

February 20, 2009

Alternative Instructional Models of Bilingual Education 2007–08

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Summary

The findings of this bilingual “best practices” study demonstrate that there are multiple approaches to help ELs achieve success, but that the most important elements include: high levels of teacher language fluency; high expectations for students; an additive learning environment with support for language and cultural diversity; consistent monitoring of students progress and teaching to rigorous academic standards; a focus on a consistent, coherent program design, and professional development and a learning community are essential. EL students can grow at the same pace as their English speaking peers when provided with consistently well-implemented programs and strong teachers. We recommend that:

- For a bilingual program to thrive, it must receive the support of administrators, teachers, and parents.
- The debate about which materials and which language to use in instruction should be superseded by a focus on instructional quality.

Overview

This study was conducted as a result of Central and Local District leadership’s request for research on ‘best practices’ in LAUSD. It focuses on Waiver to Basic Bilingual classrooms/schools in which students excel academically. There are widespread educational, political, and policy debates about the best ways of assuring that English learners (EL) are successful academically and that they acquire basic *academic* as well as *conversational* English and grade-level appropriate literacy skills. An important shift in this debate around the education of ELs is a move from a singular focus on the question, “Should students be instructed in English or Spanish?” to a focus on “What is the optimal instructional environment?” This reflects in many ways the broader national concern with instructional quality and student outcomes (August & Shanahan, 2006). Yet there is not widespread agreement about which approaches are best with which learners, or whether there are multiple optimal approaches that may achieve acceptable student outcomes. The study addresses the following questions:

- What are the backgrounds and programmatic assumptions of the alternative programs under study?
- What instructional methods, content, or organizational strategies differ as a result of applying the two approaches?

- What is the difference between program participants and children with similar backgrounds who are not program participants in academic achievement as measured on achievement tests?

Methods

This report presents the results of the investigation into the nature of classroom life and instruction in selected classrooms at these two sites, Archimedes and Orquidea. At these two elementary schools, EL students receiving Dual Proficiency or bilingual services have demonstrated strong academic gains, either across the entire school (Archimedes) or in the program-specific classrooms (Orquidea). The sample consisted of eight classrooms in two schools. At Orquidea School, we targeted four classrooms – a kindergarten class, a 1st grade class, a 2nd grade class, and a 4th grade class. At Archimedes School, we targeted a kindergarten, two 1st grades, and a 2nd grade class.

Classroom observations. The principal research approach utilized in this study was observational. Bilingual classroom observers visited the eight classrooms regularly during the school year. Each classroom was visited a total of ten times, and each observation lasted from 3–5 hours. Unstructured field notes were taken by bilingual trained observers (Ph.D. doctoral students and professional research staff from the district research office). Observers did not utilize pre-assigned categories; however they did focus on English language arts and reading/literacy. Observers recorded field notes both during and after the completion of a given observation. Field notes were then rewritten in a complete narrative form when observers were no longer at the school, translating raw notes into the typed narrative utilized in the analysis.

Motivation Observation Protocol. In addition to the data collected through extensive field notes, classroom observers used an observation protocol every 15 minutes during the observations in order to provide a quantitative estimate of the reading motivation environment. With the use of the protocol, observers gathered data regarding several reading motivation constructs: autonomy, challenge, social interaction, importance, recognition and curiosity. These particular constructs were selected because they would be evidenced through observable student behaviors.

Individual testing. The Woodcock–Muñoz Language Survey– Revised (WMLS–R) (Alvarado, Ruef, & Frank, 2005) was administered by research staff from the district and by doctoral level students. The test surveys a wide range of reading and literacy skills in both English and Spanish and consists of seven tests measuring different aspects of language proficiency: picture vocabulary; verbal analogies; letter–word identification; dictation; understanding directions; story recall; and passage comprehension (Alvarado, Ruef, Schrank, 2005). All students were tested in both English and Spanish on two occasions, once at the beginning of the study, and once at the end of the study. The other two measures employed in the study were taken from existing data sources, and included the California Standards Test (CST) in English language arts (ELA) and the Standards Based Tests in Spanish (STS) which are administered to students in Waiver to Basic and Dual Language Immersion programs districtwide

Analysis of field note data. The research team created a coding scheme designed to capture classroom variables evident in the transcribed field notes, including grouping, language, discourse (as represented by predominant speaker[s]), student engagement, affect, cognitive challenge (higher vs. lower-order thinking), instruction (constructivist vs. direct instruction), reading instruction focus, and student choice.

Key Findings

Background and Programmatic Assumptions

Given the importance of local contexts in understanding both the operation and outcomes, we summarize here briefly the background and development of the program at each research site.

