

Secondary Dual Language Immersion Programs in Texas

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The success of Spanish/English dual language immersion programs (DLI) at the elementary grades has created a budding demand for their continuity in middle and high school from seventh to twelfth grades. This study examines implementation issues unique to secondary programs in selected public-school districts in the state of Texas. Although there are bureaucratic, financial, and pedagogical concerns, this research also reveals the potential of DLI to revitalize language study at the collegiate level, foster positive intercultural relations, and better prepare students for careers in a global society.

Keywords: Bilingual education, dual language immersion, secondary education, Spanish as a second language, heritage language programs

El éxito de los programas de inmersión (PDI) en dos idiomas (inglés/español) al nivel primario ha creado una naciente demanda para su continuidad a otros niveles escolares. Este estudio examina cuestiones sobre su implementación, afectando en particular a tales programas al nivel secundario del séptimo al decimosegundo grado en distritos escolares públicos seleccionados en el estado de Texas, EUA. Aunque hay preocupaciones burocráticas, financieras, y pedagógicas, esta investigación también revela el potencial de PDI para revitalizar el estudio de idiomas en las universidades, promover relaciones interculturales positivas, y preparar mejor a los estudiantes para carreras globales.

Palabras clave: Educación bilingüe, inmersión en dos idiomas, educación secundaria, español como segundo idioma, programas como lengua de herencia

Texas Demographics

As of the 2010 U.S. Census, 37% of Texas residents claimed Hispanic ancestry, the second largest Hispanic population in the United States, following California (U.S. Census, 2015). The current English language learner (ELL) headcount in Texas is 1,010,168 with 30 percent of those in grades six to twelve (Texas Education Agency, 2017). In 2007, for the first time since the early nineteenth century, Hispanics accounted for more than half of all births (50.2%), while non-Hispanic whites accounted for just 34%. This growth is felt in elementary schools across the state as bilingual teachers and services for Spanish-speaking families has been steadily rising. The increasing size of the population of Spanish-speaking consumers in the state of Texas creates a need for bilingual personnel as evidenced by many internet job websites offering opportunities across a myriad of fields (U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2017).

With the demographics clearly supporting a need for bilingual proficiency in Texas, the time has come for Spanish language educators and advocates of bilingual education to develop more efficient and popular program models to not only teach language skills and provide a job market advantage in a global economy, but to foster positive intercultural relations between non-Hispanic English-dominant Spanish learners, Heritage Spanish speakers and ELLs.

Despite the Hispanic population increase, there has been a steady decline in the number of college students enrolling in Spanish courses across the state. According to the Modern Language Association's (MLA) Language Enrollment Database between 1958-2016, there has been a steady decline in the number of students in community college and four-year institutions of higher education (IHE) enrolling in Spanish courses (MLA, 2018). Thus, the 64,332 such students enrolled in all Texas Institutions of Higher Education in 2009 became 57,074 in 2013 and 51,440 in 2016.

Heritage Language Speakers

Over thirty-five million Hispanics report speaking Spanish at home; however, this number continues to increase with population growth (Krogstad, Stapler & López, 2015). Despite being from a Spanish-speaking family, many heritage speakers cannot claim to be bilingual, biliterate, or competent in Spanish for professional use. According to Chomón Zamora (2013), although Spanish is spoken at home there is a lack of formal language study, sometimes due to negative ethnic attitudes, as well as a preference for rapid assimilation. By the second and third generations, widespread language loss occurs (Beaudrie & Fairclough, Eds., 2012). While the advantages of being bilingual and biliterate are well documented (Callahan & Gándara 2014; Kalist, 2005; Porras, Ee, & Gándara, 2014; U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2017), heritage language students without formal language study are unable to fully benefit. It is apparent that secondary schools can be doing more to attract heritage language students to Spanish courses and academic courses taught *in* Spanish that not only prepare them for college, but for the workforce. With challenging content presented bilingually in mathematics, the sciences, history, and other subjects, heritage students can increase their home language skills to their advantage.

The Promise of Dual Language Immersion

A generally accepted definition of DLI, also referred to as two-way bilingual programs or two-way immersion follows:

A program in which the language goals are full bilingualism and biliteracy in English and a partner language, students study language arts and other academic content (math, science, social studies, arts) in both languages over the course of the program, the partner language is used for at least 50% of instruction at all grades, and the program lasts at least 5 years (preferably K-12). CAL and other institutions use this term as an umbrella term that includes two-way immersion, foreign language immersion,

heritage language immersion, and developmental bilingual programs. Throughout the U.S., it is frequently used synonymously with two-way immersion (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2018).

