

Important Administrative Tasks Resulting From Understanding Bilingual Program Designs

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Abstract

This article explores the many facets of the most commonly implemented bilingual program designs in today's schools: pull-out, structured immersion, transitional, maintenance, and dual language. We examine distinct characteristics within each program that contribute to its overall effectiveness, whether it be weak or strong. In addition, we incorporate teacher opinion on what support they feel is needed at the local and district level to promote success within the classroom. By shedding light on the frameworks and intricacies of these programs, we hope to enlighten administrators and educators alike to the extreme effects these programs can produce so that they are better suited to determine which program design will best fit their needs and the educational needs of their students.

To the detriment of the educational system as a whole, some school administrators have failed to fully comprehend the inner workings of the very bilingual programs operating in their schools. Even now, 30 years after the passage of Title VII, few administrator preparation programs offer instruction on the different programs, and there is growing evidence that the programs are not successfully nurtured and ultimately fail before they're even given a chance. By making educators aware of the purposes, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the various designs, they will be better equipped to organize and manage effective bilingual programs that include an integrated dual language/culture curriculum, appropriate bilingual/bicultural personnel, effective evaluation of the instructional process, and better informed parents and community members. Most importantly, an effective instructional program will better serve students who may not be receiving a quality learning experience.

The five most commonly implemented bilingual program designs are pull-out, structured immersion, transitional, maintenance, and dual language (Crawford, 1997). The first three fail to promote or facilitate bilingualism and are therefore considered less desirable in many communities. The remaining two are often recommended because of their proven success in fostering bilingualism, academic achievement, and cultural pluralism (Krashen, 1998).

Pull-Out Program

In pull-out programs limited English-speaking students are removed from their home classroom to provide tutoring in English. Students with different

native languages often make up these classes, e.g., Chinese mixed with Spanish speakers, but no use of any language other than English is present. Because the instruction must meet diverse needs, it may not promote cognitive development for all children. For these reasons, the pull-out design is not a true bilingual program but is included in this review simply because it is a form of instruction that bears that label.

Weaknesses

- **Time.** In most cases, students in the pull-out system spend less time learning English and may be taken out of regular classrooms. Because the time is limited, students learn English slowly and minimally. At the same time, they fall behind in the academic lessons in the rest of the curriculum. Also, English teachers' time is not fully utilized for instruction because they are required to maintain records of student progress and keep the regular classroom teacher informed. Often, the regular classroom teacher does not have time during the day to have face-to-face discussions with the pull-out teacher.
- **Psychological dimension.** Observations of students in pull-out programs show that they are prone to feeling inferior to their English-speaking cohorts who are not pulled out of class. As a result, they may develop a low self-esteem and disassociate themselves from their cultural identity and native language (Soto, Smrekar, & Nekkovei, 1999). In addition, the segregation of students places a negative connotation on the student and/or program as a whole by bringing up issues of equity.
- **Money.** The pull-out system costs more since ESL teachers must be hired to attend to pull-out students.
- **Labels.** Students in pull-out programs are given labels (e.g., Limited English Proficient, or LEP) which focus on a presumed deficit in the student, as opposed to the assets they no doubt possess.

Structured Immersion

The immersion design carries a different definition depending on its goal. We define structured immersion so as to categorize it within the bilingual program boundary. That is, a structured immersion classroom teacher provides a more comprehensible form of instruction of academic lessons in English and accepts responses and contributions from children in their native language. Thus, languages other than English are heard and used in the classroom, albeit not from the teacher. A structured immersion classroom creates an overall positive learning environment by allowing students to use their home language and by nurturing students' cognitive learning.

Depending on the teacher's second language ability, he/she can also use a language other than English to structure a lesson and present it, or to reply to student inquiries or comments. This provides more effective instruction

and develops a greater understanding and trusting relationship between student and instructor. It also allows for the different cultures of non-English speaking students to thrive, benefiting student's self-esteem and sense of identity.