The principal at Archimedes reported that the key to his school's success is teaching the child in English and in the home language. He also stated that native-speaking teachers are vitally important to the program as they have the language skills necessary to teach academic language in both languages. Currently, Archimedes School has a very positive reputation and parents line up early in the morning three to four days in advance to register children for kindergarten. At Archimedes, the overall commitment to school-wide literacy in two languages is practiced beginning in kindergarten. When students are in English-only settings, "they're not learning anything except English," said the school's bilingual coordinator. "They can't grasp any of the other concepts because they're still struggling with the language."

At the time of observations, Archimedes used the Houghton-Mifflin Lectura/Reading English Language Arts program with the Spanish Waiver to Basic (WB) students. WB students transitioned out of bilingual education by 3rd grade. Lectura is organized into themes containing various lessons broken up into days. The teacher's guide provides five days of activities for three specific areas of content on a lesson grid. The Lectura curriculum materials address phonemic awareness, high frequency words, fluency and reading comprehension skills and strategies during the Blue segment of the reading lesson; spelling, vocabulary, high-frequency words, combining syllables and building sentences during the Red section; and oral and written language during the Green section. In addition to assigning daily activities in each of the three areas, teachers are expected to provide daily 'universal access,' a time for students to learn to work independently and for teachers to work with individuals or small groups.

According to teachers at Orquidea Elementary, the Dual Proficiency program,¹ a teacher-developed, content-based developmental bilingual program, had been evolving for over 20 years. Its goal is to provide a genuine opportunity for high achievement in English and Spanish. Teachers reported that Dual Proficiency employs modeling of high-level English and Spanish, heavily-scaffolded content-based instruction, explicit application of the Latin base of Spanish

¹ Named by teacher-developers, Dual Proficiency is not to be confused with Dual Immersion or Dual language Immersion, which refer to LAUSD's two-way language immersion program that requires native English language models as well as native speakers of the second target language (Spanish, Korean, or Mandarin) as language models in each classroom.

to academic English (Bailey, 2007), and extended learning opportunities during after school hours and intersession courses. Teacher-program developers further reported that to reinforce high expectations in two languages, classroom instruction centers on content areas in social science and science using Spanish and English thematic units integrated into the curriculum unit. Grade-level standards are addressed through a unified approach in which the whole academic day contributes to the elaboration of curricular goals. ELD is integrated directly into content instruction using songs, poems, plays, and varied approaches directly tied to the unit of content study. Team teachers said they motivate children to read by awakening their natural interest in learning about the world and provided interesting content-based materials as well as class time to enjoy it.

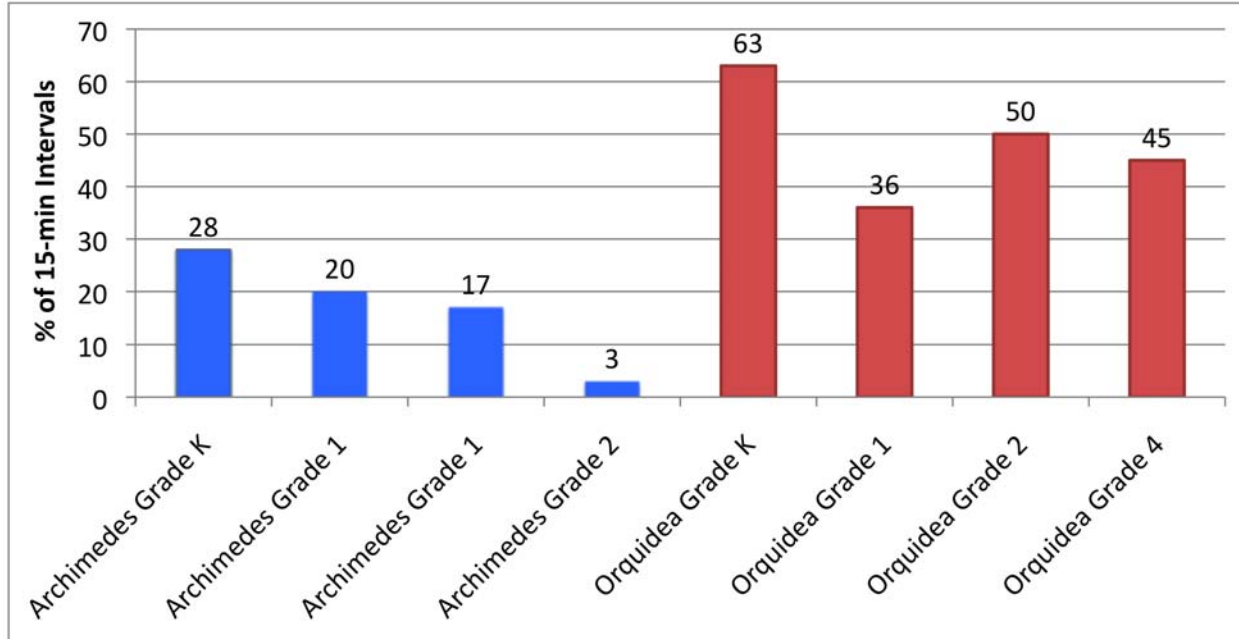
Officially, Orquidea staff utilized SRA/McGraw Hill's Foro Abierto as the state approved Spanish-language instructional material to be used in bilingual classrooms grades K-6. Foro Abierto is a Spanish version of the Open Court Reading program. Because the study's focal teachers, a K-4 vertical team, reported having worked for so many years building their own program, they stated that they used Foro Abierto to supplement their program, not as its core. The team encouraged and invited other interested staff members to attend regularly scheduled professional development meetings (which they conducted themselves) to learn about the Dual Proficiency approach, to brainstorm about how to integrate content instruction into all areas of the curriculum, and to share teacher-made Dual Proficiency materials.

