



English Language Acquisition and Educational Equity Work Group

REPORT TO THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE
THE HONORABLE BRENDAN SHARKEY



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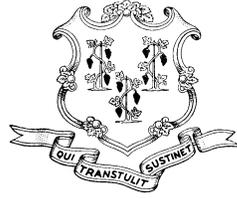
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FROM THE CO-CHAIRS



March 2015

Dear Mr. Speaker,

At the beginning of the 2015 Legislative Session you asked us to lead your English Language Acquisition and Educational Equity Work Group and gave us 45 days to deliver a set of recommendations. We are pleased to inform you that the Work Group has accomplished its task and hereby submits the recommendations contained in this report.

Through our inquiry process, we found English Learners in Connecticut to be in need of immediate attention. The single most important finding is that the system is woefully underfunded and understaffed. If we do not directly address this issue, Connecticut will never close the nation's most significant achievement gap. Imagine running a school system of nearly 35,000 students, which would be the largest in Connecticut, with \$1.9 million and a single staff person. That is essentially the crux of the matter.

In short, the recommendations are grouped into four categories: 1) Program Design, 2) Teacher Capacity, 3) Accountability, and 4) Resources. These recommendations are a starting point for what we believe the State of Connecticut needs to do to address the needs of its English Learners. A more thorough, comprehensive planning effort needs to be conducted in order to fully address the needs of our students. However, we believe that, if enacted, these recommendations will get us started in the right direction.

Respectfully Submitted,

Juan Candelaria
State Representative – New Haven

Kelvin Roldán
Hartford Public Schools

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Summary

In February 2015, Speaker of the House Brendan Sharkey appointed the English Language Acquisition and Educational Equity Work Group.

The Speaker charged the members with helping the Connecticut General Assembly understand the needs of English Learners (EL) in the State of Connecticut. More specifically, using a research-based approach and accessing national experts, the Work Group was directed to provide the General Assembly with legislative recommendations that will yield improvement in academic and social outcomes for EL students. The recommendations are not intended to replace the much needed planning that the Connecticut State Department of Education (hereafter “DOE”) must conduct in order to fully address the needs of EL students across the state. Rather, the recommendations represent what the membership believes, given current conditions, would be most impactful in accelerating the state’s agenda to meet the needs of EL students.

The Work Group carried out its assignment by reviewing research on language acquisition and background information from DOE and through presentations from national and local language acquisition experts followed by group discussions.

The Work Group’s collective primary goal is to achieve equity for EL students. Connecticut, the Education State, should be a leader in ensuring that our students have the resources to advance academically on par with their proficient English-speaking counterparts. To organize and synthesize our learning, the work group has identified the following priority areas:

- Program Design
- Teacher Capacity
- Accountability
- Resources

Background Information

Through research, review of background documentation and discussions, the Work Group identified the following data below as the basis for its recommendations.

- According to October 2014 data provided by DOE, there are 34,851 EL identified students in 173 Local Education Agencies, of which 9,904 are receiving bilingual support and 5,536 are receiving Language Transition Support Services. These students represent 6.4% of Connecticut's student population. The chart below provides an overview by program enrollment.

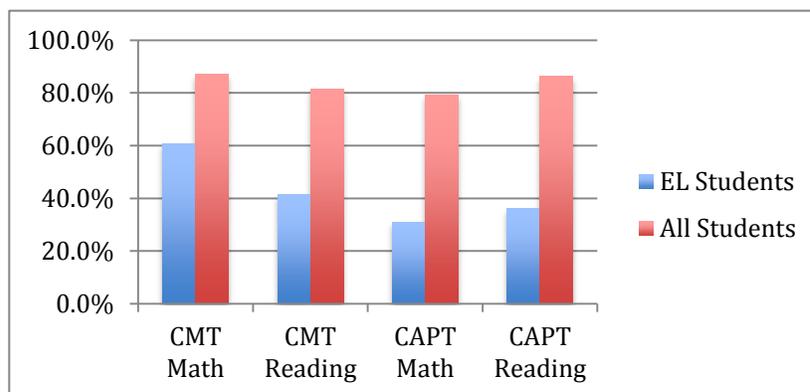
English Learners (ELs) by English Learner Program, October 2014¹

