

## Implications From the Threshold and Interdependence Hypotheses

### Variability Summary D

Annela Teemant & Stefinee E. Pinnegar

#### Threshold Hypothesis

In learning a second language, a minimum threshold level of proficiency must be reached in that language before the learner can benefit from the use of the language as a medium of instruction in school, to avoid the negative effects of bilingualism. A second threshold is the level that must be reached for the positive effects of bilingualism to manifest themselves.

#### Interdependence Hypothesis

First and second language learning are dependent on each other. An increase in cognitive or linguistic capacity in one language enhances the development of similar capacities in the other. Second language learners who develop more cognitive or literacy skills in the first language will manifest the skills more rapidly in the second language.

#### Excerpt From an interview with Jim Cummins, University of Toronto:

People get the Threshold Hypothesis<sup>1</sup> and the Interdependence Hypothesis<sup>2</sup> mixed up. They say children have to reach a certain level of ability in their first language before we introduce them to English. That has been translated in some bilingual programs as saying, "Well, we've got to keep children away from English." Nothing could be further from the truth. What the threshold idea is saying is "We've got to make children vibrantly bilingual. We've got to get them developing both languages." If we do it properly, both languages will reinforce each other.

The Threshold Hypothesis only focused on explaining the results of studies that have looked at the effects of bilingualism on children's development. The interdependence hypothesis looks at the relationships across languages. The implication I would see in those hypotheses is that we certainly want to develop students' first language and second language as strongly as possible. We don't need to be afraid of English. We don't need to delay the introduction of English. We should look at ways of increasing children's intention in relation to language, focusing them on language, and getting them to play with language, getting them to explore language. We know that bilingual children tend to do it simultaneously. Imagine what they could achieve if we were to build that language-awareness development into our classrooms and get children, for example, Spanish-English bilingual children, looking at cognates (words that have the same root) in the two languages. Many of the most difficult words in English are based on Greek and Latin. A lot of those have cognates in Spanish. The most difficult words in English are words that many Spanish-speaking students

have in their internal database in their heads. We've got to use (in a bilingual program or an English-only program) the knowledge of the first language that children have as a resource for learning English.

## Source:

Cummins, J. (Interviewee). (March 1998). TELL Program Videotaped Interviews, Stamford, CN. Annela Teemant, Producer. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University

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### Annela Teemant

Indiana University/Purdue University, Indianapolis (IUPUI)

Annela Teemant is Professor of Second Language Education (Ph.D., Ohio State University, 1997) at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. Her scholarship focuses on developing, implementing, and researching applications of critical sociocultural theory and practices to the preparation of K-12 teachers of English Language Learners. Specifically, she has collaboratively developed and researched the Six Standards Instructional Coaching Model and pedagogy. She has been awarded five U.S. Department of Education grants focused on ESL teacher quality. She has authored more than 30 multimedia teacher education curricula and video ethnographies of practice and published in *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *Urban Education*, *Teachers College Record*, and *Language Teaching Research*. Her work describes how to use pedagogical coaching to radically improve the conditions of learning needed for multilingual learners. She has also taught adult intensive English in the United States, Finland, and Hungary.



## Stefinee E. Pinnegar

Brigham Young University

A St. George native, Dr. Pinnegar graduated from Dixie College (now DSU) and Southern Utah State (now SUU). She taught on the Navajo Reservation then completed an M.A. in English at BYU. She taught for 5 years in Crawfordsville, Indiana. She then completed a PhD in Educational Psychology at the University of Arizona (1989). She was faculty at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, before coming to BYU. She helped develop and now directs the TELL program. She is Acting Dean of Invisible College for Research on Teaching, a research organization that meets yearly in conjunction with AERA. She is a specialty editor of *Frontiers in Education's* Teacher Education strand with Ramona Cutri. She is editor of the series *Advancements in Research on Teaching* published by Emerald Insight. She has received the Benjamin Cluff Jr. award for research and the Sponsored Research Award from ORCA at BYU. She is a founder of the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices research methodology. She has published in the *Journal of Teacher Education*, *Ed Researcher*, *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* and has contributed to the handbook of narrative inquiry, two international handbooks of teacher education and two *Self-Study of Teaching and Teacher Education Practices* handbooks. She reviews for numerous journals and presents regularly at the American Educational Research Association, ISATT, and the Castle Conference sponsored by S-STTEP.



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