Between-school Differences in Instructional Methods and Organizational Strategies

Looking at teacher practice and student-teacher interaction across and between the two schools, we noted significantly more instances of Spanish language use, the teaching of phonics, grammar, and spelling, and large group instruction at Archimedes than we did at Orquidea. At Orquidea, the analysis revealed proportionately more small group instruction, constructivist pedagogy, and a focus on comprehension. Another difference between the two schools has to do with the manner by which reading was taught. At Archimedes, three out of four sample teachers implemented the Lectura curriculum. Among those who implemented Lectura, one provided no additional materials, while the other two widely supplemented the curriculum with additional reading materials or language arts skill builders. At Orquidea, reading was taught through literature, social studies and science content.

In studying six specific reading motivation constructs (autonomy, challenge, social interaction, importance, recognition and curiosity/interest), there appeared to be a wide range in the levels of reading motivation present in the classrooms, with relatively more instances of reading motivation observed for students in Orquidea classrooms in comparison to their counterparts at Archimedes.

Exhibit 1. Evidence of instructional practices that support reading motivation



Academic Outcomes

Woodcock–Muñoz Language Survey: Composite scores. The composite gain scores for all study classrooms were statistically significant, and there were no significant differences between the two schools on the composites of the seven subtests in both languages. Generally, all classrooms demonstrated gains from the pre–test to the post–test, indicating growth in language proficiency as measured by the WMLS–R in English and Spanish. Both Archimedes and Orquidea demonstrated significant gains over the course of the academic school year.

Standards Based Tests in Spanish (STS). Spanish test scores were generally quite high with the exception of the writing scores in second grade classrooms from both schools.

California Standards Tests (CST) in English Language Arts. Overall, Orquidea’s Spanish home language students did not generally perform as well on the CST as did their peers throughout the district. Archimedes Spanish home language students, in turn, outperformed their peers throughout the district. Comparing CST scores for Spanish home language students, we found the WB program was stronger in both schools than it was districtwide and that Spanish home language students in WB classrooms performed much better than their peers in Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms at both schools.

Conclusion

The debate about which language to use in instruction should be superseded by a focus on instructional quality. As noted at the beginning of the report, much debate has taken place about the *language* of instruction issue for English learners. It is our belief, reinforced by this study that the focus should rather be on the *quality* of instruction. With respect to this issue, the work on effective bilingual programs suggests that there is not a single indicator of high performing or effective programs for English learner students, but rather multiple features that have been found to characterize effectiveness (Gold, 2006).

Different approaches can equally produce positive results. The classroom observers noted differences in grouping, type of seatwork, and time devoted to direct versus constructivist instruction. There were strong differences between schools with respect to how teachers motivated student reading. Despite diverse teacher practice, there were no significant differences between the two groups in looking at gains on the WMLS-R tests in English and Spanish. While the programs were quite different, they did share certain key elements – a shared vision, a strong emphasis on instruction, a deep respect for students and their cultures, the implementation of a consistent, coherent program design, and a focus on results as a barometer for effectiveness. We would propose that these should be at the core of every successful program.

