

Language Revitalization in an Inner-City Latino Community

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This article examines how a dual language immersion program implemented as a result of a collaboration between an urban school district, a liberal arts university, and a corporate partnership has served as a catalyst for revitalizing the minority language in a low income Latino neighborhood located in a large metropolitan area in the Southwest. Research has shown that the transmission of the minority or heritage language in an elementary school context stems minority language loss. For example, Freeman (1996) states that additive bilingual programs, such as Dual Language Immersion, can challenge the trend toward English monolingualism by promoting the heritage language in minority communities. This paper will describe one such program that has challenged the assumptions that students should be placed in programs where early transition into the dominant language is the norm by successfully producing fully bilingual and biliterate students with high levels of academic achievement in both languages and by changing parental perceptions toward native language maintenance.

1. Background

Dual language programs are frequently described as strong forms of bilingual instruction (Baker, 2001) combining the best features of an additive program for English Language Learners (ELL) and effective second language immersion practices for English-dominant students (Christian, 1994; Lindholm (1996). In these programs, students develop dual language proficiency as they receive instruction in English and in another language in classrooms comprised of a mixed student population, usually fifty percent English speakers and fifty percent speakers of the target language (NCRCELL, 1994). Although dual language programs may allocate the time used for language instruction in various ways, the most popular are the 50/50 and the 90/10 model. While the success of the 90/10 model, has been documented, (e.g., Lindholm 1996; Lindholm and Molina, 1997; Christian, Montone, Lindholm & Carranza, 1996) the majority of the programs reported in the literature consist of ethnically diverse and socio-economically heterogeneous students. Therefore, for the most part, these successful programs enroll English speakers who differ both ethnically and linguistically from the minority, heritage language participants.

However, Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs do not exist within a vacuum. In fact, sociocultural factors affecting ethnic relations outside of the school context, also influence programs that exist within the school walls. Therefore, community attitudes toward minority languages will have a strong impact on programs employing those languages for instructional purposes. Equally important, are the prestige and status ascribed to the languages spoken by the students in those programs (Freeman, 1996; Thomas & Collier, 2001). Due to these factors, some researchers have shown that benefits derived from enrolling in programs such as DLI will vary for individual groups depending on their ethnic group and/ or socioeconomic status (SES) within the communities where they are located (Amrein & Peña, 2000; Freeman, 1996). Ample research evidence exists that when implemented among linguistically and ethnically heterogeneous populations; i.e., majority language speakers, DLI is highly effective and promotes high levels of achievement for both English dominant and Spanish dominant students enrolled in the programs (i.e., Lindholm, 1996; Thomas & Collier, 2001).

The present study reported in this article also investigated the effectiveness of a 90/10 DLI program and explored whether its implementation within a mostly Latino elementary school had been instrumental in maintaining the native language by promoting high levels of bilingualism and biliteracy for its students

Therefore, this longitudinal analysis employed both quantitative achievement data as well as qualitative analysis of the transformation occurring both in and around this school site - currently known as a community learning center.

2. Program description

2.1 Demographic information

The program in question is located in a changing neighborhood in a large metropolitan school district in the southwest. This Community Learning Center (CLC) is comprised of 451 students in grades Pre-K-5. The population is 94% Hispanic, 5% Anglo, .08% African American. As the data below indicates, while the total enrollment has increased slightly, the ethnic composition of the student body has remained stable.

Comparison of Demographic Data: 1996-2003

1996-1997		2002-2003	
Enrollment	387	Enrollment	451
Latino	93%	Latino	94%
Anglo	6%	Anglo	5%
Afro-American	1%	Afro-American	0.8%
Asian	1%	Asian	0.2%

With 90 % of the students participating in the national Free Lunch Program and 68% labeled as an at - risk population, this community learning center has been the object of major reform efforts since 1996 when it was selected by a private university, a major corporate foundation, and the local school district to restructure its Transitional Bilingual Program into a (K-5) Dual Language Immersion Program. Other reform efforts undertaken include an adult literacy program, an after-school program, and a hands-on Environmental Science Center, also attracting extensive participation from community and business leaders in the area. For purposes of the present study, this project is focusing on the partnership between the primary school (CLC), the university, and the corporate foundation that resulted in the creation of the dual language program.

