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An Analysis of Educational Programming for and Learning Outcomes

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Learning Outcomes and Students Learning English as a Second Language

Abigail Felber-Smith

Abstract

In order to better understand the educational outcomes of English language learners enrolled in two distinct programs at this school, the researcher, a 4th/5th grade bilingual teacher, studied leading research in the field of bilingual education, administered and analyzed assessments and interviewed participants' families as well as colleagues. The premise of the study was to compare literacy levels of two sample groups—six students who received instruction solely in English and six students who received instruction both in English and Spanish. All students were Latino, and Spanish was the predominate language spoken in their homes. Study findings revealed that, regarding English literacy, students receiving instruction only in English showed slightly higher text reading levels in English, but all students performed similarly on the English writing assessment. In Spanish literacy, the assessment data revealed that students receiving instruction in both English and Spanish maintained and/or developed higher literacy skills in their first language than students who received instruction only in English. (Note: Assessments focused on writing and reading as opposed to all four domains of literacy—reading, writing, speaking and listening.)

Who decides?

Learning a second language is a journey
A challenging journey
Forever with that imperfect accent
If perfection exists
Who decides?

Learning a second language is a journey
A continuous journey
How exactly does it go again?
Jumbled phrases, incorrect tenses
Dialects too many to count
In the North they say it one way, in the South another
In Mexico one way, in Venezuela another
Who decides?



Learning a second language is a journey

An enriching journey
A first step towards new cultural understandings
New knowledge of intricacies of language function and form
New avenues for self-expression
New means of communicating with others
New opportunities for relationships
Or is it?
For me, an English speaker acquiring second language skills
My skills unquestionably are an asset
For my students, Spanish speakers acquiring English,
Their skills are often "the problem"
If their language ability is perceived as a deficit,
Why is mine a lauded skill?
Who decides?

Situating the Problem

I teach in an instructional team comprised of an English as a second language (ESL) teacher, an English speaking 4/5 classroom teacher, and myself, a bilingual 4/5 classroom teacher. At the start of the school year, my teammates and I

reviewed our class rosters and noticed a new student's name, Laura. The only information provided for this child was that she was nine years old, spoke Spanish as a first language and had not previously received instruction in her first language. As a team, we decided to assess her reading level in Spanish and English to get a better understanding of her strengths and possible literacy challenges. As the Spanish-speaking

teacher on the team, I was chosen to assess her in Spanish. After explaining the reading task to Laura, I immediately sensed an abrupt change. I asked Laura to read the first list of words in Spanish, but she said she could not read any of them. She attempted a couple, but simply applied English pronunciation strategies. I was somewhat disheartened; Laura spoke Spanish beautifully, yet was unable to read and therefore write the language. *Would her ability to speak her first language eventually fade?* I began to wonder if in a world that is mostly bilingual (Tokuhama-Espinosa 2003) were we, as a society, missing out on obvious opportunities for second language development?

The next day, Laura approached me during recess. She asked me about my students and inquired about how we work in our bilingual classroom. I explained that we do our work in both languages—Spanish and English. She seemed very intrigued. When the whistle blew to signal the end of recess, our conversation ended. However, within a few weeks, Laura approached me again. This time she made a request, *“Would you teach me to read in Spanish?”*

A Spanish-speaking student’s request for support in acquiring literacy skills in her first language, along with my personal interest in bilingual education, ignited the thinking that led me to conduct the study reported in this paper. The following questions focused the study:

- How do the literacy skills (both first language (L1) and second language (L2)) of English Language Learners (ELLs) receiving bilingual instruction progress by late elementary school? How do the literacy skills of ELLs who receive English-only instruction progress by late elementary school?

Review of Literature

According to the Directory of Foreign Language Immersion Programs in U.S. Schools (2006) available through the Center of Applied Linguistics’ Website, there are approximately 313 language immersion programs in the United States. The organization defines foreign language immersion programs as those that teach “all or part of the curriculum in a second language...and are designed for students whose native language is English.” Of the 313 language immersion programs, 132 of them are Spanish language immersion programs. There are several explanations for an increase in foreign language immersion programs in recent decades, including the following:

- increased recognition for individuals from the United States to acquire second language skills for personal, economic, educational, and national security initiatives,
- academic research highlighting the effectiveness of immersion programming on students academic and language proficiencies,
- pressure from parents and families,
- increase in schooling options, and
- increase in the importance placed on multicultural education by educators and parents (Lenker & Rhodes, 2007).

