

English/Spanish Dual Immersion Elementary School Programs: Factors to Consider

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Abstract

Some families, parents and children included, may not be fully prepared or aware as they enter into the commitment of a dual-immersion language elementary education experience. One factor crucial for a dual-immersion program to meet its objectives, parents and students must commit to a minimum of five to six years of their elementary education to the program. The purpose of my research is to describe the elements that contribute to the development of a successful bilingual school program for young children.

The principal of a dual immersion elementary school participated in an interview about her views on the elements that make her program, her school successful. Findings mirrored the research literature. Establishment of a strong partnership between parents, teachers and administrators provides a solid foundation that fosters student success. Quality professional development and a committed teaching staff further support the mission of the school which is ultimately to graduate students who are bilingual, bi-literate, and bicultural. The program must be academically rigorous and committed to sticking to the model selected whether the model is referred to as 90/10, 50/50 or a differentiated approach.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Parents want nothing more than for their child to succeed in all which they endeavor. Unexpectedly, my son was enrolled in a child care setting that allowed him to become bilingual in English and Spanish. Knowing that hiring a private tutor for him to continue his Spanish language development would be an expense we could not afford, I researched public and private school options for his education.

I found a gem of a charter school in our local area. After a school site visit and an interview with the principal I knew I had found the school for him. The only problem was that enrollment was determined by a lottery process. Initially he was placed on a wait-list, but after two weeks we received confirmation that he would be able to attend.

Now a few months into his kindergarten experience I know wholeheartedly that we made the correct choice. Both teachers and staff at the school have been impressed with my son's language abilities. My son is off to a great start towards meeting the goals of becoming bilingual both academically and conversationally. That is the goal of the school, that children are proficient in both areas.

Statement of Problem

It is widely known that the population in the United States speaking languages other than English has increased dramatically and is projected to continue on this trend. Data National Center for Education Statistics in 2005 as cited Alanis and Rodriguez (2008) indicated children across the country who spoke a language other than English was approximately four million in 2004. This statistic and forecasted growth presents instructional challenges for school systems

and some believe the best way to educate these students is via bilingual or dual immersion programs (Alanis & Rodriguez, 2008). In California there has been an increase in the number of Spanish-speaking immigrants and there are not sufficient educational programs preparing young students to become bilingual and bi-literate in English and Spanish. The program that my son is in is not widely publicized. Parents looking for a program of quality are not aware of the existence of this particular school. In addition, parents may not have had the opportunity to do extensive research into a program or know what factors to consider when selecting a dual immersion school for their elementary-age child.

Purpose Statement

The existence of a dual immersion program does not necessarily mean that it is one of quality. There are basically two types of bilingual education programs: remedial, offering a watered-down curriculum, and one that is academically rigorous. My interest is in those programs which represent the latter. The purpose of my research is to describe the elements that contribute to the development of a successful bilingual school program for young children.

Research Question

As parents consider dual immersion programs for their children, they may not be fully aware of which elements of a program are most critical. Over the last twenty years, there has been an increase in areas of program evaluation and data available for parents to review. The question addressed in my analysis of the literature, data, and an interview with a bilingual education expert is as follows: What are the elements that need to be in place for a bilingual English-Spanish program to be successful? Based on review of the literature and expanded upon

in chapter two of this paper, some considerations include: quality of school leadership and faculty; model for bilingual education, such as 90/10, 50/50 or balanced/differentiated; make-up of student population; and level of parental involvement.

Theoretical Rationale

Krashen, (1991), a linguist and educator, is considered to be a leading expert on the subject of bilingual education and second language acquisition theory. His research and experience on the topic spans nearly three decades. Krashen and Terrell (1983) differentiate between acquisition and learning in their research. The act of acquiring a language is done by “picking it up naturally” via natural, communicative settings whereas language learning involves “knowing the rules” and having specific knowledge of language mechanics such as grammar and syntax (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Language acquisition occurs when certain conditions are in place. According to Krashen and Terrell (1983), these include:

- Messages in the form of “comprehensible input” can be understood in the second language;
- An openness to input or a “low affective filter” where the acquirer has a positive relationship with the teacher/speaker of the language; and
- An understanding that fluency emerges on its own and after a silent period which can be from a few hours to several months.