Program	ELs
Student is enrolled in a school that is mandated to provide bilingual education and the student is participating in either a Dual Language or Transitional bilingual education program.	9,904
Student is enrolled in a high school that is mandated to provide bilingual education, but the high school student has fewer than 30 months to graduation, and is participating in mandated high school English as a Second Language (ESL) program.	404
Student is enrolled in a school that is mandated to provide bilingual education but the student is NOT receiving bilingual education due to parental request and is instead participating in an English as a Second Language program.	4,812
Student is enrolled in a school that is mandated to provide bilingual education but is NOT participating in bilingual education or any English as a Second Language (ESL) program due to parental request.	617
Student is receiving mandated Language Transition Support Services (LTSS) after completing 30 months in a mandated Transitional bilingual education program.	5,536
Student is enrolled in a school that is NOT mandated to provide bilingual education but the student is participating in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program.	13,026
Student is enrolled in a school that is NOT mandated to provide bilingual education and the student is NOT participating in any English as a Second Language (ESL) program due to parental request.	552
TOTAL	34,851

¹ Connecticut Department of Education

- The October 2014 data also show that:
 - The majority of ELs are located in our cities. The top three EL districts in the state are Hartford (11% of all EL students), New Haven (8.8%) and Bridgeport (8.5%). In addition, Windham has the highest concentration of EL students in the state – 24.4%.
 - Over 60% of all EL students are in Grades K-5.
 - 6,261 EL students are also identified for special education
 - 76.8% of EL students are eligible for either free or reduced-price meals.
- In the 2012-13 school year, 96% of EL students took the annual English language proficiency assessment and 59.4% made progress from their prior assessment while 25.9% demonstrated English proficiency.
- The CSDE designated Bilingual Education and TESOL as teacher shortage areas for the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years.
- Compared to their peers across the state, according to 2011 data, EL students underperformed in state assessments.

Percentage Proficient or Better on the CMT or CAPT, 2011



- Approximately two-thirds (2/3) of EL students do not transition during the mandated 30-month period of bilingual education.
- In the 2013-14 school year, 1,918 ELs (5.9%) met the DOE's English mastery standard and exited EL status.

- The English language proficiency standards are outdated. DOE has appointed a committee of practitioners to review and recommend standards that are Common Core aligned. More specifically, the committee is reviewing and considering the English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21) standards.
- Connecticut will be responsible for the alignment of the Common Core State Standards with English Language proficiency standards. The rigor of the test is much greater than the CMT and CAPT. There must be an intentional focus that ensures that teachers have and “use the instructional techniques that support ELL students’ language ability and content mastery concurrently.”²
- DOE is underfunded and understaffed and thus lacks the ability to adequately address the needs of EL students. There is currently one educational consultant at DOE providing guidance and support to a student population of 35,000, which would be representative of the single largest school district in the State of Connecticut.
- The state investment to support the needs of EL students across the state is not nearly enough to ensure that EL students advance academically on a par with their English-speaking peers. The state currently invests \$1.9 million (or \$54.52 per child) annually in ELL/Bilingual education. This figure has not grown over the years even though the EL population continues to grow. Since 2012, the population has grown 15%. Arizona, for example, has implemented a two-part funding system. The Arizona state funding formula supports an ELL identified student at a level of \$300-\$400 per child annually. If the funding is insufficient to cover the costs of implementation at the local level, districts can apply for supplemental funding to cover actual costs.
- The 2013 four-year cohort graduation rate for EL students was 63.8% compared with 86.6% for Non-EL students.

² “Implementing the Common Core for English Language Learners,” Hanover Research, March 2013.

Recommendations

Program Design

- Based on district request or through the determination of the Department of Education, allow for an increase in the current period of bilingual instruction from 30 months to 60 months (5 academic years). However, the Work Group recommends that program standards be developed and adopted prior to making the shift to 60 months to ensure positive results. The development of the standards should be done in partnership with practitioners on the ground and institutions of higher education.
- The Department of Education, in partnership with professionals on the ground and institutions of higher education, should define program types and provide the necessary supports to help districts identify which program is best suited for their student population. Program design should also give consideration to the stages of language acquisition, age and grade level, and staff capacity.
- In collaboration with institutions of higher education, current programs should be reviewed and prioritized to support research-based, effective practices.
- Program pilots should be established across the state, concentrating on what research shows are the most effective language acquisition models. The selection process for the pilots should consider, among other things, district size, EL student characteristics, geography, Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs), the number of ELL/bilingual teachers, and language groups. An independent evaluator from institutions of higher education or a professional evaluator with language acquisition expertise must be part of the pilot studies.
- It is important to connect the curriculum and the learning activities to a student's prior knowledge and experiences. As such, family/caregiver involvement should play an important role in the English language acquisition process. DOE should provide districts with best research-based practices on how to best involve families in the language acquisition process.

