

**From Remediation to Enrichment:  
Transforming Texas Schools through Dual Language Education**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article focuses on the major contrasts between transitional bilingual schooling and dual language education, showing that remedial forms of transitional bilingual classes can be transformed into quality, enrichment dual language classes, with the same instructional personnel and resources. The following characteristics are discussed: one- and two-way dual language models, segregation or integration with the mainstream, length of the program, alternation of the two languages, additive and integrated versus subtractive and isolating, and 90:10 and 50:50 models. The article concludes with a brief overview of two major concepts from theory and research in our field that inform these two bilingual models of schooling.

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### **The State of the Art in Transitional Bilingual Education**

Texas state regulations based on state legislation currently specify that the “default” program for English learners is transitional bilingual education when there are enough speakers of one language group (for example, at least 20 Spanish speakers in one grade level) for the hiring of a bilingual teacher to be practically feasible. Transitional bilingual schooling has been around since the late 1960s, when this form of bilingual schooling was developed and funded through both federal and state legislation passed in many states across the United States. Texas bilingual educators are therefore very familiar with this form of schooling through two languages, having experienced various versions of it for almost a half-century.

Transitional bilingual education has been studied from many points of view. Studies have examined, for example, bilingual teacher preparation, student-teacher interaction in bilingual classes, patterns in use of the two languages of instruction, literacy development across the two languages, sociolinguistic and sociocultural consequences of program participation, and comparisons with English-only and other instructional programs, including comparisons of student outcomes under different program types

Instructional practices in transitional bilingual classes have improved over time, with the same reforms that pervaded general teacher education of the 1990s being applied to this program model. For instance, staff development and pre-service teacher preparation have led to an increase in bilingual teachers’ use of cooperative learning and discovery approaches, moving away from a transmission model and into constructivist approaches, which in general led to improved student achievement across the curriculum during the 1990s.

So how are we doing? Not as well as we should be, given the tremendous amount of energy, resources, funding and analyses invested in this program called “transitional bilingual education” (TBE). The United States is among the few countries of the world that have experimented with this program model; yet the experiment leaves a lot to be desired. Yes, the academic achievement results have indeed shown that students who receive transitional bilingual classes achieve at a level higher than students who receive English-only instruction, where less than half the gap is closed. TBE closes slightly more than half of the academic achievement gap with native-English speakers who are on grade level. In fact, those who receive an improved form of TBE, in which teachers are using constructivist approaches with cooperative learning as a vehicle for interactive peer-teaching, and in which students attend these classes for at least four-five years (rather than the more traditional form of two-three years), can improve their scores to

close two-thirds of the academic achievement gap when tested across the curriculum in English (Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002). Is that educational equity? We don't think so!

What's wrong with this picture? Since neither English-only nor TBE programs are fully closing the achievement gap, what can we do to change what's happening in schools? Bilingual educators are constantly bombarded with pressures from administrators, school board members, the community, and sometimes fellow teachers to switch to English-only instruction as the "best and quickest way" to help our English learners reach grade-level achievement in English. This approach seems "logical" to non-bilingual educators. And current high-stakes testing pressures do not make things any easier. But as many faithful and tireless bilingual educators have correctly and adamantly stated, **ENGLISH-ONLY INSTRUCTION DOES NOT CLOSE EVEN HALF OF THE GAP IN THE LONG-TERM** (Lindholm-Leary, 2000, 2005; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005; Slavin & Cheung, 2003; Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002). English-only may lead to transitory, short-term gains in some cases. But ESL graduates do not typically maintain those gains, and it is the long term that really matters!

### **Transitioning into Dual Language Education**

What can we do to change existing transitional bilingual programs to make them more effective? The solutions presented herein make operational sense, and school administrators like them. There is a natural administrative transition from traditional TBE to one-way dual language education (DLE) (in which mostly English learners are enrolled). Making this transition does not disrupt both teachers and students by jumping onto a new bandwagon. Rather, it is taking the existing program and using existing teaching staff to improve the program's quality.

Dual language programs address the central problem—closing the second half of the achievement gap, which is much more difficult to close than the first half. And dual language instruction is the only program, bilingual or English-only, that closes the second half of the gap. When an improved and sustained TBE program focuses on cognitive and academic development through students' primary language as the important first step, the gap never happens! English learners need to achieve at or above grade level in the language in which they are the most cognitively developed and therefore the most efficient learners. With primary language schooling provided for at least half of each instructional year, we can have confidence that as English is added to the curriculum through meaningful and challenging academic content, English learners will with time reach **AND MAINTAIN** grade-level achievement in both English and their primary language. Full gap closure is assured, and all students are thus guaranteed educational equity!

