Ensuring High-quality Dual Language Immersion Education:
Louisiana's Certified Foreign Language Immersion Program Rubric

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Abstract

At the time of the demise of bilingual education in California via Proposition 227, Chueng and Drabkin (1999) discussed the unchecked prevalence of poorly run bilingual programs and the apathetic administrators who provided inadequate oversight in terms of ensuring program quality. Proponents of dual language immersion programs hope to avoid this apathy and poor implementation. Program effectiveness depends on the quality of its implementation (Li, Steele, Slater, Bacon, & Miller, 2016). While immersion practitioners and researchers are acutely aware of the list of non-negotiables that are the cornerstone of a successful immersion pathway (Fortune, 2009, de Jong, 2016), they often encounter difficulties in engendering respect of these principles among site administrators. These administrators are confused by some of the counterintuitive aspects of the immersion model. In Louisiana, Louisiana Act 196 (Session 2014) was the solution found for this issue. Louisiana Act 196 requires that the state design a template reflecting these non-negotiables, create a review rubric, attach a state certification to it, and make it mandatory for schools to obtain their certification by 2016-17. This literature review examines the rationale for each element of the immersion state site certification rubric.

Keywords: Immersion, bilingual, program evaluation, dual language immersion, one-way immersion

Introduction

This literature review examines the rationale for the Louisiana State Department of Education's certification process that is used to ensure that their immersion programs are of the highest quality. Louisiana administrators and practitioners who carefully crafted Immersion State Certification policy took into account lessons learned from bilingual education and research on immersion schools, ensuring avoidance of the common pitfalls of poor programs. At the demise of Bilingual Education in California due to Proposition 227, Chueng and Drabkin (1999) examined case studies of bilingual programs and found that there were issues with poorly run programs where "school administration seems to be quite apathetic about properly enforcing and supporting bilingual education in their schools" (p.1). The Los Angeles Time's (Anderson & Pyle, 1998) story on bilingual schools in California before Proposition 227, found that only 7% of English Language Learners became fluent each year. Of the 5,800 schools with bilingual programs, 1,150 did not move any students to fluency, and for half of those schools, it was their second year without progress. In Louisiana, a cross-comparative study showed the difference between a well and a poorly administered program and how a poorly administered program can wreak havoc on student achievement and self-esteem (Haj-Broussard, 2003).

In light of the repeal of Proposition 227 by Proposition 58 by a vote of 73% to 26% (Ulloa, 2016), it is imperative that immersion programs do not fall into the same trap of administrative apathy, but rather ensure a rigorous and high-quality education for all students. Forman (2016) discussed the conflict that occurs when immersion is implemented within a school. Site administrators become confused by counterintuitive aspects of immersion. This administrator confusion threatens the non-negotiables of immersion that are needed in a high-quality, rigorous program (Fortune, 2009). In one of the more successful immersion school districts, studies on program implementation found that students were successful when teachers adhered to immersion guidelines in language use and instructional practices (Li et al., 2016). The Louisiana solution to ensure that guidelines are followed in order to avoid administrative apathy and/or confusion, and to assure high program quality was to create a site certification. This certification consists of state designed a template of non-negotiables based on the

Teacher Effectiveness for Language Learning (TELL) framework (TELL, n.d.) and a site visit to verify compliance.

The TELL framework focuses on characteristics in seven domains that are evident in effective world language teachers: environment, learning experience, collaboration, planning, performance and feedback, professionalism, and learning tools (TELL, n.d.). With the help of the Louisiana Consortium of Immersion Schools, the state created a review rubric based on the TELL framework and best practices research in immersion. To ensure that schools followed the rubric, Louisiana legislators, in ACT 361, offered state site certification to schools that score exceptionally well on the rubric (Lafleur, 2011). Once the State Certification was in place, Louisiana legislators made it mandatory for schools to undergo State Certification (Lafleur, Guillory, Montoucet, & Ortego, 2013).

