CAL practitioner brief

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Dual Language Education: Answers to Questions From the Field

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Dual language education refers to programs that provide grade-level content and literacy instruction to all students through two languages—English and a partner language. In one-way dual language programs, the partner language is the native language of all of the students in the class. In two-way programs, approximately half the students are native speakers of the partner language and the other half are native speakers of English. Dual language programs typically begin in kindergarten or first grade and continue for a minimum of 5 years and have the goals of promoting bilingualism and biliteracy, high levels of academic achievement, and cross-cultural competence. An ideal dual language program would serve students from kindergarten through Grade 12, but the vast majority are implemented in elementary schools.

For English learners, dual language programs offer a positive alternative to monolingual English instruction (also known as English immersion) and transitional bilingual education, which often do not provide the support English learners need to achieve academically and graduate at the same rates as their English-fluent peers (de Jong, 2014; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005; Lindholm-Leary & Genesee, 2014). English learner participation in dual language education is associated with improved academic (Valentino & Reardon, 2014), linguistic, and emotional outcomes (Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2001). In addition to closing the achievement gap for English learners (Thomas & Collier, 2012), dual language education provides opportunities for all students to gain valuable multilingual and cross-cultural skills that prepare them to thrive in today's global world.

Key features of effective dual language programs include provision of (a) literacy instruction in the partner language and in English (once introduced) for the duration of the program; (b) content instruction in both program languages over the course of the program; (c) instruction in the partner language for a minimum of 50% of instructional time; (d) curriculum and instructional materials in the partner language that are linguistically and culturally appropriate; (e) professional development for administrators, teachers, and family and community members specific to dual language education; and (f) assessments in the partner language.

The authors of this brief travel across the country providing professional development, technical assistance, and job-embedded support for dual language educators and administrators. This brief was written to respond to some of the most frequently asked questions they encounter from the field. These include questions about program structure, assessment and accountability, curriculum and instruction,

Basic Dual Language Program Model Types*	Language	K	1	2	3	4	5
50:50 Program Model: Literacy instruction is provided in the two program languages at all grade levels and for the duration of the program.	Partner language	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%
	English	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%
90:10 or 80:20 Program Model: Initial literacy instruction is provided in the partner language and continues for the duration of the program. Literacy instruction in English is introduced in Grades 2, 3, or 4 and continues alongside the partner language for the duration of the program.	Partner language	90%	80%	70%	60%	50%	50%
		80%	70%	60%	50%		
	English	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	50%
		20%	30%	40%	50%		
*In addition to the basic models illustrated here, some programs allocate language in kindergarten as 70:30 or 60:40, with a gradual increase in time devoted to instruction in English until achieving a balance of 50:50, typically around Grade 3 or 4.							

Figure 1. Commonly adopted approaches to allocating instructional time in the two languages used in a dual language program.

teacher quality and professional development, and family and community involvement. The brief concludes with a list of recommended readings to support program leaders and teachers as they design, implement, and support dual language education programs in their communities.

How does the structure of a dual language program support the goals of bilingualism and biliteracy, high academic achievement in both program languages, and cross-cultural competence?

There are two basic but highly important decision points in dual language program design: the allocation of instructional time in each program language and the determination of which content areas are to be taught in each program language at each grade level. Figure 1 illustrates commonly adopted approaches to allocating instructional time in the two languages in effective dual language programs.

A clearly delineated dual language program structure supports the three pillars of dual language education: bilingualism and biliteracy, high academic achievement in both program languages, and sociocultural competence (Howard et al., in press).

Pillar One: To achieve the goal of bilingualism and biliteracy, dual language programs should explicitly plan for and allot sufficient time to the delivery of literacy instruction in both program languages. Literacy instruction in the partner language must be based on approaches that are authentic to that language. Furthermore, coordination of literacy instruction across the two program languages is crucial to achievement of a program's biliteracy goals.

Pillar Two: A clearly defined language allocation plan supports high academic achievement in both program languages by specifying what content instruction is provided in each of the two program languages. Careful attention must be paid to ensure that all content areas are taught in each of the languages during the course of the program.

