

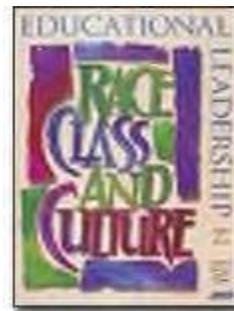
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## Accelerated Schooling for English Language Learners

A bilingual education model that uses both English and the student's primary language results in improved academic achievement and dual language proficiency—especially when used in a curriculum rich in subject-matter content and cultural relevance.



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Imagine that you are a student living in the Alaskan tundra, where even in the summertime a fall into the river can mean quick death. In your classroom, equipped with computers and video technology, your math and science curriculum covers crucial survival skills. The curriculum includes deep knowledge from the elders, spoken in your native tongue, wisdom that must not be forgotten. It also includes ecological problem solving as you analyze the impact of 20th-century innovations on your environment.

Or perhaps you have moved with your family from a small town in rural Mexico to a U.S. city. Family members and others who made a similar journey welcome you to your new community. School is at first bewildering, but Señora Román and Ms. Miller and all your Spanish-speaking classmates make you feel OK. Books in Spanish and English and your classmates' stories about life in your Mexican hometown are all over the school. Social studies and language arts incorporate rich bicultural knowledge gathering and problem solving into the standard grade-level curriculum. Your class writes e-mail messages and shares projects with a class in Mexico through the network Orillas (Cummins & Sayers, 1995). You can see that knowing how to read and write well in both English and Spanish is an advantage for getting a good job, and the school unit on careers gives you lots of new interests to explore.

Exciting possibilities? These scenarios really exist in some U.S. schools. So why do U.S. educators rely so much on remediation for students who are culturally and linguistically diverse? We assess new arrivals from a deficit perspective, looking for what's missing. And when we find that students have little or no English, we send them to a specialist to be "fixed." Yet these students often arrive with a wealth of life experiences, including age-appropriate thinking, richly expressed in primary language. How can we take the strengths that English language learners bring to school and enliven the school experience by connecting it in meaningful ways to their lives, deepening their knowledge?

### Acceleration, Not Remediation

One promising model for English language learners that is being increasingly adopted in U.S. schools is one-way developmental bilingual education (DBE). The term *one-way* refers to a bilingual program in which students who are all speakers of the same primary language—for example, Spanish—are schooled through two languages, English and Spanish. This model shares many of the features of the dual-language model (also called bilingual immersion or two-way developmental bilingual education). In the dual model, native and nonnative English speakers receive instruction together in the core academic curriculum, with English and the

minority language each used for at least 50 percent of the instructional time and the two groups serving as peer tutors for each other (Thomas & Collier, 1997/1998).

When well implemented, both one-way and two-way programs accelerate all students' growth through a meaningful, bicultural, grade-level curriculum that connects to students' lives inside and outside school. These programs have achieved high levels of academic success for both native English speakers and English language learners. Instead of enduring educational isolation in remedial classes with a watered-down curriculum, students flourish in these enriched forms of bilingual education.

The main difference between the two programs involves school demographics. In two-way DBE, native English speakers typically make up about 50 percent of the class. One-way DBE is a more practical option in schools with fewer native English speakers or with English-speaking parents who prefer not to enroll their children in bilingual classes.

One-way DBE schools or classes are appropriate in any school district with large numbers of students of one primary language heritage. For example, in urban and suburban contexts, one language group often settles in a particular area, and the neighborhood school may establish a one-way DBE program for that group. In other areas in the United States, indigenous groups live in isolated regions with few native English speakers. Some schools that serve, for example, the Navajo in Arizona and the Yup'ik in Alaska have begun building enrichment bilingual/bicultural curriculums (Cantoni, 1996). Schools in the southwestern United States with large numbers of Hispanics are excellent contexts for enrichment DBE classes.

Many of these schools serve heterogeneous populations, even though nearly all the students come from, for example, a Spanish-speaking heritage. Students are likely to vary greatly in social class, countries of origin, proficiency in the two languages of instruction, and amounts of formal schooling. Just considering language proficiency, one class may include Hispanic students who are monolingual in English when they first enroll, some who are proficiently bilingual in Spanish and English, and others who have just begun learning English.

As in two-way bilingual education, all students in the one-way model are expected to serve as equal partners in the learning process. Thus students proficient in English serve as peer experts when math is conducted in English. Likewise, Spanish-proficient peers serve as the experts in social studies instruction in Spanish. Everyone is working on ongoing, developmental acquisition of each language through meaningful academic content.

An important principle for all DBE programs is that students learn together for all or most of the school day, regardless of their proficiency in the language of instruction. Research clearly demonstrates that same-age peers stimulate the language acquisition process and increase the cognitive complexity of interactions (Collier, 1995; Ovando & Collier, 1998; Panfil, 1995).

DBE programs also promote bilingualism by valuing both languages equally. They demonstrate this principle through increasing the number of bilingual school staff and through the bilingual/bicultural school curriculum and support services. Students learn the value of their language for their own cognitive growth and future work.

