

DUAL-LANGUAGE PROGRAMS IN U.S. SCHOOLS

AN ALTERNATIVE TO MONOCULTURAL,
MONOLINGUAL EDUCATION

Eugene E. Garcia

And

Bryant Jensen

Arizona State University

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Educating in Multiple Languages: Myths

It is often the case that resistance to children learning more than one language rests on a set of myths regarding multilingualism and dual language instruction. Some of these are outlined in the table below.

Language Learning / Education Myths	
<p>ON MULTILINGUALISM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Learning a language is difficult enough, learning two or more languages leads to interference with neither language being learned.” • “Learning two or more languages confuses children because they must operate with two sets of symbols. This leads to thinking problems.” 	<p>ON INSTRUCTION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We need to teach English and non-English speakers English as quickly as possible to give them the basics they will need later to learn content.” • “Support of the native language takes time away from time which could be allowed for English language instruction.” • “Utilizing two or more languages during instruction confuses children causing them to tune-out.”

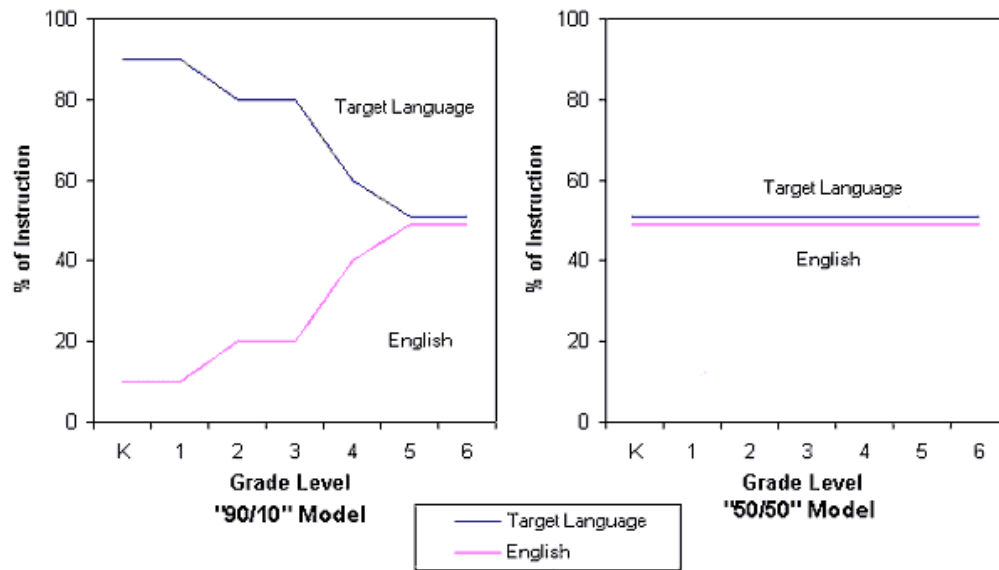
Replication of proven models in dual-language immersion and attempts to design and implement such programs within a supportive framework can be highly positive for students and lead to academic and social success—discrediting these myths.

Introduction to Dual-Language Immersion

Dual Language (DL) programs are relatively new in the United States. After the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1994, a large federal effort related to the education of dual language students was launched. It was at this point that the US Department of Education promoted the development of educational programs whose goal was dual language competency for both language minority students speaking a non-English home language as well as for students whose home language was solely English. These programs were designed to create dual language competencies in students without sacrificing their success in school or beyond. Unique among program alternatives, the goals of DL are to provide high-quality instruction for students who come to school speaking primarily a language other than English and simultaneously to provide instruction in a second language for English speaking students. Schools offering DL programs thus teach children language through content, with teachers adapting their instruction to ensure children’s comprehension and using content lessons to convey vocabulary and language structure. Striving for half language minority students and half native English-speaking students in each classroom, DL programs also aim to teach cross-cultural awareness. Programs vary in terms of the amount of time they devote to each language, which grade levels they serve, how much structure they impose for the division of language and curriculum, and the populations which they serve. The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL, 2005) has graciously compiled research-based strategies and practices associated with DL program development and implementation. Entitled *Guiding Principles for Dual-Language Education*, seven dimensions to help with planning and ongoing implementation of DL programs are discussed: a) assessment and accountability, b) curriculum, c)

instruction, d) staff quality and professional development, e) program structure, f) family and community, and g) support and resources.

There are two widely adopted models of language division: the 50:50 and the 90:10 models. In the 50:50 model, instruction is given half the day in English and half the day in non-English native language (i.e., target language) throughout the grades. In the 90:10 model, children spend 90% of their kindergarten school days in the non-English minority language, and this percentage gradually decreases to 50% by fourth or fifth grade. These two models are shown in the figure below.



Theoretical Foundation

The installation of DL programs is based on a strong theoretical rationale and supported by empirical research findings concerning both first and second language acquisition (Genesee, 1999). This rationale grows out of socio-cultural theory which maintains that learning occurs through naturalistic social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). That is, the integration of native English speakers and speakers of other languages facilitates second language acquisition because it promotes natural, substantive interaction among speakers of different languages. Furthermore, at least four theoretical and empirically sound points that follow are made in favor of DL programs.

First, research indicates that “academic knowledge and skills acquired through one language pave the way for acquisition of related knowledge and skills in another language” (Collier, 1989; Genesee, 1999). In other words, children who are taught and achieve academically in their native language are more likely to experience comparable, sustained achievements in a second language.

