Short Communication

Commonalities and Promising Practices of Dual Language Programs

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Abstract

As diversity continues to grow in the American public-school system, school districts are called to provide an education that is equitable for all students. Dual language programs have not only provided positive academic assessment outcomes for immigrants and English learners (ELs) but also have narrowed the educational gap between these populations and English speakers while keeping their home language. Based on campus visits and classroom observations in eleven public school dual language programs across the United States; administrator, teacher, and student interviews, the commonalities and promising practices that were observed and documented based on ten important common components that are found in dual language programs as noted by prominent dual language researchers. These programs also integrate bicultural and multicultural understanding and support to further enhance, not only the academic but the socio-emotional success and cultural adjustment of English Learners (ELs) to the American educational system

Keywords: English learners (ELs), Bilingual Education, Dual Language Education; Equitable Education, Social Justice

1 Introduction

Many bilingual education programs have embarked on a positive journey in the implementation of Dual Language Instructional Programs. The current research indicates that dual language programs promote the long-term academic progress of students (Collier & Thomas, 2004). For many years the demand for dual language programs has been based on two positive effects: (1) a commitment to preserving native languages as a key to accessing the global economy and (2) research data indicating that dual language learning can increase overall achievement for English language learners (Mitchell, 2018). Current research studies have continued to indicate that dual language programs not only close the achievement gap but ensure the long-term academic progress of students involved in such programs. The Collier and Thomas research studies have compared several types of programs over periods of time in several school districts across the nation. The programs that were compared included ESL that provided for 2-3 yrs. and followed by immersion in English mainstream classes; Transitional bilingual programs in which students were provided with 50 percent instruction in English and 50 per cent instruction in Spanish for 3-4 yrs. followed by immersion in English mainstream; 90-10 Transitional bilingual education which begins with 90 percent of instruction in PK in the minority language and by the end of 5th grade all instruction is in the English mainstream; 50-50 one way bilingual education dual language in which the former ELs (English learners) after 4 years of bilingual schooling in two high achieving school districts, outperforming their comparison EL group schooled in all English. By 7th grade these bilingually schooled former Els were still above grade level; 90-10 One way developmental bilingual education students who were former Els reached the 41st NCE (equal-interval-percentiles) by the end of the 5th grade and dual language program continues both languages in secondary schools; 50-50 two way bilingual immersion students who were former ELs attending a high poverty, high mobility school 58 percent met or exceeded Oregon state standards in English readying by the end of 3rd and 5th grades receiving integrated schooling through their two languages; and

90-10 Two way bilingual immersion students who were former Els performed above grade level in English in Grades 1-5, completing 5th grade at the 51st NCE (51st percentile), significantly outperforming their comparison group in 90-10 transitional group and 90-10 developmental bilingual education (Thomas, W. & Collier, V., 2001).

Research on the academic achievement of ELs consists primarily of evaluation of various program models. Much of this work addresses policy issues relating to the best way to educate English learners (ELs). These studies indicated that there was strong evidence that educational success of ELs is geared to sustained instruction through the students' home language (L1) (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian (2005). These findings further indicated that ELs who participated in programs that provided extended instruction through the medium of the students' L1 outperformed students who received short term instruction through their L1 (Lindholm, 1991, Cazabon et al.). Students who participated in an assortment of different programs and those who received no special intervention performed at the lowest levels and had high dropout rates (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

2   Methods

Given the success of dual language programs, a study was undertaken to identify commonalities and effective practices in two-way dual language education or two-way bilingual education programs commonly called dual language programs. Dual language programs serve both language minority and language majority students in the same classroom. Several criteria for effective two-way dual language education follow: (1) language minority and language majority students should be balanced in the classroom to assure equity; (2) an enrichment learning environment should be established to develop bicultural competence, bi-fluent skills, and bi-cognitive and biliterate abilities; and (3) long-term program implementation from four to six years must be effected to enable both language groups to achieve high levels of academic language proficiency in the two languages (Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2003; Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000; Lindholm-Leary, 2001).

Schools selected for this study was based on whether the students in the schools were performing on grade level on state or national assessments, and from a list of dual language schools identified by the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, DC. English language learners whose students were making one year of progress each year and monolingual English speakers were performing on grade level on state and national assessments. To close the educational gap between ELs (English learners) and English speakers, English language learners would need to advance by one and one-half years of educational gains each year in order to reach this goal.

3   The following schools from several districts participated in the study: Albuquerque Public Schools (one school in Albuquerque, NM); Chicago Public Schools (three schools in Chicago, IL); Arlington Public Schools (one school in Arlington, VA); Napa Valley Unified School District (one school in Napa, CA); Ysleta Independent School District (one school in El Paso, TX); Canutillo Independent School District (two schools in Canutillo, TX); Houston Independent School District (one school in Houston, TX); and Hidalgo Independent School District (one school in Hidalgo, TX).