Krashen and Terrell (1983) put forward a theory of second language acquisition that encompasses four main principles related to the conditions stated previously. First, comprehension, that is listening or reading, comes before production, speaking or writing. Second, production emerges in incremental stages beginning with non-verbal → one word

response → two word responses → short phrases → sentences → complex conversation. Next the focus of their theory turns to the communication of goals for each classroom activity organized by topic and where grammar and sentence structure is not emphasized. The final principle focuses on activities in the classroom and the focus on lowering the affective filter of the students via such conditions as positive rapport with their teacher and peers. If they feel comfortable to express their ideas, opinions, and thoughts, students will be successful in acquiring the second language.

Guided by these principles, Krashen (1991) theorizes that a well-designed dual immersion program possesses the following characteristics:

1. Comprehensible input in the second language;
2. Subject matter is taught without translation; and
3. Literacy developed in the first language (L1) will transfer to the second language (L2)

In this third point, Krashen (1991) goes on to clarify that bilingual programs will not be successful if they do not provide students with a print-rich environment in their native language. Cummins, as cited by Krashen (1991), further emphasized the critical point for both language and literacy development that students are provided opportunities to read leisurely since these skills will translate in the acquisition of a second language. Additionally, Krashen (1991) goes on to clarify that his use of “bilingual education” is similar “if not identical” to the term “dual immersion” or *Canadian-style immersion* (p. 9).

Assumptions

Many adults agree with the notion that it is easier to acquire multiple languages at a young age and ideally as a child. Living in a community of approximately 75,000 residents and a large Spanish-speaking population, I found that bilingual education programs were hard to find. After locating a program, how does one determine what factors to consider in determining the quality or effectiveness? Most parents may not know what to look for or factors to consider or where to find that information.

Background and Need

Bilingual Programs

According to the Center for Applied Linguistics (Howard & Sugarman, 2001), the number of dual immersion programs has increased dramatically in the United States over the last forty years. Most programs begin at the elementary level and many are looking towards expansion into the middle and high school years. The first program began in 1963. However, the development of more programs during the first two decades was slow with only ten programs in existence by 1981 (Howard & Sugarman, 2001). Over the next twenty years, the number increased dramatically to 248 programs in 23 states and the District of Columbia (Howard & Sugarman, 2001). By 2006, the Center for Applied Linguistics reported that of 310 programs, 43% were English-Spanish and several factors were contributing to this growth trend (Lenker & Rhodes, 2007). According to Lenker and Rhodes (2007), these include the following:

- Parental pressure for programs of high quality;
- Interest in a multicultural approach to education by parents, teachers and administrators;
- An increase in the number of public school options offering dual-immersion programs including magnet and charter;
- An increase in the amount of research and data demonstrating the effectiveness of such models; and
- A growth in awareness of the need for Americans to be proficient in two or more languages for multiple reasons including person, economic and national security.

With this growth in the number of programs has come an increase in review data available for the public. It is this type of data that parents need, but may not be for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to: lack of time and awareness, lack of access to technology for seeking out information, and lack of availability of information.

Increase in Spanish Speaking Population in the United States

In addition to the increase in the number of dual-immersion programs, there has been a large influx of Spanish-speaking resident in the United States. According to the US Census Bureau as cited by Watkins (2006), Spanish is the most common language spoken by approximately 28 million non-native English speakers and nearly half of them have limited or no English skills, written or spoken. As discussed by Rigoli (2007), a survey of more than 2,400 hiring managers found that they were looking for candidates who were bilingual in English and Spanish. Industries actively recruiting bilingual candidates, specifically English-Spanish, included education, banking, real estate, health care, customer service, and agricultural (Rigoli, 2007). When these factors are combined, dual-immersion programs, the anticipated steady

growth of Spanish-speaking, limited English proficiency US residents, and the jobs outlook, students fluent in both English and Spanish will have a clear advantage over their monolingual counterparts.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Introduction

The topic of bilingual or dual immersion education has been influenced by many events in United States history. This chapter delves into that story and takes a look at what information has been presented in the literature over the last two decades. The main focus of my research is on the evaluation of programs and factors considered to be of critical importance in determining the effectiveness of a bilingual education program. Review of the literature brought forth perspectives from a broad range of stakeholders including educators and parents. Research articles were collected and evaluated following guidelines developed by Truesdell (2010). Narrative descriptions were organized into subtopics reflected below.