DLI programs are growing in popularity across the country (American Institute of Research, 2017; Gross, 2016). Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, (2005) published a meta-analysis of research on program effectiveness for ELLs which supported positive effects for bilingual education, including dual language, but these studies focused overwhelmingly on successes and best practices at the elementary level. Literature searches about DLI programs at the secondary level revealed a paucity of research in databases such as: American Institute of Research (AIR), National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, Center for Applied Linguistics, Google and Google Scholar, What Works Clearinghouse, Council of Chief State School Officers, and did not yield any studies of specific relevance.

Nearly three million of the 5,359,127 students enrolled in Texas public schools in 2016-17 were Hispanic (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Because communities seek to benefit from the advantages of being bilingual and biliterate (Callahan & Gándara, 2014) the growth of DLI programs appears inevitable. Texas is an optimal state for examining the practicality and feasibility of dual language immersion at the secondary level. With increased interest at the elementary level on the part of native English speakers to enroll in DLI programs along with their ELL peers, we can increase the numbers of biliterate citizens as well as ensure a higher social status for Spanish-speakers. These converging societal realities and pressures contribute to a closer look at the challenges of implementation of bilingual immersion in middle and high school.

Research Related to Secondary Bilingual Programs

There is a limited research base on dual language programs at the secondary level, verified in March 2017 in an American Institute of Research (AIR) *Report on Best Practices for Dual Language Programs in Secondary Schools*. The report confirmed that, “due to the limited research base, the AIR vetting process yielded a small number of resources on DL programs at the secondary level. Although the research base on the impact of DL programs is growing, most of the studies have focused on the elementary level” (AIR, 2017, p. 2). These studies were primarily concerned with the acquisition of English. A few studies were helpful in contributing to this research in several ways by reinforcing the author’s findings that secondary schools are very different from elementary schools and that there is a need to more fully understand the issues facing secondary programs (Bearse & De Jong, 2008; De Jong & Bearse, 2014; Mentone & Loeb, 2000). Some issues that surfaced in the literature are particularly relevant, namely: Recruitment is often dependent on the number of feeder schools with DLI programs; trained instructors who are certified in a content area and qualified to deliver their courses in a language other than English may suddenly leave the program without

a replacement; and program models do influence second language acquisition and fluency.

Lindholm-Leary, Hardman and Meyer (2007) described a two-way California program, which came the closest to the author's research interests, that encouraged students to participate in dual language education throughout their elementary and secondary schooling. The program supported bilingualism and biliteracy, academic excellence in both Spanish and English, positive cross-cultural relationships and high levels of self-esteem. Another study in Canada (Culligan, 2010) explored student program choice and experiences in a secondary French immersion mathematics program. Students provided their rationale for studying mathematics in English or French. Study results were practical, student-focused, and affirmed the importance of student voices in program development. A study about factors that motivate high school students' decision to study Spanish (Pratt, Agnello, & Santos, 2009) found that ethnicity, home language, and economic benefits influence student choice, reminding program developers that program enrollments are dependent upon the perceived value to students.

Secondary Dual Language Immersion Programs in Texas

In a newsletter published by the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools Lindholm-Leary referenced that the Center for Applied Linguistics reported 77 middle schools and 15 high schools providing instruction in a variety of languages around the country (Lindholm-Leary, 2015). Since then, many more secondary programs have been established; however, obtaining an accurate count of DLI programs in Texas at the secondary level is challenging because they are voluntary programs for which there is no mandate or special funding stream; and, in a highly politicized political environment, dependent upon superintendents', trustees', principals' and public demand, programs may come and go from year to year. For this project, I was able to interview ten secondary and middle school representatives in selected Texas cities with large Hispanic populations and identifiable programs.

The most mature DLI at the secondary level in Texas began over two decades ago in El Paso, a bilingual border city with Mexico, where the need and value of bilingualism can be felt in the everyday life of its inhabitants. The history of the DL program in districts such as El Paso and Ysleta are encouraging as program models for newer DL programs such as those in Dallas, Irving, Houston, and other parts of the state with robust feeder programs at the elementary levels.

Because Texas' secondary DL programs are just beginning to be offered in places with large numbers of students who have successfully completed DL programs in K-6, it is important at this historical moment to learn as much as possible about the characteristics of these programs and their viability for growth.

After receiving research permission from her institution to learn about secondary DL programs in Texas, the author selected ten middle and high schools around the state to ascertain similarities and differences among them with respect to funding,

enrollment requirements, curriculum, teachers, administrative structure, student demographics, and special challenges. She administered a questionnaire with 25 questions (see Appendix).