### **Student Demographics: Two-way Dual Language Education**

So, step by step, let's walk through transforming a remedial TBE program into an enrichment DLE program. The first question typically asked by teachers in Texas concerns the demographics of the classes being served. Many bilingual educators have gotten the impression that dual language classes can only be implemented when the school has a mix of native-English speakers and native-Spanish speakers; this is not true. Two-way models of dual language (two language groups being schooled in an integrated program through their two home languages) do include native-English speakers whose parents choose to enroll their children in the bilingual classes. But there is another alternative when native-English speakers are few in number in a school or school district, or they prefer not to enroll in the dual language classes.

### **Student Demographics: One-way Dual Language Education**

Dual language is equally effective in its one-way form, found in a context where almost no students are fully proficient in English when they begin school, or where students are mostly of one ethnolinguistic background. South and West Texas school districts, especially along the border with Mexico, typically enroll mostly students of Mexican heritage. Many of these students are more proficient in Spanish than English when they enter school. These schools are one-way dual language demographic contexts (one ethnolinguistic group—e.g., Mexican Americans—being schooled through their two community languages). DLE classes have great potential for helping all students reach grade level achievement in English and Spanish, when the schools develop quality, enrichment, one-way DLE programs.

One-way is no different than two-way, other than the demographic mix of the students attending the bilingual classes. So having native-English speakers in the bilingual classes is NOT essential to the dual language model. But if some students of Mexican heritage are initially classified as more fluent in English than in Spanish, they can also benefit greatly from enrichment instruction through the two languages, leading to high academic achievement of all students. When dual language is a whole-school model, whether one-way or two-way, this transformation can become one of the most powerful reforms for schools of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

With time, these schools become perceived as schools for the gifted because of the high academic achievement of the students, even when these schools are serving mostly students of very low socioeconomic background. This enrichment model of bilingual schooling has been shown to overcome the negative influence of poverty on test scores, which in the past has been the most powerful variable influencing student achievement (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

### **Segregation or Integration with the Mainstream**

Transitional bilingual classes were developed as a separate instructional program to serve students who are not yet proficient in English. TBE students are allowed to work on academic content through their primary language for a portion of the school day, and

they receive English as a second language (ESL) through academic content for a portion of each school day. But the goal of the program is to move them into all-English instruction as soon as possible. Regular assessments determine when they have acquired enough English to move into “the mainstream,” where all the other students are located. Note that they may be only minimally prepared to enter the mainstream because TBE programs close only about half of the achievement gap with native-English speakers.

This segregation of TBE classes has led to the perception that they are remedial classes for students who are not doing well in school, and both staff and students sense this social “stigma.” They recognize that TBE students are perceived as low-achieving. The same social stigma is often felt in ESL classes, and students assigned to both TBE and ESL classes prefer to escape their placement or learn to lower their expectations for themselves. They sense that it is a remedial class, cognitively slow down in comparison to the mainstream. TBE/ESL teachers tend to provide “watered down” instruction, to accommodate new arrivals with missed years of schooling, especially with older students. Typical placement in TBE/ESL is 2-3 years; some higher quality TBE programs keep students for 4-5 years before placing them in the English mainstream.

In contrast, dual language education IS the mainstream, taught through two languages. Because of this and because DLE bilingual classes are not remedial, “special” programs, they have no exit. Students commit to receiving schooling through the two languages throughout their schooling, or at least for as many years as the school system can provide.

How can school systems accomplish this? Schools starting a dual language program typically take one year to design a plan for Grades PK-5, including beginning talks with the feeder middle and high schools for eventual PK-12 classes. Then, following the planning year, only the early grades begin the program, perhaps PK, sometimes only K if there is no preschool, or K-1. And with each succeeding year, one additional grade level is added until the program runs throughout the elementary school grades, followed eventually by a continuation of the program in middle and high school.

### **Length of the Program**

To reach grade-level achievement in second language, it is crucial that all students receive A MINIMUM OF SIX YEARS of high quality, grade-level, cognitively challenging academic work through the two languages. For ONE-WAY contexts with very few English-proficient students, it is crucial that all students receive a minimum of EIGHT YEARS of dual language education (Lindholm-Leary, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002). At the end of this article, we will explain why so much time is necessary.

### **Alternation of the Two Languages: Monolingual Lesson Delivery in DLE**

Another major difference between TBE and DLE is the pattern of alternation allowed between the two languages used for instructional purposes. In dual language

classes, keeping the two languages separate--using only one language in a given instructional session--is non-negotiable. This characteristic of DLE is based on the research from TBE. When examining the patterns of language use that emerged in TBE classes, researchers have encountered a myriad of variations—such as immediate translation, teachers’ constant use of code-switching, repetition of the same material in both languages, inconsistency in which language is being used, and other alternations driven by the social context in the classroom. Teacher educators have worked on helping bilingual teachers to explicitly plan language alternation so that lessons are more consistent and purposeful in their switches between the two languages (Milk, 1986). Interestingly, most of the TBE classroom research has demonstrated that the majority of the switches are to English, the dominant language of the U.S. and the language with higher status, resulting in less cognitive and academic development in students’ primary language. But formal schooling through primary language is the KEY to academic success in second language!