Historical Context

Bilingual education in the United States has taken many turns throughout our nation's short history. During the first century, German-language schooling was prevalent, even though there were attempts made to mandate English-only instruction. Early documents such as the Articles of Confederation were even translated into other languages for "politically significant groups of non-English speakers" (Crawford, 1999, p. 22). To this day, the United States has not adopted an official national language nor created a government entity to regulate speech.

Crawford (1999) goes on to write that favor of schooling children in one language or another changed with the increase and decrease of immigrants from other countries. In the mid-19th century, several states began passing legislation authorizing bilingual education, including Spanish. Later that century, a "resurgence of nativism" led to a gradual decline in the number of

bilingual education programs (Crawford, 1999, p. 24). The organization behind the movement was the American Protective Association. Other organizations eventually joined the movement to promote English-only instruction including the United States Bureau of Education with the goal to "replace immigrant language and cultures with those of the United States" (Crawford, 1999, p. 26). Stated simply, it was unpatriotic to learn in a language other than English. Native Americans were also forced to learn in English, to the extent this could be controlled by the government and children were removed from their families and schooled at boarding schools away from their reservations (Crawford, 1999).

Federal and State Legislation

A resurgence in bilingual education began in the mid-20th century in Florida and federal and state legislation regarding this controversial topic have been numerous and broad in scope. In January 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the first piece of federal legislation committing financial support in the form of competitive grants for schools that innovatively educated students who were limited English-speakers (Crawford, 1999).

Whether the purpose of the act was to promote bilingual education or aid in the acquisition of English speaking and literacy skills is a question that was never answered (Crawford, 1999). Additionally, it did not mandate what languages other than English could be supported by the federal funds.

The law, called the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (BEA), was part of Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which authorized funds to support education programs, to train teachers and aides, to develop and disseminate instructional materials and to encourage parental involvement (Crawford, 1999). While the funding was non-existent the first

year and severely limited in subsequent years, it did signal a start in the political arena for bilingual education. Several states, including California, passed legislation authorizing the use of bilingual education models and funding at state levels (Crawford, 1999).

The BEA of 1968 has been amended several times over the last four decades. In 1974, the main points of the amendment included:

- Clarification of the definition of “Bilingual Education Programs” as those which provided instruction in both English and the native language so that students may progress through the educational system (Crawford, 1999);
- Increased financial commitment from the federal government went from zero in 1968 to \$45 million in 1974 (Crawford, 1999).

Over the next three decades the Act would be reauthorized and further amended several times. Amendments over this time frame included:

- Inclusion of English-speaking students in bilingual program (40% in 1978) as a measure to support the acquisition of English for limited English proficient (LEP) students (Crawford, 1999);
- Expansion of federal funding in 1984 to \$140 million that included a stronger emphasis on teacher training (Crawford, 1999);

In 1986, however, the tide began to shift. California voters went to the polls and passed Proposition 63 which declared English as the official language of the state (Crawford, 1999). The proposition did not mention bilingual education, but rather that the state discontinue support for state-funded services in languages other than English (Crawford, 1999). At the same time, California’s bilingual education statute was set to expire, and despite multiple attempts by then Speaker Willie Brown to pass legislation reauthorizing the law, all bills related to bilingual

education, including this statute, were vetoed by Governor George Deukmejian and his successor Governor Pete Wilson (Crawford, 1999). Although legislation at the federal level mandating English as the official language of the United States has never made it out of committee, proposals in 39 other states came before voters between 1987 and 1998 and today there are 31 states that have an “official-English” statute (Crawford, 1999).

Finally, in 1998 a measure known as Proposition 227 dealt a nearly fatal blow to bilingual education programs in California. The initiative statute was called “English Language Education for Children in Public Schools” and was funded by Silicon Valley software entrepreneur, Ron Unz (Crawford, 1999). The language of the statute included a resolution that “all children in California public schools shall be taught English as rapidly and effectively as possible” (Crawford, 1999, p. 301). The law required that bilingual programs be eliminated and that non-English-speaking students be placed in sheltered English immersion classes during a temporary/maximum one-year period where “instruction must be overwhelmingly in English, except with a written request from parents” (Crawford, 1999, p. 302).

