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ABSTRACT

This paper argues in favor of dual language programs over typical bilingual education programs because in the dual language program the minority language has a status equal to the majority language. Through the use of the language experience approach, this study examines the role of elicited response from a small sample of English and Spanish speaking participants in an early childhood classroom. The traditional model and the dual language model are compared and contrasted focusing on the differing elicited responses from language learners. The dual language model is judged superior because of the belief that by seeing their English-speaking peers struggle with a second language, the Spanish-dominant speakers feel validated with their struggles with English. As a rule the minority language speaker is usually the only one to go through the experience of stumbling through a second language in front of an audience of native majority language speakers. To show all the children in the class that the hesitant, usually quiet Spanish speakers can actually speak quite fluidly in their native language is held to be tremendously important for all involved in the classroom. Language minority speakers get to be in the role of "expert" for part of the time. Every child has the opportunity to witness their peers' struggle to speak one language or the other. (Contains 10 references.) (KFT)

Elicited Response in the Pre-Kindergarten Setting: Good or Bad Idea?

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As teachers certified in Bilingual Education, we have usually avoided eliciting response from children in their weakest language for several reasons inherent in the North American model of Bilingual Education in teacher training. We know that eliciting a student's weakest language in a structured situation can stigmatize the language learner as well as the language itself for potential learners. In addition, once elicitation has occurred, the focus for the learner can easily become one of structured performance rather than communication. Natural language learning has been shown by extensive research to be language which is retained longer. It is also more likely to be applied in various settings outside of the classroom by second language speakers who have been reinforced for approaching language use with a natural and communicative focus. Decades of research indicate that this is the case for minority second language learners in a structured bilingual classroom. However, does this principle change when the second language (L2) learner is an English dominant child learning Spanish in a dual language program in the United States? In such a program, the dynamics of majority and minority language status should have changed. If second language responses increase or decrease in response to an intervention of eliciting response for English speakers, will language status shift for Spanish speakers in the same setting? The social dynamics of language use and status are different in dual language programs than other bilingual education classes. In bilingual classrooms that are not using a dual language approach to instruction, the language minority child strives to learn a second language. It is the language minority child who is identified with a need to master the target language. With the dual language approach, however, social and academic dynamics of language use and need have shifted to both language majority and minority learners. Through the use of the Language Experience Approach, this study examines the role of elicited response with a small sample of English and Spanish speaking participants in an early childhood classroom. This article provides an overview from each of us, trained with doctorates in second language teaching from different states, regarding our philosophies as bilingual educators and reasons we have felt challenged to question our thinking and practice as a result of teaching in dual language programs.

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2

In dual language programs, both majority language speakers of English and minority language speakers, (for example those students who speak Spanish as their first language,) are expected to use each of their languages in the classroom (Lessow-Hurley, 1996). Ideally, each language is used for communication both verbally and in literate form. As we approach the instruction of each learner in dual language classrooms, the dynamics of language production change according to each student. Dual language instruction differs from other bilingual teaching for several reasons.

Instruction in a dual language program always involves teaching in someone's weaker language at any given moment during the day (Meza-Zaragosa, 1998.) Initially, this can lead to poor practice as the teacher may be tempted to code switch for "important" information, such as announcements and directions (Montague, 1998). Code switching does little in facilitating second language learning and perhaps even discourages it by invalidating the second language of each child in some way. Language learners are efficient, why would they try to learn a second language if the "important" information is provided in their first language? Rather than switching languages, important information can be previewed and reviewed in the native language while being taught in the second language. Another strategy is to teach in the second language and facilitate peer scaffolding in the native language. One of the interesting aspects of dual language instruction is that virtually every child is a minority speaker at some point during the instructional day. This can create teachable moments when, as their teachers, we facilitate the creation of meaning for second language learners of both English and Spanish.

In many ways, the role of the bilingual teacher has been to strengthen and protect the minority languages of students while also facilitating their acquisition of English, helping them to learn content in their strongest language until they can learn all subjects in both languages (Cummins, 1984; Krashen, 1996). When the teacher is not fluent in the home

language of the student, use of English as a Second Language (ESL) techniques becomes imperative. English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction is an integral component of any quality bilingual program (Krashen, 1996). Even within the ESL component of bilingual education, however, students benefit from the validation of having their home culture and language enter the classroom through family visits, environmental print, etc. (Ada and Smith, 1998; Bailey, 1998; Montague, 1999; Quintero, 1998). Some students are more adept at learning literacy in their home language while able to address areas of the curriculum, which are rich in context such as Math and Science in their second and weakest language.

