



ESL Newsletter

APPALACHIA INTERMEDIATE UNIT 8

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Bilingual Education

Bilingual education is greatly misunderstood by the general public and even many educators. It is often confused with ESL education. Bilingual education is intended to teach English reading, reading comprehension, writing, listening, and speaking utilizing two languages, usually English and Spanish, although it may (and does) occur using other languages, for example, English and Russian. ESL education is taught only in English. Many educators new to ESL instruction are often surprised that you can teach English to a child that speaks any language in the world using only the language of English and ESL techniques.

Does bilingual education have an advantage over ESL

education? Statistically, a student in a bilingual education class becomes proficient in English 2 to 4 years sooner than the typical 7 to 10 years for a student in an ESL education class.

However, there are drawbacks to the bilingual classroom. If virtually all of your ESL students are Latino (from Mexico, Puerto Rico, South America), then a bilingual class can be justified. However, if your ESL population is scattered among many different languages, a bilingual class is obviously not possible, your only choice being an ESL class.

Besides the previously mentioned drawback, there are considerable political opponents to bilingual education. Many community groups and educators in

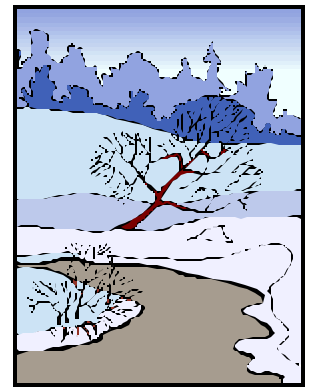
the Latino community are against bilingual education, even though there is a preponderance of research indicating that bilingual education is an excellent method of teaching the English language.

The argument against bilingual education characterizes bilingual statistics and research as "flawed", some even going so far as to charge that the statistics and research have been faked. Additionally, there is a very strong sentiment among Latinos that they have been "singled out" for bilingual education because they constitute over 50% of the ESL population in the country. Additionally, another strong sentiment among the Latino population is that a Latino child

already knows Spanish and therefore should only be exposed to English in school.

Given the above scenario, bilingual education has become a major battleground in political races and in school systems all across states that have sizable Latino-ESL populations, such as California, Florida, or Texas.

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Feature Teacher Spotlight



Mrs. Sue Montgomery
Hollidaysburg School District

In each issue, we will spotlight one teacher from an IU8 district. In doing so, we hope to emphasize the dedication and accomplishments of our teachers in implementing ESL programs. Please note that this is not meant to serve as a competition. It is meant to be a compliment to all the fine teachers we have in the ESL Consortium. Hollidaysburg Area School District's ESL teacher is Mrs. Sue Montgomery.

Mrs. Montgomery lives in Hollidaysburg with her husband, Rob, and their two children, Geoff and Chelsea. She graduated from State College Area High School. In 2000, Mrs. Montgomery graduated from Penn State University, earning a B.S. in Elementary Education with distinction. Currently, she is enrolled in the ESL Certification classes offered by IU8 and will be certified in Spring 2004.

The Hollidaysburg Area School District's Program

consists of mainstream, pull-out, and push-in, for various proficiency levels and ages. Students are taught reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Cultural awareness, laws, and safety in the American culture are emphasized. PA standards and TESOL standards are aligned with every lesson and assignment. Students are taught study skills, research writing and computer skills. They are encouraged to use the library and computer resources. The district values the culture of each student and relates it to aspects of American culture. Activities focus on history, current issues, holidays, and projects that align their past and present lives.

Twelve different languages are spoken by the ESL students. Philippine, Telugu, German, Polish, Chinese, Spanish, Italian, Hindi, Urdu, and Bengali are examples of those currently spoken. The parents have gratefully translated for other districts and other parents. Currently, the district has students in grades K-9 in the ESL program, including four delightful students from China who speak Mandarin. Several students did not speak any English when they started in the Hollidaysburg Area District. Romania, Italy,

Mexico, and Poland are the countries that the other students in the ESL program represent.

The most important aspect of Mrs. Montgomery's room is her risk-free learning environment. Learning takes place when the environment nurtures the learning. Mrs. Montgomery uses multiple assessment strategies. One of her favorites is using a tape player to record her students. In kindergarten, she tapes the daily songs and opening, so the students may take it home with them. For weekend stories, she records her voice reading stories and sends it home with students. Sometimes, a "Story Bag" with activities that she has made accompanies the tapes. Daily, she finds time for a read aloud for all of her students. She has a strong desire for children's literature and believes that we never outgrow the appreciation for children's literature.

Mrs. Montgomery's teaching style includes planning and implementation for language and literacy, working cooperatively with content teachers, and monitoring progress. Her goal is to create a community of diverse learners.

"Every word or utterance in a second language is a step forward and should be seen for what it accomplishes rather than for what it fails to do."

- Else V. Hamayan

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In talking to teachers around the districts, typical characteristics of ESL learners are proving to be true. Most noticeable is the effort required to think in two languages and speak a new language. By the end of the day, the students are often mentally and physically exhausted from their effort. Many compare the effort to “swimming” through school. Some students may even fall asleep later in the day from the constant effort of trying to speak, read, write, and listen in a new language and culture. Research has shown this to be normal, because the brain is learning how to pass meaning from one language to another. Content area

teachers and teachers who have ESL learners at the end of the day need to take this into account when working with ESL learners.



Bilingual Education (Continued from Front Page)

There are a number of myths surrounding bilingual education that die hard. Many people believe that in communities that have a substantial Latino population that Latino students are taught all classes in Spanish, particularly at the elementary and middle school level. Actually, this does not happen in any public school in the U.S. Another myth is that the

Latino population does not want to speak English, and that they only want to speak Spanish. This might be true in some cases, but the overwhelming majority of people in the Latino community, as was indicated before, only want their children to speak English in a public school setting. What keeps this myth alive is the fact that the Latino community is very

tight-knit and often speaks only Spanish at home, giving the false impression that English is not valued in the Latino community.

Myths About ESL

There are many “myths” surrounding ESL. One such myth is that younger children learn English much faster than older children. Research has shown there is virtually no difference between how quickly children learn at any age. Another myth is that children will learn English much more slowly if their parents do not speak English at home. Once again,

research has shown that, surprisingly, this has virtually no effect on the progress of these children. Finally, another myth is that LEP children, once attaining proficiency, will have no accent. Actually, virtually all of these children will carry some accent the rest of their lives.