More than a decade after its passage, Proposition 227 is no less controversial. Several states including Arizona, Massachusetts, and Oregon have attempted to pass similar statutes with mixed results. Proposition 227’s leading supporter, Unz, points to state standardized test results as the proof that students taught in bilingual classes have remained the same and scores have doubled for English-learners taught in English-only classroom environments (as cited in Sifuentes 2008). Krashen has gone on record stating that standardized test scores are not a true method for evaluating a teaching method (as cited in Sifuentes, 2008). Speaking at a conference, Krashen noted that a better comparison could be made if one looked at two groups of students with similar language proficiency and background, with one group receiving bilingual education

and the other with English-only instruction (Sifuentes, 2008). Using this lens, Krashen shared his research experience that students in bilingual education programs typically acquire more English than students placed in English-only programs (Sifuentes, 2008).

Review of the Previous Literature

Introduction to Research

Despite the political events of the last three decades, the body of research on bilingual education overwhelmingly represents a point of view relating to quality of education. Programs which contain and maintain specific elements have a higher rate of producing students who are bilingual, bi-literate and bicultural when compared to programs that are remedial or watered-down in nature.

Evaluation Overview

Many educators believe that bilingualism is cognitively, social, and affectively beneficial for both native English-speaking students as well as those learning English (Alanis & Rodriguez, 2008). Alanis and Rodriguez (2008) reported multiple research evaluation studies that identified certain pedagogical and social factors that contribute to a bilingual education programs success. These included the following: school-home support; highly trained teachers and staff; professional development; and program design/features.

In their study, Alanis and Rodriguez (2008) focused on one school with a diverse campus located in an inner city in Texas. City Elementary, a high performing school, educated students either in a bilingual program (90/10 model) or in an all-English model if English-speaking parents opt for that model of education for their child. The research questions for their study

included: extent to which participation in the program contributed to students' academic outcomes; and factors which contributed to the sustainability of the dual language program at this school.

Data was collected from three sources: site visits/observations; key personnel interviews, a purposeful sample of ten teachers and one principal; and data from a standardized test administered in English to students in the fifth grade to determine if students were meeting minimum state expectation standards. Alanis and Rodriguez (2008) found that the length of time a student spent in a dual immersion program was positively correlated with student academic achievement.

When Alanis and Rodriguez (2008) standardized test scores, students from City Elementary consistently outscored their district and state averages. The evidence points to the fact that the dominant use of Spanish for instruction through third grade did not impede student performance on the test that was administered in English only at fifth grade. A major factor that contributed to student success was the academic rigor of the program and high expectations. Students were not taught a watered-down or remedial program. Additionally, staff at the school promoted both languages equally and did not promote one over another.

Dual Language Programs

Perez (2004) presents a six-year longitudinal, ethnographic, and descriptive study of two bilingual education elementary programs, English-Spanish, in Texas. The author described in depth the important role and influence of parents, community stakeholders, teachers and administrators have on a bilingual program. The programs studied use the 90/10 model for instruction.

Ramos (2007) noted that the number of bilingual programs in the US has increased by 300% in the last 10 years. The author surveyed parents of children enrolled in a bilingual education program in South Florida in an attempt to gain information about their reasons for choosing the program for their child and their degree of satisfaction with their choice as well as their opinions regarding support for Spanish, the minority language in this study. Of 745 surveys distributed, 366 were returned for a 49% response rate.

Some notes Ramos (2007) reported include: subjects were highly educated and only a small number lacked a high school diploma; Spanish was the native language of a majority of subjects responding; approximately 50% considered themselves bilingual and approximately 33% were Spanish-speaking only; and Spanish was spoken in the home 50% of the time both to children and between parents.

Ramos (2007) found that the top three reasons parents selected this school for their children included: a desire for a strong bilingual-bicultural identity; greater opportunities for academic and/or career advantages; and the location of the school in their neighborhood. With regard to parental degree of satisfaction with the school, the following results were found: parents were pleased with the academic rigor of the programs; parents considered Spanish important for academic or career advancement and opportunities; and parents valued the extent to which the school reached out to the surrounding community.

Regarding parental involvement in schools, Ramos (2007) found that nearly all respondents felt that their involvement benefited the community and that they possessed the language and academic abilities to help their children with homework. Furthermore, parents largely supplemented their children's education at home by reading in both English and Spanish

and by providing situations in which their children could interact with both English and Spanish speaking friends/family.

