

Implementing Educational Language Policy in Arizona-Legal, Historical and Current Practices in SEI

M. Beatriz Arias and Christian Faltis, New York: Multilingual Matters,
2012, 181 pages

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Implementing Educational Language Policy in Arizona-Legal, Historical and Current Practices in SEI, presents a critical examination of Arizona's restrictive language policies as they influence teacher preparation and practice by bringing together scholars, researchers, and educators. The two editors of *Implementing Educational Language Policy in Arizona*, Beatriz Arias and Christian Faltis have a significant and substantial trajectory in the area of instructional policy of English learners. They have compiled a volume of chapters that provides us with a multidimensional analysis of the implementation and impact of state prescribed educational policies and their impact on language minority students in Arizona. These language-learning experts expose the effects of one state with the educational authority to impose educational policies that prescribes structured English immersion as the only model for instruction of language minorities. They reveal, layer-by-layer, the consequences of the Structured English Immersion (SEI) model and how it prescribes the complete segregation of English learners for four hours a day from English speakers and academic content for a minimum of one year. Furthermore, the book exposes the limited educational practices available to educational administrators, teachers, and parents in determining opportunities for English learners resulting from the mandatory and restrictive language for instructional practices.

There are approximately 10 million Hispanic students in the nation's public kindergartens and its elementary and high schools; they make up about one-in-five public school students in the United States (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). This volume exposes the State of Arizona's restrictive educational policies constricting the use of immigrant languages that resemble rapid assimilation policies from the early 1900's (Wiley, 2010). The state's SEI model is highly prescriptive, outlining discrete skills to be taught and set amounts of time for specific isolated language skills. The model's design has little or no basis in what is known from research experts about effective language instruction for English learners. The authors expose the questionable basis of the SEI model of instruction. Throughout each chapter, the multiple layers of fallacies that formed the invalid arguments of the instructional model are disclosed.

The editors have selected highly qualified scholars and researchers who serve as advisors and are considered experts in their sphere of educational policies affecting English learners. The authors, all leading experts in their domain of expertise, weave a unique and compelling analysis of the impact of these educational policies. They expose layer per layer of the language policy in the raw and artificial research it was based on.

The volume is divided into three sections. Part One includes three chapters that focus on language policies in Arizona. Part Two has three chapters that focus on the implementation of sheltered English Immersion in Arizona. Part Three includes three chapters that focus on implementation Structured English Immersion in teacher preparation in Arizona.

Part One: Language Policy in Arizona

Part one offers an analysis of the connections between language policy and the connection to teacher preparation in the state. Chapter 1, written by one of the editors of the volume, Arias, provides a framework that serves as a lens to absorb the slow, unveiling, false premises from which the state SEI mandates are based on. The author believes that this lack of tolerance for alternative approaches for English language instruction feeds into the molding of teacher beliefs that can lead to deficit views of speakers of languages other than English. The author magnifies the limitations of teacher preparation instructors' ability to adequately prepare pre-service teachers for instruction of English learners within this state controlled course work. Arias argues that it is the role of teacher educators to address the impositions of this detrimental state requirement. By

disclosing these limitations, teacher educators have the potential of developing critical, culturally responsive and potentially transformative teachers. Chapter 2, is written by both of the editors of the volume. Faltis and Arias provide background information on the creation of the Task Force that developed the flawed research based model of the Structured English Immersion. They go on to inform the reader how this model restricted the use of non-English languages for instruction, and mandated SEI programs to teach English to English learners within a one-year period. Faltis and Arias disclose the failure of the Task force to consider the overwhelming evidence by language experts that the SEI Program model is pedagogically unsound and without a reliable research base. Chapter 3, continues to expose the flaws in the state mandated SEI model. The authors, Long and Adamson inform the reader how the SEI program model fails to consider a wider body of Second Language Acquisition research on how children learn new languages. They show the reader how the program model fails to consider best teaching methods to support the learning in a second language. They go on to reveal how the state model fails in the development of academic language required for success in the content areas. They argue that the model fails to consider the difference between academic competence and conversational competence. Without adequate development of academic competence, English learners will fail in Arizona schools

