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Making U.S. Schools Effective for English Language Learners, Part 1

by Virginia P. Collier and Wayne P. Thomas

This article is based on Virginia Collier's plenary speech at the 33rd Annual TESOL Convention in New York City. Part 2 will appear in the October/November 1999 issue of TM, and Part 3 in the December 1999/January 2000 issue.

What is your charge over the next several decades? What is your responsibility as you work with English language learners of many bilingual/bicultural heritages? As we look at the rapidly changing demographics in the United States, with language minorities predicted to be 40% of the school-age population by the decade of the 2030s, it is clear that we still have much to accomplish. U.S. schools are currently underserving English language learners, and this school population will continue to grow, challenging schools to continue to change. So we have a huge responsibility. How can we rise to the challenge?

Most of this century, as we ESOL/bilingual professionals have shaped our field, we have made teaching decisions based on what seems right for our students. We have set up school programs that seem to meet our students' needs, using our best professional guesses. But now, at the end of the 20th century, we have reached a new stage of maturity. It is time to base our school decisions on research findings in school effectiveness. We can follow our students across time as they progress through school. We can find out how well our schools have served our students who entered our schools as English language learners.

In this article and in Parts 2 and 3, we provide

an overview of findings from our series of studies conducted in 23 school districts in 15 states over the past 14 years. We have now collected over 1 million student records from 1982 to the present, following all language minority students in each school district for every year of their attendance. In each district we follow individual students in cohorts of similar background (e.g., socioeconomic status, primary language and second language proficiency upon entry, amount of prior schooling) by each school program in which the students are placed. We follow these students for as many years as they remain in that school district, including in the mainstream, to examine their long-term academic achievement as measured by all the tests given by the school system at each grade level in math, science, social studies, reading, and writing.

We take the position that all students should have access to equal educational opportunity. This means that the average test scores of English language learners and native English speakers, which are quite different at the beginning of their school years, should be equivalent by the end of their school years, as measured by on-grade-level tests of all school subjects administered in English. After following the students' academic progress across the years in order to measure progress toward this goal, we see clearly that being schooled in one's second language is not a quick and easy process. Now that we have published many studies on the general achievement patterns among former English language learners, we want our field to understand more clearly why it takes English language learners so long to reach parity with native Eng-

lish speakers in school. Teachers need to understand this basic finding to explain it to politicians who mistakenly think everyone should be able to become fluent in English in 1-2 years. The point is that, for the school-age child, English proficiency is only one of many processes that occur. With every year of school, all students go through intense academic, cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical development that is measured in school tests based on the typical growth of the native English speaker. These tests measure cognitive growth as well as vocabulary and concept knowledge in English and the application of that knowledge across all the subjects taught in school. With each year of school, to stay at the 50th percentile, students must achieve 10 months of gain on the tests given across the curriculum.

English language learners are not typically given this type of school test in English during the first 1-2 years after their arrival, as the tests underestimate what they know but cannot yet demonstrate in English. But after about 2-3 years' exposure to English, most school districts begin to test former English language learners on standardized school district tests, and at this point they achieve around the 10th percentile as a group. Then the students must accomplish more than 1 year's achievement for 6 years in a row (e.g., 15 months' growth per 10-month school year for 6 consecutive years) to eventually close the 40-percentile gap between them and native English speakers. Native English speakers are not sitting around waiting for ESL students to catch up with them! They are contin-

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uing to make 1 year's progress in 1 year's time in their English language development and in every school subject. Therefore, we must not only help our students acquire the English language but also help them accelerate their academic growth.

In our research, we have found that typical programs across the United States have not succeeded in closing this achievement gap (from the 10th to the 50th percentile). Former ESL students continue to make good progress with each year of school but do not make the dramatic progress needed to close the gap. Figure 1 provides an overview of our findings to date, including the basic characteristics of typical U.S. programs and ultimate student attainment following attendance in each type of program. Many U.S. programs are conceived as remedial programs as if our students have a "problem" and need to be sent to specialists (us) to be "fixed." The end result of much of this well-meaning remedial work is that former English language learners make up the lowest achieving groups, graduating at the 10th percentile or leaving school without graduating.