Why is it that foreign language programs designed primarily for English speaking children go essentially uncontested, yet there are entire organizations (e.g. U.S. English, English First) that advocate for immigrant children to receive academic instruction solely in English? Further, Cummins (2000) argues that the media creates a positive image of bilingual education programs that are designed for middle class to affluent majority language children, yet has difficulty with the rationale for bilingual programs designed to support the needs of often marginalized children from language minority groups. The argument can be made that offering students instruction in their first language is not only an issue of academic achievement, but also of social justice.

Providing students with quality instruction in their first language does not necessarily mean successful bilingual programming. “Various home and parental, community, teacher, school and society affects may act and interact to make bilingual education more or less effective” (Baker, 2006, p. 262). With that said, the following are identified by Cloud, Genessee, and Hayaman (2000) as defining characteristics of effective programming:

- parent involvement,
- high academic standards,
- language instruction integrated with academic instruction,
- strong administrative leadership,
- student-centered and developmental curriculum,
- reflective educators, and
- integration with other school programs and other schools.

Further, Baker (2006) adds that strong bilingual programs not only promote bilingualism, but also biliteracy and biculturalism. In other words, good programming cultivates skills that go beyond speaking two languages; children learn to speak, read, write and listen in two languages, and also develop an understanding of the culture that

encompasses the language. This is also referred to as additive bilingualism or acquiring proficient language skills in a second language without displacing or replacing the first language or culture (Cloud, Genesee, & Hayaman, 2000). Strong bilingual programs produce not only academic, cognitive, and social/emotional benefits at the individual level, but also cultural, social and economic benefits that affect both individual students and entire communities.

Several studies have demonstrated that English Language Learners (ELLs) receiving instruction in their first language (L1) within strong bilingual programs perform better academically and obtain higher levels of English proficiency than ELLs that do not receive instruction in their L1. Ramírez et. al. (1991) conducted an eight-year longitudinal study that analyzed the learning outcomes of 2,300 Spanish-speaking students from five states in grades kindergarten through sixth. He focused on students in submersion (i.e. students placed in mainstream classrooms with no first language support), early-exit and late-exit bilingual programs. He found that by sixth grade students enrolled in late-exit programs were outperforming those in immersion and early-exit programs in math, reading and English language proficiency.

The findings of Thomas and Collier (1997) support those of Ramírez (1991). Thomas and Collier conducted a study from 1982 to 1996 that involved approximately 700,000 students' records from five large U.S. school districts. It focused on 42,317 students; sixty-three percent of the students spoke Spanish as a first language, but over 150 different home languages were represented in the study. They completed both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses of the data. Among other things, Thomas and Collier examined the affect programming has on ELLs' long-term academic achievement. They found that the strongest predictor of a student's academic success in English is the amount of formal schooling that a child receives in his/her first language. They also found that in the early grades, students' English proficiencies were about the same across the various program types (i.e. ESL pull-out, early-exit, late-exit and dual language). However, they reported that by sixth grade students in late-transitional bilingual programs were nearing their native language peers' English proficiency (50th percentile), while students in traditional ESL pullout or early-exit programs performed only at the 30th percentile. Such findings can be attributed to the fact that curriculum in the early elementary school years is often more contextual and

dependent upon social English skills (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills, BICS), which students tend to acquire rapidly regardless of the academic program. However, as students progress through their studies, learning concepts become more abstract and dependent upon academic English skills (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency Skills, CALPS) (Cummins, 2000). The acquisition of academic English is a never-ending endeavor, even for native English speakers. If English language learners are placed in only-English programs, they will likely show quick acquisition of the BICS as it is embedded in daily living, yet there is a risk that students become overwhelmed by academic content; this can impede not only English language acquisition, but also content learning.