The project was initiated at the request of the superintendent of this large urban school district as the study site was chosen due to its proximity to the university, its size, as well as the linguistic and demographic characteristics of its student population. Among the goals of the university-school district-corporate collaboration were the following: 1) to fully implement a dual language program across the school, with graduates at the fifth year performing at standards that exceed expectations; 2) to achieve "exemplary" school status by the year 2000; and, 3) to reduce the mobility rate to below 20% by 2002.

Presently in its seventh year of implementation, the first cohort of participants began the program at the Kindergarten level, and is currently enrolled in the sixth grade in a newly-implemented middle school dual language program located a few blocks from the elementary school. As of the end of the 2001-2002 school year, a total of six cohorts of students had enrolled in the program. Concurrently, a group of students with similar ethnic and linguistic characteristics has been enrolled in a classroom where English is the medium of instruction. This English-medium group, also moving through the school's program, has served as the study's comparison group.

One of the interesting features of this study was the similarity in SES and ethnic makeup of both the Dual and the English-medium group. Similar to Lindholm's (2001) schools labeled as high need and high ethnic density schools, the school's population participating in the free lunch program (determiner of socio-economic status for purposes of this study) has remained stable since 1996. Although the

school is located in a neighborhood undergoing a transformation from low income rental housing to middle to upper income homes purchased by professionals relocating close to the downtown area, the school's enrollment has not been affected by this urban transformation. Interestingly, the parents of the English-speaking students enrolled in the dual language program, are mostly Hispanic in origin, yet had lost their proficiency in the heritage language which they now are in the process of recapturing by enrolling their offspring in this program. Thus, their participation is a strong indicator of their positive attitude toward the program and the heritage language, evidenced by their strong program support.

2.2 Description of school characteristics from inception to the present

The table shown below indicates the allocation of programs and staff from 1996, when the collaboration started, to the end of the present academic year.

1996-1997	Afro-American	2002-2003	Afro-American
Dual	5%	Dual	78%
TBE	40%	TBE	0%
English Only	55%	English Only	22%
Bilingual Staff	40%	Bilingual Staff	80%

In order to move toward the goal of transforming the school from a transitional bilingual emphasis to a program where bilingualism and biliteracy were the goals, the school has gradually added one DLI grade level every year since its inception. Presently, 78% of the students are enrolled in the school's dual immersion programs. In order to meet the goal of reducing the mobility rate, the program has been instrumental in retaining nearly 10% more students than in 1997 as the mobility rate has been reduced from 32% to 23%.

At the present time, the only programs available to the parents are DLI and the English-only strand from Kindergarten to 5th grade. Therefore, the DLI strand currently includes 78% of the student population. Whereas in 1996, when the program began, 40% of the students were enrolled in a program with a transitional philosophy, as of the present time, there are no transitional classrooms remaining. The students enrolled in an English-as-a-medium of instruction classroom strand have decreased from 55% to 22% of the population. Similarly, the percentage of fully bilingual teaching and clerical staff has increased from 40% to 80% of those employed at the school.

Additionally, as a result of a U.S. Department of Education grant, the CLC was able to add a pre-Kindergarten program ensuring continuous recruitment of both language groups at this level. Although both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking parents enroll their children at the Pre-K level, this parent group has provided English-speakers for the DLI program due to their desire that their children become fully bilingual and biliterate.

3. Methodology

3.1 The guiding research questions for the study included the following:

(1.) What is the growth in language proficiency experienced by an ethnically- homogeneous group of Spanish dominant and English dominant students enrolled in a Dual Language Program as compared to students enrolled in an English-medium classroom? (2.) What is the growth in academic achievement experienced by an ethnically homogeneous group of Spanish dominant and English dominant students enrolled in a Dual Language Program as compared to students enrolled in an

English-medium classroom? (3.) What role does the Dual Language Program play in the restructuring and reform efforts of a mostly Latino inner city school?

