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**Dual Language: The Most Effective Instructional Program for ELLs**

**Introduction**

The effectiveness of Bilingual Education has long been substantiated through extensive empirical research. One common element found in all successful instructional programs for English Language Learner’s (ELLs) school achievement is extensive and sustained cognitive and academic development of the first language. Successful programs continue to demonstrate that the route to “academic English,” long-term school achievement in English and closure of the achievement gap is through strong “enriched” schooling in the first language and English.

To effectively educate ELLs, you must provide first language instruction while simultaneously developing English skills and then facilitate transfer of these skills to English. It is an understanding of “cognitive and linguistic transfer” that is a fundamental principle of enrichment bilingual programs. Cognitive and linguistic transfer is an understanding that knowledge, skills and cognitive development occurs in any language and easily transfers to a second language. However, the initial development of this knowledge and skills is best and more readily developed in the first language and then transferred to the second language.

Although instruction in Spanish (first language) appears counter-intuitive to English language acquisition, it is essential because it is focused on academic content learning and cognitive development that allows them to keep up academically and cognitively with native English speakers (who are also learning in their first language). When the emphasis is on English (second language), students learn English, but fall behind academically and cognitively since they do not fully understand the instruction being delivered in the second language. Therefore, through instructional programs such as Dual Language Enrichment (DL), where ELL students continue first language and English instruction through at least 5th grade, there is greater long-term academic and cognitive success. Overwhelming studies continue to show that early-exit transitional bilingual education (TBE), ESL, or English-only programs are the least effective for ELLs since they provide limited or no native language instruction at all.

**The Concept of Transfer**

Understanding academic and cognitive transfer is a fundamental principle of bilingual education and dual language enrichment programs. It is an understanding that knowledge, skills and cognitive development occurs in any language (native language) and easily transfers to a second language. However, the initial development of this knowledge and skills is best and more easily and readily developed in the first language and then transferred to the second language. In other words, you only learn a science or reading concept one time in Spanish and transfer the concept to English. DL stresses the importance of ELLs learning content areas and reading in their first language (knowledge and skills), while at the same time they acquire English language skills learn some content in English. Once the ELL students are educated and on-grade level academically, cognitively and linguistically in their first language and simultaneously developed academic and linguistic skills in the English language, transfer occurs leading to biliteracy by the end of 5th grade.

**BICS & CALP Language Proficiency**

Another important fundamental concept shared by Cummins (1981) is the recognition that a first or second language develops in stages: 1) Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and 2) Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency (CALP). The distinction between BICS and CALP is critical for quality education for ELLs. The first stage, BICS, is achieving a degree of language proficiency where the individual can carry on a conversation, etc., but it is not sufficient to learn academic content in school. BICS takes approximately 2-3 years to fully master.
The second stage is CALP. CALP is having the academic proficiency in a language necessary to perform academic demands in school, like reading a science or social studies book with comprehension. CALP takes approximately 5-7 years to develop. Successful ELL instructional programs such as DL recognize these two basic principles and therefore provide ELLs with first language instruction for a minimum of five (5) years, and at the same time develop content-based English. However, the central focus of DL programs is full literacy in the first and second language in order to more successfully make a transition to the second language and ensure long-term academic achievement at the middle and high school level. The fastest route to academic English is through the academic development of the first language.

**Effective Instructional Models for ELLs are Enrichment, not Remedial**

Based on the principles outlined above, only enrichment instructional models (i.e. two-way and one-way DL) effectively close the academic achievement gap for ELLs based on long-term standardized assessments. In contrast, remedial models (TBE early-exit or ESL) only partially close the gap (we continue to lose 40-50% at the secondary level through the use of these inferior instructional programs). As reported by Thomas & Collier (2002), in remedial models, once ELLs leave a remedial program and join the curricular mainstream, at best, they make one year’s progress each school year (just as typical first English speakers do), thus maintaining but not further closing the gap. In fact, the gap widens as students move into the academic and cognitive challenge of the secondary years (middle and high school) where former ELLs begin to make less than one year’s progress per year.

Thomas & Collier (2004) explain that remedial programs may only provide ELLs with very important support for one to three years and often offer “watered down” instruction in a “special” curriculum focused on one small step at a time process because the goal is to subtract the first language and thus not develop it. This causes cognitive and linguistic retardation in ELLs because neither their first nor second language are fully developed. In contrast, DL models are programs that not only will instruct ELLs in their first language but will fully develop it through at least the elementary years and develop content-based English with the goal of full biliteracy. These programs are called dual language, two-way models, one-way models, dual language immersion, etc. The principal difference is that these models are additive and enrichment, versus subtractive and remedial, rigorous versus watered down with low expectations. DL programs’ goals are biliteracy and both language groups (Spanish & English…or other language) may participate in this opportunity together or separately.

**Why Dual Language Programs for ELLs?**

The success of DL education has been and continues to be well documented through empirical research over the last 20-30 years (Rolstad, K. Mahoney, & Glass, G. 2005). One-Way and Two-Way DL programs are promising models of instruction for ELLs (and All students) evidenced through gap closure research that demonstrates the long-term success of ELLs. Research in this area has grown with sustained high academic achievement, higher graduation rates, and college readiness. The success of one-way & two-way DL for ELLs is largely due to the following:

1. use of the correct language for learning (first language) and English throughout elementary, and
2. use of “instructional practices” that are academically engaging and rigorous. Dual language programs inherently use enrichment practices typically found in gifted and talented instructional settings.

**Two Types of DL:**

**Two-Way DL:** A DL program with goal of biliteracy (minimum through 5th grade) where BOTH groups (native English speakers and ELLs) participate and learn together. Through biliteracy goal, ELLs continue to do well on English instruction and assessments in middle school & high school with many outperforming native English speakers!

**One-Way DL:** A DL program with goal of biliteracy (minimum through 5th grade) where MAJORITY or ALL students are ELLs (or non-ELLs). Through a biliteracy goal, ELLs continue to do well on English instruction and assessments in middle school & high school with many...
outperforming native English speakers! One-Way DL can be easily adopted by a school district as the official Bilingual Education program for ALL ELLs (from the same language) to receive a quality education and achieve long-term success. In Texas, there are hundreds of school districts today that successfully serve their ELL population through One-Way DL.

**Conclusion**
The most effective way to educate ELLs is through a dual language enrichment model of education. To effectively educate ELLs, you must provide extensive and sustained instruction in their first language (Spanish) while simultaneously developing English skills and then facilitate transfer of these skills from Spanish to English. A One-Way DL program can serve as the official Bilingual Education program in a school district and successfully serve large numbers of ELLs.

**Selected References**

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