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K-6 BILINGUAL PROGRAMS IN THE LOS ANGELES METROPOLITAN AREA

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Abstract

This article describes three programs currently in place in an elementary school which is located in a large urban school district in the southwest. This elementary school, which is located in a predominantly Latino working-class neighborhood, serves 1375 students, 65 percent (900) of whom are limited English proficient. Each of the following three programs are described: (1) Full Bilingual, (2) Modified Bilingual, and (3) English Language Development. The article further describes aspects of each of these programs including instructional strategies (e.g. sheltered instruction, ESL methods and techniques, and whole language approaches). A new experimental configuration, the bilingual ungraded K-4 instruction, is also discussed in this article together with information regarding the role of parents and teachers' backgrounds. The report concludes with a discussion of the successes of the bilingual programs together with some comments and recommendations for future improvements.

The School

The elementary school described in this article is located in a large urban school district in the southwest. This elementary school serves 1375 students, 65 percent (900) of whom are limited English proficient (LEP). Students attending this school are from the surrounding community which is predominantly Latino and working-class. While the vast majority of students are low-income, students come from the

general neighborhood or the low-income housing project which is adjacent to the school. Surrounding the school there is a fair amount of crime and gang activity. Students attending the school come from single parent households, dual parent households or homes in which extended family members reside. There is some transiency in these neighborhoods, though it is not as great as it is in other schools in the district.

The Students

Given the nature of the student clientele, the faculty and staff have attempted to meet the needs of these students in a variety of ways. LEP students receive their instruction from one of three existing programs: (1) Full Bilingual Program, (2) Modified Bilingual Program, and (3) English Language Development Program (ELDP). Of the 900 limited English proficient learners, 83 percent (750) are placed in full and modified bilingual programs, while the remaining 17 percent (150) participate in the English Language Development Program. In California, a program which consists largely of ESL instruction is frequently referred to as "English Language Development." It is generally believed that the term ELD is more positive since it places emphasis upon the process of acquiring English rather than the fact that English is a second, and not a first language. It should also be noted that ESL instruction is a component of all three previously mentioned programs as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 Components of Three Program Types

Full Bilingual	Modified Bilingual	English Language Development
ESL	ESL	ESL
L1 Language Arts	L1 Language Arts	
Content in L1	Content (math) in L1	Content (all subjects) in sheltered English
	Content (other subjects) in sheltered English	

School and District Goals for Bilingual Programs

The primary goal of all three programs is for children to develop a level of language which will allow them to achieve academically. This is consistent with the district's and school's stated goals. In addition to this, the bilingual program also maintains that its goals include linguistic proficiency and academic achievement in both languages. While the bilingual programs would be considered transitional, every attempt is made to foster the development of the primary language.

Three Program Types

Type 1: Full Bilingual Program

The majority of limited English speaking students are contained within the full bilingual program. The Full Bilingual Program is defined and outlined in the Los Angeles Unified Bilingual Master Plan which complies with the state and federal regulations regarding the education of LEP students. Eighty percent of the school day, students receive subject matter instruction including language arts, math, social studies and science in the primary language, Spanish. Daily, students engage in ESL instruction for a minimum of 30 to 45 minutes. For the remainder of the school day, limited English proficient students receive instruction in art, music and physical education classes together with English Only (EO) students. Only English is spoken in the homes of English Only students. "Sheltered" English instruction is the preferred vehicle through which art, music and physical education are instructed. Given the nature of the curriculum, all participating students are limited English proficient.

Type 2: Modified Bilingual Program

In addition to the full bilingual program is the modified bilingual program. This program is also outlined in the district master plan. Two-thirds of the students in the modified program are LEP while the remaining one third consist of IFEP (Initially Functionally English Proficient), RFEP (Redesignated Functional English Proficient), English Only, and ELDP students. EDLP students are those students whose

home language is a language other than Spanish or whose parents elect to place their children in a non-bilingual program. Thus, LEP students receive instruction alongside students who are fully proficient in English or who are receiving their instruction in English. Spanish-as-a-second language (SSL) is a goal, but not actively pursued. Math and language arts are instructed through the first language, while other subject matter, including art, music, and physical education, is delivered by means of "Sheltered" English. ESL is also provided daily for a period of 30 to 45 minutes.