How long does it take our students to reach the 50th percentile? Effective enrichment programs take a minimum of 5-6 years to close the achievement gap in second language. Remember that this means students must make 15 months' progress with every 10-month school year. They can do it, and through an enrichment model, learning can be very exciting. In Part 2, we will share some of the details of these enrichment models. □

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Summary of Characteristics and Effectiveness
of Common Programs for English Language Learners

	REMEDIAL					ENRICHMENT	
	As in law	As well implemented			As well implemented		
While in these programs students receive:	Proposition 227 in California	ESL Pullout	ESL Content	TBE* with Traditional Teaching	TBE with Current Teaching	One-way DBE**	Two-way DBE
Cognitive Emphasis	None	Little	Some	Some	Moderate	Strong	Strong
Academic Emphasis (in all school subjects)	None	None	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Linguistic Emphasis L1=primary language, L2=English	Only Social English (only in L2)	Only Social English (only in L2)	Academic English (only in L2)	Develops Partial L1 + L2 Academic Proficiency	Develops Partial L1 + L2 Academic Proficiency	Develops Full L1 + L2 Academic Proficiency	Develops Full L1 + L2 Academic Proficiency
Sociocultural Emphasis C1=1st culture C2=2nd culture	None	Little	Some	Some	Moderate	Strong C1+C2	Strong C1+C2
Program Length	Transitory 1 year	Short-term 1-2 years	Short-term 2-3 years	Short-term 2-3 years	Intermediate 3-4 years	Sustained 6-12 years	Sustained 6-12 years
Native Language Academic Support	None	None	None	Some	Moderate	Strong	Strong
Exposure to English Speakers	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes Half-day	Yes Half-day	Yes All day
Extra Instructional Cost	High (extra teachers needed)	High (extra teachers needed)	High (extra teachers needed)	Small-to-moderate (special curriculum)	Small-to-moderate (special curriculum)	Least expensive: Standard mainstream curriculum	Least expensive: Standard mainstream curriculum
Percent of Achievement Gap With Native-English Speakers Closed by End of Schooling (based on data-analytic research)	Presently unresearched but expect no gap closure or expect an increased achievement gap	None final average scores at 11th national percentile	Less than 50% final average scores at 22nd national percentile	Less than 50% final average scores at 24th national percentile	More than 50% final average scores at 32nd national percentile	100% of gap fully closed by end of school average scores at 50th national percentile	100% of gap fully closed by end of school average scores above 50th national percentile

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* TBE stands for *transitional bilingual education*. ** DBE stands for *developmental bilingual education*.

Matters

Making U.S. Schools Effective for English Language Learners, Part 2

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This article is based on Virginia Collier's plenary speech at the 33rd Annual TESOL Convention in New York City. Part 1 appeared in the August/September issue, and Part 3 will be in the December 1999/January 2000 issue.

So now you know, from Part 1 of this article, that schools need to find new ways to accelerate the academic growth of English language learners. Acquiring English is only one of many tasks students have ahead of them in academic, cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical development during Grades K-12. What most U.S. schools are now doing is not enough, as former ESL students, as a group nationwide, are graduating at the 10th percentile or leaving school without graduating. But some exciting possibilities exist in schools where English language learners' growth is accelerated, leading to long-term equity with native English speakers.

From Remediation to Enrichment

How a program is set up and perceived by staff and students can have a powerful influence on students' achievement. Pullout or separate bilingual and ESL classes too often are set up for remediation—to fix what is viewed as a problem. New arrivals are assessed based on what's missing. Teachers water down the curriculum to get across the remedial skills being taught. With time, ESL students know that they are not receiving age-appropriate schoolwork, and they tune out or act out. Inclusion models tend toward the same pattern, with the ESL specialist or bilingual aide tutoring English language learners in

the back of the room, resulting in lowered expectations and less meaningful interaction with native English speakers. But equal team teaching in an inclusion classroom (a bilingual/ESL certified specialist teaming with a mainstream certified teacher) has the potential to become an enrichment model.

In contrast to remediation, enrichment adds to what the students already know. The strengths that English language learners bring to the classroom, including knowledge and life experiences from other cultural contexts as well as a native speaker's knowledge of another language, are used as resources for learning, as essential building blocks. In enrichment classes, students know that they are being challenged and are deeply engaged in the learning process. They get to work on the "cool stuff"—using computers and solving real-world problems. They teach each other, and their language repertoire expands dramatically with rich language use, both oral and written. Sound like a gifted class? Sure, but students of all levels of socioeconomic status and ethnolinguistic background and with varied levels of proficiency in the two languages of instruction are able to flourish in these classes.