Part Two: Implementing SEI in Arizona

Part two offers a detailed examination of the impact of implementing SEI in Arizona classrooms. In chapter 4, Combs discloses how the SEI model contributes to the promotion of folk theories that tend to reproduce the discourse and practices of this atheoretical based model. Combs asserts that although the Arizona state legislation and educational officials may believe that one year is a reasonable length of time for English learners to acquire enough English to perform in mainstream classrooms, no research on second language learning supports this allegation. She asserts that there is no research evidence that supports this allegation that students can learn a second language in one year. This chapter unveils how one model does not meet the educational needs for all English learners. In Chapter 5, the authors Wright and Sung expose that despite the implementation of Arizona's model for English language instruction, many teachers value bilingualism and agree that bilingual education, when properly implemented, is effective in helping English learners learn English and achieve academic success. The SEI instructional model does not allow the use of the first language. Rather, the requirements of four hours of English language development each day are not based on solid research. The authors argue that this highly prescriptive model has little to no basis in what is known from research about effective language instruction for English learners. In chapter 6, the authors, Krashen, McSwam and Rolstad continue to disclose how the SEI instructional model neglects to reference significant research bearing on questions raised by the Task Force. Incorrect interpretations and inappropriate conclusions were presented in their literature review. This review neglected a body of respected research that was not considered or included in the instructional model. The authors, all experts in the field who have focused for decades on second language acquisition and instruction of English learners, conclude that Arizona's model of English language instruction lacks theoretical and empirical support and rigor. They assert that this model, based on unproven instructional methodology, promotes an English-only ideology.

Part Three: Arizona Teacher Preparation for SEI

Part three addresses the process of how teachers are prepared to address the language needs of English learners in Arizona under the state mandated SEI model. As thousands of new teachers enter the classroom each year, they have been influenced by the models and teaching theories learned in their teacher preparation courses. The SEI model has prepared many teachers with an English-only mandate for teaching English learners.

In Chapter 7, Moore's research sheds light on the English-only methodology and strategies represented in the SEI model. The author notes that SEI training varies across the state depending on the organization offering the training sessions. The study reveals that for-profit instructors and community college faculty emphasized methodology over key issues in language minority education, including the sociocultural, sociopolitical and

historical-structural context of SEI in society and research in the field. While for-profit trainers did consider themselves advocates of English learners, they nevertheless explicitly stated that politics were outright avoided in an effort to stay on task. Teachers serve as carriers of the discourses and theories. Denying the contexts in SEI in society and research in the field discounts the importance of other successful methods. Pre-service teachers are subject to only one method and they will be influenced by and in turn contribute to the English-only ideology that fails to consider a deeper analysis that challenges the marginalization of the use of the first language.

In Chapter 8, the authors, Murri, Markos, and Estrella-Silva, explore the implementation of SEI model in teacher preparation programs and how language policies affect the daily interaction that occurs within teacher education colleges, schools, and classrooms. The authors believe that pre-service teacher must be given opportunities to critically exam the current SEI policies and in order to reach their own conclusions as to their effectiveness as the best teaching practices for English learners. Changes to this model will not happen until the limitations of the mandated language policy are exposed and viewed through a critical lens. The social marginalization that occurs in schools under this model must be unveiled, revealed, and understood, before necessary revisions to enhance, increase and improve the present model of instruction toward a more equitable model. In Chapter 9, the author, Olson, considers the importance of having pre-service teachers examine their own ideological beliefs and assumptions in order to counter possible deficit perspectives that serve to defect from best instructional practices for English learners. The author contends that self-reflection needs to be included in SEI courses as a path to begin examination of their own underlying ideological beliefs and assumptions that might have influenced their internalized view of English learners ability to succeed in English classrooms. By including this self-reflection in SEI courses, pre-service teachers will have a better chance of providing instruction practices through a more critical lens that may lead to significant opportunities for their students.

Conclusion

The editors state that educational language policy is a critical component for addressing equal opportunities for language minority students. Linguistic and cultural diversity in the United States is represented by about one-in-five public school students in our schools today (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). This means that in order to serve the needs of these students, as a nation, we must be better informed of the consequences that will affect the educational outcomes of our next generation of Americans. As citizens, we must become better informed of the pedagogical choices that affect these outcomes. This volume provides us with the lens to view both the pedagogical limitations under the SEI model and the lack of research-based second language development practices that failed to provide the state of Arizona with an effective model for approximately one in five public school students. Chapter by chapter, the authors deconstruct the layers of unproven methods that form the SEI model that failed to consider the vast body of research that argues against a subtractive language policy. The book is a valuable contribution to the field and a “must-read” for those working within the constraints of restrictive language policies.

References

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