Exhibit 2 Programmatic Features

	Archimedes School	Orquidea School
Distinct Features	A Waiver to Basic approach which uses Spanish as a bridge to English until grade 3	A dual proficiency approach which promotes bilingualism across the grades
	Program or approach is schoolwide	Program operates semi-independently within the school
	Strong leadership – provided by the principal	Strong leadership – provided by the group
	Reliance on commercial curriculum	Reliance on teacher-developed curriculum
Common Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar populations – non-English home language, low SES • High levels of teacher language fluency • High expectations for students • Additive learning environment – support for language and cultural diversity • Consistent monitoring of students’ progress and teaching to rigorous academic standards • A focus on consistent, coherent program design 	

For a bilingual program to survive, someone has to have the courage to support it (administrators, teachers, parents). Unfortunately, the precipitous decline in the number of bilingual classrooms in this state and district makes this point more salient than ever. Archimedes Elementary is a learning community that pays close attention to research on effective schools and programs for EL students. Accountability for achievement in Spanish and English language arts is a clearly stated foundation for the bilingual program. Average student achievement is above the 75th percentile in Spanish reading for second graders at Archimedes. The principal maintains that, because his scores are high, the district administrators allow him broad discretion to permit different approaches leading to desirable student outcomes. At Orquidea School, the Dual Proficiency has developed over time through the collaborative efforts of the teachers, who have created and maintained a very effective professional development community. However, this program has only been able to continue with strategic administrative support.

Successful programs take an additive, rather than subtractive approach to bilingual education. From Ms. Parra's kindergarten through all following grades of Dual Proficiency at Orquidea, a consistent message is sent: "You (the student) are expected to progress in two languages. Your Spanish knowledge will directly help you to reach a higher level in English than you would be able to reach otherwise." At Archimedes, Ms. Lopez teaches in a very structured manner with high expectations for all her kindergarten students in both English and Spanish. She firmly believes that all kindergarten students can be taught to write a complete story not just a sentence, and the majority of students reach that goal by the end of the academic year. She gives short speeches to her students about the value of hard work, what it meant to be a good student, and how important it is to go to college.

Not all bilingual approaches, programs, curricula, or teachers are equally successful. Among the eight teachers observed, there was a range of interactional and instructional styles, Spanish language ability, years of teaching experience, philosophical approaches to bilingual education, effort expended, pedagogical skills, and, concomitantly, student outcomes in both English and Spanish. It is exactly these types of variations, which are an undeniable feature of any school program, that make strict comparisons difficult. However, where we observed the most success, we saw teachers who, on their own time, worked together to examine their own practice and to problem solve; teachers who thought deeply about what their students knew and what they needed to learn, and who had a deep and abiding respect for the children with whom they worked. Teacher problem-solving ability and drive also played a role in the success stories.

EL students can grow at the same pace as their English speaking peers when provided with consistently well-implemented programs and strong teachers. The WMLS-R outcomes for sample students at both schools demonstrate that strong teaching yields strong results. The academic content units taught in Dual Proficiency classrooms meaningfully value, elucidate, and apply the child's European, Hispanic, and Indigenous cultural heritages while advancing the students' mastery of California content standards. In other words, the Dual Proficiency

program embodies Culturally Relevant and Responsive Education (CRRE). Archimedes teachers affirm the importance of ongoing and long-term support for students in both English and Spanish and maintain contact and support for the student community long after the classes have moved on to subsequent grades. Both schools form cohort groups of students who stay together throughout their elementary careers.

Professional development and a learning community are essential. The schools we observed were very distinct in terms of professional development. At Archimedes, the principal had a strong role in the area of professional development, and took an active role in instructional matters, including modeling lessons, observing instruction, etc. Professional development was practical and more focused on student outcomes. An important marker of success at this school was formal accountability measures, primarily high-stakes standardized tests. At Orquidea, the professional development (as well as the program itself) was carried out by the teachers themselves. Instruction was also the focus at these sessions, including presentations by individual teachers of their implementation of the program, general discussions about the program philosophy and theory, discussions about specific teaching issues or problems, etc. An important indicator of success for these teachers was informal measures, performance based assessments, and day to day monitoring of individual student progress.

Limitations

There were limitations of this work that need to be taken in to account in considering the findings. For example, this study was descriptive, and did not set out to test hypotheses regarding the programs. In addition, our sample was relatively small – eight classrooms and further limited in other respects as well (one geographic area, one local district, and a relatively short time span). A small sample size is often more useful to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. This mixed-method study was not designed to be offer findings that can be generalized across the district, the state, or the country, rather to provide valuable insights about the education of English learners enrolled in two widely different school and program types.

For more information regarding this study see the full report:

Hayes, Katherine, Alternative Instructional Models of Bilingual Education 2007–08.
Research and Planning No. 2009–02. Available Online: <http://research.lausd.net>