Data-Based Findings

Enrichment classes for ESL students are rare in the United States, but they are growing in number. Let's look at the enrichment models we have found in our research so far.

Having analyzed data in 23 school districts in 15 states since 1985, we have seen a consistent and generalizable pattern in each school district data set. This pattern is best illustrated in Figure

1 (see p. 6), showing the influence of initial school program on English language learners' long-term achievement in the mainstream curriculum. In separate analyses of the influence of student background variables such as socioeconomic status (SES), country of origin, and primary language, we have found that a well-implemented enrichment school program enables students to score high despite low SES. Figure 1 illustrates the long-term effects of programs that existed in the 1980s and how student graduates of those programs are doing in the 1990s. These are still the most widespread practices in U.S. schools today. Initially English language learners make dramatic progress whatever school program they attend in the first 2-3 years. But as they leave their special program and enter the mainstream, and as the cognitive and academic demands of the curriculum become greater in middle and high school, they begin to lose ground when compared with the constantly advancing native English speakers. The three program types represented by Lines 4, 5, and 6 are among the most common in the United States and the least successful in the long term.

Features of Enrichment

But exceptions to this pattern can be seen, especially in Lines 1 and 2. One-way and two-way developmental bilingual education are less common program models, but they are becoming increasingly popular as educators discover their potential for accelerating student achievement. In these enrichment programs, students receive the mainstream curriculum through both their

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primary language and English, with challenging academic work that is cognitively on grade level. Teachers use cooperative learning, thematic interdisciplinary units, and hands-on materials and make ample use of video and microcomputers. Materials and books present a cross-cultural perspective, and lessons activate students' prior knowledge for bridging to new knowledge. Enrichment bilingual classes for older students include problem posing, knowledge gathering, reflective thinking, and collaborative decision making.

We have found that groups of students who enter these programs in kindergarten reach the 50th percentile on the school tests in their L2 sometime between the fourth and seventh grade. (Remember from Part 1 of this article that students must make 15 months' progress in a 10-month school year for 5–6 years to reach the 50th percentile in their L2.) Native English speakers who choose to join the bilingual class (a two-way model) achieve similarly in their L2 and typically are on or above grade level in English across the curriculum throughout their schooling. So these models accelerate all students' growth.

Teachers in enrichment classes do not teach traditionally, which we define as a textbook-driven, teacher-controlled class in which students have few opportunities to interact with each other. Instead, teachers in enrichment classes use cooperative learning, literacy development across the curriculum, process writing, performance and portfolio assessment, critical thinking, learning strategies, and global perspectives infused into the curriculum to create an interactive, discovery, hands-on learning classroom. Ongoing staff development is a crucial support system through which teachers experiment with and share with each other creative ways of enriching the school experience. In Part 3, we will show why these enrichment strategies work well for ESL students.

For more information on the specifics of implementation of the programs discussed above, see Genesee (1999) and Ovando and Collier (1998).

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- Genesee, F. (Ed.). (1999). *Program alternatives for linguistically diverse students*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics and Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence.
- Ovando, C. J., & Collier, V. P. (1998). *Bilingual and ESL classrooms: Teaching in multicultural contexts* (2nd ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill. □