Data collection was three-fold for the study. Interview questions addressed program implementation, effective practices, and program successes. Each participant who was interviewed was encouraged to be candid and to respond in detail. Surveys were distributed to participating teachers and collected on site or subsequently collected via e-mail if not completed during the site visit. All survey responses were tallied and compared to establish characteristics of the programs. Observations were conducted in each classroom and instructional practices were observed. Notes from the observations and interviews were compared and common characteristics were determined. After these nationally recognized dual language schools were visited, a list of commonalities and effective practices was developed through triangulation of data from on-site classroom observations, school administrator and classroom teacher interviews, and classroom teacher surveys. Trends in commonalities and promising practices that emerged from these data sources and that were consistent were further validated by comparison with national research findings of leading experts in dual language education.

3. Results

Commonalities in Dual Language Schools

1. 50/50 or 90/10 Model: Most of the schools in the study established an agreed-upon a model that varied from school to school. A common practice seen in the study was that the initiators of the program, whether they were teachers or administrators, were well read in the current research and shared the information with other participants. In some

cases, teachers shared information with administrators and vice versa. Most of the programs were implementing a 50-50 model of dual language education.

2. Positive Communication: All schools in the study used various means to share information with parents. Some schools invited parents to learn about the program, while others held parent classes at respective school. One school held community meetings to share research and other program information with parents. In the schools, most administrators in the study learned the research and applied it in a respectful gradual phase-in program in their schools. According to teacher and parent interviews, administrators were able to preserve the integrity of the program by implementing a gradual phase-in even though over-enthusiastic teachers and parents wanted immediate implementation of the programs. The phase-in process of beginning a dual language program simply means that one grade level per year was added to program implementation. This allowed time for teacher at each grade level to attend staff development and classroom set up for dual language instruction. One administrator made a consistent effort to raise awareness of the program model used at her school with district officials. The most common practice derived from administrator interviews was their ability to keep open communication between teachers and parents so that gradual phasing-in of the program could occur and unrealistic expectations would not hamper program success.

3. Professional Development: Another common practice used by administrators included facilitating teacher training before initiating the program in a particular grade. For the schools that used a gradual phase-in of the program, this was accomplished smoothly. Some schools wrote grants to fund teacher professional development. Other schools hosted research discussions to motivate teacher-to-teacher training, while two schools were fortunate enough to have district training available. Schools reached agreement upon the program model to be used so that the professional development could be adapted to the model and training needs of the faculty. This collaboration was valued by the administrator and reinforced through hiring practices and communicated to promote school-to-parent relationships.

4. **Instructional Practices**: Instruction reflecting the population in the school is imperative to prevent teacher burnout and facilitate success for children as various language models are available on a peer basis. Without access to peer language models, unnecessary linguistic responsibility can fall upon the teacher. Over time, this affects program quality (Montague, 1998). For optimal success, each language must be equally represented in all classrooms through effective balance. English learners work best when they are integrated with children who are native speakers of the target language. Bialystok et.al. (2015) describes joint language activation as the ability of the person to access both languages at once and the languages interacting with each other. Cooperative learning was observed in many of the classrooms, with the students engaged in cooperative activities. The development of reading and writing was very evident in all of the schools. Student work that was represented in the classrooms displayed a high level of literacy development in both languages in the school. Students were engaged in project-based learning in all the schools. High quality language arts instruction in both languages was integrated into thematic units. Student use of the home language was encouraged if they were having trouble communicating in English. Instructional time was monitored to ensure that the model of the program was respected. There was a focus on the core academic curriculum rather than a watered-down version. Learning together increases student interest in the school and curriculum topics, improving student motivation to learn, and further accelerating student learning (Calderon & Minaya-Rowe, 2003; Freeman, 1998; Lindholm-Leary, 2001). Many teachers participated in Sheltered Instruction training workshops. Sheltered Instruction is an instructional approach designed for ELs whose main purpose is to make content comprehensible (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2000). Structured Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model is a research-based and validated instructional model that has been proven effective in addressing the academic need of English Leaners throughout the United States. (Echevarria, Vogt, and Short). The SIOP Model consists of eight components helpful in planning for language and content instruction. Those components included lesson preparation, where the teacher researches best approaches to teaching specific content and sets up the instruction for content and language learning. The next component is Building background, the teacher plans instruction to reflect student interests drawing from student background experiences to build new learning experiences. Another component is Comprehensible input, during the development of this component the teacher is careful to make sure that during the delivery of instruction that graphic organizers and collaborative activities are used to ensure content comprehension. Perhaps one of the most important components of the SIOP Model is the Strategies, where the teacher prepares to use sheltered instructional strategies to support student learning. In using the SIOP Model to develop instructional plans teachers are able to design and deliver instruction that addresses both the academic and linguistic needs of dual language learners (CAL,2014).

