

CRITICAL COMPONENTS FOR DUAL LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

As parents, teachers, administrators, and professors involved in bilingual education and teacher-training, the issues we face when considering dual language programs for our schools are of incredible importance. To the untrained, they are issues too easily missed in the early stages of establishing a dual language bilingual program. In many cases, programs are initiated by well-intentioned practitioners and administrators too quickly, without many of the key components identified here that are ideal for success. Though the needs of any successful program reflect the community and school specifically, this article addresses several key components that are critical to success in dual language programs; these include: (a) definition of the model to be used; (b) a gradual phase-in of the program; (c) development of instruction that reflects the population in the classroom; (d) quality materials in each language of instruction; (e) teachers committed to attaining bilingual education training; (f) dedicated administrators with a clear understanding of research as well as community needs; and (g) definition of the role of elicited response. This article offers insight to school administrators, teachers, and parents interested in beginning or improving dual language or two-way bilingual programs in their communities.

We would not begin an early childhood program, a gifted and talented special education program, a technology core, or any other school-wide program without first adhering to careful guidelines that might address such issues as teacher-training, materials, space, etc. Why would we act any differently in bilingual education?

As the number of second language learners in public school classrooms continues to increase each year, educators are finding a need to become better aware of the issues involved in the instruction of students with a home language other than English. One way to address this need is through bilingual education, schooling that includes instruction in two languages. A primary goal of bilingual education is for students to learn English (Krashen, 1996). According to cognitive research and theory in language acquisition, the best way for students to learn English and gain access to the high level of proficiency needed for upper-intermediate and secondary instruction, is for them to attain initial mastery in their home language before addressing literacy in English (Krashen & Biber, 1988; Krashen 1996; Willig, 1985). We should not assume that the initial surface

abilities necessary for social interaction in English indicate an ability to read a text at grade level well enough to extract meaning or perform well on standardized testing measures in English (Cazden, 1992; Collier, 1992; Cummins, 1981, 1989).

With English acquisition as the primary goal, one essential element of any bilingual program is ESL instruction (Krashen, 1996). The conceptual base developed through the medium of a child's first language facilitates later learning in English so that children with a home language other than English are able to attain similar access to education as their English-speaking peers (Krashen, 1996; Beykont, 1994). For decades, this "compensatory view" has been the premise of bilingual education. For many of us dedicated to multilingualism, however, this is not enough.

When a child presents him/herself at school with a home language other than English, he/she brings a great resource that can be used to validate his/her family and home customs, as well as augment the classroom repertoire of potential experiences for his/her peers and teacher. This is apparently agreed upon when a child, who is fluent in French, German, Sign, or one of several European languages, begins school. However, if the child speaks a local Pueblo language or a Spanish dialect that is not European, their language, oftentimes, is not valued. This phenomenon is not unique to our educational system or even our country. Kjolseth described it nearly three decades ago: "The more locally irrelevant an ethnic language and culture is, the higher its social status, and the more viable it is locally, the lower its social status" (in Grosjean, 1982, p. 65). This inverse relationship is highly frustrating to those of us who are bilingual and reap the benefits of it in many aspects of daily life, such as world perspective, problem solving ability, and increased communicative potential. For my colleagues who have the added advantage of not only being bilingual but also having access to a minority home culture, being truly bicultural, their languages connect them to family, culture, and history. These are precious and irreplaceable, not valued enough by those of us who don't have them.

As an Anglo bilingual educator, I want all children in U.S. public schools to value their individual cultures and language differences. I would love to recapture the Choctaw language of my great grandmother and all of the cultural wisdom that would have been transmitted to me along with it. I would like to have access to the culture and language of my French antecedents or the Dutch-Swedish parents of my grandmother. So much of what I am trying to learn about family cycles and histories and philosophies would be more accessible to me if this process had not been interrupted before my birth. Think about your own ancestry. Is it fair that any of us who reside in the United States of America are not multilingual? Effective bilingual education can also serve as a "heritage language" program when it is able to revive a family language that otherwise had been lost before the child's birth. Language is our greatest untapped resource in the United States.

For many parents and educators who don't speak a language other than English but don't have the means to send their children to school in Mexico or Europe, monolingualism has appeared as their children's sole option. However, with the theory of dual language instruction, all children could attain bilingualism. This has contributed to a new relationship between bilingual and monolingual classroom educators.

Prompted by the need to prepare our children to navigate in an increasingly global society, schools that are willing can invest planning time in learning and funding programs that can produce bilingual children in all of our communities. These programs are based upon French immersion models in Canada and are usually referred to as "two-way" or "dual language" programs (Baker, 1995). By providing a certain amount of instruction in each language, English-speakers and Spanish-speakers benefit. Speakers of different languages benefit as their peers, teachers, and school culture come to appreciate and even expect differences among students. Students who are minority language speakers are seen as desirable and often actively recruited as educators plan and instruct dual language programs (Montague, 1998). Some schools use Spanish or another locally relevant language for their two-way programs. I have talked with educators whose dual language programs introduce a third language such as Chinese by the intermediate grades. As an ESL resource teacher in one major southwestern city, I have seen and worked with teachers in Spanish/English as well as Navajo/English programs. It is the goal of these programs to produce communicative and literate children who can negotiate between two languages in their daily interactions. These are schools involved in dynamic education centered on our children, actually tapping into our nation's greatest resource.