In summary, Ramos (2007) found that the parents of this community/school were overwhelmingly in support of the school and its model of instruction. The additional support these students were receiving at home was also having a direct impact on their academic success. Thus, it was concluded that parents have a crucial role in maintenance and further development of minority languages.

Sierra (2008) presents statistical data from dual immersion programs around the world. Although this article focuses on the state of bilingual education in the Basque Country, it discussed principles that are applicable no matter the location of the program. Student achievement was confirmed not to be poorer than that of comparison programs that did not utilize a dual immersion model. Additionally, statistical analysis showed bilingual education to have a positive impact on skills such as reading comprehension.

Two-Way Immersion

Christian (1996) describes what a bilingual education model looks like and the state of dual immersion education as it existed in the mid-1990s. The study collected information from over 160 schools in the United States that identified themselves as offering a dual immersion or bilingual education.

Christian (1996) outlined eight factors considered essential for successful bilingual education models. Additionally, student population, enrollment policies, and program features/design are described in detail. Program evaluation results from bilingual programs around the country point to strong educational effectiveness in promoting academic achievement

for all students as well as high levels of bilingual proficiency for all students in their minority and majority languages.

Academic Language and Literacy

Krashen (2002) articulates his beliefs regarding language and literacy development. He argues that reading in a primary language (L1) provides a student with advantages in acquiring literacy and academic proficiency in a secondary language (L2). In short, reading ability is a transferable skill. In the quest for developing higher levels of literacy and academic proficiency, he argues that the most important factor in achieving these goals is via free voluntary reading in the second language.

Summary

In a review of the literature, program evaluation data collected and analyzed from dual immersion programs deemed successful around the country share several common themes. The factors identified as contributing to a successful program include:

- Strong parental support of students and collaboration with school leadership;
- Quality of the schools teaching staff and specifically a commitment of support for their professional development by the administration;
- A rigorous curriculum; and
- A print-rich environment in school and access to books for leisurely reading purposes.

The purpose of my research is to go beyond this literature review of dual immersion programs and conduct an interview with an expert in the field. Data from the interview is used to compare results with previous findings in the literature.

Chapter 3 Method

Introduction

The nature of the research question was important in determining the methodological approach to gathering information. A qualitative, non-experimental design approach was selected and involved an interview with an expert in the field of bilingual education. The purpose for choosing this method was to see if there were any similarities or differences between the information collected in a review of the literature and the only bilingual school in our community. This research follows a research approach as described by Patten (2009).

Sample and Site

The sample and site for this qualitative study was purposive. This particular English-Spanish dual immersion school is the only one, public or private, in a northern California rural community of approximately 75,000 residents. According to its 2010-2011 School Accountability Report Card (SARC), the program at this school is offered for grades kindergarten through sixth and has an enrollment of over 707 students. When broken down by race, 24% identify as white, 72% as Hispanic, and 4% either Black, Asian, or multi-racial. English-learners account for 53% of the student body. Fifty-five percent of students are classified as socio-economically disadvantaged. The average class size in 2010-2011 ranged from 22 in second grade to 31 in fourth grade (Napa Valley Unified School District, 2012).

The SARC also reported that the school site went through extensive remodeling in 2004-2005 and systems and buildings were all found to be in good condition. All teachers on staff have full credentials and none are teaching outside their subject area of competence. They are all

NCLB compliant as well. With regard to curricular materials, all textbooks were rated to be in good condition and each student was given their own copy for appropriate usage (Napa Valley Unified School District, 2012).

The principal interviewed has been with the school since 1989. As a leader in promoting the value of dual immersion education, she was selected because of her passion and experience in building a program from the bottom up. For purposes of anonymity, the interviewee is identified as “Principal Garcia.”

Data Gathering Strategies

The strategy used for gathering data from the study participant was a face-to-face interview. Once Principal Garcia agreed to participate, a form entitled “Principal Permission/Consent to be a Research Subject” was sent via email along with five open-ended interview questions. The face-to-face interview was conducted on January 18, 2012 in her office and lasted approximately twenty-five minutes. During the course of the interview, a sixth question relevant to the topic was added regarding her opinion of the three main models for delivering a dual immersion program. The data gathered during the interview will be used to compare her experience and expert opinion with that of the information gathered in a review of the literature.

