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# Dual Language Programs on the Rise

“Enrichment” model puts content learning front and center for ELL students

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*Teacher Antonio Monrreal works with a student in a 7th grade dual language class at Liberty Middle School in Pharr, Texas.*

Dual language programs, which provide instruction in both English and a second language, are flourishing in elementary schools across the country as educators find benefits for both English-language learners (ELLs) and those fluent in English.

At a time when other types of bilingual education are on the decline and the B-word—bilingual—has been scrubbed from the U.S. Department of Education lexicon, dual language programs are showing promise in their mission to promote biliteracy and positive cross-cultural attitudes in our increasingly multilingual world.

In 2000, there were about 260 dual language programs operating in U.S. schools, according to Richard Riley, who was serving as education secretary at the time. That year, he called on the nation to increase the number of dual language programs to 1,000 by 2005, saying our nation would be stronger with more biliterate citizens who could read and write in more than one language. “We need to invest in these kinds of programs,” said Riley. “In an international economy, knowledge, and knowledge of language, is power.”

Over the past decade, however, dual language programs have grown tenfold, with an estimated 2,000 now operating, including more than 300 in the state of New York alone, according to Jose Ruiz-Escalante, president of the National Association for Bilingual Education.

The dual language classes are taught predominantly in English and Spanish, though programs in Chinese, Haitian Creole, and French have cropped up in urban districts. Which language is used, and when, depends on what dual language model is chosen. Some teach in English one day and the second language the next day, while others alternate the language by subject matter.

Among the myriad ways of teaching ELL students to become literate in English, dual language is considered an enrichment, or additive, model building on a student’s home language, with content being taught in both languages.

On the other end of the spectrum is structured English immersion, in what is seen as a remedial, or subtractive, model in which students are encouraged to focus entirely on English and let their home language lie fallow in the academic setting (see sidebar “The Changing Landscape of Bilingual Education”).

Models for educating English-language learners have shifted since three states banned the use of transitional bilingual education (TBE) classes in the 1990s. Here are the major models:

*Structured English Immersion (SEI).* Instruction is focused heavily on English grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure, and pronunciation skills. Subjects are taught in English at a student's level of comprehension. This is now the dominant model in U.S. schools.

*Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE).* Students receive instruction in their native language and, increasingly, in English from bilingual teachers.

*ESL Push-In and Pull-Out.* ESL tutors work alongside teachers in mainstream classrooms to help ELL students, or students attend ESL tutoring sessions outside the classroom.

*Dual Language (or two-way dual language, two-way immersion, or dual immersion).* English learners are grouped with English speakers to learn all content in two languages. In one-way dual language, the class is comprised mostly of English learners, with instruction conducted in English and (typically) Spanish. The number of dual language programs has grown steadily over the past 10 years.

*Source: O. Garcia and J.A. Kleifgen, Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Language Learners.*

Advocates say dual language programs are more effective in educating both native English speakers and ELL students in the long run. "If our primary purpose is to educate our children, and we have the capacity to deliver some content in the native language, then the child will receive a more effective education," says Leo Gomez, a professor at the University of Texas–Pan American, whose dual language model now operates in 501 schools in six states. "It's not all about learning English. It's about learning content, and the students' transition into English as they progress."

### **Only One Small Piece for ELLs**

Dual language programs first cropped up in the 1960s to address the needs of Spanish-speaking students in Florida and French-speaking students in Maine. By the 1980s, dual language magnet schools were established in cities like Tucson, Ariz., to help desegregate schools by attracting white students to predominantly minority schools. In the 1990s, bilingual programs came under attack for their lack of effectiveness in teaching English to immigrants, and ballot campaigns succeeded in banning transitional bilingual education programs in California, Massachusetts, and Arizona. In a sign of the times, the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs in the U.S. Department of Education was renamed the Office of English Language Acquisition. Dual language programs, however, were left alone by the sponsors of ballot questions because they served both English speakers and those learning the language.

Despite the growth in the number of dual language programs in the past 10 years, however, they still make up a small piece of the instructional programs for ELL students, with the vast majority receiving English-only immersion instruction. In New York City, about 4 percent of ELL students were in dual language programs in 2010, up from 2 percent in 2000, said Jo Anne Kleifgen, coauthor of the 2010 book *Educating Emergent Bilinguals: Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Language Learners*.

Dual language can be cost-effective, with some dual language schools able to address the literacy needs of English learners within the confines of the regular classroom and without English as a second language (ESL) tutors, says Teachers College professor Maria Torres-Guzman. But costs associated with starting up a program can present obstacles. In New York, a state program awards five-year planning grants to provide support for materials and consultants who can get the program

up and running. Finding bilingual teachers can prove challenging as well.