Teacher Capacity

- To address the ELL/bilingual teacher shortage issue, the Department of Education should:
 - Allow for certification reciprocity with other states.

- Design multiple alternative paths leading to certification for bilingual and ESL teachers. Consideration should be given to granting Durational Shortage Area Permits for up to two years for teachers with TESOL coursework. The Department of Education must collaborate with institutions of higher education in the design of rigorous programs to meet the needs of the state's EL students.
 - The Department of Education should work with teacher credentialing organizations and other partners to incentivize and grow the number of ELL/bilingual teachers. Particular attention should be given to language groups with low teacher numbers in the preparation pipeline.
 - Work with higher education and other partners to ensure that information regarding available incentive-based programs are reaching potential candidates.
- The Department of Education should ensure that districts have professional development (PD) plans with an emphasis on language development and culturally responsive pedagogy. Learning-centered methodologies, differentiated instruction and community-based approaches that support an inclusive learning environment throughout the school should be included in all PD planning.³
 - RESCs should play a role in teacher professional development (for both ELL and content teachers). DOE should work with RESCs to define that role and coordinate support for districts with low numbers of EL identified students.

Accountability

- In order to provide appropriate guidance and support, DOE should adopt disaggregated data collection⁴ processes, monitor and disseminate EL student data in all tested subject areas.
- DOE should provide an annual report on the progress of ELs in all Local Education Agencies. This report should include, but not be limited to, standardized test performance data, graduation data, and program transition data by language group.

³ Laurie Lane-Zucker (2004)

⁴ Collier and Thomas (2004)

- In order to ascertain content knowledge, as soon as the option becomes available, EL students should be allowed to take the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium exam in their native language. Student scores should not count towards the school/district performance for the first two years.
- DOE should ensure that districts are providing families with clear guidance and information on their rights as it pertains to accommodations.
- In collaboration with districts and higher education, DOE should clearly define the pre- and post-assessment system and assessment schedule. Priority should be given to assessment protocols and research-based approaches that focus on achievement gap closure.⁵

Resources

- DOE should be provided with the appropriate resources to staff and support the needs of EL students. The State of Connecticut should provide districts with appropriate levels of funding to support the needs of EL students. There is a need to develop an equitable formula that adequately supports EL students.
- Current investments, such as the Commissioner's Network and Alliance Districts funding, should be reviewed and structured so that EL needs are included in funding priorities.
- A program and funding audit should be conducted to better understand efficacy and adequacy of current programming. This process should include family/caregiver and student input.

⁵ Collier and Thomas (2004)

Supporting Research

Program Models

Pull-Out ESL Program: Students are removed from mainstream classrooms for a portion of every day to receive ESL instruction in smaller class sizes with students of similar proficiency levels. This type of program is common in elementary schools where a designated ESL teacher works with small groups of children. Pull-out programs are not usually content-based programs.

Push-In ESL Program: An ESL specialist comes into the general education classroom to support English Learners for the mandated time. The thought behind this type of program is that pulling students out of their classrooms is an inefficient use of time and can prevent students from fully integrating into the classroom. The model is designed for ESL teachers to provide in-class support in conjunction with pull-out instruction.

Ideally, the ESL teacher and the classroom teacher will work together to plan to make the most of the time, however, collaboration between the 2 teachers is not always successful. This collaboration can be a Team-Teaching collaboration (the ESL teacher and the classroom teacher take turns delivering lessons with the ESL teacher focusing on providing scaffolding and addressing more basic skills). In this model, the ESL teacher is the expert on making the content area material accessible to all learners.