When language alternation occurs in the bilingual classroom with no explicit purpose for the switches, students soon learn to tune out the language that they know less well. Why bother to pay attention, when eventually the material will be repeated in their more familiar language? This duplication reduces available instructional time. It is equivalent to receiving a half-day of school in a poor country, because of overcrowded conditions and limited resources. Certainly the repetition of lessons slows down students’ cognitive and academic growth and gives students the message that they are slow learners.

Dual language enrichment classes resolve this complex issue BY TEACHING DIFFERENT CURRICULAR MATERIAL IN EACH LANGUAGE. As teachers plan together the curriculum for each grade level, they make decisions regarding language alternation by choosing what will be taught in English and what will be taught in Spanish (or Vietnamese, Arabic, Mandarin Chinese--whatever the primary language of the students—we use Spanish as an example throughout this article). Possibilities include alternation by time of day, day, half-week, or week. The alternation can be by thematic units or by subjects. Alternating can occur with one teacher who is academically proficient in both languages responsible for the curriculum to be taught in the two languages; or by team teaching, where two teachers are assigned two classes that alternate between the two teachers, with one teacher teaching only in Spanish and the other teacher teaching only in English. With explicit planning, both languages get the maximum instructional time needed for students to stay on grade level in L1 AND completely close the gap in L2.

DLE teachers understand that the concepts of NO TRANSLATION AND NO REPETITION OF LESSONS IN THE OTHER LANGUAGE are important principles of enrichment bilingual classes. Students who enroll in DLE classes are informed that they will have to pay close attention during the Spanish instruction, because these lessons will not be repeated in English, and the same is true during English instruction. Lessons should interconnect across the two languages, through spiraling into increasingly cognitively complex material that builds on the initial concepts, and through thematic

units that unite the work in both languages. Eventually and with appropriate instructional planning across several grade levels, students will have experienced all subject areas in each language.

Some schools choose to alternate equally—e.g., if math is taught in Spanish this year, next year students will receive math in English; or if English is the morning language in the fall semester, then Spanish is the morning language in the spring semester. However, the Gomez and Gomez DLE model (2006) separates the two languages by subjects, with math taught in English and social studies and science taught through Spanish throughout Grades PK-5. However, students get experiences through both L1 and L2 in those three subjects, alternating the language of the day, through bilingual learning centers and L1/L2 conceptual refinement and content support, and through specials (P.E., sustained silent reading, music, art, computer lab, and library). This model has worked especially well in South Texas and is now being implemented in other regions of Texas and other states of the U.S.

How about code-switching? Teachers who have grown up in code-switching communities (including most of the State of Texas) want to understand why their regional variety of bilingualism appears not to be validated by the dual language enrichment model. Code-switching is indeed an important and rich use of the two languages and occurs naturally among bilinguals in any region where two languages come into contact. Switching from one language to the other has purpose, such as serving as an identity marker, or because the other language says it better.

When older students have become deeply proficient in their two languages, a very meaningful thematic unit exploring uses of code-switching in the community is a fascinating linguistic exercise for teachers and students, usually leading to a deeper understanding of language use in varied social contexts. It is indeed important to formally acknowledge and affirm patterns of code-switching in the community. One way this can be done in the DLE classroom is to explicitly discuss code-switching with students and then acknowledge the relevance of natural uses of code-switching in social settings in the school and the community. Overall, the rationale for keeping the two languages separate during the instructional time is to help students develop very strong academic proficiency in each language.

### **Nature of the Program: Additive and Integrated vs. Subtractive and Isolating**

Transitional bilingual classes tend to be isolated from the mainstream. They are designed for English learners to get access to the curriculum through their primary language, and for them to receive ESL instruction through the curriculum, in a self-contained classroom, separate from native-English speakers. This strategy has been well-intentioned over the decades of TBE implementation. However, as a result, students in TBE classes have tended to be perceived as slow learners, separated for remedial instruction because they cannot succeed in a mainstream class. This social stigma is hard to overcome, and students soon sense this “distance” present in their social settings in

school. Some begin to perform like slow learners—a self-fulfilling prophecy created by their isolation.