In addition, some critics say dual language programs are growing more because of their popularity among English-speaking parents than because they are effective models for those who need help with English. “The Spanish-speaking kids are roped in as tutors for the English-speaking kids,” says Ron Unz, the California software developer who spearheaded the ballot initiatives against bilingual education in California and Massachusetts. “The whole debate on dual language is dominated by English-speaking parents who want their children to learn Spanish. I question whether the Spanish-speaking students are [really] learning English.”

### **Worth the Wait**

Numerous studies, however, have found that ELL students can thrive in dual language programs but that these programs may not be an effective short-term intervention if learning English is the primary goal in the early grades.

George Mason University professors Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier conducted a longitudinal study over 18 years in 23 districts across 15 states, comparing those in dual language programs with those in transitional bilingual programs or English-only classes. They found the dual language model closed the achievement gap between English learners and native English speakers. The programs also transformed the school experience to become more inclusive for all involved: The landmark 2002 study found that the nurturing of multiple cultural heritages and languages in school led to friendships that crossed class and language barriers as well as increased parental involvement.

One of the hallmarks of dual language programs is teaching kindergarteners and first graders to read in their home language. A 2006 meta-analysis of five experimental studies by Claude Goldenberg confirmed that learning in one’s home language promoted reading achievement in a second language.

A 2009 Johns Hopkins University study that followed 545 Spanish-dominant kindergarten students in dual language, structured English immersion, and transitional bilingual programs found, however, that by grade 2 the dual language students were slightly behind their peers in English immersion classes in English language measurements. Studies by Canadian researcher Jim Cummins have found that it can take up to seven years for a non-English-speaking student to attain mastery in academic English in dual language programs.

Richard Gomez, associate professor at the University of Texas, urges patience from those who call for immediate results. At the Pharr San Juan Alamo district on the Texas-Mexico border, dual language programs developed by Gomez and his brother, Leo, are offered in preK–12, with two cohorts of students already graduating high school with good results.

### **Dual Language in Action**

Terri Thomas Klemm, principal at the **George Washington School** in White Plains, N.Y., has created a thriving dual language program in the small-city district in New York City’s northern suburbs, where student rolls are 50 percent Latino, 20 percent African American, and 30 percent white and other. The school established a dual language program four years ago, several years after the school began teaching Spanish to English-speaking students, and their parents were clamoring for more.

In its first year, the parents of 120 students signed up their children for 44 slots in two of the school’s six kindergarten classes, each class containing equal numbers of both Spanish-dominant and

English-dominant students. There has been a waiting list for both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking students each year since, and the dual language program was so successful that White Plains has established dual language in a second elementary school.

Klemm says the dual language program has boosted involvement by Latino parents, which has long concerned school officials here. It has also created more opportunities for cross-cultural appreciation and made Spanish a language that is an important part of the school, not something to try to ignore, she says.

The school is already getting results. Among second graders in dual language classes, students are outperforming their peers on Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) tests, with 82 percent of second graders at or above grade level, compared to 70 percent for the students in English-only classrooms.

The programs in Texas and White Plains highlight two of the different models used in dual language schools. In the Texas program designed by Leo Gomez and Richard Gomez, preK–1 students in the **Pharr-San Juan-Alamo district** learn to read in their home language. Up through grade 5, math is always in English while social studies and science are taught in Spanish. From grade 2, both English-dominant and Spanish-dominant students have classes in English language arts and Spanish language arts.

On alternative days, English or Spanish is used for the daily announcements and instructions between classes. There is also support for content in a student's non-dominant language. For example, after English-dominant students have a science class on the water cycle, taught in Spanish, they will have a lab period in which the content is taught in English.

In White Plains, the language of instruction changes each day, for all subjects, with students switching each day to adjacent classrooms. Both classrooms are set up in a similar manner to ease the transition. Wall posters are in English in one room, Spanish in the next. So are instructions about writing and reading.

The model in White Plains creates an interesting twist on team teaching: The teachers must be in constant communication because one picks up the curriculum where the other left off the day before. And they do so in a different language.

“Their heartbeats have to be aligned,” said principal Klemm. “They need to be true partners. It’s two teachers, with one voice for the students.” Testing data from the district found that 10th graders from K–5 dual language programs scored higher than those in the district’s regular programs on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge (TAKS) statewide tests in reading, math, science, and history, said Rosalva Silva, the district’s dual language coordinator. In 2008, at least 90 percent of 10th graders in dual language passed TAKS tests in all four subjects.

Remarkably, each of the 115 students who started out in the district’s first two cohorts of dual language in kindergarten in 1995 and 1996 graduated from high school, and 90 percent from the first cohort are now enrolled in college, said Silva.

“In the long run, dual language schools have tremendous benefit,” says author Jo Anne Kleifgen. “You have young adults with strong skills, who graduate from high school, who can communicate in more than one language.”

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