## **A Long-Term, Across-the-Board Approach**

Most DBE programs initially begin in kindergarten and add one grade each year. Programs provide bilingual/bicultural instruction throughout the elementary school years and, when possible, continue in middle and high school through provision of thematic courses or mainstream subjects taught in the community language for academic credit, as well as academic curricular courses taught in English.

In cost-effective models, two teachers share two classes by teaming, with each teacher using only one instructional language. The languages alternate daily or weekly, or according to subject area or theme or time of day. Separating the two languages maximizes the building of academic proficiency in each. The teachers do not repeat or translate a lesson when the class shifts from one language to the other, but a spiraling curriculum allows the reinforcement of concepts in each language over time. If a teacher is fully proficient in using both languages for

all curricular subjects, teaming may not be needed.

DBE teachers use cooperative learning, thematic interdisciplinary units, hands-on materials, and such technology as video and computers. Materials and books present a cross-cultural perspective, and lessons activate students' prior knowledge for bridging to new knowledge. DBE classes for older students include problem posing, knowledge gathering, reflective thinking, and collaborative decision making. The classes teach both languages through meaningful, cognitively challenging academic content across the full mainstream curriculum.

Teachers devise meaningful, ongoing assessment in each instructional language, using multiple measures. Teachers use everyday activities to keep records of students' developing language and content knowledge, including occasional audio and video recordings of students at work, and furnish constant feedback to individual students on their reading and writing acquisition in each language. At appropriate intervals, teachers administer standardized tests in both languages to measure long-term group progress across time, using the tests in English to document the long-term closing of the achievement gap with native English speakers.

In this type of enrichment program, active parent-school partnerships build on "funds of knowledge" in the community (Moll & González, 1997). Instead of perceiving the home and the community as barriers to learning, the school uses the community as a wealth of resources to create a meaningful bicultural curriculum. For example, working-class parents who are experts in building codes, appraising, renting, selling, budgets, carpentry, roofing, and masonry can share their knowledge and skills with 6th graders working on a unit on construction, incorporating objectives in math, language arts, physics, and social studies (Moll, 1992).

Finally, an essential feature for success is that school administrators must advocate for the program, educate the whole community about the program, provide ongoing staff development and teacher planning time, provide for evaluating program effectiveness, and commit to ongoing improvement.

## **The Current Situation**

Is this type of program common in U.S. schools? Not yet. But each year more schools in varied contexts throughout the United States decide to implement either one-way or two-way bilingual enrichment classes.

Currently ESL pullout—the least effective and the most costly model—remains the most common type of program for English language learners in the United States. ESL pullout is expensive because it requires extra ESL resource teachers (Crawford, 1997). It is less effective because students miss important academic subjects while they attend ESL class; articulation with the mainstream teachers who send their students to ESL is difficult to maintain; and students have no access to primary language schooling to keep up with grade-level academic work while learning English (Ovando & Collier, 1998).

The growing research base on long-term outcomes clearly demonstrates that ESL pullout is the least effective model, whereas DBE is the most effective (Collier, 1992; Thomas & Collier, 1997). DBE graduates are successful in both English acquisition and full curricular mastery, outperforming native English speakers on standardized tests.

## **Making the Transition**

So what can schools using the ESL pullout model do to improve their programs? Perhaps DBE seems out of reach for your school right now, for whatever reasons. But why not take reasonable steps to gradually move from remedial to enrichment models (Brisk, 1998)?

A first step is to shift from ESL pullout to ESL content classes (sometimes labeled "sheltered instruction"). When beginning English learners receive access simultaneously to both the English language and academic content—math, science, and social studies—taught by an ESL teacher who understands the second language acquisition process, or team-taught by ESL and content specialists, their long-term academic achievement is much higher by the end of schooling than that of students who received only ESL pullout. This shift to ESL content will

close almost half the achievement gap. For all program models, language taught through academic content is essential for accelerated learning (Ovando & Collier, 1998).

The next step is to add academic work through the primary language. Schools that have well-implemented transitional bilingual education (TBE) raise their English learners' long-term achievement to a still higher level than the achievement gained in ESL content programs that do not provide primary language support. Transitional bilingual programs that use current approaches to teaching with cooperative learning, hands-on materials, and thematic interdisciplinary units (described in the DBE implementation section above) typically provide three to four years (grades K through 3) of academic instruction through students' primary language, as well as ESL content for half the instructional time.

Finally, gradually transform that transitional bilingual program into a well-implemented enrichment model. Think of the steps that you need to take and keep making steady progress. In developmental bilingual programs, cognitive development continues nonstop as students work hard on grade-level material and build full academic proficiency in the two languages. A respectful, caring, and empowering bicultural environment provides sociocultural support. There is no "exit" from an enrichment program. It is the mainstream curriculum.

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*Authors' note:* for more information and research findings on DBE and other program models in bilingual/ESL education, visit the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence's Web site ([www.crede.ucsc.edu](http://www.crede.ucsc.edu)). Project 1.1 (Thomas & Collier) addresses distinguishing curricular features of programs and the long-term academic achievement of English language learners who attended these programs.

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