In order to measure student growth, a battery of tests measuring linguistic growth, cognitive development, and academic performance in both Spanish and English have been utilized. The tests are described below:

1. The *Woodcock – Muñoz Language Survey* , measuring academic language proficiency in both English and Spanish.
2. The *TerraNova™ Assessment Series* , an English-standardized achievement instrument which measures academic achievement in reading, language arts, and mathematics.
3. The *Supera™ Assessment Series*, a standardized achievement test in Spanish, which measures academic achievement in reading, language arts, and mathematics.
4. The *Texas Assessment of Academic Skills Test*, a criterion-referenced test which allows comparison of students across the state in reading, writing, and mathematics.
5. The **SOLOM**: an oral language proficiency rating utilized by the teachers and developed by the California State Department of Education.

The tests chosen for this report are significant in that they provide nationally recognized measures of language proficiency and academic achievement.

3.2 Procedures

Language proficiency tests were administered every fall and spring in both languages. The test utilized to measure initial language proficiency was the *LAS (Language Assessment Scales, 1990)*. Subsequent language proficiency data was derived from the *Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey* (1993). Academic achievement in English was obtained from the *TerraNova Assessment Series* (1998) and in Spanish, *from the Supera Assessment Series* (1998). The longitudinal study includes six cohorts of student participants in both the DLI and English-medium classrooms. They are described as follows:

Academic Year: Kindergarten Enrollment:		
Cohort 1: 1996 – 1997	Dual Language:	48
(Now in sixth grade)	English -medium	23
Cohort 2: 1997 – 1998	Dual Language:	43
(Now in fifth grade)	English – medium	22
Cohort 3: 1998 – 1999	Dual Language:	48
(Now in fourth grade)	English – medium	22
Cohort 4: 1999 – 2000	Dual Language:	43
(Now in third grade)	English – medium	16
Cohort 5: 2000-2001	Dual Language	63
(Now in second grade)	English-medium	10
Cohort 6: 2001-2002	Dual Language:	68
(Now in first grade)	English-medium	18

However, this paper only reports on the first two cohorts that enrolled at the Kindergarten level in 1996-1997 and 1997-1998, respectively as this quasi-experimental study compared the students' academic achievement as well as their changing linguistic proficiency for both the control and the English-medium classroom. **Cohort 1** was comprised of two Kindergarten classrooms receiving

instruction in the 90/10 dual language model, totaling 48 students and one group of 23 students enrolled in the English-medium classroom. **Cohort 2** included 43 students in the dual language track and 22 students in the English-medium comparison group. In accordance with the dual language methodology and guidelines, the students represented a mixed language proficiency level of (Cohort 1 – 24 Spanish speakers; 14 English speakers, and 3 balanced bilinguals) and Cohort 2 – 25 Spanish speakers and 18 English speakers). Students in the English-medium classrooms also represented a linguistic mix. Although predominantly English proficient, these students were also from a Latino ethnic background, but were placed in the English-medium classroom due to negative parental attitudes toward Spanish as -a- medium of instruction. Dual language guidelines were followed (Christian, 1994) as language allocation gradually increased to include 50% of instruction in Spanish and 50% in English by the end of the fifth grade.

4. Study findings

4.1 Language proficiency

Although the study and data analysis are ongoing, some preliminary results and trends can be gleaned from an analysis of the data. The charts below report on academic language proficiency in Spanish as measured by yearly administrations of the Woodcock Muñoz battery. Although the test uses a rating from 1-5, the scores are also converted to scaled or W scores in order to facilitate comparisons. Comparing the growth experienced by both Dual Language and English-medium student participants for cohorts 1 and 2, the following observations could be made: The Tables included below display actual scores obtained by both groups on the Woodcock-Munoz.

