How do community-based heritage language programs and two-way immersion programs compare?

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This brief describes the similarities and differences between community-based heritage language programs and two-way immersion programs, which take place in PreK-12 public and private schools.

Community-based heritage language and K-12 two-way immersion programs are similar in that both seek to develop proficiency of students in languages other than English, which are often the languages of the local community (Christian, 1994). In doing so, they develop bilingual individuals and enrich the multilingual resources of the United States by providing opportunities for children to develop proficiency in their native or heritage language. Despite these and other similarities, there are differences between these two types of programs. Community-based heritage language programs are designed to address the needs of speakers of a non-English language and to develop cultural knowledge and linguistic abilities associated with the language. (See the Heritage Brief: *What is a heritage language program?*) Addressing heritage language learners' needs includes developing a curriculum that links students to their heritage language and their cultural identity.

Two way-immersion programs serve both an English-language home background student population and a population of students who speak the partner language with their families and in their communities (Christian, 1994, 2007; Howard & Sugarman, 2007). These programs focus on developing proficiency in two languages -- English and the partner language -- while also developing the academic skills of the students in the program.

These programs differ from community-based heritage language programs in terms of the student population served, the program's location, and the program's design and focus.

Student population

The student population in community heritage language programs is typically connected to the program through a specific non-English language and a shared culture or country of origin. (See the Heritage Brief: *Who is a heritage language learner?*) Involvement in the program is a voluntary decision, usually made by parents. An important goal is for students to learn about the language and culture that connects them to the local community, relatives in the United States and overseas, and their ancestors.

Students in two-way immersion programs are enrolled as a part of their K-12 education. They consist of both those with a cultural connection through family to the non-English language and those without that connection. While there are many positive educational benefits for both sets of students, some challenges have also been noted. Two way-immersion programs may serve a middle-class English speaking population and a working-class heritage language population (Christian, 2007). This cultural and socioeconomic difference in student population can contribute to a situation where the needs and perspectives of the heritage language students are overlooked in favor of the English dominant group (Valdés, González, García, & Máquez, 2007). At the same time, both types of programs strive to provide an effective education in the language other than English.

Location

Two-way immersion programs are usually located in public schools, charters, magnets, or private schools, largely at the elementary school level. If a coalition of parents decides that they want to establish a two-way immersion school or program, they may request that the school or district establish it (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000). Students in these programs at the elementary school level follow the normal district academic curriculum and progress through the grade levels. At the secondary school level, they usually receive credit for language study or for study of the content in which the language is taught.

In contrast, study in community-based heritage language programs is often not recognized by the K-12 system, and this may result in isolation of the programs from school-based study and credit systems. Wang and Green (2001) argue that community-based heritage language programs should be connected with school-based systems in specific ways. In school districts and states, there is some movement toward granting credit for language study in heritage language schools that meet district and state curriculum standards (Compton, 2001). However, there is more coordination to be done on this issue.

Program design and focus

Community-based heritage language programs are designed to help students gain fluency and proficiency in their heritage language, and a primary focus is often on building cultural connections. These programs are often established out of a community's desire to pass on their language and culture from one generation to the next in order to maintain communication within families and communities (Webb & Miller, 2000). The goal is to teach language and culture and to honor the language varieties that students speak (Draper & Hicks, 2000).

Two-way immersion programs focus on developing proficiency in English and another language (e.g., Chinese, Navajo, Spanish) and may aim for students to learn academic subjects in both English and the partner language, eventually using English for one-half of instruction and the partner language for the other half.

Because two-way immersion instruction is usually offered in a school-based setting, language instruction tends to be integrated with other instructional programs, and the program strives for academic achievement in both English and the non-English language.

Both heritage and two-way immersion programs may build cultural appreciation for students in the heritage or partner language as an important part of their design.

Conclusion

While the goals and design of community-based heritage language programs and two-way immersion programs differ in some ways, both types of programs are attempting to advance language maintenance and learning and to benefit heritage language communities and the nation as a whole (Peyton, Carreira, Wang, & Wiley, 2008; Peyton, Ranard, & McGinnis, 2001). In order for both types of programs to flourish, strategic planning, networking, and action are needed to create a social, political, and economic climate in which bilingualism and biculturalism are truly embraced.

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