Ethical Standards

The study participant was informed of the nature and scope of the study in writing and prior to the start of the interview. The participant signed a consent form agreeing to participate in the study. She was assured that confidentiality would be maintained, and that she had the option

to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. This research adheres to the ethical standards for use of human subjects in research as documented by the American Psychological Association (2010). In addition, both the Dominican University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS Application #9015) and my advisor reviewed and approved the proposal.

Chapter 4 Findings

Overall Findings, Themes

The introductory question asked Principal Garcia (personal communication, January 18, 2012) to discuss her own experience with dual immersion education. *“I started learning Spanish in the fifth grade at Shearer (in Napa). It was really very organic. We had 3 Spanish-speaking students in our class. They were already bilingual and several of us noticed that wow they can speak two languages.”* Thanks to a dedicated teacher and enthusiastic peers, Principal Garcia began to cultivate a love for the Spanish culture and language with in-class lessons and after-school meetings. Her passion for the Spanish language would grow further during her high school and college years when she participated in various exchange programs.

Upon graduation from college, she went to Santiago, Chile and lived there for two years. She had graduated from Santa Clara University and had also completed her bilingual credential. It was in Chile that she had her first professional teaching experience at an American School where she taught for two years in a “*very*” international program/school. In 1988 Principal Garcia moved back to the United States and she began teaching first grade at this school. She was one of two bilingual teachers hired because of a grant the school had received to start a dual immersion program. She would go on to teach four years in first grade before moving on to her next role at the school.

In 1995 the school secured more grant funding to support its goal of adopting a 90/10 dual immersion model. Principal Garcia described the program as: *“In two-way (dual immersion) you have a goal for both student populations to achieve fluency in both languages and there is never an exit. In an early exit model, which was the previous model, once you can speak well*

enough in English, you can drop the 'crutch' language of Spanish. We had immigrant students who were Spanish speakers losing their first language. It's called subtractive bilingualism. Students came in knowing one language and leaving with another one, rather than gaining a language and strengthening the native one." With her passion for the Spanish language and culture so firmly engrained into the fabric of her being, it was only natural for Principal Garcia to become the grant coordinator who would take this program through a monumental change to become a 90/10 model for dual immersion education.

In her capacity as grant program coordinator, Principal Garcia recalled the impact Proposition 227 had on the program. *"It had a huge impact. We were already functioning as a dual immersion program for a couple of years. In our third year was when the campaign for the proposition came out and our parent community did an excellent job of rallying against it and informing the community about Ron Unz, his motivation and the things being said that were untrue. A reporter from the San Francisco Chronicle wrote an article about dual immersion programs and interviewed my daughter who was part of the first dual immersion class at our school and was in second grade at the time. She was used as a key example and asked how this (Prop 227) was going to affect all children. She told the reporter that she wasn't going to forget English and she was also getting to learn Spanish."*

"Proposition 227 was just one of the reasons we decided to apply to the district to become a charter school. As a school, we didn't want to be hindered by the 30-day English only or the waiver process. A second reason was our desire to control school enrollments." The school is in a predominantly Spanish-speaking neighborhood and a district rule was to give priority to children who lived within a certain boundary. Before becoming a charter school, 95% of kindergarten students came from Spanish-speaking homes. When considering the research

behind a 90/10 model, the make-up of the student classes should be a balance of approximately 50% native-English and 50% native-Spanish in terms of languages spoken in the home.

According to Principal Garcia, *“we needed to do something to achieve a balanced enrollment demographic of native English and Spanish-speaking students, preferably 50-50.”*

With her passion and guidance, Principal Garcia got parents and staff together to conduct research about charter schools. They attended workshops about starting dual immersion charter schools. They made a deliberate choice to proceed with a 90/10 model for curricular design and instruction. According to Principal Garcia, *“the best results for second language proficiency for both groups of students was found in 90/10 models. Generally when a 50/50 model is adopted, there isn’t community support for the program. When you want to have a high-level proficiency in Spanish, you need to go with the 90/10 model. It’s very difficult to achieve that in the 50/50 model. In the 90/10 model we have to be very systematic and intentional about communicating in Spanish in the beginning.”* A charter following this model was written and approved by the school board. Principal Garcia’s dual-immersion program became a charter school in October, 1998.