- Both groups: fully English (FEP) proficient and English Language Learners (ELL) in the DLI program made significant, statistically significant gains in oral proficiency and Literacy skills in Spanish.
- These gains have been sustained by subsequent cohorts who continue to make gains in the Spanish language.
- Cohort 1 achieved a statistically significant growth in literacy skills between 1997 and 2001.
- Surprisingly, students entering the program as FEP gained just as much as students entering the program as Spanish dominant English Language Learners.
- Cohort 2 also sustained significant gains, although not as high as Cohort 1, but they are also approaching the national norm of a W score of 500.
- An unexpected finding was that students who began the program as English dominant (students also of Latino origin) continued to make gains in Spanish oral skills, although not as high as those in the DLI program.
- Students in the English-medium classroom were also able to transfer their literacy skills from English into Spanish as they sustained growth in their Spanish literacy skills as well (from a mean score 329 to 470; and 351 to 488 for Cohort 2.

- Students enrolled in the DLI program made significant progress in English as evidenced by the scores on the English administration of the **Woodcock Munoz**, although these scores were not as high as their Spanish scores.
- Surprisingly, students in the DLI, achieved higher scores in English oral skills than their counterparts in the English-medium classrooms.
- Literacy skills in English were just as high for the DLI group as those scored by the majority of the English-medium group, and higher for Cohort 1.

**Comparison of Mean Scores for Cohorts 1 and 2
and Last Year Scores for all cohorts**

**Spanish Test Results (Mean W scores, Fall 1997 –
Spring 2001**

	<i>Fall 1997/98</i>		<i>Spring 2001</i>		<i>All Cohorts</i>
	<i>COHORTS</i>				
<i>Dual Program</i>	1.	2.	1.	2.	<i>All</i>
Oral Proficiency					
<i>FEP</i>	458	451	*485	*483	484
<i>ELL</i>	452	449	*485	*481	482
Literacy					
<i>FEP</i>	379	351	*506	488	
<i>ELL</i>	372	351	*507	493	N/A
<i>English - medium</i>	1.	2.	1.	2.	<i>All</i>
Oral Proficiency					
<i>FEP</i>	438	449	459	465	445
<i>ELL</i>	442	449	467	460	444
Literacy					
<i>FEP</i>	329	351	*470	488	
<i>ELL</i>	338	351	483	493	N/A

**Comparison of Mean Scores for Cohorts 1 and 2
and Last Year Scores for all cohorts
English Test Results (Mean scores, Fall 1997 – Spring 2001)**

	<i>Fall 1997/98</i>		<i>Spring 2001</i>		<i>All Cohorts</i>
	<i>COHORTS</i>				
<i>Dual Program</i>	1.	2.	1.	2.	<i>All</i>
Oral Proficiency					
<i>FEP</i>	459	444	484	466	468
<i>ELL</i>	451	447	482	467	462
Literacy					
<i>FEP</i>	355	350	486	477	N/A
<i>ELL</i>	347	350	482	479	
<i>English - medium</i>	1.	2.	1.	2.	<i>All</i>
Oral Proficiency					
<i>FEP</i>	430	448	476	478	485
<i>ELL</i>	448	447	478	475	478
Literacy					
<i>FEP</i>	386	353	490	472	N/A
<i>ELL</i>	370	351	487	469	

5. Academic achievement

The Tables included below report on academic growth as measured by the norm – reference tests in Spanish and English, respectively. Supera Spanish scores are provided for Reading and Language, and Terra Nova scores are provided for the Reading and Language sections as well.

Significant findings for the Spanish administration of the SUPERA (a measure of academic achievement) included information presented in the tables below and summarized in the following sections.

