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Designing and Implementing Two-way, Dual Language Programs: Issues to Consider

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With growing pressure on school administrators to close the achievement gap for English language learners, two-way immersion programs are being considered in increasing numbers across the nation. In this program design, language minority children are placed in classrooms with native English speakers and both groups of children learn and achieve in both languages. In well-designed programs the outcomes show that the program produces academic achievement across the curriculum that is equal or better than students educated in monolingual classrooms on standardized tests in English. Plus they also enjoy the benefits of becoming balanced bilinguals. This report reviews the literature on the rationale, challenges and considerations for administrators seeking to implement two-way dual language programs.

Keywords: English language learners, two-way dual language program, two-way immersion, bilingual/foreign language education

As the growth of English language learners continues to show dramatic increases in schools across the nation, up by 53% since the 1997-98 school year, (Education Week, updated June, 16, 2011 retrieved 7/31/11), and as schools and districts can no longer escape the accountability mandates of No Child Left Behind, administrators and policy makers are increasingly turning to the research on programs that have been shown to be effective in promoting academic success and closing the achievement gap. One such program receiving recent attention is the Two-way, Dual Language Program (TWDL), also sometimes referred to as Two-way, Immersion Program (TWI), or sometimes just Dual Language Program (DL). (Calderon & Minaya-Rowe, 2003) This model of education is not necessarily a new concept (Howard, Christian, & Genesse, 2004), but it has not had widespread attention in the United States until recently. More and more districts (<http://www.cal.org/twi/directory>) now are considering the potential impact and challenges of implementing this program model that specifically targets the language needs of language minority children in our schools, as well as provides enriching educational opportunities to English-speaking, majority children.

Two-way, dual language programs are designed to provide cognitive continuity for English language learners, building on the linguistic strength they bring to the school setting. Of equal importance is the effort to provide high-quality second/foreign language instruction for native English-speaking children. The goal is to develop bilingualism and biliteracy for all children in the programs, while, at the same time building academic success across the curriculum. (<http://www.cal.org/twi/FAQ>)

Programs generally start in kindergarten or first grade by providing instruction in using both English and the native language of the language minority children. Language is not directly or specifically taught, but rather is used as the medium of instruction. Literacy instruction is delivered in both languages, as is math, social studies, science, etc. Instruction is delivered through both languages but not translated. Lessons are not repeated in both languages, but rather taught through thematic teaching in which skills and knowledge taught in one language will be reinforced in the other language. (Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2005)

There are two basic model of program design. One is the 50-50 Model where children begin being exposed to classroom instruction 50% of the time in English and 50% of the time in the partner language. This begins in kindergarten and adds a grade level each year as students move up through the school grades. The other model is the 90-10 Model, in which they begin kindergarten using 90% of the non-English language and 10% English, changing the ratio by 10% each year until the 50-50 distribution of languages is reached—usually in the 4th (grade i.e., 80-20

in first grade, 70-30 in second, 60-40 in third, and 50-50 in fourth). (Calderon & Minaya-Rowe, 2003) Most programs extend at least through elementary school and a few have been extended into the secondary level as an extension of TWI programs at the elementary level. (<http://www.cal.org/twi/directory>) Both program models of language distribution have produced promising results so far. (Howard & Sugarman, 2001) Thomas & Collier (as cited in Howard, Christian, & Genesee, 2004) report

in their study of the long-term effects of two-way immersion programs in comparison with other approaches reviewed programs implemented 1996-2001, [they] found that English language learners were able to reach and/or surpass the 50th percentile in comparison to English speaking norms on standardized achievement tests in both languages. They also found that there were fewer dropout...[Additionally,] bilingually educated students continue to outperform their peers educated monolingually in all subjects after 4-7 years. (p.4)