Thomas and Collier found that dual language or two-way immersion programming led to highest student achievement outcomes and even sometimes showed students outperforming their monolingual peers. Dual language or two-way immersion refers to programming that serves both language minority and language majority students. The program uses both groups of students' first language for academic instruction and the goal of the programs are to develop bilingualism, biliteracy and biculturalism for all students (Cloud, Genesee, & Hayaman, 2000). Cummins (2000) confirms these findings by presenting a compilation of data that highlight positive academic outcomes for students in a variety of dual-language programs. He specifically acknowledges programs that involve two languages that are very linguistically distinct such as Korean-English programs and also programs in which many of the students come from low socio-economic families. He emphasizes that similar positive outcomes result in both 2-way and 1-way developmental programs. The label "developmental" is comparable to the label "maintenance" as both have educational aims of first and second language development. The results outlined by Cummins are likely attributed to the additive nature of these program models. Developmental programs, both 2-way programs and 1-way programs, support the development of students' L1 and L2 in settings that consciously work to equalize the status of the two languages and cultures. These programs acknowledge and actively work to dismantle the power relationships that can interfere with student success (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan 2000; Cummins 2000). A further explanation as to why strong bilingual programs prove effective is that a strong foundation in a student's L1 can serve as a tool for acquiring

English language proficiency. Concepts and strategies, such as decoding, skimming, scanning, making inferences, making connections, and using background knowledge, transfer when acquiring a second language (Baker 2006; Cummins, 2000; Ramirez, 1991). Overall, a student's L1 can be developed with no cost to their academic achievement or English development (Cummins, 2000).

Beyond the fact that students can work towards bilingualism without undermining their academic achievement, research also indicates that the skills acquired in becoming bilingual might enhance cognitive development. Researchers have found evidence that the skills one acquires through learning a second language might heighten one's ability to manipulate linguistic structures and carry out metalinguistic tasks (Bialystock 2007; Hakuta & Diaz 1985). Further, Bialystock found that certain cognitive skills appear to develop earlier and deteriorate more slowly in individuals that are literate in two or more languages.

Strong bilingual programming also results in social and emotional benefits for students such as providing students with a sense of belonging and connectedness to their families, school communities, and neighborhoods. These benefits inextricably connect with student academic performance, reduced dropout rates and a more secure sense of self and purpose. All children want to feel like they belong and that they are accepted by their peers and adults that they regularly encounter. Strong bilingual programming can fulfill students' need to belong. Abraham Maslow brought his understandings of human needs to the public in his 1976 paper, "The Theory of Human Motivation," in which he claims:

These needs [esteem needs] may be classified into two subsidiary sets. These are, first, the desire for strength, for achievement, for adequacy, for confidence in the face of the world, and for independence and freedom. Secondly, we have what we may call the desire for reputation or prestige (defining it as respect or esteem from other people), recognition, attention, importance or appreciation. (p. 10)

Maslow's theory has since been reconsidered in terms of its hierarchical structure (e.g. Wahba & Bridgwell, 1976), yet in general his explanation of needs that motivate human beings is still widely accepted. Lily Wong Fillmore (2000) comments on the role of the educational institution and the family in supporting children's needs. She has found that educational programming that does not

provide instruction in a student's L1 or, at the very least, encourage the preservation of students' L1 tends to result in a loss of students' heritage language. This is due to the fact that students in an environment where their home language and culture are not valued are inundated with messages that acquiring English is the only way to be successful. Cummins (2000) writes that children can become "infested with shame" (p. 13) when their linguistic skills and home cultures are not validated. Such pressures along with limited opportunities to utilize and further develop L1 skills lead to a loss of L1. Wong Fillmore (1991) found that a loss of L1 can lead to a child feeling alienated in their own home. Wong Fillmore (2000) further states:

I contend that the school cannot provide children what is most fundamental to success in life. The family plays a crucial role in providing the basic elements for successful functioning. These include: a sense of belonging; knowledge of who one is and where one comes from; an understanding of how one is connected to the important others and events in one's life; the ability to deal with adversity; and knowing one's responsibility to self, family, community...The content differs from family to family, but this is the curriculum of the home--what parents and other family members teach and inculcate in children in the socialization process. (Wong Fillmore, 2000, para. 22)

Bilingual programming can provide students with opportunities for attaining fulfillment of their social emotional needs by providing them with a positive educational experience in which their cultural identity is accepted and validated. Also, bilingual programming supports family connections through first language development.