Principal Garcia went on to describe several elements in a dual immersion program she considers to be critical to success. It is these elements that parents should be aware of when they are considering dual immersion programs. According to Principal Garcia, consistency and *“sticking with the model”* are of great importance. She elaborates by saying *“you always separate the languages for instruction. If you start that from Day One in Kindergarten and continue all the way through sixth grade, it really helps the students’ proficiency. If you’re mixing languages, it’s a waste.”*

Principal Garcia emphasized the importance of parental involvement. Although families with children attending her school represent a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds, they have a common interest – *“we all want our kids to be bilingual, bicultural and bi-literate because of the opportunities it will provide for them in the future.”* She goes on to state that *“leadership development among the parents is important. Dual immersion cannot survive without passionate school and parent leadership.”* Parents in her program are required to volunteer a minimum of one hour per month. When on campus parents can be seen supervising on the playground, helping in the classroom, or meeting with school administrators planning for future fundraising activities.

Another key element identified by Principal Garcia is the quality of the staff in the program. *“Our school has a faculty who are passionate about our mission and vision about developing dual language proficiency and heart.”* She has a regular, open communication with staff. Principal Garcia is a hands-on administrator who visits classrooms and meets with parents to hear concerns. She supports faculty in their classroom and offers them professional development opportunities to facilitate their own growth as educators.

When asked during the interview about advice she’d have for parents considering a dual immersion education for their child, her response was concise. *“In order to meet the mission of the school/program, a full commitment to the school from kindergarten through sixth grade is required for students to achieve the bilingual, bicultural and bi-literate potential.”* Parents play a critical role in fostering this growth and work in partnership with school staff and administrators to achieve this goal. They need to be supportive in building bicultural relationships with other parents and families. For some, they need to accept that they might not be able to help with homework or that their child may speak a second language better than the parents.

In closing the interview Principal Garcia commented on the students in her program.

“Our graduates want to help others. They see themselves as special – as having this extra gift that others don’t have. They feel compelled to use it to help others in the world.”

Chapter 5 Discussion /Analysis

Summary of Major Findings

In reviewing notes taken during the interview conducted for this research, three main elements emerged. Of utmost importance is the adherence to the model selected for a dual immersion program. Principal Garcia was of the opinion that the 90/10 model is the best for true achievement of bilingual and bi-literate proficiency (personal communication, January 18, 2012). In grades kindergarten to second grade, instruction must be primarily in the minority language, Spanish in this case. If teachers stray from the model and give in to speaking English so that all students can understand instruction, his/her time is wasted. To explore this element at a particular school, parents should inquire as to which model guides the programs instruction and request to visit a kindergarten classroom to observe a lesson.

A second factor parents should consider in choosing a dual immersion program for their children is the level of commitment they will be asked to make. This can take many forms. In order for the program to meet its goal of fostering the development of a bilingual, bi-literate, and bicultural children, parents must be prepared to keep their child enrolled for the full seven years, from kindergarten through sixth grade. Because instruction is primarily in the minority language the first three years, it is not uncommon for students to experience a delay in the development of their English reading abilities. There have not been any long-term deficiencies experienced by dual immersion graduates attributed to the model. On the contrary, many believe learning a second language has cognitive and social benefits that outweigh this delay.

In order to facilitate a bicultural community, parents may be asked to get involved as much as possible with their dual immersion program. Parents should be ready to attend school

functions and mixers that provide opportunities to create bicultural relationships between parents and families. Teachers may need parent help in the classroom during school hours or send prep-work to take home. Parents may be asked to help supervise on the playground or assist in fundraising for afterschool enrichment programs. Regardless of the nature of the involvement, many parents would expect to contribute some amount of time to their child's school no matter where they choose to enroll. A dual immersion program is no different in that respect.

Finally, the quality of the teaching staff at a dual immersion school should be considered because it is critical to its success. All classroom teachers should be credentialed and bilingual in the languages taught by the program. Teachers should have regular opportunities for professional development. They should be well-supported by school administrators and trusted to do what they do best: teach!