Dual language classes are the mainstream (in this region, in these schools, in Texas?—certainly not across the U.S.). Students attending these classes are thrilled that they are enrolled in the “gifted” program, as it is perceived by students and staff. They know that being schooled through two languages is very hard work—much more complex than monolingual schooling—and they rise to the task at hand, excelling academically and cognitively as they make the leaps in learning. They take much more seriously the process of acquiring two languages, because they know that they have to continue to excel academically in both languages, throughout Grades K-12. They are aware that when they graduate from high school, they will be fully equivalent to monolingually-educated native-English speakers. In addition, they will have many more advantages in the professional world because they are gifted bilinguals.

Furthermore, DLE classes transform the context of bilingual schooling from subtractive to additive bilingualism (Lambert, 1975). In a subtractive context, lack of societal support for a minority language leads to gradual loss of that language. In TBE classes, social pressures are placed on students to eradicate use of their first language as soon as possible. Students who lose their first language at too young an age risk interrupting their cognitive development, which must continue in primary language through age 12, to assure full cognitive development. In contrast, DLE creates an additive bilingual context, where students acquire their second language at no cost to their primary language or to cognitive development (Baker, 2006; Collier & Thomas, 2006). Proficient additive bilinguals typically outscore monolinguals on all types of tests. Students around the world who have been through the process of additive bilingualism, developed in school, are the high achievers of this planet (Baker, 2006; Collier, 1992).

### **An Implementation Decision: 90:10 or 50:50?**

Does it make a difference whether you choose to start the program in Grades PK, with 90 percent of the initial instruction in the MINORITY language (e.g., Spanish), gradually increasing English instructional time until the two languages receive equal time by fourth grade? The answer from the research is yes, the 90:10 model is more efficient and more effective! Studies (Collier & Thomas, 2004; Lindholm-Leary, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 2002) have clearly demonstrated that students can reach higher achievement in L2 in a shorter time when attending the 90:10 model. But in Texas, sometimes the 50:50 model is easier to sell politically (50 percent of the instructional time in each language, Grades K-12). Both DLE models (90:10 and 50:50) are highly effective in the long term. Houston Independent School District chose the 90:10 model for their TBE and DBE classes, and it works very, very well for their students. English learners fully close the gap in English, and native-English speaking participants in the two-way classes outscore their monolingually educated peers (Thomas & Collier, 2002).



## Research-based Concepts for TBE and DLE

So how come it (can't tell what "it" refers to.) takes so long? How could it be that dual language education is so superior to transitional bilingual schooling? Why doesn't English-only work better than either TBE or DLE?

The key to understanding why it (can't tell what "it" refers to.) takes so long is based on two concepts from the theory and research that informs our field. Cognitive and academic development is taking place all through the school years. Cognitive development is a natural, subconscious, developmental process that occurs through stimulation of a child's mental processing, by interacting with the child's immediate social environment, using the language the child knows best. At home, cognitive development is stimulated by parents, siblings, and other family members through problem-solving together at home for basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, shelter), emotional support, and lifelong learning together to carry out basic responsibilities. This is best done through the language (or languages) in which the parents and family are cognitively mature. When children get nonstop cognitive development until age 12 through the language (or languages) in which they were nursed, they will reach full cognitive maturity. Since children of ages 5-12 spend quite a few hours of each day attending school, when the school helps students develop cognitively through both their home language and their second language, they receive nonstop cognitive development, which assists with the process of high academic achievement (Baker, 2006; Collier & Thomas, 2006; Ovando, Comb, & Collier, 2006). On the other hand, students in TBE programs may experience cognitive and academic "slowdown" while they are losing L1 and gaining English. The achievement gap eventually seen in test score comparisons starts here.

The second concept is that the native-English speaking group (against whom English learners are competing in Texas schools) is a moving target! They are not sitting around waiting for the English learners to catch up with them. Every school year, they make another ten months of academic gain in all curricular subjects, on average. The English learners have to make more than one year's progress every year, for at least six years in a row, to catch up to this moving target when tested in English. And the academic work gets more and more complex with each year of school. This means that English learners must be as cognitively and academically advanced as the comparable native-English speakers, or cognitive and academic gaps will appear, leading to lower test scores for English learners with each school year.

But when English learners receive instruction through their primary language, they can catch up and keep up with academic work (making that ten months of progress each year) AND the English instructional time helps them to acquire their second language and stimulates cognitive development as well. Instruction through both languages allows students to make more than one year's progress—accelerating students' growth. Each year they gain more than typical native-English speakers gain. After six years of academic work through both languages, students in a high quality dual language program can reach grade-level achievement in their second language and stay on grade

level through the remainder of their schooling (Collier & Thomas, 2004; Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002).

Understanding the importance of nonstop cognitive development through primary language and the length of time it takes to catch up for any student group initially performing below grade level when the tests are given in English are the two major theoretical concepts underpinning the success of dual language schooling. Why not enrich your bilingual schooling for English learners, and, once you are fully meeting the needs of English learners, expand the program to meet the needs of all students who want to enroll? It's a win-win for all!

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