Further benefits of bilingualism and biliteracy include cultural, social and economical benefits at the individual, community and global level. Frengel (2003) summarizes these benefits as:

In today's world, monolingualism is a detriment to social progress and personal development. Monolingual Americans risk 'cultural isolation' in which there is a perceived ignorance about other cultures, as well as the practical difficulty that they are beginning to lose their jobs to more linguistically versatile people who can comprehend cultural subtleties in the business world as a result of their multilingual and multicultural perspective. (p. 47)

In the United States, many universities require a certain amount of foreign language coursework either as requirements for entrance into the

institution or as requirements to graduate out of the institution. As Baker (2006) writes, "It is ironic that many US and UK students spend time in school learning some of the very languages that children of immigrants are pressurized to forget" (p. 391). He continues by explaining that politics surrounding immigration in the United States work to anglicize immigrant children, stripping them of their language skills, yet the politics surrounding global trade increase the demand for bilingual and biliterate individuals. Baker refers to minority languages and cultural knowledge as natural resources, and therefore, the repression of such groups results in economic, social and cultural "wastage" (p. 391).

Still other researchers focus on bilingual education in the context of identity development and social justice. While identity formation is quite dynamic and is inextricably intertwined with power relationships that exist across majority and minority groups (Baker 2006; Cummins 2000), this paper will focus on the role of one's native or first language (L1) as a feature of identity development. Iris Marion Young (2005) writes:

eliminating group differences is both unrealistic and undesirable. Instead, justice in a group-differentiated society demands social equality of groups, and mutual recognition and affirmation of group differences. Attending to group-specific needs and providing for group representation both promote that social equality and provides the recognition that undermines cultural imperialism. (p. 102)

Many programs created to support language minority students are designed with the ultimate goal, or as Baker (2006) states "covert aim" of assimilation into the English language and majority mainstream culture under the assumption that this assimilation results in a society that is socially cohesive. However, an ignored truth is that such programs simultaneously emanate a rejection of the minority language and culture. Only programs that provide students with instruction in their first language with the defining mission of developing in students both bilingualism and biculturalism allow for preservation of children's identity, while at the same time preparing them for full participation in all of society's institutions (Marion Young). With no academic instruction in a child's first language coupled with a devaluation of the home language and culture, a child's first language is often lost. As students lose their native language, a solid identity formation is also at risk. In other words, strong bilingual programs support social justice by supporting a child's identity formation and the

cultural differences that exist across the many groups that make up the United States and global societies in which we live.

Numerous benefits have been found that directly correlate to providing students instruction in their first language. So much so that James Crawford (2000) claims, "When language-minority students fail, it is more likely from too little instruction in their native language than too little English" (p. 7).

METHODS

Participants

The participants in this study included a sample of twelve fourth and fifth grade students; all names of people and places are pseudonyms. Six students were in my instructional teammate's multiage classroom in which the sole language of instruction is English. Six of the students were in my 4th/5th grade bilingual classroom in which the primary language of instruction is Spanish. I should note that at the kindergarten level, families for whom Spanish is the first language have the option to enroll their children in the bilingual program; consent is needed. If students enter the school at a later grade, teachers take into account students language skills and prior educational experiences before conferring with parents about program placement.

Several factors influenced the sample selection for this study. All 12 students are Latino and speak Spanish as a first language. My instructional team and I analyzed past report cards in order to choose comparable sample groups from each homeroom in terms of academic achievement and internal motivation or effort. Further, I chose students that had been in either all-English programming or all bilingual programming. After considering the above factors, the sample group includes three 4th graders and three 5th graders that are enrolled in the bilingual program, four of whom are girls and two boys. The other six students are in the general education program, four 4th graders and two 5th graders, three girls and three boys.

Data Collection

I organized my research as a group case study that includes both quantitative and qualitative data because a case study allows that I "attempt to depict a phenomenon and conceptualize it" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 451). I collected two distinct sets of data. The first included staff interviews, parent interviews and other research about the history of the bilingual program in order to acquaint myself

and my audience with the program from its nascent state to its current more stable form. Secondly, I gathered data that focused on student literacy achievement and student self-perceptions as a way of conceptualizing the effectiveness of the bilingual program in which the participants were enrolled.

I collected data via three different assessments, a self-perception questionnaire, a reading assessment, and a writing assessment in order to better understand the participants' literacy abilities. I also conducted short interviews with each participant's family. The self-perception questionnaire required that students respond on a one to five scale—one corresponding to “never” and 5 to “most of the time”—to a series of twenty-one statements about how they view themselves as readers and writers in both Spanish and English. All students completed the questionnaire in their homerooms, in the language in which they primarily receive instruction and without time constraints. Students completed the survey within 10 minutes.

