



2009 NDTAC National Conference

Session Notes

Session Title	Effective Education Practices for English Language Learners and Immigrant and Culturally Diverse Students
Presenters	Carlos Rodriguez, John Hosp
Date and Time	Tuesday, June 23, 10:45 a.m.–12 noon

Summary

This session consisted of two presentations, the first by Carlos Rodriguez and the second by John Hosp. Below are summary notes for each of these presentations.

Carlos Rodriguez

Effective Education Practices for ELL, Immigrant, and Culturally Diverse Students

Though frequently viewed as a homogenous minority group, bilingual, immigrant and English language learner (ELL) students are unique, diverse, and often the majority in their classes or schools. Compounding this diversity, many of these students have parents who were born outside of the United States or have family members of varying legal status, and they may view life through a very different lens than youth who do not live in such “mixed status” families. Additionally, due to such factors as their demographic profile, lack of access to culturally and linguistically competent services, and unique help-seeking patterns (i.e., the tendency to view emotional or behavioral problems as disciplinary issues rather than mental health ones, or to make differing value judgments of normative behaviors and appropriate treatments), many Latinos are at high risk for falling into a cycle of poverty and mental/behavioral disorders. These issues thus require that educators take unique approaches in effectively educating bilingual, immigrant, and ELL students.

When working with students who are diverse learners/ELLs, educators must work with what the students bring to us conceptually, linguistically, and experientially. We must consider whether we are using language simply to provide translations or to stimulate students’ communicative, cognitive, and academic growth. Is the school’s staff well-trained and linguistically competent to work with the students’ unique and differing circumstances and learning stages, and if finances don’t allow for this, can the school recruit volunteers to help? Are the teachers creating competent students who value learning and themselves? It is critical for educators to bear in mind that comprehension precedes production, and production emerges in stages—we must start with communication work (where the focus is on basic interpersonal communicative strategies, or BICS) before we can communicate to our students about academic work (focusing on cognitive academic language proficiency, or CALP). Building communicative competencies provides the foundation for healthy psychosocial development, self-confidence and motivation, and academic performance.

John Hosp

A Correlated Constraints Model for Serving Latino/a Students Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk

Latino students are a fast-growing and underrepresented population in the United States. These individuals must be seen as “integrated systems” whose functioning is affected by multiple factors, including risk factors (those that increase the likelihood that an individual will develop difficulty in a specific area or activity) and protective factors (those that provide resistance to the negative influence of poor performance in another area).

It is important to note that isolated risk factors are not as problematic as multiple risk factors; likewise, isolated protective factors are not as beneficial as multiple protective factors. Additionally, certain factors may function as either risk or protective, depending on the level and context in which the factor is present. Individual and environmental factors function on a continuum and interact to form positive or negative outcomes.

For youth involved in the juvenile justice system, the window for the most effective application of protective factors may have passed and mitigation of existing risk factors may be more effective. Risk factors may be correlational, predictive, or causal, and it is with the *causal* factors (such as academic skill) that educators are provided the opportunity to create change.

Q&A / Comments

Q1: We talk about these youngsters as if they have no linguistic competence, but in reality, we as solely English speakers are judging these students simply because we don't speak their language. How do we get around that?

Carlos Rodriguez: We must consider students' prior knowledge and look at what they are bringing to us in terms of language, feelings, and how they are making sense of the world. We must engage them to put ourselves into what they see. We have to think not only that we have to teach them, but also that we have to learn what they already know.

John Hosp: In short-term facilities, learning about students' prior knowledge can be particularly challenging. Paperwork can be very helpful if you have it, but often it doesn't arrive until right before the student leaves. A few things we can do in such situations are to work with the system to streamline records transfer; follow multiple evaluation practices of Reviewing records, Interviewing, Observing, and Testing (RIOT); and ensure that we have faculty with the ability to teach these students. I worked in one school in which 95 percent of the students were not English proficient, yet only two of the 65 faculty members spoke Spanish—there was essentially no communication.

[Moderator] Lynne Kendall-Wilson: An additional challenge is when students have not been in school and there are no records to transfer in; students who have no papers at all have an added stressor about their status. This may become a significant problem in that even when such students have the ability to communicate, they often don't want to share for fear of possible negative impacts. In these cases, although we are mandated to report some things, we try to create a sense of comfort and safety.

Q2: To what extent is not speaking English a risk factor? How can we turn this into a protective factor rather than a risk factor?

John Hosp: Various linguistic factors can be risk or protective. One thing to keep in mind is that English-only instruction may be mandated in some cases, and in such scenarios, teachers are often judged on how well they maintain that standard.

Carlos Rodriguez: I look at it as understanding, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For children, listening is a protective factor, talking is risky, reading can be protective, and writing can be nonrisky if it won't be judged. These students watch, listen, and don't talk—their natural instinct is to protect themselves and try to make sense of the world. As a teacher, I would pay attention to what my students are doing to make sense of the world. Remember that comprehension precedes production; because I am an English-speaking teacher, most of my students will shut down if I try to get them to talk.

Q3: Working in groups with students at different levels and having different backgrounds is much harder than working with students individually; thus, utilizing individual time after group time can be very helpful.

Carlos Rodriguez: I let kids who speak different languages work collaboratively with each other and try to interpret each other—I've found this to be a very helpful strategy in getting these students to start communicating.

John Hosp: When we look at patterns, certain students may prefer to work individually and others in small groups, and this can vary not only from individual to individual, but also from subject to subject. Knowing this about the students you teach can make a big difference. It isn't always accurate to assume what a student prefers based on his/her racial/ethnic group status (the use of cultural learning styles).

Q4: What are the most recent directions of research in this area?

Carlos Rodriguez: A few of the most recent directions include increased work around communicative pedagogies, Sheltered English (controlling teacher language around a subject; being consistent with how a teacher uses language), and [funds of knowledge](#) (drawing on resources and information available in a student's home/living environment).

John Hosp: Recent work also has been done around disproportionality issues and in trying to differentiate language difficulties from learning difficulties, as the two may be difficult to disentangle.

Carlos Rodriguez: I think we'll see increased court work around the latter issue, as you can't test students for things you haven't taught them. This is a legal issue, and I think it will be revisited.

For any further questions pertaining to the session or the topics discussed, please contact NDTAC at NDTAC@air.org.

Relevant Resources

NDTAC's [Records Transfer Toolkit](#)

Use the NDTAC Records Transfer Module to determine how successful your facility is at transferring student records.