Type 3: English Language Development

Still a third program is provided for those children whose parents prefer that their child not participate in a bilingual program. This program also serves the needs of students whose first language is other than English. Currently, ten students from other language backgrounds are served in this program. While the majority of students are native Spanish speakers, other home languages include Cantonese, Samoan, and Tagalog. It is not always feasible to provide a teacher who is proficient in these languages, consequently the ELD program suits the needs of these students as well. Instruction is primarily conducted in "sheltered" English although 45 minutes to one hour of ESL instruction is provided as well. Students enrolled in this program are sometimes in self-contained classrooms if there are sufficient numbers. If not, ELD students are placed in modified bilingual classrooms.

Sheltered English Instruction Thus, in the modified bilingual program, subject matter which is not instructed in the primary language is provided in sheltered English. Sheltered instruction consists of content area instruction using a variety of strategies which make the meaning of the content clear to the learners. This is accomplished by presenting concepts in contextually rich environments when pictures, maps, and realia are used. Furthermore, hands-on activities which engage the students and cooperative learning are other techniques which play important roles in the sheltered instructional experience. By employing these and other techniques, the subject matter is instructed, conveyed and English language acquisition is fostered. While the sheltered techniques employed are primarily intended for the limited English population, they are used with English Only (EO) students as

well since these learners generally require additional contextual assistance and practice.

ESL Instruction

Assessment

During this academic year, a school-wide (grades 1 to 5) ESL period was instituted. As a result, each teacher is able to focus upon one ESL level rather than addressing the needs of multiple levels within a single grade level. All students including IFEP, RFEP, and English Only (EO) students as well as LEPs are first tested using the SOLOM (Student Oral Language Observation Matrix), an oral language assessment instrument which tests comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. Using this assessment instrument, students are assigned from 1 to 5 points in 5 areas. The total number of points determines the student's proficiency level. Each level represents a distinct language acquisition level. SOLOM scores of 1 through 4 represent varying developmental levels of BICS, while a score of 5 indicates the presence of some CALP. According to Cummins (1989), BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) signify communication skills which rely heavily upon clues provided in the "here and now" (e.g. gestures, physical interactions). BICS are also commonly referred to as "playground English." In contrast to this is CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency) which refers to the language which does not rely upon the here and now as is the case when the student engages in academic activities such as reading, writing, learning of subject matter.

After being tested, students are then grouped on the basis of their SOLOM test scores; consequently, students are of differing grade and age levels. Each teacher is then assigned a specific SOLOM level which he/she teaches each day at the designated hour. For example, a teacher designated to teach SOLOM level 3 students receives students from grades 1,2,3, and 4 for that period of the day. Students testing at SOLOM level 3 remain with him/her while the others receive their instruction from other teachers during the time designated for ESL instruction. The section below describes the students' linguistic skills at

each of the 5 SOLOM levels and the specific strategies which are used for the instruction of ESL to these learners.

Second Language Instructional Strategies

Various language teaching strategies are utilized depending upon the student's SOLOM level. Students who function at Level 1 (Preproduction Level) have little knowledge of English; therefore they are in need of developing a receptive knowledge of vocabulary. Teachers instructing students at this level generally rely on a variety of methods and teaching strategies. One method, Total Physical Approach (TPR), requires students to respond with actions as a result of hearing teacher-initiated commands. In addition to TPR, teachers make use of manipulatives, pictures, charts, puppets, music and arts. Students functioning at Level 2 (Early Production) are able to respond to questions with single words or short phrases.

While the previously-mentioned instructional strategies continue to be used, teachers attempt to model slightly more complex constructions such as multiple commands which students are required to carry out simultaneously (e.g., sing and clap). Students are also required to pantomime increasingly more complex structures (e.g., drive a car). Furthermore, students engage in picture books, choral speaking and cooperative learning. Students at the Level 3 (Early Production II) are able to engage in conversations using short phrases and sentences and respond to questions

In addition to the previously-mentioned strategies, the teachers engage students in role-playing and dramatizing. Teachers make good use of fairy tales, folk tales, poetry, etc. They also develop the students' ability to label, chart and cluster ideas.

Level 4 (Speech Emergence) students are able to respond to the teacher's questions and engage in conversation using more complex constructions. At this point, the teacher begins to expose learners to sheltered English language arts. To facilitate this transition, the teacher makes use of the Language Experience Approach (LEA) which converts students' oral expression into its written form. Consequently, the teacher leads students in story telling, interviewing, writing student-authored books, maintaining journals and other related activities.

Level 5 (Intermediate Fluency) students are able to engage in casual conversation, yet lack academic language. At this point, mainstream language arts are added. For example, in order to foster the skills necessary to function in an academic setting, students engage in discussions which require them to relate their personal experiences to the text content. The students also make oral presentations and participate in group discussions, debates and simulations in which content goes beyond personal experiences.