Weaknesses

- **Purpose.** In many structured immersion programs the student's native language is not incorporated sufficiently to make an impact. While structured immersion recognizes the student's native language and does not prevent the student from using it in class, it does very little to actually develop that language, in effect devaluing it. In essence, while this program intends to create an environment of multiculturalism and tolerance, it imminently and inherently leads to assimilation.
- **Minimalism.** Structured immersion follows a minimalist approach in that there are no targeted goals for development of the home language.
- **Instructors.** A structured immersion design often does not make use of a certified bilingual teacher or a teacher who is actually formally trained as a bilingual educator. As a result, the students do not receive the quality of education they deserve.

Transitional Bilingual Education

In a transitional classroom, teachers instruct and students are encouraged to use a language other than English. This way, students are not only learning the English language, they are also enhancing their knowledge of their native language. In addition, students are being instructed so as to develop their cognitive thinking as they are working in the academic curriculum. By so doing, biculturalism is accepted and promoted, both directly and indirectly. A solid foundation is laid for biliteracy to take root.

Weaknesses

- **Purpose.** While the transitional design is the first true bilingual instructional program, its major setback is that it is intended to exit English language learners as soon as possible. Because of the early exit purpose, biliteracy is unfortunately rarely reached. Moreover, there is an implicit devaluing of the native language.
- **Time.** The quality or utility of the transitional bilingual design is dependent upon a number of variables, the most important of which is time. Most daily classroom instruction is not evenly divided between the use of two languages. As a result, a student typically spends approximately two years in a transitional program, which is not sufficient for second language acquisition.
- **Capability.** The other determining variable is the teacher's capability. A classroom teacher's formal preparation and experience are defining factors

that will decide a student's educational quality. Most transitional programs do not have state certified bilingual teachers. Many transitional programs have teachers who speak a second language, but their proficiency varies (e.g., high proficiency in oral abilities, lower in reading, and even lower in writing). In some instances, parents and other members of the community offer assistance as a supplement to the teacher's second language usage.

- Resources. Finally, the quality of this program is dependent upon the instructional materials and resources available for use. These not only include books written in students' native languages, but also materials that are relevant to the life experiences of the students and equivalent to their varying reading levels. It is important to have a sufficient number of texts for students. In addition, variety of classroom literature prevents lessons from becoming stagnant or biased and allows for different texts to reinforce instruction.

When Deciding on a Design

Due to the inherent weaknesses of the three aforementioned programs, it is ill-advised that any administrator or school district seek out and implement them. Further caution is depicted in research gathered by Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier from 1991-96 (National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1997). They discovered that students who participate in pull-out programs do not perform as well on standardized tests in English reading (24th percentile) than those students in structured immersion programs (34th percentile), and both of these programs produce lower scores than transitional programs (40th percentile). It is important to note that student scores from all three program designs score less than the national average of 50%. Thomas and Collier discovered that the two remaining bilingual program designs to be presented, maintenance and dual language, not only scored better than the three previously discussed, but they scored above the national norm in the 52nd and 61st percentiles, respectively.

Although the data presented by Thomas and Collier are not based solely on program design, the characteristics of the following programs do, in fact, produce higher academic scores and foster a more positive learning atmosphere from which all students can benefit.

Maintenance/Developmental

Maintenance bilingual programs are designed to preserve and enhance a student's native language while the student acquires a second language, English. The National Research Council has recently released a report (1997) on the state of research on language minority students. This report indicates that students with a strong background in their home language are likely to develop higher levels of proficiency in English than those who do not have such a primary language advantage (August & Hakuta, 1997). While home

language instruction assists the acquisition of English, the maintenance models emphasize fluency in both languages in school, as well as biliteracy and academic excellence.

Maintenance programs are additive and based on an enrichment model, which allows students to fully engage and participate in the instruction, as opposed to merely being exposed to it. Maintenance programs are organized in a homogenous group of students; i.e., all students have the same home language (Ovando & Collier, 1985). The emphasis is to continue native language instruction through 6th grade, at a minimum, and hopefully into secondary grade levels. A late exit is an integral part of the maintenance program.