To determine students' reading levels in both Spanish and English, I utilized the Primary Language Arts Assessment (PLAA), a district-wide assessment purchased from the Rigby Company and then adapted to meet the needs of the district. The assessment is designed as a one-on-one interview; students read aloud a short passage and then respond to three to five comprehension questions. I conducted the interviews in both English and Spanish with all 12 participants over the course of a two week period.

Every February, students in grades 3, 5, 7, and 9 complete a district wide writing assessment designed to inform about students' writing abilities in terms of the following six writing traits:

- ideas,
- organization,
- voice,
- word choice (vocabulary),
- fluency, and
- conventions/use of language.

Students are provided with two prompts (i.e. one persuasive, the other descriptive) and an option for “free choice.” They choose any of the three options and over the course of three days they complete a piece of writing; they are asked to follow the writing process: planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. A team of trained teachers and other district staff assess the samples with rubrics that follow a one to five point rating system for each writing trait.

All 12 participants completed a writing assessment in both English and Spanish. I should note that the two assessments were identical in format; however, the persuasive and descriptive prompts were revised so that students wouldn't simply attempt to reproduce and translate the publication from their previous assessment.

I also conducted brief interviews with each participant's family in order to confirm that Spanish was the dominant language spoken at home and to discuss with parents the educational backgrounds of their children and their perceptions, concerns or appreciations for the education their children were receiving; I wanted to better understand the external factors that could support or hinder students' literacy development.

DATA ANALYSIS

Program History

I learned through an interview with a colleague, Ms. Mills, that the 2007-08 school year was the seventh year of the program. She explained that it was about seven years ago that many schools across the district began revamping their ESL/bilingual programs in response to allegations brought against the district that some schools were not in compliance with legislation outlined in Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that mandated certain educational programs/services for the ELL population.

I contacted our district-wide ESL/Bilingual program coordinator to learn more about the program development. On March 26, 2008 she wrote that in 2001 “the Division of ESL and Bilingual had a site monitoring visit from DPI [Department of Public Instruction] (aka – audit) and we were found out of compliance in eight areas” (email). The same week, she sent me a copy of the “Wisconsin Bilingual/English as a Second Language (ESL) Program Site Visit Summary” provided to the district from DPI as well as a copy of the “Response and Program Improvement Plan” created by the district in response to the visit summary. The visit summary (2001) from DPI states that:

The program and the district as a whole are not adequately meeting the needs of Limited-English Proficient (LEP) students and their families. Primary evidence for this is found in poor academic performance rates and

unacceptably high dropout rates of LEP and formerly LEP students. (p. 1)

The reviewer highlights eight areas that were in need of improvement, all of which involve district wide reforms and support, not just within the ESL department. In response, the district formed action teams made up of teachers, bilingual resource specialists and program coordinators from across the district that corresponded to the eight areas of needed improvement—from curriculum and pedagogical reforms to changes in staff allocation policies (District Response and Program Improvement Plan, 2001).

The building principal's concerns reflected those highlighted in the Department of Public Instruction summary. She utilized the words *appalling* and *abysmal* to describe past district-wide school-based statistics relating to the academic progress of Latino students. She stated, "I was a little... no I was a lot concerned about the academic progress of our Latino students" (personal communication, March 28, 2009). She explained that according to the data, all content area learning stopped when students were placed in English-only classroom environments. Due to the district statistics, the increase in Spanish-speaking students, the growing body of research of success of heritage language programming and staff interested in starting a bilingual program, she decided to open a bilingual program in fall of 2001.

Ms. Mills explained that during her first year as a 4th/5th grade teacher, none of the four bilingual classroom teachers were certified in bilingual education. The resources were also scarce, "I had one stack of chapter books. That was it...and some of them were not grade-level appropriate" (personal communication, March 10, 2008). Ms. Mills explained that at that time she felt quite pressured to get the kids proficient enough in English to transition them out of the bilingual program.

The 4th/5th bilingual students in this study, if started in kindergarten, entered the program in its second or third year. Therefore, throughout their educational experience they may have suffered the consequences of an unclear mission, insufficient resources, uncertified teachers, and rapid turnover. For example, I learned from Ms. Mills that there had been seven kindergarten teachers in seven years. The cohesiveness of any program and its curriculum is destabilized with constant fluctuation in teachers. Over the past seven years, however, the program has rapidly aligned itself with current research in the field. Our bilingual team recognized

the importance of continuing staff development, collecting quality resources, strengthening relationships within the community and refining policies in order to continue to improve the quality of education for our students. The mission behind the program is that students develop a strong literacy base in their first language while gradually acquiring English skills they need to be successful in a general education environment.