Transitional English Language Arts Component

After the student has achieved a level of linguistic proficiency, he is transitioned and readied for the mainstream or regular all-English classes which follow. This instruction, an important part of the full and modified bilingual programs, is received during the daily ESL hour. The process of transitioning generally begins during the third or fourth grades and takes approximately one year. During this period of time students are readied for the mainstream or regular all-English courses which will follow.

There are a number of criteria which are used in order to determine whether a student is ready to be transitioned. In order to qualify for transitioning, students must: (1) demonstrate first language reading and writing proficiency which is equivalent to the end of second grade, and (2) receive a score of 4 on the SOLOM examination. When these two criteria have been met, the LEP student is administered the CARE (Criteria for the Addition of Reading in English) test. The CARE consists of several sub-tests.

Primary language proficiency Using a multiple-choice format, primary language reading comprehension is tested. In addition, the student must complete two compositions which are elicited by prompts in the primary language. One composition is descriptive while the other requires students to explain how a task is to be carried out.

English language oral and aural skills. The student is provided with a series of picture cards which must be sequenced then described in English. The student is also read a short poem or excerpt in English, then must respond orally to several comprehension questions. Finally, the student must respond in writing to a series of oral requests in English (e.g., write your address, circle if you are a boy or a girl).

well since pass each subtest in order to qualify for entry into the transitional program.

During this transition period students continue to receive instruction in Spanish language arts. ESL instruction emphasizes oral language, written composition and reading skills. Those reading and writing skills which are unique to English are emphasized as opposed to skills which will automatically transfer from the first language to the second with little or no instructional support. Items unique to English include punctuation, capitalization, and spelling phonics.

Writing strategies include the use of the language experience approach, group stories, student-generated stories, dictation and other whole language strategies. With time, the first language subject matter instruction is replaced by sheltered instruction. Upon completing this transition instruction, students are then mainstreamed into English reading. Once students are mainstreamed, they continue to receive Spanish language arts instruction.

Whole Language Approach

In all three types of programs, heavy emphasis is placed upon providing language instruction which is consistent with the whole language (WL) philosophy and orientation. Consequently, students are immersed in language daily. Many of the whole-language activities which teachers use come from Routman (1991). These activities include reading aloud, shared reading, teacher reading, student reading, paired reading, guided reading, writing aloud, and shared writing. Students engage in listening, speaking and reading activities including language experience, and sustained silent reading. Literature is extensively used as are manipulatives and realia to develop fundamental vocabulary and concepts in the first and second languages. School officials report that standardized test scores have improved since using a WL approach.

Bilingual Ungraded K-4 Instruction

Currently, teachers and administrators are experimenting with a new configuration: "ungraded classrooms." This evolved as a result of a school-based management team which identified as its primary goal the development of language which would allow students to achieve

academically. After researching a variety of innovative methods, it was determined that the ungraded classroom could allow teachers to more effectively meet student's needs to improve language and content. From the teacher's perspective, the ungraded classroom would allow teachers to work with more linguistically homogeneous groups, rather than attempting to deal with an entire range of linguistic abilities.

During its second semester of operation two full ungraded bilingual classes have been formed, one containing students from grades K-2 and a second class of students from grades 2-4. While first and second language literacy is the focus of instruction, subject matter is taught using a number of student-centered approaches. Teachers follow a grade-specific subject-matter curriculum, yet they also pursue subject matter in which students develop an interest. That is, students are permitted choice regarding the subject matter which they can pursue. For example, students from the ungraded classes went on a field trip to the museum. Afterwards they were taken on a tour of the La Brea tar pits where they learned about local dinosaur history. Because the students became so enthused about dinosaurs, the teacher created a dinosaur display for the students and took the students to the library where they were able to check out books on dinosaurs. Children were permitted to engage in the activity which they desired. One student wrote a report on the topic, others drew pictures and still others wrote about the pictures which they had drawn. Students belonging to all grade levels engaged in these dinosaur-related activities. Student motivation and enthusiasm for reading have reportedly increased since changing to the ungraded classrooms.

Parental Involvement

This elementary school maintains strong ties with the parents of limited-English proficient students in a variety of ways. First, teachers frequently instruct parent-oriented courses during their intersession (i.e., vacation) times. This school is not on a traditional calendar. The school functions year-round such that at any one time one group of teachers and students is on vacation. Intersessions generally last from 4 to 6 weeks. In the past, courses have been offered on a variety of topics including ESL for parents, parenting skills, family math, reading with your child, and language development. Additionally, a new program has

been initiated in which once a week parents of kindergartners are taught how to assist their pre-reading child. All of these classes have been offered during the daytime hours. Apart from these parent classes, there are a group of parent volunteers who regularly come to the school to assist teachers in their classes.