In the dual language classroom used for this study, the minority and majority speakers are grouped together so that both linguistic groups can benefit from each other's language. However there are differences in language production of each language between groups. One example is a child whose first language is Spanish. This child is a 4 year-old who has been in this dual language program seven months. He says things like "give me the block red" spontaneously in the Spanish-only classroom, using his second language of English by choice with peers. However, many English-speaking children in the classroom where this study took place have been in the dual language program since the age of three, exposed to the Spanish language in an academic setting for two to three years. Most of them have not spontaneously made such an utterance in the target language unless the teacher elicits the response. It appears that for the Potentially English Proficient (PEP) student, acquiring English occurs quickly, even if it is a social level of language production. Second language acquisition occurs much faster for the PEP student than for the Non-Spanish speaker (NSS) learning Spanish.

A Canadian colleague prompted the thesis of this study when he made the observation that the North American dual language model is different than the Canadian programs he had seen in the area of second language elicitation. He said that in Canada, the

children would never speak the minority language of French unless the teachers elicit it. Though we discussed the difference between the two settings in terms of socio-political dynamics, the question of the role of elicitation remained. My Canadian colleague was surprised that North American bilingual education teachers tend to be hesitant in the area of eliciting student use of the minority language of Spanish. This comment was in direct contradiction of many of the beliefs about bilingual education that the researchers for this study abide by closely. These differences raise several important questions: (a) what are the conditions, variables, influences that affect the process of second language production for each type of language learner? (b) are there greater social and other incentives for one language group to learn a second language? (c) what are the implications of the levels of language exposure and available language models in peer groups? Though these are imperative questions to ask, this study addresses one small component of each of them. What role does teacher expectation play in language production?

Methodology

Participants

This study took place in a dual language classroom for four and five year old children who are pre-literate. The responses of 45 children were included for this study. Half of the children are five years old and half are four-year-olds. Most have been enrolled in the dual language program at this school since the age of three. Therefore, most four year olds have been in the program for two years while most five-year-olds have been in the program three years. Four children have been recently enrolled and entered the program within the last two years.

Setting

The dual language model followed by the school for these age levels includes one half day of instruction in a classroom where Spanish is the medium for instruction, and the other half of the day is spent in a classroom with English instruction. Vocabulary

development is included by each teacher in the language of the classroom through the use of early childhood activities and instruction. For example, English vocabulary development is addressed the first half of the day for half of the students in the English classroom while their peers in the Spanish classroom receive Spanish vocabulary development and enrichment. At midday the groups switch teachers and classrooms and receive complimenting instruction in the other language.

The Spanish speaking teacher engaged in this study through observing her student's language and recording their responses before, during and after the intervention. Baseline data was collected for the months of October, November and December during the Language Experience Approach (LEA) portion of the day with the students (Carrasquillo, 1998.) This period is when the children dictate language that the teacher records on a large chart in front of the children. She records their exact utterances in both languages and no elicitation occurs by the teacher. They can then read the selection back to their peers and illustrate their comments. The LEA charts are posted for children to see their individual language production valued publicly. Intervention for the purposes of this study included the teacher eliciting response from the children in Spanish, since this was the language of instruction for this class. The period of intervention, when the teacher elicited response in Spanish, lasted for the months of January and February. An example of typical elicitation by the teacher included requests such as "Cómo se dice eso en español?" (How do you say that in Spanish?) The post intervention period, when the teacher ceased to actively elicit response, lasted for the months of March, April and May.

Procedure

During the Language Experience Approach (LEA) portion of the day, the teacher conducted a group discussion with the children. This discussion centered on current events in the classroom and for individual students. For example, the LEA discussion included references to the night before at the students' homes, or a book read to the group or a class

experience such as a field trip. The teacher called upon individual students and recorded their verbal language on a large chart paper in front of the group. Students were then occasionally asked to read their recorded language back to the group, or illustrate the thought that was recorded, or the group read the remark together. Through using LEA, the teacher was able to model the oral-written language connection, punctuation and spelling and left to right orientation while recording the students' language of choice. Individual language choice was collected for the months of October through May. Each utterance was coded according to language choice and type of code-switch, if any.

Baseline Language Production Phase

The results of baseline data indicate that students consistently responded in their strongest language for entire utterances. The teacher conducted the lesson in Spanish and responded to children's comments and questions in Spanish regardless of the language used by the child. She recorded their responses verbatim in any language the child elected to use, as directed by the Language Experience Approach (LEA). In this way, the children were reinforced for responding to Spanish, regardless of whether they used Spanish themselves. There was little evidence of code switching by the students during the LEA portion of the day.