Method

This literature review examined the research-based rationale behind each element of the Certified Foreign Language Immersion Program Rubric. The rubric is located on the Louisiana Believes World Languages and Immersion Website (https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/world-languages-immersion). The rubric elements were organized into three main categories: (1) scheduling, (2) protection and instruction of the TL, and (3) program guidelines, evaluations, and advocacy. When a search of the JSTOR Digital Library was conducted using these categories as keywords nearly 800 citations were found. Of these, only articles related directly to the specific rubric elements were selected. Then, the 33 articles were organized according to the rubric category that they addressed and included into this review of literature.

Findings

Scheduling. Scheduling is the largest area of the certification rubric. The rubric requires 60 -80% of the instructional day in the Target Language (TL), after eliminating the extra pull out classes from the schedule (library, PE, music, etc.). For middle school programs, the requirements are three core content courses, such as math, social studies, or science in the TL (one of which can be a TL language course). High school requirements are two courses per year, one of which must be a core content course in the TL.

The rationale behind the rubric requirements for specific amounts of time in the target language comes from research demonstrating that the more time spent in TL, the higher TL proficiency attained (Genesee, 1987; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Lindholm-Leary & Howard, 2008; Turnbull, Lapkin, & Hart, 2001). It is important to note that Genesee (1981) and Lindholm-Leary (2014) found no differences are attained in first language (L1) development in dual language programs regardless of the amount of time spent in L1; however, the length of time spent in the TL had a profound effect on TL proficiency. There is even research that shows that despite reduced exposure to L1, immersion students L1 skills exceed those of non-immersion monolingual students (Björklund & Mård-Miettinen, 2011; Lindholm-Leary & Howard, 2008; Lambert, Genesee, Holobow, & Chartrand, 1993). Thus, more time in the TL does not hurt L1 and helps TL development. Lindholm-Leary and Genesee (2014) believe that more time in L2 has an additive effect on L1 development.

In contrast, students with limited time in the TL (such as 50/50 programs) will have difficulties in higher grades because the cognitive level of work is more advanced than students' TL proficiency (Met & Lorenz, 1997). Thus L1 proficiency does not suffer when TL time is maximized, but TL and academic achievement are severely affected by not having enough time in the TL.

Protection of and instruction in the TL. Numerous rubric elements deal with the protection of and instruction in the target language. The promotion of highly developed TL requires strong language policy that encourages instructional language use and discourages the use of non-instructional languages (Lindholm-Leary & Molina, 2006). In other words, there need to be school-wide policies in place that promote students' use of the TL and discourage use of L1 during TL instructional time. These policies need to be evident in the teaching that occurs, the classroom environment, and examples of classroom tests, especially during the site visit.

Sustained periods of monolingual instruction help to promote adequate language development (Howard, Sugarman, Christian, Lindholm-Leary, & Rogers, 2007).

However, sustained time and use of the TL is not sufficient. Genesee and Lindholm-Leary (2013) discuss how immersion teachers often simplify language in the class to focus on the tested content. Accuracy in language use is rarely emphasized as long as students understand the content and can communicate their ideas. To assure a focus on language, TL teachers must view every content lesson as a language lesson, including content obligatory and content compatible language objectives (Snow, Met, & Genesee, 1989). Thus, the rubric ensures that language planning integrates language and content instruction. Sites must also show the integration of vocabulary, syntax, and language functions in instructional planning, demonstrating that the teaching of content simultaneously enhances student oral and written production.

Teacher training and development. Professional development and training are meant to ensure teacher training in immersion pedagogy. Ideally, teachers should have native or near-native proficiency, but those teachers are rare, and proficiency is often inadequately assessed (Met & Lorenz, 1997). The rubric requires that teachers be native speakers of the TL or have a high level of language proficiency. In Louisiana that means an American Council of Teachers of Foreign Language Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL OPI) of Advanced-Low or a Common European Framework (CEFR) certificate at the B2 level. While this OPI level is lower than other states require, the rubric took into consideration that Louisiana French was often given lower ratings than standard French on the ACTFL OPI and the state wanted to ensure that Francolouisianais teachers would not be excluded from certification eligibility.

Language immersion teachers need specialized professional development to address content, language, and literacy development in a subject driven program (Fortune, Tedick, & Walker, 2008; Kong, 2009). Accordingly, each year immersion teachers must have 12 hours in immersion-specific training. The rubric also requires administrators and ELA partner teachers' have six hours of language immersion professional development in order to enhance cross-fertilization and staff unity in the immersion setting (Met & Lorenz, 1997).