Pillar Three: Cross-cultural competence is defined as the ability of each person to see the cultural differences in others as valuable assets rather than as obstacles to overcome (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009). This is often the forgotten pillar in dual language programs, but it is extremely important because students, parents, and teachers must be given the tools to engage in conversations about equity and social justice. A program structure that elevates the partner language and culture and builds in opportunities for culture education for teachers, students, and families is needed to meet this goal.

How does the accountability movement impact instruction and assessment in dual language programs?

There are a number of accountability challenges for dual language programs. The first is the inappropriateness for English learners of most English-language assessment measures, which are normed with native English speakers. The second is the dearth of literacy and content assessments available in the partner languages. Lindholm-Leary (2012) notes a third accountability challenge, specific to dual language programs: Because of the extensive use of the partner language in the early grades, students in these grades typically score below their

peers in mainstream English programs. Although this deficit disappears by the later grades, the early discrepancy can result in pressure from administrators to use more English in the early grades, which can have serious implications for the effectiveness of the program. Another concern is assessment load and fatigue, as students in dual language programs typically participate in the same assessments as their monolingual English peers in addition to assessments in the partner language. Testing students in two languages is also costly and uses time that might otherwise be used for instruction.

In response to the assessment challenges faced in dual language programs, Escamilla (2000) suggested that assessment consider how the two program languages function individually, as well as how the two interact. This allows for more effective assessment of students' academic progress in both languages. Escamilla's current work focuses on developing assessments for emergent bilinguals that include both formative and summative approaches to evaluating growth in reading and writing and thus monitor students' progress on a "trajectory towards biliteracy" (Escamilla, Hopewell, Butvilofsky, Soltero-González, Ruiz-Figueroa, & Escamilla, 2014).

How does the current focus on standards-based curricula impact dual language education? What are some recommended approaches when designing dual language curricula?

Holding all students accountable for high levels of academic achievement, regardless of their socioeconomic, linguistic, ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds, has been a hallmark of education in the United States for over 15 years (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). To this end, many school districts have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in math and English language arts as the basis for developing rigorous curricula that promote college and career readiness. Dual language programs are no exception. The challenge they face is in identifying a standards-based curriculum in the partner language that aligns in terms of rigor, scope, and focus with Common Core standards while authentically reflecting the unique features of the partner language, culture, and literacy practices. While adaptations of the Common Core standards are currently available in Spanish (see http://commoncore-espanol.com/), curriculum options for less prevalent program languages such as Mandarin and Russian are extremely limited, leaving schools to develop curricula on their own. The lack of authentic, rigorous, and clearly articulated curricula in partner languages threatens to undermine the success of dual language programs, which are aimed at developing equally high levels of language and literacy in both program languages.

In the absence of readily available multilingual curricula, it is important that dual language programs develop a curriculum that matches their program model, local standards, and assessments. Duguay, Massoud, Tabaku, Himmel, and Sugarman (2013) offer recommendations for integrating language and literacy development for English learners into CCSS-aligned content instruction delivered in English. Nonetheless, a gap remains in the development of authentic, standards-based curricula to guide the teaching of content, language, and literacy in partner languages other than Spanish.

Another curriculum challenge facing dual language educators is deciding when to use English for instruction and when to use the partner language. It is neither necessary nor feasible to teach all content concepts in both languages. Thus, it is important to develop a detailed curriculum map that demarks which standards or units are taught in each program language. Programs frequently opt to teach specific content areas in the partner language for one grade level or span of grade levels, then switch to English to deliver that content at the next grade level(s). To address time constraints inherent in teaching content in two program languages while also devoting instructional time to language development in the two languages, experts recommend a dual language curriculum organized around thematic units that integrate language and content across the curriculum and afford students ample opportunities to practice and apply vocabulary and grammatical structures in a variety of instructional settings.

Finally, it is important to view with caution commercially available curriculum products in languages other than English. Major textbook publishers frequently rely on translated rather than authentic texts, and, as a result, these products may not provide the linguistically and culturally authentic literacy experiences that dual language students need in order to develop bilingualism, biliteracy, and cross-cultural competence. Furthermore, many products available for teaching initial literacy in Spanish are modeled after English-language products and may emphasize

approaches and practices that are not appropriate for early Spanish literacy development. Awareness of how teaching reading in Spanish is different from teaching reading in English is needed so that educators can adequately assess the quality of commercial products. The same holds true for teachers using other partner languages.