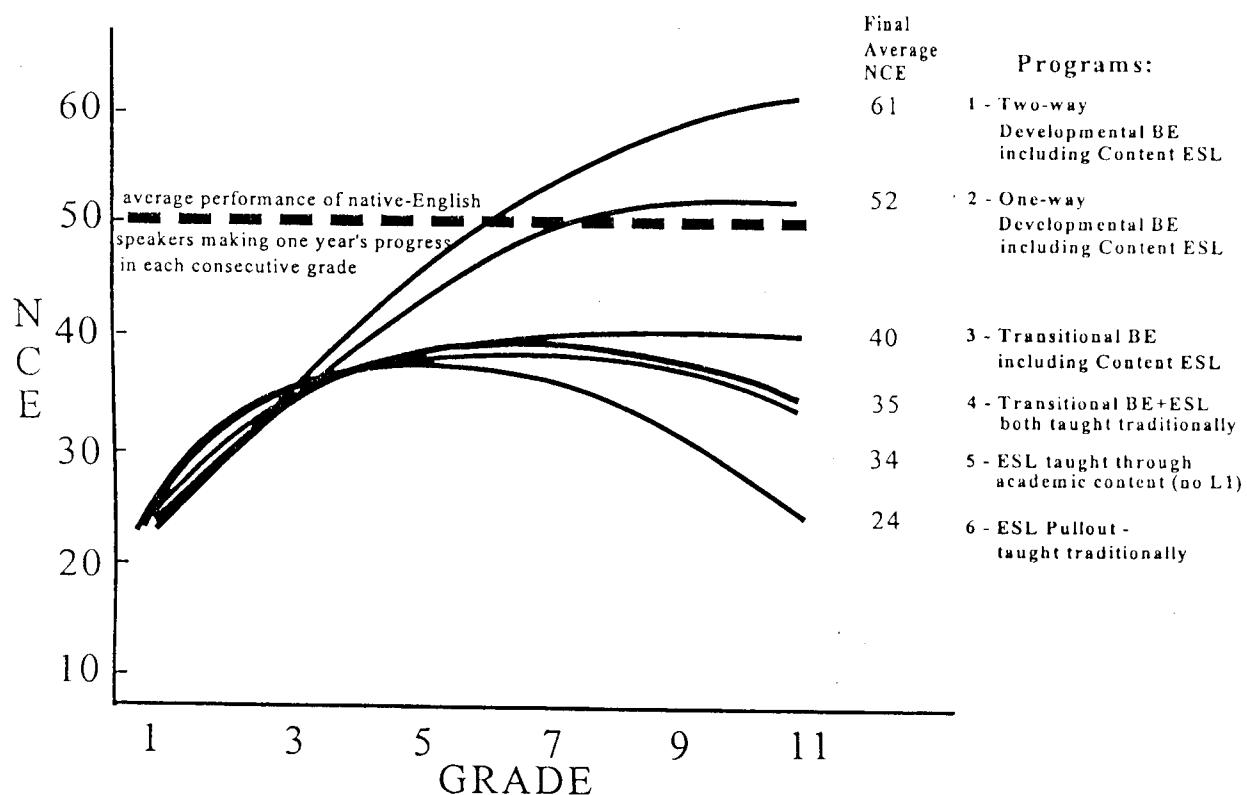
Virginia P. Collier and Wayne P. Thomas are internationally known for their research on long-term school effectiveness for linguistically and culturally diverse students. They are professors in the Graduate School of Education at George Mason University and researchers with the national Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE). Their research reports can be downloaded from <http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu> and <http://www.crede.ucsc.edu>.

Figure 1

**ENGLISH LEARNERS' LONG-TERM K-12 ACHIEVEMENT
IN NORMAL CURVE EQUIVALENTS (NCEs)
ON STANDARDIZED TESTS IN ENGLISH READING
COMPARED ACROSS SIX PROGRAM MODELS**

(Results aggregated from longitudinal studies of well-implemented, mature programs in five school districts)

- Program 1: Two-way developmental bilingual education (BE), including Content ESL
- Program 2: One-way developmental BE, including ESL taught through academic content
- Program 3: Transitional BE, including ESL taught through academic content
- Program 4: Transitional BE, including ESL, both taught traditionally
- Program 5: ESL taught through academic content using current approaches with no L1 use
- Program 6: ESL pullout - taught traditionally



Making Schools Effective for English Language Learners, Part 3

by Virginia P. Collier and Wayne P. Thomas

This article is based on Virginia Collier's plenary speech at the 33rd Annual TESOL Convention in New York City. Parts 1 and 2 appeared in the August/September and October/November issues.

The 21st-century challenge to our field is to move school programs away from focusing on remediation (fixing what is viewed as a problem) to enrichment (adding to what the students already know). Part 2 of this article provided some brief glimpses of teaching in enrichment classes designed for all students, including English language learners. This final segment focuses on understanding why enrichment strategies work so well for our students.