The consensus among staff that the program continues to progress does not replace the need for constant reflection and adaptations for improving student experiences. This is where the rest of the data analysis comes in. What was happening with the students? How did their literacy rates compare to their English language-learning peers who did not receive instruction in their first language?

How Does our Program Compare to Existing Research?

Family Interviews

When conducting interviews with participants' families, I kept notes on all responses. I then analyzed the data and highlighted any common themes. I noted two themes as most pertinent to this research. First, slight differences emerged within literacy activities in the home; that is, responses varied in terms of number of hours of television viewed and/or in the number of books in the home and whether these activities were in Spanish or English or both. However, consistent with the selection guidelines for this project, all 12 families confirmed that Spanish was the dominant language spoken in the home. Secondly, when asked if it was a priority that their children be bilingual, eleven of the twelve interviewees responded with a confident *yes*. One mother even added that she would love for her children to learn three or more languages (personal communication, March 14, 2008). The one parent who did not respond with an outright *yes* did not in any way renounce the hope of her daughter being bilingual as an adult; she instead stated, "que es más importante que aprendan [sus hijas] inglés para poder defenderse" (it is more important that they [her daughters] learn English so that they can defend themselves) (personal communication, February 14, 2008). She highlighted the importance of learning English in order to achieve your goals, or "to make it" in U.S. society. When reflecting on the families' responses, I could not help but wonder if they were fully aware of the fact that many of the children that are in English-only

programming might maintain their Spanish-speaking skills, but are not on path towards full bilingualism and biliteracy as highlighted in the following data analyses.

Reading Assessment

I conducted all of the one-on-one reading assessments. I then discussed the results with my instructional team. I wanted to ensure that the data I had collected reflected students' achievement. I identified each student's independent text reading level (TRL) within a range since a child rarely works at a distinct level. I entered all students' TRL ranges into a table. (See Figure 1).

Because the sample groups are so small, I chose not to analyze students' scores in terms of trends or patterns or successes and/or failures of the educational programming in which I work; instead, I decided to approach the data in terms of how individual student's scores might or might not reflect current research in the field. Below I will highlight two such connections.

First, English language learners need 7-10 years of formal instruction to acquire proficiency in academic English (Ramírez, Yuen, & Ramey 1991). Students D, E, F, G, K, and L, all students in the bilingual program, scored at or above their grade level expectation on the Spanish reading assessment. Students are expected to read at or above a text reading level of 28 by the end of the academic year in fourth grade and of 30 by the end of their fifth grade year. None of these students achieved scores at grade level on the English reading assessment; however, as fourth and fifth graders these students have received 5-6 years of instruction. While they are not yet reading in English at the grade level expectation, students K and L both tested at a fourth grade text reading level, just one grade below their current grade. Thomas and Collier (1997) and Ramírez (1991) found that by sixth grade students receiving instruction in their first language (L1) were demonstrating grade level English proficiency and outperforming their English language learning peers in English-only programming. While I cannot predict student achievement in sixth grade or beyond, I do wonder the following:

- *How will students' English reading abilities progress through middle and high school?*
- *What systematic improvements within the bilingual program might support English acquisition?*

Secondly, the work of Lily Wong Fillmore (1991) is also reflected through this data. That is, students that are not provided with opportunities to utilize language in academic contexts often do not fully develop these skills. Of the students receiving instruction solely in English, Student J, scored a text reading level that correlates to a second grade text reading level in Spanish and scored proficient in English. Students C, H and I scored at or above grade level in English, but at or below first grade in Spanish. Students A and B scored below grade level in English and Spanish. The fact that students A, B,

Figure 1: Reading Assessment

Primary Language Arts Assessment (PLAA) & Spanish Primary Language Arts Assessment (SPLAA)			
		Text Reading Level	
Students	Grade Program	English	Spanish
Student A	4 general	24-26	2-4
Student B	4 general	23-25	8-10
Student C	4 general	26-28*	10-12
Student D	4 bilingual	21-23	28-30*
Student E	4 bilingual	16-18	27-29*
Student F	4 bilingual	15-17	26-28*
Student G	4 bilingual	14-16	>30*
Student H	5 general	27-29*	1-3
Student I	5 general	27-29*	7-9
Student J	5 general	28-30*	18-20
Student K	5 bilingual	24-26	29-30*
Student L	5 bilingual	25-27	>30*
*meets grade level reading expectation			

C, H, I and J do not receive any formal academic instruction in their first language is one factor that would affect their performance on the reading assessment. Many other factors, including but not limited to, their use of Spanish in the home and the community and previous educational experiences such as preschool might also influence their reading skills in Spanish.

