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The Importance of Student Centered Democratic Education & the Effects on Placement of English Language Learners

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the theoretical framework upon which a democratic classroom is based, and the effects that a curriculum based on social justice has on English Language Learners (ELLs). Furthermore, it explores authentic means of assessing ELLs, in addition to other more traditional and standardized testing. In a social justice framework, all students should have access to the curriculum (Cunningham, 2001). This study analyzes how the use of rigorous curriculum, paired with targeted support for ELLs, may accelerate English development and academic proficiency. The study focuses on an English language development class, in which a rigorous language arts curriculum is adapted to the needs of ELLs. It also examines three case studies of ELLs placed in mainstream language arts classes. Findings from this study suggest that multiple measures of assessment can be utilized as a basis for placement of ELLs. In addition, ELLs may be well served in mainstream classrooms, with adequate support. A quantitative analysis of test scores at the beginning and at the end of the school year and a qualitative analysis of students' performance and attitude will support the use of instructional practices designed to meet the needs of ELLs within an environment of academic rigor.