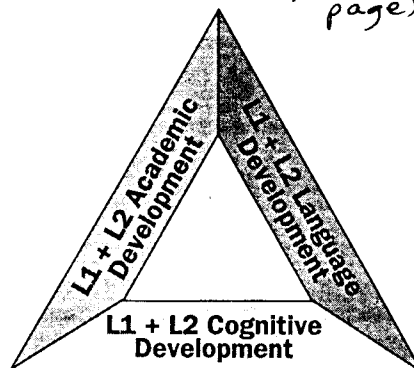
To experience accelerated academic growth, language minority students need a school context that provides the same basic conditions that the majority group experiences. This includes attention to the ongoing developmental processes that occur naturally for any child all through the K-12 school years. For students who come from a bilingual community, these interdependent processes—nonstop *cognitive, academic, and linguistic* development—must occur in a supportive *sociocultural* environment through their first language (L1) and their second language (L2) to enhance student learning. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

Sociocultural Processes

At the heart of the figure is the individual student going through the process of acquiring an L2 in school. Central to that student's acquisition

of language are all of the surrounding social and cultural processes occurring in everyday life within the student's past, present, and future, in all contexts—home, school, community, and the broader society. Sociocultural processes include individual students' emotional responses to school, such as self-esteem, anxiety, or other affective factors. Also included are community or regional social patterns, such as prejudice and discrimination against groups or individuals, that can influence students' achievement in school negatively, as well as societal patterns, such as the subordinate status of a minority group or acculturation versus assimilation forces at work. Enrichment programs can lessen such negative forces by creating a socioculturally supportive environment at school where all students are affirmed, valued, and respected as important partners in the learning process.

Figure 1 (see last page)



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Language Development

Linguistic processes, a second component of the model, consist of the subconscious aspects of the students' language development (an innate ability all humans possess for acquisition of oral language) as well as the metalinguistic, conscious, formal teaching of language in school and the acquisition of the written system of language. This includes the acquisition of the oral and written systems of the student's L1 and L2 across all language domains, such as phonology (the pronunciation system); vocabulary, morphology, and syntax (the grammar system); semantics (meaning); pragmatics (how language is used in a given context); paralinguistics (non-verbal and other extralinguistic features); and discourse (stretches of language beyond a single sentence). To assure cognitive and academic success in the L2, a student's L1 system, oral and written, must be developed to a high cognitive level at least through the elementary school years. Enrichment teachers recognize that each language is best acquired throughout schooling by means of natural and rich language use, oral and written, across the curriculum.

Academic Development

A third component of the model, academic development, includes all schoolwork in language arts, mathematics, the sciences, and social studies for each grade level, K-12 and beyond. With each succeeding grade, academic work dramatically expands the vocabulary, sociolinguistic, and discourse dimensions of language to higher cognitive levels. Academic knowledge

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and conceptual development transfer from L1 to L2. Thus enrichment teachers know that it is most efficient to develop academic work through students' L1 while teaching the L2 during other periods of the school day through meaningful academic content. In earlier decades in the United States, schools emphasized the teaching of the L2 as the first step and postponed the teaching of academics. Research has shown that postponing or interrupting academic development while students learn an L2 is likely to promote long-term academic failure. In an information-driven society, language minority students cannot afford to lose the time, with native English speakers constantly surging ahead. Enrichment programs prevent interrupted academic development, thus allowing language minority students to keep up with native English speakers.

Cognitive Development

The fourth component of this model, the cognitive dimension, is a natural, subconscious process that occurs developmentally from birth to the end of schooling and beyond. An infant initially builds thought processes by interacting with loved ones in the language of the home. All parents (including those nonformally schooled)

naturally stimulate children's L1 cognitive growth through daily interaction and family problem solving in the language the parents know best. Students bring 5-6 years of cognitive development in their L1 to their first day of school. Enrichment teachers affirm this as a knowledge base, an important stepping-stone to build on at least throughout the elementary school years. Extensive research has demonstrated that children who reach full cognitive development in two languages (generally reaching the threshold in the L1 by around age 11-12) enjoy cognitive advantages over monolinguals.

L2 educators in the United States mostly neglected cognitive development until the past decade. Language teaching curricula were simplified, structured, and sequenced during the 1970s, and when academic content was added to language lessons in the 1980s, academics were watered down into cognitively simple tasks. Too often neglected was the crucial role of cognitive development in the L1. Now we know from the growing research base that educators must address language, cognitive, and academic development equally, through L1s and L2s, if they are to ensure students' academic success in the L2.

Interdependence of the Four Components

For the child, adolescent, and young adult still going through the process of formal schooling, development of any one of the three academic, cognitive, and linguistic components depends critically on the simultaneous development of the other two. Also, sociocultural processes strongly influence students' access to cognitive, academic, and language development in both positive and negative ways. It is crucial to language minority students' long-term success for educators to provide a socioculturally supportive school environment that allows natural language, academic, and cognitive development to flourish through L1s and L2s.