The Collaboration can also involve the ESL teacher pulling-out a small group of students during the independent work time to reinforce or re-teach a skill. The small group lesson should align to the classroom teacher's lesson, if possible a third way for the ESL teacher to service the students. This is less collaborative, but can work well for small EL populations. In this model, the ESL specialist sits with the students one-on-one to assess reading and writing skills during independent reading time or independent work time.

Sheltered⁹ English Immersion Program: A sheltered English immersion program is an instructional approach used to make academic instruction in English understandable to ELs. Students in these classes are sheltered in that they do not attend classes with their English-speaking peers; therefore, they do not compete academically with students in the mainstream. These students study the same curriculum as their English-speaking peers, but the teacher employs ESL methods to make instruction comprehensible. In the sheltered classroom, teachers use physical activities, visual aids, and the environment to teach vocabulary for concept development in mathematics, science, social studies, and other subjects.

⁹ de Jong, 2011

Self-contained ESL: A self-contained ESL program is an educational approach used to segregate ESL students for the entire day, which is spent on direct instruction of the societal language.

Content-based English as a Second Language (CBESL) Program: This approach makes use of instructional materials, learning tasks, and classroom techniques from academic content areas as the vehicle for developing language, content, cognitive, and study skills. English is used as the medium of instruction.

Transitional Bilingual Education Program: This program, also known as early-exit bilingual education, utilizes a student's primary language in instruction. The program maintains and develops skills in the primary language and culture, while introducing, maintaining, and developing skills in English.

The primary purpose of this program is to facilitate the EL's transition to an all-English instructional program, while receiving academic subject instruction in the native language to the extent necessary. Classes are made up of students who share the same native language.

Dual Language Bilingual Education Program (a.k.a. Two-way Immersion Program): This is an educational program that provides instruction in English and another language (usually Spanish). Classrooms are composed of both native English speakers and students for whom the second language is their native tongue. Since literacy instruction is in both languages, both groups of students become proficient in both languages.

Collier & Thomas suggest that a ratio of 70:30 is the minimum linguistic group balance required to ensure that there is enough of a critical mass of students native in one of the two languages to “*stimulate the natural second language acquisition process*” (Collier & Thomas, 2004, p.3).

Research (Howard & Christian, 2002; Collier and Thomas 2004) shows that a successful TWI program should provide:

- A minimum of 4 to 6 years of bilingual instruction starting no later than first grade.
- A bilingual curriculum no less demanding than the curriculum offered in monolingual schools.
- No more than 50% of instruction in English.
- Students with an additive education in which a new language is learned while their native language is developed.
- Classrooms with a balance of native English speakers and native speakers of the second language.

- An emphasis on collaborative learning should be used to foster positive interactions among students

One-way Bilingual Education: Students who are all speakers of the same primary language are schooled in two languages in this bilingual program (for instance students of Hispanic-American heritage being schooled 50% of the time with Spanish as the language of instruction, and 50% of the time with English as the language of instruction, in a bilingual classroom specific to them). This model shares many of the features of the dual language or two-way bilingual education approach.

Research Findings: Models Comparison

Policies that support the creation and implementation of bilingual and biliteracy programs, wherever it is feasible, are important; research shows that two-way bilingual programs, especially in districts with a large population of one specific linguistic and cultural background, seem to be the most effective programs. The initial results of the switch to English-only programs (based on Proposition 227) are misleading; the initial increase in standardized test scores was not sustained; the achievement gap between ELs and non-ELs has not decreased. In fact, the effects were negative: increased drop-out rate and special education referrals (Gandara & Hopkins 2010, i.a.).

Collier and Thomas (2004) reviewed 18 years of research on EL instruction models, conducted in 15 states, 23 large and small districts, rural and urban, with over 2 million student records analyzed, to arrive at this conclusion:

“Both one-way and two-way bilingual programs lead to grade-level and above-grade-level achievement in second language, the only programs that fully close the gap. Groups of English learners attending one-way bilingual classes typically reach grade level achievement in second language by 7th or 8th grade, scoring slightly above grade level through the remainder of their schooling.