In other studies, English speaking students also were found to perform at or above the English-speaking control group in English reading, math and other areas of the curriculum. (see for example, Cazabon, Nicholadis, & Lambert, 1998; Krashen, 2004) The research reported here assert that when the goals of the program are to develop high levels of literacy and academic content proficiency through two languages, students are able to develop "additive bilingualism." (<http://www.cal.org/twi/FAQ>) They are considered balanced bilinguals, being able use the target language for social and academic purposes equally well. Additionally, both groups of students enjoy the opportunity to learn from each other and develop positive, successful skills of cross-cultural respect and communication. (Soltero, 2004)

Most Dual Language programs in the US focus on English and Spanish, but "there are also programs that target Korean, Cantonese, Arabic, French, Japanese, Navajo, Portuguese, and Russian." (Garcia, 2005) As of July 8, 2011, the Two Way Immersion (another name used to describe the same approach) website for the Center for Applied Linguistics lists 395 programs in 29 states. (<http://www.cal.org/twi/directory>) In well-implemented programs, both native English speakers and language minority students tend to do as well or better than their peers in other educational programs. (<http://www.cal.org/twi/FAQ>)

The basic steps for implementation, as adapted from Carrera-Carillo & Smith (2006), include the following:

1. Planning and Organization: Policy makers must plan and organize strategies for implementation; identify resources, both local and national; identify personnel; establish recruitment and public relations strategies. They must begin by understanding second language acquisition and reaching out to the community.
2. Community Involvement- Stakeholders: To fully implement a TWI program, the school must convince parents, administrators, and teachers. They must engage and encourage children who will be educated through a language they do not know. ELLs have no choice but English speaking children do and without them it would not be two-way.
3. Physical Organization: The school environment and classroom environments must be structurally planned and organized to provide the most conducive environment for dual language instruction to occur.
4. Teaching Through Best Practices and Hands-on Activities: Teachers must receive professional development that will enable them to provide instruction that builds language skills and content concepts at the same time. Extensive instructional planning will be necessary that that provides hands-on, thematic instruction using research-based practices.
5. Assessment and Accountability: Plans for authentic assessments that hold teachers and students, schools and parents accountable must be undertaken. (p.vii)

School communities facing the issues of large language minority populations have many challenges. Two-way Dual Language Program is one model of a program that can benefit the district and the ELL students tremendously when strategically planned and implemented. One essential feature of the program is that effort is made to maintain an equal number of native English-speaking students as there are native speakers of the partner language, which can be a challenge in some communities where there is a low incidence of ELLs of the same language background, or in communities where there is a high incidence of mobility between schools. Other basic challenges include:

1. Finding highly qualified native language teachers for the appropriate grade levels
2. Getting a 4-6 year commitment from parents to keep their children in the program

3. Getting commitment from English-speaking parents to leave their children in classrooms where they only initially understand at most 50% of the language of instruction.
4. Getting buy-in from policy-makers, administrators and teachers
5. Identifying appropriate materials, assessments, and other resources.

Determining the right fit of program model, assessing the needs of the ELL students, and matching the research with the desires of the school community will ultimately enable administrators to design an effective Two-Way Dual Language Program to produce both academic gains for language minority and native English speaking children as well as develop bilingual-biliterate communities, and culturally enriching experiences for everyone.

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Dr. April Haulman , a Professor at the University of Central Oklahoma, has worked in bilingual education over 35 years as a teacher, curriculum developer, grant writer and administrator, and university faculty member. She has a Ph.D. from the University of Oklahoma as a recipient of the Title VII Bilingual Fellowship. Her classroom experience includes elementary, secondary, junior college, community education and university level setting. She has successfully written and administered federal grants, coordinated statewide and regional institutes and conferences, as well as published in professional journals and presented at national conferences. As a member of UCO teacher education faculty, she is the Coordinator and Academic Advisor of the Bilingual Education/Teaching English as a Second Language. Dr. Haulman has a long-standing reputation for her commitment to the educational needs of Oklahoma's limited English proficient children.

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