In conclusion, program success is dependent on the degree to which students receive high-quality instruction based on standards-based curricula in the partner language as well as in English, with no watering down of the curriculum when it is delivered in the partner language. Ideally, curriculum in dual language programs follows thematic units and incorporates linguistically and culturally appropriate resources that develop both language and content knowledge as well as cross-cultural competence.

What does the current research on dual language education say about the strict separation of languages?

A long-held tenet of dual language education has been the strict separation of program languages (Howard, Sugarman, Christian, Lindholm-Leary, & Rogers, 2007). A policy of strict language separation carves out space for language and literacy development in the partner language, provides ample opportunity to engage in extended discourse in that language, and serves to elevate the status of the partner language. The practice also encourages teachers to stick to the partner language and utilize sheltering strategies rather than translation to make input comprehensible, thus facilitating adoption of the important role of the teacher as language model.

In dual language classrooms, students are more likely to use English during partner language instructional time than vice versa (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003). To reinforce use of the partner language, teachers often employ a special signal or routine (e.g., put on a scarf or hat, lead a song, flip a sign) as a helpful reminder to young learners to use the partner language. Other strategies that encourage student use of the partner language include recasting (restating student responses in the target language), providing a word bank or sentence stems, choral rehearsal of desired vocabulary and grammatical structures, teaching children to assist peers by functioning as language models, and encouragement and positive reinforcement (Sugarman, 2012).

While the separation of program languages provides numerous benefits to students in dual language classrooms, strict and inflexible adherence to the practice has come under some criticism. Research indicates that emergent bilingual learners experience positive effects when provided opportunities to compare and contrast their two languages (Dressler, Carlo, Snow, August, & White, 2011; Jiménez, García, & Pearson, 1996; Nagy, García, Durgunoglu, & Hancin-Bhatt, 1993). Cross-linguistic comparison promotes the transfer of skills and contributes to the development of metalinguistic awareness, defined as the ability to identify, analyze, and manipulate linguistic forms (Koda & Zehler, 2008). In programs that uphold a strict separation of languages, however, opportunities to engage in cross-linguistic comparison are limited.

Therefore, practitioners have developed systems for providing students strategic opportunities to engage in cross-linguistic comparison to promote metalinguistic awareness. Most notable among these approaches are the practices of student-initiated bridging and the teacher-planned "Bridge" (Beeman & Urow, 2012). Teachers who adopt these approaches continue to deliver content instruction in a clearly designated language for the bulk of a unit, but they also build in targeted bridging activities that encourage students to connect the content across the two program languages, compare and contrast linguistic features, and apply content recently learned in one language through engagement in enrichment activities in the other language. In this way, students are encouraged to access and leverage all their linguistic resources, regardless of the identified language of the lesson, and to explore and celebrate the special gifts they possess as emergent bilinguals. The insertion of structured opportunities for connecting the two program languages marks an important enhancement to the traditional practice of strict separation of languages.

How are the professional development needs of dual language educators similar to and different from those of other teachers?

In dual language classrooms, educators are responsible for teaching rigorous academic content in two languages to a diverse population of students. Furthermore, they need to engage emergent bilingual children in critical thinking and problem-solving

activities that develop skills in cross-cultural competence. This daunting task requires a specialized educator skill set that goes beyond what general education teachers and teachers of English learners in monolingual English settings need to know and be able to do (Achugar & Pessoa, 2009; Guerrero & Guerrero, 2009; Menken & Antunez, 2001; Soto, 1991). Yet teacher preparation curricula in the majority of university programs today focus on general education pedagogical practices or, at best, on practices designed to meet the needs of English learners in settings in which English is the language of instruction, with a focus on sheltered English techniques (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2010) and culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010). While such training is helpful, it does not sufficiently prepare aspiring dual language teachers to effectively serve in dual language settings. Therefore, it often falls on the schools to provide targeted professional development to build up and enhance capacity of their dual language teaching staff.

