

Frank Ramirez  
EDCI 6460, UNT  
Dr. Mary Harris  
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## How Effective Are Two-Way Dual Language Programs?

With increasing demands for accountability and high academic achievement for all students, policymakers are paying attention to English language learners (ELLs). A major impart of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 on local schools serving linguistically diverse students is the requirement that achievement data be disaggregated by groups, including ethnic groups and English learners, with the goal of closing the achievement gap over the next decade.

### Vocabulary Terms

- ELL- English Language Learners
- NES- Native English Speaker
- L1- 1<sup>st</sup> Language
- L2- 2<sup>nd</sup> Language
- NCE- Normal Curve Equivalent

### Descriptive Context

Many school districts statewide have implemented Dual Language programs. Over 400 Dual Language programs have been started since 2004, and the number is growing rapidly. There are several school districts in the Dallas Fort Worth Metroplex that have some form of Dual Language program. For example, Irving Independent School District (IISD) has Dual Language Two-Way and One-Way programs offered to students in selected elementary schools, grades, K-3. Next school year there is a proposal to extend to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

There are two types of Dual Language programs: One-way and two-way. According to Collier and Thomas (2009), *dual language education* refers to an enhanced, enriched, and more effective model of bilingual schooling. They go on to describe these programs.

Dual language programs are qualitatively different from other bilingual programs....Students are educated together throughout the day in cognitively challenging, grade-level academic content in interactive classes that emphasize solving problems in authentic, real-world contexts....The only difference between the two enrichment bilingual models, *one-way* and *two-way*, is the demographic mix of students who attend the bilingual classes....One-way refers to one language group being schooled through two languages....Two-way refers to two language groups being schooled through their two languages and thus teaching each other. (Collier & Thomas, 2009, p. 66-67)

The Dual Language program has characteristics that produce an effective program for ELLs. Collier and Thomas cite six major characteristics of effective programs for English learner.

- (1) They are long term;
- (2) Instruction occurs through the first language;
- (3) Instruction also occurs through the second language;

- (4) There is sociocultural support along with new language learning;
- (5) The instruction is cognitively challenging with discovery learning; and
- (6) There is integration with the mainstream program (Collier & Thomas, 2009, p. 47).

The Dual Language program is a long term bilingual program designed to enable ELLs to close the achievement gap. According to Collier and Thomas, “The long term (six or more years) is an essential characteristic of effective programs that fully close the gap” (2009, p. 47).

Because of the increased demand for accountability and closing the academic achievement gap for all students, the mission is to assist students with their individual educational endeavors. According to Espinosa, “with the increasing demands for accountability and high academic achievement for all students, educational policy makers are increasing their attention to young children (ages 3 to 8) from non-English speaking backgrounds” (Espinosa, 2010, p. 1). In two-way bilingual programs, students learn two different languages simultaneously while achieving their individual education endeavors.

### **Differing Perspectives**

There are different types of Bilingual Education programs currently practiced in various school districts nation wide. Some of the models offered are not considered enrichment programs like Dual Language, one-way and two-way. According to Collier and Thomas, these remedial programs include 1) Transitional Bilingual Education, which includes ESL taught through academic content with no L1 use and ESL taught traditionally, 2) ESL pullout from the mainstream classroom with no L1 use, and 3) Proposition 227-type programs offered in California that provide instruction for successive 2-year quasi-longitudinal cohorts of ELLs (Collier & Thomas, 2009, p.55).

### **Snapshots of Research and Court Decisions**

The history of Bilingual Education has not always supported ELLs. The basic rights of ELLs to be taught in a language they understand have prevailed thanks to historic court decisions that focused on meeting the needs of students.

*Hernandez v. Texas* (1954) was a landmark U.S. Supreme decision that gave ethnic groups such as Mexican Americans equal protection under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Similar rights were extended to other ethnic minorities in this ruling.

*Lau v. Nichols* (1974) continues to be the most significant federal court decision defining legal responsibilities of schools serving ELLs. The key issue in this ruling is providing a *meaningful education*. Just teaching the mainstream curriculum in English is not considered meaningful.

*Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981) extended the interpretation of meaningful education for ELLs. This federal Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals decision in Texas has been used as a standard for all succeeding court cases as well as for Office for Civil Rights guidelines for compliance with the *Lau v. Nichols* decision. The Castañeda ruling formulated three criteria for evaluating programs serving ELLs: 1) based on sound educational theory recognized by experts in the field. 2)

Implemented effectively with adequate resources and personnel. 3) Evaluated and found effective in both the teaching of languages (English and L1 if the program is bilingual) and in access to the full curriculum (math, social studies, science) (Collier & Thomas, 2009, p.10-11).

### **The Issue in Practice**

Here is the snapshot of comparisons of ELLs to native English speakers and of gains to be made in Bilingual Education programs based on (Collier & Thomas, 2009, p. 55).

- ELLs start at the 20 NCE or 8<sup>th</sup> percentile.
- English speakers start at 50 NCE or 50 percentile.
- They are separated by 30 NCE's, 17 percentiles or from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile.
- Typical native English speakers at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile or NCE (normal curve equivalent) make one year of achievement gain during each school year (10 months gain in a 10-month year).
- ELLs must gain more than 1 year's achievement ( e.g., 15 months gain per year) in each of several (6 years ) consecutive school year to ever close their typical 25 NCE or 12 percentile gap with English speakers when tested in English).
- This process requires not only learning academic English but also catching up to grade level across all academic subjects.

Collier and Thomas studied ELL long –term achievement through longitudinal studies of programs in five school districts in California 1998- 2000. Started in Grade 1 and continuing through Grade 11, ELLs who were in two-way Dual Language programs reached 61 NCE (the 70 percentile), ahead of the mean for native English speakers at the 50 percentile. Similar results were reported in Houston ISD and Northern Maine (Collier & Thomas, 2009, p. 74

Students educated in a Dual Language environment need a minimum of five years of schooling in their L1 and five years of schooling in their L2 to achieve on grade level in either of the two languages.

### **Recommendations**

I recommend that all schools nationwide adopt and implement the Dual Language Two-Way program at their respective campuses. This program is effective for all students regardless of culture, language, and race. This program, when implemented as a 6-year program and with consistency, can close the achievement gap for ELLs. The advantages are too great to ignore.

In the education world, there is an increased demand for accountability for closing the achievement gap. Collier and Thomas's research has shown the Dual Language Two-Way program is effective with ELLs. In regards to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Goals, it is imperative that students get the opportunity to compete with the rest of the world. Learning two languages allows this opportunity and closes the achievement gap. Therefore our students can be bi-literate, bilingual, and bicultural, and use whichever language serves them better By Choice.

### **Summary**

Not all Bilingual Education programs are effective in closing the achievement gap. Dual Language Two Way programs have been successful in closing the achievement gap. Collier and Thomas's study of the 6-year program has shown that this enrichment model is effective with all students regardless of language (2009). The research suggests that the Dual Language Two-Way enrichment Bilingual Education program is the most effective with closing the achievement gap and addressing accountability requirements.

**Sources, Cites, Links**

Collier, V. P., & Thomas, W. P. (2009). *Educating English language learners for a transformed world*. Albuquerque, New Mexico: Fuente Press.

Espinosa, L. M. (2010). Challenging common myths about young English language learners. *The State Education Standard*.