Teachers' Backgrounds

Currently the school's staff of 50 consists of a group of young, energetic, and dedicated teachers, many of whom are enrolled in the master's degree program in multicultural education at a local state university. Seven of the teachers possess the bilingual credential and are designated as "fluent" in Spanish according to district standards. For those who are seeking to obtain this credential there are district classes available which provide them with the bilingual methods and culture which is needed for the credential. Still there are a total of 15 teachers who are fairly proficient in the language, yet who have yet to obtain their California bilingual credential from the state.

Staff development also plays an important role at this school. E.L.D. program teachers are not bilingual in most instances though some maintain low level fluency in Spanish. Increasing numbers of teachers have obtained their language development specialist credentials from the state of California. L.D.S. training and skills are similar to those of the bilingual specialist credential, yet proficiency in a second language is not required. All teachers have received in-service training in second language acquisition, whole language, and other innovative approaches to teaching content and language instruction.

Success of the Program

Higher test scores. The school's bilingual coordinator has noted a dramatic improvement of overall instruction in the school's bilingual program in recent years as evidenced by an increase in test scores. She attributes this to a number of factors. The additional in-service training and focus upon whole language has caused teachers to make greater use of literature in their classrooms. Using this approach, students have exhibited a greater desire to read. As a result, students have expended greater time and effort reading. Given this increased "time on task" it is

understandable why reading achievement has improved. Furthermore, there has been greater emphasis upon the development of oral language. As a result, English language proficiency has increased.

Leadership. Probably the greatest asset is the dedication and enthusiasm of this school's principal, bilingual coordinator, teachers and staff. They are always striving to find newer and more effective ways of improving instruction. Many of the teachers at this school are pursuing advanced degrees (e.g., master's, language development specialist credential, bilingual specialist credential). Similarly, several teachers who are not bilingual are in the process of developing Spanish proficiency. The surrounding area may be lacking in material wealth, yet the overall instruction is quite rich.

Ungraded ESL The ungraded ESL which was described previously has also greatly facilitated instruction for students and teachers alike. Teachers can concentrate on teaching students of a single linguistic level rather than several levels.

Native language. Students enrolled in either full or modified bilingual programs tend to develop a solid foundation in first language skills. Consequently, they make a smooth and successful transition to English. Those students not consistently receiving instruction in primary language skills tend to experience more difficulty making the transition to mainstream classes. This is often the case when students are pulled in and out of bilingual programs for one reason or another (i.e., parental preferences, school changes).

Critical Comments and Recommendations

Parental input. Some parents do not fully comprehend the rationale underlying bilingual education, consequently many prefer not to place their child in a bilingual program. Instead, their child is placed in the ELD program. It may be in the best interests of all involved to more formally address this problem and for groups of teachers to develop either literature or parent workshops in which they can educate parents regarding the effectiveness of bilingual instruction and the tenets and research upon which it is constructed.

Education of administrators. In this school district and surrounding districts, it has become increasingly common for the principal to make

major decisions regarding the curriculum and placement of students. As a result, English only students are being placed alongside limited-English-proficient students and teachers are instructed to teach subject matter using sheltering techniques. Many teachers have found themselves frustrated with such teaching assignments. They know that sheltering techniques are intended for intermediate level students who are being prepared for mainstream instruction. If principals are to function in this capacity, they need to have a firmer foundation and knowledge in language acquisition, methods and techniques.

Teacher training. Teachers instructing in the programs are well aware of the theory underlying many of the techniques and methods which they are encouraged to use with students. Yet, they are not knowledgeable of practices which do in fact work with their learners. This problem brings to mind a number of problems in the field. First, perhaps there is a need to provide teachers with greater documentation of the effectiveness of theoretically-sound techniques. This also points to the need to empower teachers themselves to conduct their own research so that they may test for themselves the validity of their instructional practices.

Grant writing. This school has been quite successful at obtaining outside funding due to the efforts of a small group of teachers at the school. While this has greatly benefitted all, only a few teachers are knowledgeable of the grant proposal writing process. The vast majority of teachers at the school have not developed this valuable professional skill. Teachers sometimes learn of grant proposal workshops and seminars held in the community and the district, yet the times and locations of these seminars make it difficult for the average teacher to attend. What is needed are grant proposal writing workshops for those teachers working at the school site.

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