Writing Assessment

One of our district's Program Support Teachers

Figure 2: English Writing Assessment Results

English Writing Assessment							
Student	Grade/Program	Ideas	Organization	Voice	Vocabulary	Fluency	Conventions
A	4 general	4	3	3	3	3	3
B	4 general	4	3	4	2	3	3
C	4 general	4	3	3	4	3	3
D	4 bilingual	4	3	4	3	3	2
E	4 bilingual	3	3	3	3	3	2
F	4 bilingual	3	3	4	3	2	1
G	4 bilingual	4	2	3	3	2	1
H	5 general	4	3	4	3	3	2
I	5 general	2	2	3	2	2	2
J	5 general	4	3	4	4	3	3
K	5 bilingual	4	3	4	3	3	2
L	5 bilingual	4	3	4	3	3	2

(PST) graciously agreed to be a second rater in the writing assessment process. We separately scored all 24 writing pieces in all six areas. We rated the majority for the pieces equally. If we were within a point of one another, I reviewed the rubric once more to make a final decision. There were five items for which our scores differed by two points. I therefore, asked a colleague to be a third rater.

I must admit that I was quite nervous about administering this assessment. Students within the bilingual program did not receive any formal instruction in English literacy (outside of the content areas of science and social studies) until 4th grade, and even in 4th and 5th grades literacy time was split between both languages. I knew that the students in my bilingual homeroom, particularly the 4th graders had not had ample experiences with writing in English.

I should note that through conversations with one of our district coordinators of reading and language arts, I understand that the writing assessment is not specifically aligned to district grade level expectations. Because students across the district take the assessment during set years, the data is analyzed in terms of student progress over time. She did acknowledge that at 4th and 5th grade, a score of 3 is considered average (personal communication, August 14, 2008). I compiled the

data into tables according to writing traits (See Figure 2). Again, the goal of the writing assessment was not to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of program models, but to determine if the results reflect current research in bilingual education.

First, the work of Lily Wong Fillmore (1991) is again revealed through the writing assessment data. Students D, E, F, G, K and L (all in bilingual programming) scored proficient for their grade level across all six traits on the

Spanish assessment (see Figure 2 below). None of the students in the general education program scored proficient across all six traits on the Spanish writing assessment. Students A and J scored proficient in four of the six traits, students B and C in three and students H and I in two. Wong Fillmore argues that without adequate practice in academic contexts, students risk losing or not fully developing literacy skills in their first language.

Students D, E, K and L scored at grade level on the English writing assessment with the exception of conventions or use of language (i.e. spelling and grammar). Students F and G also scored at grade level in at least three of the traits. Of the students in the general program, A, C and J demonstrated proficiency in all traits, while students B, H and I scored below proficiency in at least one or more

Figure 3: Spanish Writing Assessment Results

Spanish Writing Assessment							
Student	Grade/Program	Ideas	Organization	Voice	Vocabulary	Fluency	Conventions
A	4 general	4	3	3	3	2	1
B	4 general	3	3	3	2	2	2
C	4 general	3	2	3	3	2	1
D	4 bilingual	3	3	4	3	3	3
E	4 bilingual	4	3	4	3	3	3
F	4 bilingual	4	3	4	4	3	4
G	4 bilingual	4	3	4	4	4	3
H	5 general	3	2	3	2	2	1
I	5 general	3	1	3	2	2	1
J	5 general	3	2	3	3	2	3
K	5 bilingual	3	3	3	3	3	3
L	5 bilingual	3	3	4	3	3	3

traits. These scores reflect individual differences in writing development, but also connect to the findings of Ramírez et al (1991) that students need time to develop proficiency in academic English.

