

Running Head: DUAL LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

Dual Language Programs: A Look into an Emerging Approach  
to Learn Two Languages Simultaneously

Morgan Jacquette

Aurora University

Dual Language Programs: A Look into an Emerging Approach  
to Learn Two Languages Simultaneously

It is evident that as a country, the United States has become a multilingual nation. The melding of cultures along with the constant flow of immigration has allowed America to become a melting pot society. While the majority language spoken in the United States is English, there are many children and adults who speak a minority language. Elementary schools have used bilingual programs to help transition minority speakers into speaking the majority language of English. In these programs, only minority language speakers are taught. The purpose of the program is to transition them into learning in English, rather than helping them become competent in both the minority and majority languages. There is an emerging alternative program for teaching two languages simultaneously: dual language programs.

According to Tara Fortune (2010) from the Center for Applied Linguistics, dual language programs usually begin in kindergarten and continue until students reach the middle school level. The students in the program are taught in the minority and majority languages. For example, in an area with a heavy Hispanic population, there are many students who speak Spanish at home. Spanish would be considered the minority language. There would also be many students who speak English at home. English would usually always be considered the majority language in dual language programs. In dual language programs there is a mix of students, usually half and half, that speak the minority language or majority language at home. These students learn together in the same class. They spend half the day learning in the majority language and the other half in the minority language. Within this integrated classroom, students are encouraged and given ample opportunity to work collaboratively.

Additionally, this collaboration is also seen in the way dual language teachers interact with each other. According to Carrera-Carrilla (2006), dual language classrooms are taught by partner teachers. These teachers each have their own classrooms. While each teacher should be able to speak each language fluently, they teach only in one language. There are generally two classrooms per grade level. The teachers switch the students half way through the day. They collaborate with each other in planning lessons, thematic units, classroom set-up, and behavior management procedures, but they teach in one language by themselves.

Meanwhile, Carrera-Carrilla (2006) states that are seven steps that need to be taken in order for there to be success in a dual language immersion program. These seven steps are: 1. Giving instructors the information they need in order to fully understand what a dual language program is, so that they can plan lessons that promote both language acquisition and literacy skills. 2. Organizing the classroom to create a properly prepared environment. 3. Collaboration between partner teachers and grade-level teachers. 4. Teaching through best practice. 5. Learning through hands-on activities. 6. Assessing as a way to better instruction and accountability. 7. Building community support. These seven steps are a framework that is crucial to the success of dual language programs.

Before beginning a dual language program, teachers and other staff members need to fully understand what the program entails. Carrera-Carrilla (2006) recommends that there be one year of planning, preparing, and course training prior to beginning the program. Teachers need to learn about the theoretical framework of the program so that they can understand what makes it beneficial. In this one year training, teachers also learn strategies to enhance language acquisition and literacy skills. Teachers also begin to collaborate with their partner teachers so that they can learn to work cohesively as a team.

Moreover, partner teachers need to organize their classrooms as well. Carrera-Carrilla (2006) states that the classrooms of the partner teachers need to look identical. Since students are switching classrooms midday, it is helpful for the classrooms to be set up and decorated the same way. This helps makes the transition between teachers and classrooms run smoothly. Within each classroom, there is a “magic rug” where whole group lessons are taught. The desks are arranged in groups so that students are encouraged to work together and interact with the languages they are learning. Partner teachers establish rituals in their classrooms. This allows transitions between lessons to run smoothly so that unnecessary time is not wasted redirecting student behavior. The students know what is expected of them and it is constantly reviewed. Partner teachers need to create the same type of consistency in each classroom.

As stated before, the partner teachers for each grade create thematic units and lessons together. They choose science and social studies topics, and integrate them into reading, math, writing, and technology lessons. Students are learning about a variety of academic subjects in both languages. This helps them to learn useful vocabulary and gives them the opportunity to use both languages in meaningful and educational ways. The collaboration between the partner teachers becomes an example to students about how they should be working together. Children often look up to their teachers, and should see positive behaviors (Carrera-Carrilla 2006).

Additionally, another step to a successful dual language program is the instructional strategies used for language acquisition. Carrera-Carrilla (2006) states that teachers should encourage students to learn from one another. This can be done through the use of debates, presentations, and discussions. This gives the students the opportunity to use their academic vocabulary in both languages and interact with each other as well. Teachers also need to give students the opportunity to obtain information on their own. They should be able to analyze,

synthesize, and evaluate information individually and collaboratively. In dual language programs, classrooms are student directed.

Moreover, hands-on learning is always present in dual language programs. Through the use of content based learning centers, students use academic vocabulary while using manipulatives to practice concepts they have learned. The teacher meets with a guided reading group while the rest of the students circulate around the room completing centers. Guided reading groups are made up of students of the same academic level, while center groups are made up of mixed abilities so that students learn from each other through collaboration (Carrera-Carrilla 2006).

In addition, the use of hands-on learning allows students to converse with each other. According to Cloud (2000):

The development of advanced levels of language competence, in a primary or second language, is most successful when it occurs in conjunction with meaningful, important, and authentic communication. In the school setting, this can be communication about academic subjects. Thus, including second languages not only as subjects of study but also as vehicles for teaching and learning other academic subjects is a logical and effective way of extending students' language competence (p. 2).