With the stimulus of native-English-speaking peers in two-way bilingual classes, groups of English learners typically reach grade level achievement in second language by 5th or 6th grade, reaching an average of the 61st NCE or the 70th percentile by the eleventh grade.” (*Research and Practice*, 2:1 Winter 2004, p.11)

Length of ELL programs

While the findings do not imply that students must be segregated from their peers, there is a consensus in research that it can take between 5 to 9 years for a student to reach a grade level achievement in Academic English. This is because in addition to communicative discourse, language learners are expected to attain academic literacies which become increasingly more complex with grade level. In addition,

research shows that higher rates and speed of exit do not imply success; long-term attendance in bilingual programs results in students' outperforming monolinguals (Ramirez 1998, Howard et al. 2003, Parish et al. 2006, Francis et al. 2006, Genesee et al. 2005, i.a.).

“In every study conducted, we have consistently found that it takes six to eight years, for ELLs to reach grade level in L2, and only one-way and two-way enrichment dual language programs have closed the gap in this length of time. No other program has closed more than half of the achievement gap in the long term.” (Collier & Thomas. 2004. The Astounding Effectiveness of Dual Language Education for All. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice*, 2:1 Winter 2004, p.5)

“Conversational aspects of proficiency reached peer-appropriate levels usually within about two years of exposure to English but a period of 5-7 years was required, on average, for immigrant students to approach grade norms in academic aspects of English (e.g. vocabulary knowledge).” (Cummins. 2008. BICS and CALP: Empirical and Theoretical Status of the Distinction. In Street, B. & Hornberger, N. H. (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*, 2nd Edition, Volume 2: Literacy. (pp. 71-83). New York: Springer Science + Business Media LLC.)

“Looking at well-educated Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel, Levin & Shohamy (2008) note that it took 7 to 9 years or even longer for students to reach comparative levels of achievement in math and literacy.” de Jong, E. (2011) *Foundations for Multilingual Education: From Principles to Practice* (p.153). Philadelphia: Carlson Publishing.

Instructional Approach

But more than just types of EL programs or models, what is essential is a) the pedagogical design, b) instructional approach, and c) quality of instruction offered in the program.

“For too long, advocates and educators have focused on finding the ideal way to teach English. The real choice is between compensatory and quality education.” (Brisk, M. 2006, p.14)

“ELL students come from very different linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds and face multiple challenges in the classroom: “Students must overcome culture shock, acquire basic communicative competence in English, master academic language for each subject area, deal with shifts in family roles and language use in the dominant culture, and negotiate problematic concern of identity in a social climate that is often hostile to difference.” (Collier, C., 2010, p.1).

“A high quality program includes features such as:

- Sufficient material resources in both languages to implement the program (e.g. textbooks)
- A highly qualified bilingual staff proficient in the language or languages of instruction and knowledgeable about bilingualism, second language acquisition
- Clear program articulation, that is curricular grade level expectations and language use expectations for both languages are made explicit and provide a continuous experience for students for language and cognitive development
- Teacher collaboration (within and across languages)” (de Jong, E. 2011, p.162).

Of utmost importance is teacher training. Studies show that teachers not explicitly trained in ESL and bilingual processes interpret bilingual strategies as signs of confusion and deficiency. When students do not follow cultural norms of spoken and written discourse, the feedback is primarily negative if any. To compare, classroom teachers in the significant effect-yielding studies:

- Maintain high expectations; they do not use limited English proficiency as an excuse for lowering standards
- Use current approaches to teaching that builds on students’ native and second language resources
- Implement a curriculum that reflects and builds on students’ cultural experiences
- Use culturally and linguistically responsive instructional practices (de Jong, E. 2011, p.162).

Furthermore, studies on community-based or place-based education, encouraging family and community involvement show an increase in student’s engagement in their community, improved student academic achievement and increased teacher retention (Laurie Lane-Zucker, 2004; Epstein, (2005); Lee & Bowen, 2006).

To close the achievement gap, the National Education Association (NEA) proposes a series of strategies (NEA, 2011) based on the Seven Standards for Effective Pedagogy

developed by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE) at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa.

Derived from Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) and Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1978) in which social interaction is fundamental to cognitive development, the Seven Standards for Effective Pedagogy should be at the core of a EL program pedagogical design. Examining the impact of five of the Standards for Effective Pedagogy (Contextualization, Complex Thinking, Language and Literacy Development, Instructional Conversation and Joint Productive Activity), Doherty et al. conclude: *"Consistent findings from correlational, experimental, and true experimental designs have documented a systematic relationship between the use of the Five Standards and a broad range of affective, behavioral, and cognitive indicators of improved student performance."* (Doherty et al. 2003. p.3)

Seven Standards for Effective Pedagogy

1. Contextualization

Contextualization refers to the need to connect the curriculum and the learning activities to the students' prior knowledge and experiences. A culturally inclusive curriculum that takes into consideration the sociocultural values and perspectives of the students and his/her community is conducive to improved learning outcomes.