Intervention Phase

The intervention for this study took place during the months of January and February. Intervention included a change in teacher expectations for the lesson. During the intervention phase the students were given a prompt, as usual, and the teacher recorded their responses on the LEA chart. Responses to teacher questions were given in Spanish when answered by the Spanish dominant speakers; the other responses were usually given in English. In these cases, the teacher responded with a typical eliciting question during the intervention such as "¿Me puedes decir eso en español?" (Could you tell me that in Spanish?) Students showed comprehension of the question asked when they responded

"no" or refused by shaking their head to indicate that they could not give a response in Spanish. There were times during the intervention when these same students, although unable to provide a complete sentence in Spanish, were able to give isolated words or two word phrases in Spanish. The teacher noted that most of the children were not as interested in the LEA activity when an elicited response was requested. Notations by the teacher include an awareness that the "usual" talkers that shared before the intervention phase were reluctant to speak or give their responses in English when they were asked to try to say their thought in Spanish. Spanish speakers' responses in Spanish increased, as they became more involved in the activity.

Post-Intervention Phase

During the months of March, April and May, the intervention of eliciting response in Spanish was ceased. The teacher's focus returned to one of natural language production. Early into the post-intervention stage, students became more relaxed and freely responded to the teacher in the language of their choice. Immediately, the teacher noticed the children "begging" for permission to let them say something. They wanted their thoughts and words to be included on the LEA chart.

With only a few weeks into the month of March, the teacher noticed a verbal change in the students. Once elicitation had clearly ceased, the students appeared to think that the teacher had forgotten to ask them if they could respond in Spanish. They had become quite conscious of language use. One example of this was when an English-speaking child told another student to "say that in Spanish" when responding to a question or prompt during the second week of March. It is interesting that some students had "picked up" on the elicitation phase and appeared to enjoy the challenge of experimenting with the new language. These students continued to produce some words in Spanish electively. At the same time, there were other children who had become reserved and appeared to relax with the post-intervention stage, switching back to exclusive use of

English. Nevertheless, collective results from both language groups show a general decrease in production of English and Spanish during the intervention phase.

Significantly, the level of language production did not completely recover to pre-intervention levels within the last 3 months of the school year.

Limitations

The biggest limitation for this study is the age of the children. At four and five years old, many children aren't aware of the labels we place on language systems such as "English" and "Spanish". They aren't yet completely capable of knowing how to say something in Spanish, as much as they know the words they need to communicate with their friends who understand Spanish better than English. A similar study conducted with older children could possibly yield very different results.

The timing of the study was also challenged by school holidays and classroom organization. Language Experience Approach was not held as regularly toward the end of the school year as it was in the Fall. Also LEA lessons were sometimes limited to a shorter period due to the end of the year pressures naturally present in the classroom.

Conclusions

It is evident that the intervention raised the meta-linguistic awareness of both Spanish and English speakers in this classroom. Some of the children returned to responding in English, not attempting production in their second language. Others were too timid to share their thoughts. A few experimented with the target language by choice.

It is possible that seeing that their English speaking peers struggle with second language use proved to validate Spanish dominant speakers' struggle with English. As a rule the minority speaker of Spanish usually has the unfortunately frequent experience of stumbling through trying to express themselves in a second and weaker language that their English speaking peers have mastered. To show all of the children that the hesitant, and quiet native Spanish speaker can actually speak quite fluidly in their home language is

tremendously important for all involved in the classroom. Most likely, minority speakers also saw that their fluency in Spanish was a desired goal for English speaking peers, which could contribute to validation of their home language. Language minority speakers became the “experts” for their peers during the course of this study. Once elicitation had taken place in this classroom, every child had the opportunity to witness their peers’ struggle in producing one language or the other.

In early childhood practice, it is extremely important to strengthen the home language before introducing another language in an academic setting (Cummins, 1984; Krashen, 1996). The question for dual language teachers becomes one of teaching the language as a foreign language in addition to teaching the language through a communicative focus within the context of the lesson. Most bilingual teachers have not been trained in two-way immersion, dual language practices and techniques. There are not many universities in the United States that offer training programs in this area, if there are any at all. This is a significant need in the area of second language education. On a dynamic level, Bilingual Education classes prepare teachers for the basic components of dual language instruction. However, at the university level, we don't often offer actual teaching practices that differentiate a bilingual teaching strategy from a dual language teaching strategy. Are the techniques and approaches utilized in teaching Potentially English Proficient (PEP) students English the same for teaching Potentially Spanish Proficient students? There are certain social and political differences between the two languages due to population represented in the classroom, community status of each language and the level of value the school administration and curriculum give to each language. While this investigation informed our understanding of possible answers to these questions, there is still much that we have to learn.

This study has interesting implications in the area of second language instruction for majority language speakers. Educators aware of self-esteem issues have approached elicited

response with caution when second language learners approach public use of their weakest language. The socio-political status of the language can affect this process dramatically. This study examines the issue for majority language learners attempting the use of a minority language. Further study in this area with greater populations in different geographical areas and at different grade levels will better inform our practice regarding second language instruction.

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