The hands-on learning incorporated in dual language programs allows students to learn academic language in both languages, and use that vocabulary with other students in meaningful contexts.

Meanwhile, teachers need to use assessment to better dual language programs, and augment the learning of their students. According to Carrera-Carrilla (2006), dual language teachers need to use authentic assessments. These include observations of students while they are working at stations or at their seat. A teacher should be able to tell from the behavior of a student

if the academic work is too easy or hard for them. Using observation or discussion as a form of assessment allows the teacher to see what a student is able to do or what he or she knows.

Teachers can use assessment to see the growth of a student over time. It is also used to see which students need additional practice with concepts.

Most importantly, the final step for a successful program is community support. Without this, a dual language program cannot thrive. Teachers can involve the community in their classroom by having guest speakers and taking their students on field trips to community events. Parental support is also important for dual language programs to survive. Students need to feel that their parents value their education. Teachers can involve parents by sending a letter every time a new unit is started so that they know what their student is learning in school. Parents will feel informed and included in their child's education. Administrative support is given to dual language programs through the resources that the school board provides to the programs. Competent teachers need to be hired so that students are taught by professionals who have command for both the languages being taught, as well as the academics being taught. Last of all, the students are an important factor. Students need to desire to be in a dual language program. If a student is opposed to it, they may not work to their full potential. They may have an attitude that brings down other students. Dual language classrooms are student directed, and students need to want to be there (Carrera-Carrillo 2006).

Meanwhile, there are many benefits to be reaped from learning two languages. According to Cloud (2000), these benefits are educational, cognitive, socio-cultural, and economic. The educational benefits of learning two languages are imperative. According to Cloud (2000), "language plays a dual role in education. It is both a prerequisite to successful education, and it is an important outcome of successful education" (1). By participating in dual language programs,

students create a foundation of both languages. They build a strong foundation of literacy skills in their native language, whether it is the minority or majority language. This leads to a strong foundation of literacy skills in their second language. Students spend so much time thinking about the different sounds that make up words, and how those words are used to form sentences in both languages. Once students have a strong base with both languages, they can begin to learn greater academic vocabulary because they can use the skills obtained from learning two languages.

Consequently, there are cognitive benefits from learning two languages as well. Cloud (2000) states that bilingual students have better use of divergent thinking, pattern recognition, and problem solving skills. Bilingual students are able to look at and think about concepts in a variety of different ways. They have experienced firsthand the differences between two languages and understand that some questions can have many different answers, or many different ways to achieve an answer. They can use their divergent thinking skills to rapidly think about a variety of ways to solve a problem.

Meanwhile, there are also cultural benefits to learning two languages in a dual language setting. According to Cloud (2000), “effective communication requires more than simply knowing a linguistic code. It requires knowing how to use the code in socially and culturally appropriate and meaningful ways; that is to say, it requires cultural competence as well” (2). When learning their first language, their native language, children usually acquire natural cultural tendencies. They are immersed in their culture and learn the ins and outs of what is socially correct. When children, or any person, are learning their second language, they are generally learning only the language, not the culture that is connected to that language. There can often times be a disconnect in fully understanding what someone is saying. People may not

understand why a word was used or how body language can change the meaning of a spoken word. In dual language programs, this is not the case. In these programs, students are learning another cultural code.

Moreover, in a dual language setting, students become bicultural. According to Freeman (2005), they have a cross-cultural understanding. Students obtain a greater tolerance for other people because they begin to understand the differences between different people. They may have encountered these differences when working with their classmates, but through collaborating on projects or activities they found a way to understand each other. Before becoming bicultural, students may have looked at each other and thought “you’re different and I don’t understand you.” After becoming bicultural, they can now look at each other and think “you’re different than me, but I understand why you say and do some things now.” They can learn to work together to solve problems that may otherwise have escalated due to cultural differences.

Similarly, learning two languages also has economic benefits. As this nation continues to grow as a multilingual nation, there is going to be a higher demand for people who speak more than one language (Cloud 2000). When students who have participated in dual language programs are old enough to join the work force, knowing a second language, and culture, will help put them a step above the rest. They will be a valuable asset to any company or enterprise that needs people to interact with others who have different cultural beliefs.

All in all, dual language programs provide an opportunity for students to receive an academic education while learning a language other than their native language at the same time. Dual language programs promote learning through collaboration. According to Genesee (1998), students learn through social interaction. Dual language programs provide social interaction

while students use both the minority and the majority language at the same time to learn academic concepts. The earlier children learn to speak a language, the more native-like they will sound. Dual language programs provide students with a well rounded education as well as the opportunity to become bilingual.

Reference List

- Carrera-Carrillo, L. (2006). *7 steps to success in dual language immersion: A brief guide for teachers & administrators*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Cloud, N. (2000). *Dual language instruction: A handbook for enriched education*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Fortune, T. (August, 2003). *What Parents Want to Know About Foreign Language Immersion Programs*. Retrieved April 5, 2010 from the CAL website:  
<http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/0304fortune.html>
- Freeman, Y. (2005). *Dual language essentials for teachers and administrators*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Genesee, F., & Cloud, N. (1998). Multilingualism is basic. *Educational Leadership*, 55(6), 62.  
Retrieved from Professional Development Collection database.