their English-speaking peers in school. The problem is in part due to several

factors: curriculum deliverance in a foreign language, cultural differences, and family/school disconnect. Current census reports reveal that Hispanic populations in the United States, and therefore within public schools, are on the rise. With the passing of the 2002 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as No Child Left Behind, mainstream classroom curriculum instruction is now primarily taught in English. Without honoring the many languages and cultures that California students bring to the classroom, the disconnect between school and home deepens. This study followed qualitative design research using the interview format to research ways to more fully integrate Hispanic students and their families into the public school system. Teachers and administrators served as participants in data collection. Results indicated that honoring Hispanic culture within the curriculum and broadening the definition of parent participation, Hispanic students and families feel more connected to the educational process.

Lillie, K. E., Markos, A., Estrella, A., Nguyen, T., Trifiro, A., Arias, M., . . . Perez, K. (2010). Policy in practice: The implementation of structured English immersion in Arizona. Los Angeles, CA: Civil Rights Project / Proyecto Derechos Civiles. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED511331.pdf>

From the authors' abstract: This study examines the implementation and organization of the state mandated curriculum in the 4-hour SEI block in 18 K-12 classrooms in 5 different districts. We focus on the effects of grouping by language proficiency, the delivery of the structure-based ESL curriculum, the provision of resources and limiting of access to grade-level curriculum, and problems of promotion and graduation for ELLs. In each of these areas, the implementation of the SEI 4- hour block raises concerns with regard to equal educational opportunity and access to English. Key among the findings of this study are: ELLs are physically, socially, and educationally isolated from their non-ELL peers; they are not exiting the program in one year, raising serious questions about the time these students must remain in these segregated settings; reclassification rates are a poor indicator of success in mainstream classrooms; and the four-hour model places ELLs at a severe disadvantage for high school graduation. The only means for these students to graduate with their peers appears to be through after school and summer school programs that either did not exist or had been cut.

Pettit, S. K. (2011). Teachers' beliefs about English language learners in the mainstream classroom: A review of the literature. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 5(2), 123-147. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/19313152.2011.594357>

From the author's abstract: This literature review on teachers' beliefs about English language learners (ELLs) in mainstream classrooms is organized into three sections: (a) inservice teachers' existing beliefs, (b) predictors of inservice teachers' beliefs, and (c) the connection between inservice teachers' beliefs and practices. This body of literature points to a clear need for increased professional development for mainstream teachers because, currently, teacher education possesses a "poverty of language learning." According to the research included in this review, a relation exists between beliefs and practices in relation to teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms. Certain factors, such as training in teaching ELLs, years of teaching experience, and exposure to language diversity, have been identified as predictors of mainstream teachers' beliefs about English to speakers of other languages students. It is important for teachers who hold deficit beliefs toward ELLs to adopt a new set of beliefs for successful inclusion of ELLs.

Reeves, J. R. (2006). Secondary teacher attitudes toward including English-language learners in mainstream classrooms. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 99(3), 131-143. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.3200/JOER.99.3.131-143>

From the author's abstract: Researchers have given limited attention to teacher attitudes toward inclusion of English-language learners (ELLs) in mainstream classrooms. The author explored 4 categories within secondary teacher attitudes toward ELL inclusion: (a) ELL inclusion, (b) coursework modification for ELLs, (c) professional development for working with ELLs, and (d) perceptions of language and language learning. Findings from a survey of 279 subject-area high school teachers indicate a neutral to slightly positive attitude toward ELL inclusion, a somewhat positive attitude toward coursework modification, a neutral attitude toward professional development for working with ELLs, and educator misconceptions regarding how second languages are learned.

Sabharwal, S. (2009). *Effect of grouping on the language development of English learners*. (Doctoral dissertation), Argosy University, San Francisco Bay Area. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED506034.pdf>

From the author's abstract: The purpose of the study was to examine if there was a significant difference between first-grade English Learners (EL) who constitute a majority (greater than 50%) of the English language mainstream classroom (homogeneous grouping) and first-grade EL who constitute a minority (less than 50%) of the English language mainstream classrooms (heterogeneous grouping) in the area of English language acquisition as measured by the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). To accomplish this, the researcher gathered CELDT scores of entire English language mainstream EL who were enrolled in first grade for the 2006-2007 school year and who maintained enrollment in the same district for second grade in the fall of 2007-2008 school year at a Unified School District (USD). In this study, the researcher also determined perceptions of the teachers of the entire English language mainstream EL, who were enrolled in first grade for the 2006-2007 school year and who maintained enrollment in the same district for second grade in the fall of 2007-2008 school year at the USD, on the advantages and disadvantages of homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping in EL A questionnaire, developed by the researcher, was given to all the English language mainstream first-grade teachers at the USD. A study of teachers' perceptions helped substantiate that the non significant difference in differently grouped EL test scores was not due to the difference in teacher perceptions of EL groupings.

What Works Clearinghouse. (2012). *WWC review of the report "A randomized experiment of a cognitive strategies approach to text-based analytical writing for mainstreamed Latino English language learners in grades 6 to 12."* Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED534781.pdf>

From the ERIC abstract: The study reviewed in this report examined the impact of the "Pathway Project" intervention on students who were mainstreamed Latino English language learners (ELLs). One hundred and three English teachers in 15 schools in California were recruited and randomly assigned to either the "Pathway Project" condition or a comparison condition. The study found, and the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) confirmed, a statistically significant positive effect of the Pathway Project intervention on student outcomes in the spring of the implementation year in the English language development domain. The average effect size calculated by the WWC for the English language development domain was 0.22. The study did not find a statistically significant or substantively important effect in the reading domain. The research described in this report meets WWC evidence standards without reservations.

Methods

Search of Databases and Websites

- Institute of Education Sciences (IES) website (<http://www.ies.ed.gov>)
- ERIC database (www.eric.ed.gov)
- EBSCO's Academic Search Elite database
- Google Scholar (scholar.google.com)

Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Searches:

(Second language learning OR limited English-proficient students OR English language OR English [second language] OR English language learners OR ELL students) AND (mainstream OR mainstreaming) AND (ability grouping OR grouping [instructional purposes]) OR cluster OR clustering OR group OR grouping)

Criteria for Inclusion

REL Southwest selected resources that provide research on diversity training programs in the public school system. When REL Southwest staff reviewed resources, we considered – among other things – three factors:

- 1) Date of Publication: The most current information (primarily published from 2005 to the present) is included.
- 2) Source and Funder of the Report/Brief/Article: Priority was given to publications written in relevant, peer-reviewed journals or reports or produced by well-known research organizations.
- 3) Methodology: sources include literature reviews and policy reports.

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