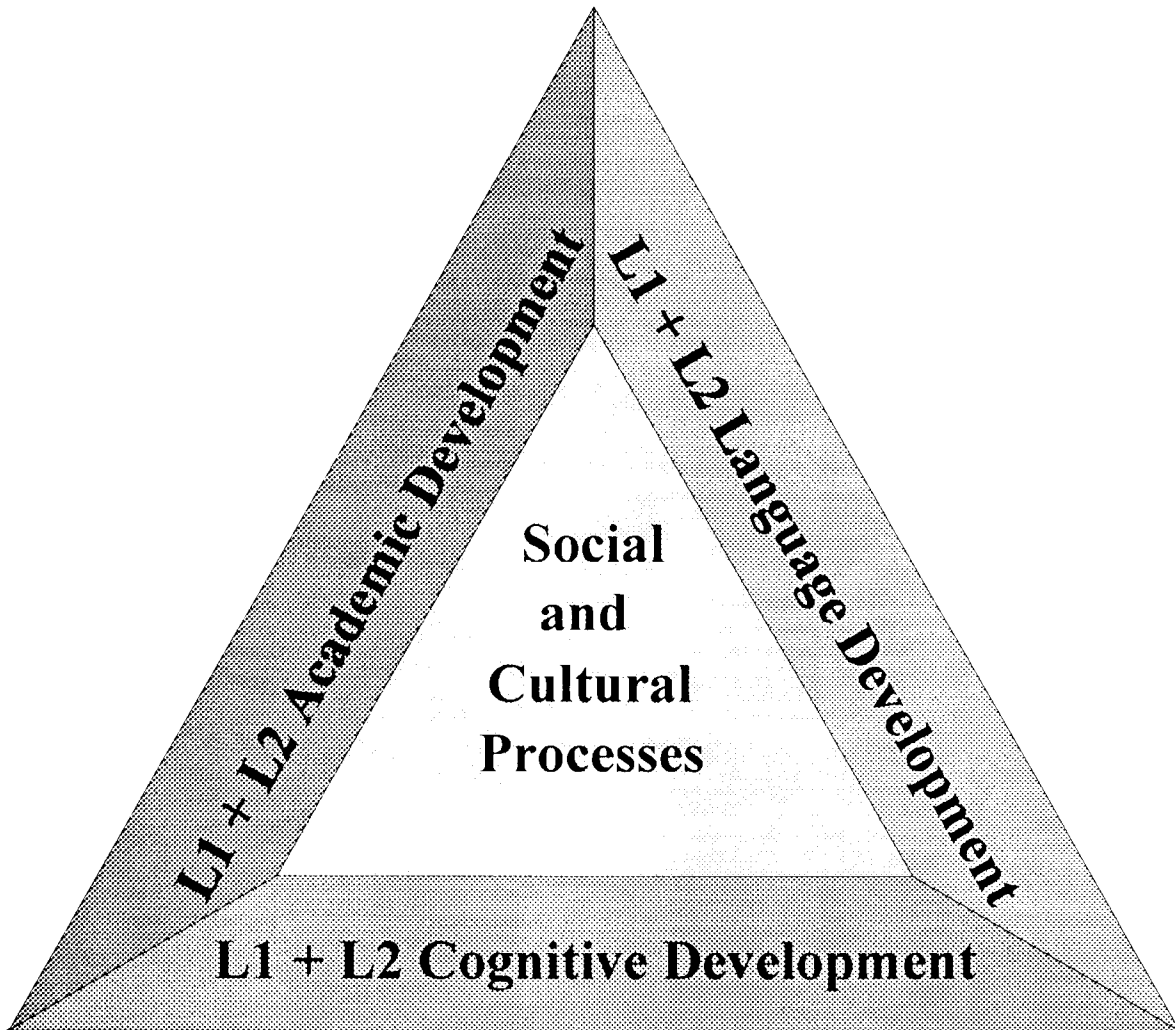
Enrichment schooling builds on the knowledge base that our students bring to the class-

room and accelerates linguistic, cognitive, and academic growth. In a socioculturally supportive environment, schools and families become partners in the enrichment process.

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Figure 1

Language Acquisition for School



The Prism Model

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