Strengths

The maintenance model is recommended for English language learners due to its following strengths.

- Offers sociocultural benefits for language minority students.

A well-implemented maintenance program provides non-English-speaking minorities with an equal educational opportunity (Crawford, 1999) by allowing them to develop and sustain their native language. The entire school community reinforces the home language *as well as English*.

- Cognitive–academic language proficiency is developed.

Academic English is typically acquired over a period of five to seven years (Cummins, 1989), and it is made more comprehensible by using home language instruction. Contextual knowledge in the home language aids in understanding in the second language (Krashen, 1996). Early reading acquisition in English is facilitated when a student is aware of the phonemic structure of their home language (Genesee, 1993), thus a strong ability in the native language helps support second language acquisition.

- Continued development in two languages.

It is a fallacy that bilingualism handicaps children. In fact, research has shown that bilingualism provides endless cognitive advantages (Hakuta and Snow, 1986). In developing both languages, students are able to take advantage of positive transfer between native and second language development (Genesee, 1993).

- Students receive substantial language support in their native language. By supporting instruction in the native language initially and throughout cognitive development, the learning process and success in the second language is amply facilitated and nurtured. It is much easier, as Krashen (1996) explains, to learn and to read in a language the student already understands. Once the student can read in his/her native language, for example, he/she can learn to read in other languages because literacy transfers to other languages. It is an important aspect that academic outcomes are produced by the interaction of both developmental and instructional variables.

Two-way/Dual Language

Two-way bilingual education develops dual language proficiency by instructing students in their native language, as well as in English. Half of the class consists of native English speakers and the other half, non-English speaking students. Spanish is presently the most common home language represented in two-way programs. Two-way programs provide all of the students with a variety of experiences in two languages and create an environment that fosters academic excellence in both languages. It is also supportive of full bilingual proficiency for both native and non-native speakers of English (Christian, 1999) and promotes a positive attitude toward both cultures, which, in turn, helps to reduce racism within the formative minds of children. This is perhaps the strongest attribute of the two-way/dual language model.

Two-way bilingual programs work toward affective learning and success in academic and language development. Language minority students benefit from the opportunity to develop and learn through their home language as well as English (Krashen, 1991), and English speakers achieve well academically in an immersion environment (Genesee, 1987; Harley, Allen, Cummins, & Swain, 1990). The environment created in a two-way/dual language program is additive, whereby students learn a second language while continuing to develop their home language. The program supports the development of both languages and enhances students' self-esteem and their understanding of other cultures (Crawford, 1991).

To maximize success, a two-way bilingual program should offer a minimum of four to six years of bilingual instruction. This enables students to achieve bilingual proficiency. Within this time period the language input should be comprehensible and interesting. The typical two-way bilingual program emphasizes language, academic and social development, and many strengths that, in themselves, argue for its wide spread implementation.

Strengths

- The curriculum is context based.

The curriculum emphasizes concept development. Second language input is adjusted to the student's level of understanding. The input stimulates student interest and is relevant to the concepts being developed.

- The curriculum emphasizes academic development and balance in both languages.

Integration is the focus, not sheltered instruction. This ensures equity in the classroom. It also maximizes the interactions among language-minority and language-majority children.

- The languages are not mixed within a subject.

By separating the languages and providing sustained periods of monolingual instruction, the two-way bilingual program promotes linguistic

development better than those approaches that mix languages during the same lesson. Techniques used in the learning process may include:

- Experiential Learning
- Hands-on activities
- Thematic units
- Peer interaction

The predominant attitude fostered by two-way bilingual programs is that the home language of a student is highly valued and considered a resource; it is not treated as a problem that needs to be overcome through remedial techniques or elimination; i.e., converting a student to an English only speaker.