Much of this information can be gathered by contact the school office or attending an information session about a chosen program. In fact, many of the questions and concerns a prospective parent of a dual immersion student may have can be answered at those types of meetings. While informational, they also give you access to an administrator or teacher to ask the burning questions you may have about a program. Additionally, the sessions usually involve a school tour and an opportunity to see a classroom with students in action.

Comparison of Findings to Previous Research

The information gathered in the interview with Principal Garcia reinforced the major findings gleaned in a review of the literature. A critical component key to a successful dual immersion program is strong parental support. Parents must be in it for the long haul. In order to meet program goals of producing children who are bilingual, bi-literature and bicultural, parents

need to make a seven year commitment, from kindergarten to sixth grade. Many programs won't allow new students to enroll beyond first grade.

Both a review of the literature and the interview conducted in this research identified the academic rigor of a program as a contributing factor leading to successful fulfillment of helping students become bilingual and bi-literate. Alanis and Rodriguez (2008) found in their survey of ten teachers and a principal that holding high expectations and not offering a watered-down curriculum was a major factor in student success. Principal Garcia echoed the same sentiment in the interview. She emphasized that once a school chooses a model, whether it is 90/10 or 50/50, the staff, administration and parents must remain committed to it. For her school, a 90/10 model, this means that kindergarten teachers must deliver their instruction in Spanish-only and not give in to students who may be frustrated because they come in speaking only English. For the 10% of English instruction they receive, they rotate to a different teacher. This leads to my next finding: that successful programs employ a high quality teaching and support staff.

While there are minimum faculty requirements for teaching in a dual immersion program, there are other factors parents should consider when selecting one. At minimum, faculty should hold and maintain the requisite teaching credentials as mandated by their state's education governing body. Additionally, the faculty should be bilingual in both languages offered in the program design. Teaching staff at successful schools regularly attend professional development workshops with the support of school administration.

When comparing notes taken during the interview with Principal Garcia to the information gathered in a review of the literature, many common themes emerged. Ramos (2007) found that a major reason parents choose their programs is due to a desire to have their children become bilingual, bi-literate and bicultural. A passionate Principal Garcia has articulated the

same theme in the mission for her school (personal communication, January 18, 2012). When considering a program for their child, parents should seek out this type of information and can do so usually by locating the school web site or contacting the school office.

Limitations/Gaps in the Study

Conducting an interview with a highly respected dual immersion educator was a good place to start for this research project. However, this approach may have been too narrow to capture all of the potential perspectives. The information gathered during the interview was consistent with data found in the literature, some of which included parent and staff surveys. Adding a survey component of the parents and staff at Principal Garcia's school may have provided other key elements like ones found in the literature, but not discussed in the interview. An example might be the reasons parents choose the program. If they live in the neighborhood, did they choose it because of the schools proximity to their home or because of the quality of the program?

Implications for Future Research

Future research on this topic in determining key factors should include a broader perspective of those associated with a dual immersion program. Constituents to include may be parents of current students, parents of incoming students – depending on the timing of the survey, staff who teach at the school and staff who administratively support the school. Each of these groups has a unique perspective and may identify elements others have not considered.

Conducting interviews with constituents from each of these groups could also be considered. While some people may be more willing to take paper/pencil or computerized survey,

others may prefer to verbally convey their thoughts and opinions. Using both survey and interview methods could potentially yield more elements believed to be key to choosing a program. It could also reinforce the main elements found in the literature and previously described.

Overall Significance of the Study

The literature regarding successful dual immersion programs is overwhelmingly positive if certain key elements exist. It is these same elements that parents should consider when choosing a program or determining if this education model is a good fit for their children and family. Elements such as program design, strength of school leadership, and quality of faculty can be learned by attending an information session, seeking out school information via the web, or contacting parents who have students currently enrolled in the program.

The key element of parental involvement involves gathering information and that act of making a personal commitment should they end up choosing this model of education. When gathering information, prospective parents should inquire about volunteering expectations and ways in which they will be able to help at school. Parents considering dual immersion need to do their homework and ask questions. The information is out there.

About the Author

Sara Drozdowicz is a wife, mother of two boys, and elementary teacher. She is originally from Minnesota and now resides in northern California. Sara is currently completing coursework for her Master's in Education at Dominican University of California. When not working or studying, she enjoys spending time with her sons and husband whether it involves cooking, gardening, swimming, camping, or travelling.

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