With the premise of dual language instruction, the view of a bilingual child with a locally relevant language shifts from a "compensatory and deficit model" to a "gifted and talented" orientation. In many schools, this means that minority language speakers are now finding validation, excitement, and enthusiasm about their presence in classrooms. Differences between individuals become celebrated rather than melted down. However, as bilingual educators, we must continually keep the highest standard in clear sight.

Through my work as a classroom teacher, a consultant in ESL, and an assistant professor at two different universities in the southern and southwestern parts of the United States, I continue to evolve in my understanding of how dual language theory translates to solid practice. I have had the opportunity to work with teachers, administrators, and curriculum planning committees at various stages of implementing dual language programs. Though our discussions continue to inform our understanding, some prevailing commonalities have emerged. Dual language is different in many aspects from bilingual education as many of us were trained to implement it. The following are several components that appear critical for success in many dual language programs.

DEFINE THE MODEL

There are different dual language models that can be implemented on a school wide basis. Several are backed by ample research in United States schools, which is an important aspect to consider due to the socio-political differences between minority language representation in the U.S. and Canada. The 90/10 model has been shown to be most successful for minority language learners (Thomas & Collier, 1997). This model provides 90% of instruction in the minority language and 10% in English for the pre-school year. The program graduates to an 80/20 model in first grade, then a 70/30 in second grade, etc. There are variations of this model including a 50/50 model from the kindergarten level up.

Though a planning team may change the particular model implemented initially, contemplation of each teacher's plan for implementation is a good place to begin thinking about your program once the target model has been identified. Each teacher may choose to implement delivery of dual language differently in his or her classroom. Some teachers deliver instruction in one language according to the day of the week, some split the time of the instructional day up according to hours. Several teachers have told me that a tangible reminder defines language division best for both teacher and students. These teachers use a recess bell, turn on a lamp, or put on a hat. In any case, it is generally agreed among bilingual educators that keeping the language model pure is essential for teachers in dual language programs. Some exceptions to this rule could possibly be cultural storytelling or other activities where a less formal model is required by the curriculum (for one such exploration, see Mejia, 1998).

Some bilingual teachers pair with English-speaking teachers to create a dual language program for both groups of children involved. These opportunities provide the benefit of freeing bilingual teachers from the tendency to code switch between languages in the interest of keeping teacher language modeling pure. In addition, this model affords inclusion of the talents of those monolingual English-speaking teachers who are also dedicated to bilingualism for children. Code switching seems to come so naturally for many bilinguals that this is a continually acknowledged struggle among the teachers I have talked with.

GRADUAL PHASE-IN OF THE PROGRAM

Dual language instruction can vary from nearly full immersion for English-speakers (as with the 90/10 model), to balanced dual language instruction for a group that includes children from all along the bilingual continuum (as with 50/50 instruction). Models for such programs are being developed as schools implement programs on a dynamic basis, which is an excellent reason to

progress slowly and phase in programs. As many parents talk with educators at the school and university levels about the possibility of establishing dual language programs, excitement can reach levels that inspire overzealous beginnings.

In some cases, the concept of dual language has been adapted too quickly in schools. Instead of being phased in grade by grade (Lindholm & Molina, 1996), it is initiated at several levels or in multiple classrooms simultaneously. This places undue pressure on the English-speaking children to adapt quickly to language learning during a school year when formal, standardized testing begins to dictate instruction in several states (Morse, 1999).

Phasing in two-way programs, perhaps as a school within a school, at one grade per year lays the groundwork for success. The program extends as the group of initial children is promoted to each subsequent grade level. If a child begins a dual language program in kindergarten, she would have more chance at success than the one who begins at an intermediate grade where instruction is more highly complex and context reduced, such as reading for meaning from a textbook. For those concerned about the English speaker hearing 90% of kindergarten instruction in a minority language (as with the 90/10 model), we must remember to provide the most academic support for the least supported societal language (Grosjean, 1982; Krashen, 1996; Cummins, 1981). The English speaker doesn't face the threat of losing her language or culture when she partakes of a dual language program. Both groups of speakers hear television, radio, employees at businesses, and many more models of English on a daily basis. The English speaker will not lose his or her native language or culture from dual language instruction, regardless of the model implemented.