Based on the scores reported below, it is evident that both groups showed growth in both their primary and second languages. Literacy scores show a dramatic increase from fall to spring in the major language of instruction due to the formal reading instruction normally evident during the latter part of first grade

Academic Achievement: SUPERA(Norm-referenced test-Spanish) Cohorts 1 and 2 (Mean Scores reported as Normal Curve Equivalents)

	1999		2001		2002	
	1.	2.	1.	2.	1.	2.
Dual Language						
Reading	34	52	38	33	50	60
Language	68	38	39	39	43	37
English-Medium						
Reading	17	30	5	11	N/A	N/A
Language	25	19	19	29	N/A	N/A

Although the scores tend to be low when compared to national norms, there are some meaningful patterns that can be discussed. When tested in Spanish, the Dual Language group did significantly better than the English – medium group in all areas. When tested in English, the English – medium group did slightly better in each category, but analysis of variance revealed that the differences were not statistically significant. This result indicates that when tested in English, the Dual Language students do about as well as the students who have been instructed using only English.

Based on the scores obtained, it is evident that both groups showed growth in both languages. Literacy scores made a dramatic increase from fall to spring in the major language of instruction due to the fact that formal reading instruction normally begins during the latter part of first grade. It is interesting that the magnitude of the gains in the “off” language differ a great deal. The English – medium students made small gains in Spanish, but the Dual Language students, still being instructed in Spanish 80% of the time, made gains in English almost as large as those made in Spanish.

For Cohort 2, we have the expected result that each group does significantly better than the other in its primary language of instruction. By national standards, most of the scores are low, however. Notable exceptions are the Spanish reading and language arts scores for students in the Dual Language group.

**Academic Achievement: TERRA NOVA (Norm
referenced test/English)
Cohorts 1 and 2 (Mean Scores reported as
Normal Curve Equivalents)**

	1999		2001		2002	
	1.	2.	1.	2.	1.	2.
Dual Language						
Reading	27	22	37	24	37	51
Language	51	10	25	23	32	36
English-Medium						
Reading	37	33	33	33	N/A	N/A
Language	54	32	25	39	N/A	N/A

6. Preliminary results

As the attached charts indicate, it is evident that both groups are showing growth in both languages. Based on the Woodcock-Muñoz scores, both cohort groups show a dramatic increase in the areas of Broad Language abilities and Literacy. Although the students enrolled in the Dual Language Program were not taught English reading formally, their reading skills in Spanish are transferring to English. The students enrolled in the English program made significant gains when tested in English, and surprisingly, showed some growth when tested in Spanish. These findings seem to corroborate that some transfer of linguistic skills may be occurring even if students are not formally instructed in the second language.

Progress in academic achievement was measured using the *TerraNova and Supera* batteries. Although the scores are low when compared to national standards, both groups of students enrolled in the Dual Language Program are making significant progress when tested in Spanish. When tested in English, the English-medium group performed slightly better than the Spanish-medium group, although the differences were not statistically significant. Measures of academic achievement were also derived from the TAAS, the state administered criterion referenced program. When measuring their abilities in reading and mathematics at the end of the third grade, both Spanish-medium and English-medium groups showed outstanding growth from the results obtained over the last two test administrations as evidenced by an overwhelming 86% passing rate for the dual language group and a 94% passing rate for the English-medium group.

Cummins, for example (1999) argues that no model of bilingual education by itself is a guarantee that language minority students will achieve. Since "the reasons why some groups of students experience underachievement have much more to do with issues of power and status than with linguistic factors". Educational interventions that succeed will most likely challenge the low status assigned to a linguistic and cultural group and empower the parents and students from such groups (Cummins, 1999). In fact, in schools where the program population combines both low

socioeconomic status language minority students with language majority students from middle-class professional homes, special efforts must be undertaken to preserve the minority language and enhance its status.

7. Conclusions

Preliminary findings seem to indicate that the Dual Language Immersion Program is successful in developing academic language proficiency and biliteracy in Spanish-origin students attending an inner-city school. Although the students placed in the English-medium classroom are also making progress, they are unable to develop grade appropriate academic language skills in their heritage language. On analysis of the data, it is clear that a host of other factors that are providing additional support to the restructuring efforts of this community-learning center.

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