Second, English skills—when learned as a second language—are best acquired by students who first have strong oral and literacy skills in their native language (Saunders and Goldenberg, 1999; Lanauze and Snow, 1989). Thus, English language learners (ELL) are more likely to acquire oral and written English skills when native language skills have been firmly established.

Third, as data discussed later in this article demonstrate, DL programs enable native English speakers to acquire advanced second language skills without compromising their first language development or academic achievement (Genesee, 1987; Swain and Lapkin, 1982).

Finally, language skills are acquired best when used as the means of instruction rather than just the focus of instruction. High-quality DL programs provide the opportunity for children with diverse linguistic backgrounds to learn academic content while simultaneously learning and exploring a second language in a shared educational space.

Assessment of Current Programs

Currently in the United States, there are over 400 DL programs, and the number is growing rapidly (CAL, 2004). While the vast majority offers instruction in Spanish and English, there are also DL programs which target Korean, Cantonese, Arabic, French, Japanese, Navajo, Portuguese, and Russian (Christian, 1999; Garcia, 2005).

There are three major goals for students in these programs:

1. to help children to learn English and find success in US schools;
2. to help these children become competent in their own language without sacrificing success in school; and,
3. to promote linguistic and ethnic equity among the children, encouraging children to bridge the gaps between cultures and languages.

These goals are naturally interdependent, and relate to the individual student at differing levels, depending on his or her particular socio-linguistic and -cultural background. For example, a native English speaking child benefits by coming to understand that another language and culture hold equal importance to their own. A Spanish speaking Latino child who is enrolled in a DL program is given equal school status due to their knowledge of their home language, rather than being penalized and segregated because of it. As a result, he or she will likely have more confidence in his or her ability to learn English. Moreover, children who learn the language and culture of their peers are more likely to become friends, regardless of ethnic background.

Lambert (1990) suggests that dual-language programs are an optimal resolution to the strange and prevalent dichotomy between foreign language education and bilingual education in US schools. He suggests that the purpose of “second language pedagogy” is to bring “language minority families into the American mold, to teach them our national language, to help them wash out as quickly as possible old country ways” (p. 323). On the other hand, “the foreign language approach aims to add refinement and international class to the down-to-earth, eminently practical American character” (p. 324). His clear conclusion is that DL, two-way immersion programs improve language teaching for everyone, both second language learners and foreign language learners in the same classroom.

Student Achievement under Current Programs

There is evidence to suggest that dual-language immersion is an excellent model for academic achievement for all children. It has been shown to promote English language learning as well or better than other special programs designed for language minority children. One hundred percent of Spanish dominant children in the Key School, a 50/50 DL school in Arlington County, Virginia, demonstrated oral English fluency by third grade, as shown by the LAS-O Oral English Proficiency measure and classroom observations (Christian, 1997). English writing samples collected from native Spanish speakers in fifth and sixth grade were indistinguishable from those of native English speakers, and all were of high quality (Christian, 1997). In a separate study of four DL schools following the 90:10 program model in California, it was found that by fifth grade most students were clearly fluent in English, and made good gains in English reading at most school sites (although they did not attain grade level performance in reading) (Lindholm, 1999).

Dual-language immersion programs also appear to encourage achievement in academic subjects in both English and the minority languages. In an early study comparing DL students to a control population, Christian (1994) found that third graders from the Amigos Dual Immersion Program in Cambridge, Massachusetts outperformed a Spanish speaking cohort in a more conventional bilingual education program in reading and mathematics in both Spanish and English. In fact, students in this program performed consistently at grade level norms for children their age, which included children who only spoke English. DL provided these children with the tools they needed to perform well in

These comprehensive longitudinal data for DL students showed that both native English speakers and native Spanish speakers in the study showed progress in their language and literacy skills from the beginning of third grade through the end of fifth grade. In addition, native Spanish speakers demonstrated more balanced language and literacy skills in the two languages, while native English speakers demonstrated clear dominance in English, yet, the DL program seemed to produce academic level functioning for both groups of students over the period studied.

A similar longitudinal study reported similar results in a set of San Francisco schools (Garcia, 2005). That study assessed writing proficiency based on a set of literacy standards adopted by the State of California for English and the San Francisco School district for English, Spanish and Chinese (Cantonese). In this study, writing from first to third grade was assessed for students in a DL program in Spanish and English and for a DL program in Chinese and English. These students attended schools populated by at least 50% free lunch qualified families and at least 50% non-English proficient students. Aligned with the district and state standards, a writing rubric developed for each language—the Authentic Literacy Assessment System (ALAS)—was used to collect longitudinal data for these students (Garcia, 2005). Examination of these data indicated that English/Spanish as well as English/Chinese writing reached grade level benchmarks by the third grade for these DL program students. Instruction in two languages did not hamper English grade level writing development and produced grade level writing in another language other than English (Spanish or Chinese).

Significance to the United States

Public education entails adding to and improving the competence of all students in as many areas as possible in order to create functional, responsible and aware citizens. We have a responsibility to act in the best interests of our student population, which is ever changing and growing. Having all US students become fluent in more than one language is not only a marketable skill in today's increasingly diverse and global society, but, as the studies mentioned demonstrate, it can also contribute to increased cognitive flexibility and high achievement in math, science and language arts. If we expect our future workers, civil servants, and academics to compete in a global, multi-lingual world, we must prepare them with the skills to do so. This important social and academic skill can be infused into all areas of curriculum with students learning in both English and at least one other language if not more throughout their academic careers. The dual-language capacity of teachers and services will also allow for more parent-staff-student interaction and leave room for creative community involvement, both locally and globally.

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