INSTRUCTION REFLECTING POPULATION

Instead of having a balanced population of minority and majority language speakers represented, some dual language teachers find they are addressing a majority language group with perhaps only 1-10% of minority speakers who may already have developed minimal English skills. This places incredible linguistic responsibility on the teacher and deprives the student of peers who serve as language models, ultimately affecting the quality of the program (Montague, 1998). The importance of access to language peers has been examined thoroughly (Grosjean, 1982). International research over the history of bilingual education indicates that children are efficient language learners and their language abilities develop best in environments where the language is necessary for communication and basic functioning (Krashen, 1996). The importance of a balanced population cannot be overstressed unless we are prepared to engage in Spanish as a Second Language instruction with a strict immersion model. In such a case, any Spanish speakers in the class will inevitably become bored and disengage quickly.

MATERIALS

Some dual language programs begin before materials in each language have been purchased or have arrived, leaving literacy instruction in the minority language at a class-made, teacher-made level. This can tax the success of the program quickly in addition to sending clear messages to children regarding the importance of each language. The value of materials in each of the languages represented in oral instruction should be clear if we wish bilingualism for our children to include biliterate capabilities. As a practitioner researcher, I documented this need clearly in my own classroom for my 1998 practitioner research study. It is a topic that arises with much emotion from teachers who talk to me during professional conference presentations I make on the topic of dual language.

TEACHER TRAINING

Possibly the most important aspect of any program is teacher training in bilingual education. This issue is raised by teachers who have not been trained as bilingual teachers and often do not have access to teaching techniques such as clear association with context, extensive use of para-linguistic cues, etc. Though the new relationship between English-speaking and bilingual educators can be wonderful to explore as they share their groups of children, the success of the entire program can weigh heavily on the bilingual faculty. This makes it even more essential for the success of the program that the teaching staff has high quality training and materials rather than being expected to rely solely upon their bilingualism and creativity. As a young teacher, I taught bilingual education because I was bilingual and believed in my work. Though I did some loving, dedicated work with my children during those years, upon earning my certification in ESL and Bilingual Education years later, hindsight became clearer in regard to previous teaching errors I had made. To this day I can think of things I could have done better and some that I shouldn't have done at all, if only I had known. Foremost on this list, is the practice of concurrent translation. For many years, this was bilingual education as I understood it. However, concurrent translation provides minimal benefit for second language learners and can overtax the classroom teacher.

I have heard these sentiments repeated to me many times by other bilingual educators. A bilingual teacher who has not been trained in Bilingual Education and ESL is at a decided disadvantage. Stepping up to the challenge of maintaining a high standard for any program might require a certain commitment from dual language teachers to attain bilingual and/or ESL certification.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

In schools where parents may be uninformed regarding the potential of dual language programs, administrators can serve as the open door into a world of knowledge and benefits for their children. When dual language teachers need support in the areas of creative solutions to pressing challenges or additional access to resources and colleagues, the school administrator can be invaluable. As the head of the school, the administrator serves as a model for children, teachers, and parents preparing to engage in the new forum of language learning offered in dual language programs. I have talked with one group of teachers whose principal set aside the first few weeks of the school year in order to meet with parents new to the dual language concept. It can be scary to have a child in pre-school who spends most of their day in their weakest language. For example, an English speaker spending most of her kindergarten day in a Spanish environment is working in her weakest language. These parents need the support of a dedicated administrator just as minority language parents have needed such support through the years.

EXAMINE THE ROLE OF ELICITED RESPONSE

For those of us trained in Bilingual Education for the language minority learner approaching acquisition of the majority language, elicited response has been carefully treaded territory. For language minority learners, the threat posed by the social stigma of mispronouncing a word in the presence of peers fluent in English is a constant threat. However, for the language majority speaker learning a minority language, as with an English speaker learning Spanish, the socio-political dynamics have changed. Those of us in dual language programs are finding that if we refrain from eliciting response too long, English speakers will not attempt use of their second language. The pressure for acquisition and production is not as strong since English can be used to negotiate in most other areas of life outside the classroom. This topic deserves more attention in the professional literature and deserves the attention of any staff planning a dual language program.

CONCLUSION

Refraining from initiating dual language programs until all critical components are in place should facilitate our student's bilingual success in academics to a greater degree than possible otherwise. Dual language models appear to be one last effort at saving bilingual education for many communities. For others, it represents the first opportunity they have had to participate in bilingual education. With dual language programs, proponents of all children can join together in the pursuit of multilingualism for all students. In the name of quality bilingual education, stepping up to the challenge can mean dual language programs that begin immediately for some schools while other

campuses may choose to delay initiating their program until a solid base of components critical for their needs is created. If maintaining high standards does not remain a constant priority, however, dual language programs may not fair very well under scrutiny.

Bilingual education is indeed under attack in our country (Krashen, 1996). Several states have undertaken initiatives to end what we know can be a benefit for all of our children. The cognitive advantages of bilingualism are immeasurable (Grosjean, 1982) and the validation of one's home culture and language is tantamount to learning if we expect our children to move beyond Maslow's initial levels in the Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954). As Krashen recommends for all of us, let's not give anyone anything to attack. We should only be engaged in quality bilingual educational programs. All of our children can benefit, and perhaps some very old wounds can be healed as bilingualism becomes valued, rather than lost.

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