Cummins's work on Identity Texts (Cummins & Early, 2011), where EL students write and illustrate personal stories both in English and in their home language, shows how this creative writing activity *"enable[s] students to showcase their intellectual, literary, artistic, and multilingual talents in ways that challenge the devaluation of their cultures and identities in the school and wider society."* (Cummins, 2011, p.144). It helps develop a positive sense of self for the student, whose multicultural and plurilingual identity is now valued and respected.

Similarly, analyzing the Multiple Dimensions of Academic Language and Literacy Development (Cumming, 2013), Alister Cumming finds that engaging students in personal identity writing activities can enhance academic literacy development.

2. Complex Thinking and Challenging Activities

Higher-order thinking work where students have to manipulate, transform, synthesize, explain and interpret meaningful information enhances knowledge retention and understanding. A curriculum and learning activities involving authentic intellectual work have better chances to result in greater student engagement and academic achievement (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993).

3. Language and Literacy Development

“The distinction between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) was introduced by Cummins (1979, 1981a) in order to draw educators’ attention to the timelines and challenges that second language learners encounter as they attempt to catch up to their peers in academic aspects of the school language. BICS refers to conversational fluency in a language while CALP refers to students’ ability to understand and express, in both oral and written modes, concepts and ideas that are relevant to success in school.” (Cummins, 2008, p. 71) Although a culturally inclusive and contextualized curriculum and content-based activities conducive to meaningful intellectual work result in greater student engagement and learning outcomes, an active process of noticing linguistic forms (words, structures, sounds), of identifying gaps and holes as students negotiate forms in their oral and/or written interactions with others, of testing new forms and of reflecting upon them using the feedback received during the interaction, is also essential (Schmidt, 1993; Long, 1991; Ellis 1994).

The development of a metalanguage to identify and explain language usages within an authentic context and with a purpose of engaging in meaning-making *“supports curricular learning, as students recognize how language choices contribute to the meaning of a literary text, an important goal in ELA”* (Schleppegrell, 2013, p. 156), or any other academic discipline.

Teachers must be explicitly educated in language learning/teaching

4. Observation and Modeling

Learning by observing and modeling behaviors, thinking processes or procedures is another teaching strategy that has proven effective and is grounded in Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory. This theory proposes that people learn through observing and imitating others: *“Most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.”* (Bandura, 1977, p. 22).

Observations regarding language must be systematic, leading to the need of an articulated curriculum for language learning. (Cook, V. 2008)

5. Instructional Conversation

Also grounded in social learning theories and more particularly in Vygotsky’s concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), this fifth Standard for Effective Pedagogy highlights the importance of learning through goal-directed dialogues between the student and the teacher. Within the ZPD,

students develop deeper understanding while engaging in Socratic dialogue with the teacher.

The goal may be content- or language-based, with both addressed during the instructional conversation.

6. Joint Productive Activity

The sixth standard involves working collaboratively on a common product/project and goal (Doherty et al. 2003). As students are investigating a topic or a problem and are creating their project, learning is facilitated by the collaboration and the interaction with peers and teacher.

In a study reviewing the literature published between 2000 and 2011 on the effectiveness of project-based instruction in K-12 classroom settings, Margaret Holm concludes:

“Research clearly indicates that project-based learning is beneficial, with positive outcomes including increases in level of student engagement, heightened interest in content, more robust development of problem-solving strategies, and greater depth of learning and transfer of skills to new situations.” (Holm, 2011, p. 10). The project drives students’ learning through discovery, inquiry, and collaborative creation, and involves authentic communicative language use in the process.

However, language instruction cannot be overlooked; otherwise, fossilization of incorrect forms may result (Cook, 2008, de Jong 2011, i.a.)

7. Student Directed Activity

This last standard relates to the positive effect on learning of encouraging students to make decisions and expand on their prior and newly acquired skills and knowledge, as well as of guiding them in self-regulating their learning.