Program guidelines, evaluation, and advocacy. As a safeguard to "administrative apathy" (Chueng and Drabkin,1999) the rubric focuses on the consideration of program entrance, exit, and remediation policies to help reduce attrition. It is important that parents put their children in immersion because they value program goals, strategies, and outcomes (Boudreaux, 2010). Thus, entry into the immersion program must ensure parental support. Furthermore, it is critical that immersion programs have the resources and bilingual specialists necessary to provide instructional support, assessment, and intervention in the target language (Genesee, 2007).

As with any educational program, it is important to ensure that students learn what the program is trying to teach them. In the case of immersion, evaluation of the target language acquisition is necessary. Since immersion students may have difficulties in higher grades because the cognitive level of work is higher than TL proficiency (Met & Lorenz, 1997), it is critical that proficiency levels be monitored through testing. Monitoring proficiency levels ensures continued progress toward the language proficiency goals of the program/state (Fortune & Arabbo, 2006).This evaluation needs to entail the Louisiana immersion language checklists (see Appendix A for a link to those checklists), a grade on the report card for students TL achievement, and a more standardized test of language level (DELF, ELLOPA, SOPA, AP, etc.).

The final elements of the rubric address the need to ensure that the school is involved with advocacy for the program's continuation, growth, and place within the community. Cloud, Genesee, and Hamayan (2000) discuss how whether starting, expanding, or sustaining programs requires change, and change requires stakeholder support. This area of the rubric addresses what the schools are doing to ensure the strength of the program, the buy-in and participation of all the stakeholders, and the expansion of the program to higher grades. It is the area wherein schools demonstrate how the immersion pathway integrates into the community.

Discussion

Thus far Louisiana has fourteen site certified schools of the 39 immersion school sites. (LDOE, Press Release, May 19, 2016). While there seems to be an overall appreciation for site certification, research needs to be done to determine differences in academic level, language level, and attrition/retention numbers of students in site certified schools versus comparable non-certified immersion schools. Also, these criteria need to be compared to other criteria throughout the U.S. and Canada to determine if they can be improved or if they can help other programs improve their immersion criteria. Different rubrics will need to be created for different immersion contexts (two-way immersion, indigenous immersion) to highlight elements that are priorities in those contexts.

When presented at a recent immersion conference, attendees mentioned that this type of state certification was more valuable than SACS at their school because it met their needs. National organizations, such as the Center for Applied Research in Language Acquisition (CARLA) might want to build upon this rubric to create a national certification process. Administrators creating immersion programs might wish to use the rubric as a guide to creating a strong immersion program. Using this rubric will ensure that newly created immersion programs will not be described as "poorly run" and administrators who follow the rubric will not be considered "apathetic" (Chueng and Drabkin,1999). Research examining programs with high levels of language levels, academic achievement, and alumni success need to be examined to see if those programs have similar features outlined in this rubric. Overall, this is just the beginning, but it appears to be a positive one towards ensuring that immersion language education remains a rigorous and successful learning context that will develop students' 21st-century skills and prepare them for the global economy.

Conclusion

This literature review examined the research-based rationale that supports Louisiana's immersion site certification process. This process was implemented to ensure a high quality immersion pathway and to avoid the pitfalls that early bilingual education programs encountered. The guiding feature of this process is a rubric that is organized into three main categories: (3) scheduling, (2), protection and instruction of the TL, and (3) program guidelines, evaluations, and advocacy. The research demonstrates the sound rationale for these categories in site certification. Future research should examine the academic, linguistic, and socio-cultural benefits of site certification. Research along these lines would verify the importance of systemic site certification policies. Further research could also serve to formalize best practices within sites that have earned certification through the processes described in this article.

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Appendix A

Access the State-Certified Immersion Schools section to find the immersion rubrics and checklists referenced in this article. The checklists are in French and Spanish with an English translation:
Louisiana Believes. (n.d.). *World languages & immersion standards.*
https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/world-languages-immersion