Some Administrative Tasks

We've explored the aspects of two relatively successful bilingual education programs, but the inherent strengths of these designs cannot stand alone. Appropriate implementation and management must aid their effectiveness. Therein lies the vital question of how exactly this can be attained. Teachers' input was sought with regards to this question via focus groups and interviews. The teachers involved are all bilingually certified teachers with teaching assignments varying from Kindergarten to eighth grade. A compilation of their thoughts follows:

Program Vision & Design

Support should begin with the building administrator. The teachers interviewed expressed that a knowledgeable administrator is the key to creating a successful bilingual program. The administrator should have a clear understanding of what elements are necessary for an effective bilingual program. In addition, and more importantly, the building administrator needs to have a focused vision of what outcomes he/she is expecting from the program. This vision needs to be communicated to the staff, faculty, and the community in order to form a partnership in which all are motivated to achieve these outcomes.

The administrator's vision should include a definition of the philosophy of the bilingual programs and clearly state the criteria he/she requires for the program. The focus of the program should be evident in all aspects of the school, particularly concerning the curriculum, and in the professional development of the teaching staff. The building administrator should be working to create an obstacle free learning zone.

Administrators should spend time not only keeping up to date on research, but also confidently communicating this information. As a result, they will gain support of their program from district administrators and the community. Standards must be maintained. Bilingual education within the

school should not be perceived as an elective or as a remedial program; instead, it should be viewed as an essential program and a reflection of local, state, and federal standards.

Parent Involvement

Parental involvement is crucial to the success of bilingual programs because parents are resources, both to their children and to school personnel. They act as communicators, translators, cultural specialists, etc. Administrators must involve parents in the decision-making process and encourage them to participate in literacy-rich activities, in any language, with their children. Research indicates that parents can best promote literacy in English by developing early literacy in their children's native language (Genesee, 1993).

Curriculum

The administrator must have a detailed understanding of the intricacies of the curriculum. This will provide continuity in the program from grade to grade. Teachers are key to helping students understand what is unfamiliar; they facilitate the students' comprehension (Krashen, 1991). Administrators must expect that their teachers keep them informed of what is going on in the classroom. This will construct an environment of mutual trust between the administrators and the teachers, wherein the administrator can be confident that teachers are achieving the program goals and creating a successful environment for all children (National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1985).

District Level

Given that there needs to be coordination between school levels and connections among schools, district administrators should emphasize the learning being achieved and must show their dedication to the mission. District administrators need to become more closely involved with the actual practice of education. By learning about and staying in touch with the operations of school based bilingual education, the mission of the district can be better reflected and the importance of being bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate can be promoted.

One way to reflect this dedication is through the attitudinal changes that need to be implemented through practical applications within the district (Little, 1992). Changing policies that may support any form of cultural assimilation or prejudice will verify a support for bilingual programs. Such shifts will provide validation for bilingualism. For example, in high school programs, credits should be assigned to classes with a bilingual format to at least the same degree that they are to their monolingual English counterparts. By making such changes, bilingual education will become a part of the core curriculum.

In addition, at the district level, administrators need to provide the funding for more qualified teachers, for the translation of materials, for professional development, and for innovation within the classroom (Milk, Mercado, & Sapiens, 1992).

Professional growth must be sustained and encouraged within the district. This is achieved through strong instructional leadership and a focused effort within the district to recruit, retain, and promote the best available staff. The district should allow individual schools to plan professional development activities that are pertinent to the goals and mission of their school (Lucas, 1992).

Steady district encouragement and support will produce fundamental change. However, new ideas must be developed over time so that these practices will take root. Successful change studies reveal that time invested in generating, implementing, and adapting reflectively plays a crucial role in promoting long-term effectiveness (Joyce, 1990).

Therefore, the benefits that students and the educational system as a whole will reap from the most effective (and effectively managed) bilingual program are evident. Not only are the intrinsic characteristics of a program design responsible for the overall academic and social success of a classroom, but the way in which it is implemented and organized can and will determine its effectiveness.

A bilingual classroom should, in essence, run like any operation where both the type of machinery and the people behind that machinery are carefully scrutinized and selected with the students' success in mind.

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