Self Assessment Survey

In analyzing students’ responses to a self-perception questionnaire, I organized the information in a table (See Figure 3 for sample). Overall, no significant differences emerged from the data. However, the responses of students D, E, F, G, K and L revealed a slightly higher prediction of their skills as adults than students A, B, C, H, I and J, with the exception of skills involving writing in English. For example, when analyzing responses about how students predicted their skills as adults, all six students in bilingual programming responded with a four or a five in terms of their capabilities as readers and writers of Spanish as adults, whereas only two students in English-only responded with a four. When responding to the same prompts in terms of English reading skills as adults, four students in bilingual programming responded with a 4 or 5, while only three students in the general education program. On the contrary, students in English-only instruction revealed a stronger belief that they would be good writers in English as adults; four students responded with a 4 or 5, yet only two students in bilingual programming marked a 4 or 5.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Limitations

One limitation should be noted. It is impossible to control for all outside factors that could support or interfere with a student’s academic performance/achievement. For example, I learned through the interviews with students’ families that

Statement		Response Scale 1-5 1 = Never 5= Always
I will be a good reader in Spanish when I am an adult.		
Student A	4 general	1
Student B	4 general	3
Student C	4 general	3
Student D	4 bilingual	5
Student E	4 bilingual	5
Student F	4 bilingual	4
Student G	4 bilingual	5
Student H	5 general	3
Student I	5 general	4
Student J	5 general	3
Student K	5 bilingual	5
Student L	5 bilingual	5

Figure 4: Sample Self-Perception Questionnaire Results

some of the participants spent some time in programs outside of the district, some outside of Wisconsin. Also, as I stated above, the early years of our bilingual program had its share of imperfections. Therefore, this study was designed to notice trends in student literacy skills as compared to current research in the field and to call attention to the kind of learning that can and does take place in a variety of educational programs. Further, it will likely elicit deeper questions, reflections and thinking around learning opportunities and instructional design for diverse students.

Future Implications

Those who intend to make the United States their home need to learn English, but doing so at the expense of their heritage, culture, and native language should not be necessary. (Frenkel, 2003, p. 47)

In many metropolitan school systems in the United States, nearly 50% of the student population comes from homes in which English is not the dominant language spoken; however, there is still little consensus on how this linguistic and cultural diversity should affect educational policy and pedagogy (Cummins & Schechter, 2003). Further, ample research substantiates the existence of an achievement gap between minority students and students that belong to the majority group; in other words, students from minority groups, particularly in the United States African American, Latino and Native American students, are performing lower on standardized tests and experiencing higher dropout rates than students from the majority group (see Jaekyung, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Such research reinforces the necessity for educators to mindfully engage in regular reflection on their practice; they must regularly adapt and/or renew their practice in order to provide all students with the skills needed to find their success.

That was the motive behind this research project. I was eager to better understand the learning outcomes of Latino students in our school's programming. Throughout the design, implementation and analysis stages of this project, many other questions emerged. For example:

How are English language learners receiving first language (L1) instruction performing in academic areas such as math or science in comparison to English language learners receiving all instruction in English, or their second language (L2)?
How are all English language learners achieving in academic areas in comparison to grade level expectations?

How might these same sample groups perform throughout middle and high school?
While any one of these questions might lead to more telling or informative sets of data in terms of the benefits or lack of benefits from various program models, this project does reveal evidence that English language learners that are provided instruction in their L1 via a late-transitional bilingual program model are maintaining and developing their Spanish language skills, while at the same time progressing towards proficiency in English literacy. The findings in this study directly correlate to research in the field of bilingual education: Strong bilingual programs can result in academic first language development that does not impede upon academic second language development, in this case English language development.

Throughout the time working on this project, Laura made significant progress in her Spanish reading and writing. Her unwavering eagerness to learn was ever-refreshing. While I know that providing instruction in a child's first language is not always plausible, it is still disheartening to acknowledge the reality of our education system: Many opportunities for full bilingualism—reading, writing, speaking and listening and biculturalism are compromised by an institution and a society inundated with misinformation, a lack of information, and highly politicized rhetoric.

The daily experiences of teachers can be demanding, challenging and wearing, yet it is imperative that educators find the time to connect with colleagues and reflect upon programs that are offered to students within schools. Our ultimate goal is to support students' academic, as well as emotional and social growth allowing them to fully participate in our democratic, pluralistic society.

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