Findings

Following is a composite of the findings which hopefully will be instructive to districts who might want to undertake such programs. As expected, secondary programs are very sparse and diverse in their design and offerings. Yet the main commonality was that all the programs came about because the parents of children in elementary and middle school DL programs wanted their children to continue into high school. Programs, with few exceptions, do not recruit beyond their own feeder schools and only accept those students who are already bilingual enough to take academic content courses in Spanish. Students who are limited in English are, for the most part, not the target audience of these programs, which are largely enrichment programs leading to a performance acknowledgement (sealofbiliteracy.org/texas), Advanced Placement (AP) credits for college, or other recognition of bilingual academic achievement. Secondly, one of the biggest issues was attracting and retaining qualified personnel. In every instance, finding teachers who are certified in a content area and bilingual enough to teach in Spanish was the most difficult aspect of maintaining program offerings. Most of the teachers, while certified in grades seven through twelve, are not certified as bilingual education teachers as per the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Currently, Chapter 89 of the Texas Education Code (Adaptations for Special Populations, TEC, 2012) addresses the needs of ELLs, but specific policies for voluntary enrichment DL at the secondary level have not been developed. English dominant students who wish to participate are limited to forty percent. Also, newcomers, who lack literacy skills in the home language and English, are not the primary clientele. While some ELLs newcomers could potentially benefit, to earn the Texas performance acknowledgement they must first attain level 3 proficiency in English.

At the time of this study, none of the programs had any special funding nor stipends for their teachers. Most programs do not have a designated paid coordinator. Ensuring that students, also enrolled in selected career clusters under Texas HB5 such as STEM, Humanities, Health, the Arts, can fit their Spanish courses into their schedules so that they can attain AP credits and DL credits is also a major challenge. Another concern is the language of content testing under the State of Texas Academic Assessment Readiness (STAAR) program. While students may take their AP courses in the sciences, social studies, and/or mathematics in Spanish, they will be tested in English. Vocabulary words in the second language may present issues unless the students have adequate exposure to the content concepts and vocabulary in both languages.

Programs do not recruit widely, but rather rely on the counselors of the DL programs at their feeder schools. The curricula vary widely depending upon the

availability of a TEA certified 7-12 content teacher able to teach in Spanish. Access to teachers changes from year to year, making it difficult to stabilize the number and subjects taught in Spanish in a given year. Another issue that surfaced in the interviews was that there is competition within the high schools for these same students. Many students are now also attracted to dual credit Early College programs or career academies that offer more advantages to students and make it more difficult to accommodate the Spanish courses due to scheduling conflicts.

What the Future May Bring

What today appears to be a boutique program for select numbers of students, holds the potential to blossom in different ways. For example, students who are exposed to Spanish in Kindergarten through grade six may be encouraged to enroll in a DLI program in middle and high school. Studying side by side, heritage language students and dominant English-language students will enrich each other's proficiency skills. Similarly, newcomer ELLs could be placed into DL academic courses to assist them to maintain content knowledge while continuing to acquire formal English through specialized English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. They would benefit by having peers who are acquiring their language while they acquire English. The intercultural and linguistic benefits would be magnified many times over for all students.

As such programs develop in middle and high school, the numbers of students continuing to study Spanish (or other international language) should increase in colleges and universities. This will create a pipeline of biliterate graduates for 21st century professions and careers for a global society. High school students graduating with second language proficiency will be ready to acquire specialized content vocabulary in such chosen careers as medicine, education, pharmacy, law, criminal justice, translation and interpretation, and others. It is the author's belief that our U.S. education system should take full advantage of the growing demographic of heritage speakers whose communication skills can systematically be nurtured alongside second language learners for mutual benefit and in the national interest.

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Appendix

Survey Questionnaire

Secondary Dual Language Immersion in Texas

1. How and when did the idea come about for a Dual Language Program at your school?
2. What is the goal of your Program?
3. How are students selected to participate?
4. How many can participate?
5. What are the characteristics of the students (Ethnicity, Socioeconomic status, etc.)?
6. How are students recruited?
 7. To whom do you market your program?
8. Do you have an attrition issues? (Why or why not?)
9. Please describe your curriculum?
10. Which subjects do the students learn in both languages?
11. At what grade do they begin dual language? 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th?
12. How do you staff your program? (Coordinator, counselors, teachers, tutors, etc.).
13. How many teachers do you have?
14. How do you find qualified teachers?
15. From where so you recruit teachers?
16. What percent are bilingually certified by BTLPT?
17. Bilingual Supplement?
18. LOTE?
19. What other Texas certificates do they have?
20. How is your program funded?
21. Under which HB 5 Endorsement do students transfer to HS from Middle School?
22. Which HB 5 endorsement is appropriate for Dual Language program when they must select one for high school?
23. Do students in dual language also get LOTE credits toward fulfilling their two-year High School sequence?
24. Is content assessment for STAAR and other tests in English even if the class is taught in Spanish?
25. Anything else I did not ask that you would like to share?