5.**Accountability:** Common to all schools was the practice of developing special features inherent in the overall program to meet the need of the population represented at the school. It is important to mention that the dual language program design must meet the needs of the represented population, that is the reason some programs, although they are dual language programs, are implemented differently. Because of the current accountability climate, teaching and working with English learners elicited some creative strategies from educators. For example, tutoring before and after school occurred twice weekly for all students in the program at one school. Some programs had tutoring scheduled during the school day as well. At many of the schools, second language strategies from ESL, Total Physical Response

and the Natural Approach were used for both language groups. What sets the programs apart is that the schools used these second language strategies with language majority students learning a minority language instead of the reverse, which is usually seen in bilingual programs meant to benefit English language learners. In effect, this created a fully integrated ESL and Spanish as a foreign language orientation in each classroom. This had powerful social effect; children operated effectively in heterogeneous groups and elected to work together in self-selected groups. Native English speakers and native Spanish speakers learned in the early grades of the program the degree to which they needed one another. Rather than separating over language or cultural difference, children appeared to value the differences between each other. Teachers used various strategies to encourage this mixing, including lots of project work for small group and large group confidence building activities. Teachers set aside time for vocabulary enrichment. This was a time when students practiced using new vocabulary words in the alternate language. All was viewed as enriched classroom instruction.

6. **Cultural Component**: It is essential that cultural aspects of all languages represented in the program. Several programs included classes in cultural dances, martial arts, traditional preparation of cultural foods, music, holiday traditions, and community representatives or parents from different cultures visiting the classroom for cultural presentations. Creating an openness for cultural groups to share and/or teach their cultural practices has an empowering effect as well as supporting the self-esteem of the students in the dual language program (Montague, 1999).

7. **Administrative Support:** School district administrators and principals made a strong commitment to dual language education over a long period of time. Students take time in developing languages. Scientific evidence clearly points to a universal, underlying human capacity to learn two languages as easily as one, and the early years represent the golden time for developing two languages. The National Academy is telling the public clearly to "do no harm" by laying out research showing that dual language learners can be set back in both languages when their exposure to their home language is limited in the early years (Rubio, 2017). Administrators are committed to ensure that most of their students are making yearly   academic progress. The research continues to show that full academic language development in English learners takes from five to seven years.

8. **Set high expectations/Evaluation Processes:**   Setting high expectation to ensure an equal balance of Spanish and English language development leads to a true balance of academic and language success. Having an evaluation instrument that will carry program language evaluation and student progress long term is an important component of successful programs. Oral communication is the foundation for the development of literacy. This statement is equally true for novice English Language learners in a dual language program because both groups do not possess the basic oral communication to function in the alternate language used in the classroom. Depending on the level of English proficiency, students may have developed basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) needed to survive in the classroom. However, ELs need to develop the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) needed to be successful in the all-English classroom. The BICS is acquired in 2-4 years of exposure to a non-native language, while the CALP takes from 4 to 8 years of meaningful English instruction (Cummins, 1981b). Successful programs have the requirement that all enrolled students stay in the dual language program from PK-3 through the 5th grade in order for them to make the language and academic gains commonly made in such programs. Monitoring of language development is crucial because second language learners can be at different levels of language proficiency and teachers need to make instructional adjustments. In all the schools the administration and faculty had high expectations for students. Ongoing assessment was very important to adjust the direction of instruction by using a formative assessment process to strengthen language development leading to high academic attainment.

9. **Quality Teaching Materials in both Languages:** All schools had quality teaching materials in both languages in the classrooms and in the library. Library resources in both languages were readily available, along with computer programs, and other audio-visual materials. Classrooms had classroom libraries with children's literature and chapter books in both languages. The books represented the cultures that were involved in the dual language programs at the schools. Music and art classes incorporated cultural activities from the different cultures in the school. Students wrote creative writing projects in both languages and had an author's day celebrating their writings and cultural projects.

10. **Quality Teachers:** All teachers in the dual language bilingual were bilingual and or ESL certified. All teachers participate in staff development sessions at the beginning of each school year. Teachers became highly qualified language teachers by participating in training session that support the integration of language and content in English and Spanish. For example, one of the unique ways the teachers make sure the academic language is maintained in the upper grades is through the teaching of Social Studies content in Spanish for all students. Doing this will ensure the academic language development of all students is maintained and enriched and balanced. The students developed projects each six week period in both languages through interactive group activities. Teachers had been trained to use graphic organizers to further enrich their teaching for English learners. These visual charts are created in both English and Spanish in the dual language classroom. Evident in all the dual language schools were highly qualified and informed teachers that applied effective teaching strategies and used resources that facilitated and supported learning

two languages through content is another program strength. Teachers had an understanding of the importance of oral language development, academic language, and the importance of culture and inclusivity, and value the balance of the two languages involved the programs (Samson and Collins, 2012). These ten commonalities in the dual language schools made it apparent that students were receiving an enriched education as has been professed by Dr. Virginia Collier and Dr. Wayne Thomas through their research. Dual language programs have proven to provide a quality education for English learners over the past twenty years. By exploring some of commonalities found in effective programs across the United States and highlighting the impactful program features observed or noted schools and school districts can begin to explore future possibilities of implementing successful practices for the education of English learners. The challenge now becomes to encourage school districts to take the challenge and move all bilingual programs to this enrichment model of instruction adapting the impact areas to their own communities and language populations.

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