Findings from research studies, most of which looked specifically at programs using Spanish as the partner language, indicate that professional development for dual language teachers needs to target the following:

- Development of academic language proficiency in the partner language (Guerrero & Guerrero, 2009)
- Understanding of linguistics and second language acquisition theory (Menken & Antunez, 2001)
- Knowledge of the cultures associated with the partner language (Walton & Carlson, 1995)
- Diversity awareness and skills in culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Walton & Carlson, 1995), including adoption of a non-deficit attitude toward bilinguals and bilingualism (Achugar & Pessoa, 2009; Soto, 1991)
- Effective multicultural parent communication and education strategies (Soto, 1991)
- Specially designed delivery of content in English, such as sheltered instruction techniques (Echevarría et al., 2010)

These recommendations for bilingual teacher preparation provide a solid foundation for designing an effective professional development plan for dual language educators.

What strategies do dual language program leaders use to recruit and retain appropriately qualified staff in the face of the bilingual teacher shortage?

Given the long list of knowledge and skills required of effective dual language teachers, program leaders often cite a shortage of qualified staff as a major challenge for program success (Kennedy, 2013). A targeted teacher recruiting plan is recommended to address this challenge (Howard et al., in press). Schools and districts report utilizing a variety of creative recruiting strategies, including these:

- Engaging in partnerships with local colleges and universities to create a pipeline of dual language teacher talent
- Tapping into local non-educator talent through implementation of "grow-your-own" teacher preparation programs or alternative routes to teacher certification
- Implementing future teacher talent development programs that (a) encourage current bilingual high school students to explore teaching opportunities through high school course work, (b) support these students as they seek a college teaching degree, and (c) recruit them back to serve in district dual language classrooms upon successful university graduation
- Providing incentives—including annual stipends, hiring bonuses, or non-financial perks such as opportunities for conference travel—to prospective teacher candidates to lure them in geographic areas where competition for teacher talent among programs is fierce
- Participating in recruiting fairs at regional and national conferences
- Partnering with international organizations and agencies to recruit certified teachers from other countries to serve in U.S. schools
- Conducting independent international searches

(Kennedy, 2013)

When recruiting teachers internationally, program leaders need to plan and account for additional challenges, including payment of legal fees for visas and other requirements associated with the immigration process; provision of orientation guidance for newly arrived international teachers to assist in the transition to life in the United States; accelerated professional development opportunities to en-

sure that international candidates are familiar with the curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices of U.S. schools; and cognizance of the likelihood that short-term visa holders will leave and need to be replaced at regular intervals, necessitating development of a long-term plan for orienting and training a revolving pool of international teachers. Despite these considerable challenges, many programs rely on international recruiting as a viable strategy for staffing their dual language schools with a linguistically and culturally diverse pool of teachers who enrich and strengthen their programs.

How do successful dual language programs promote family and community engagement?

Successful dual language program implementation must include a responsive infrastructure that encourages families and the community to be actively engaged in school processes and that strengthens the school–family relationship (Howard et al., in press). Parents, including those whose children are English learners, must feel comfortable in the school setting and be willing to participate in every aspect of the dual language program. Effective leaders make parent education a priority and systematically plan and implement activities that promote family and community engagement. Guerrero (2015), specifically addressing the need for Latino parents to be given an opportunity to fully participate in the dual language education of their children, suggests that program leaders do the following:

- Recognize that families from different cultural backgrounds have varied perceptions of what school involvement entails
- Focus on creating a non-threatening and non-judgmental environment so that parents participate more comfortably in the educational process
- Host events such as family learning workshops that focus on dual language activities modeled and explored in both program languages, and multicultural events that serve to increase inclusivity and cross-cultural competence for all stakeholders
- Disseminate information in both program languages through facilitation of meetings, flyers sent home, family learning workshops, and grade reporting to ensure that all parents are able to fully understand school expectations and norms

Moreover, dual language educators must actively work to establish a climate that is truly inclusive of all community members. Special care must be taken to recruit candidates for leadership committees and parent–teacher associations from among all parents, so that parents from both language groups are appropriately represented in all activities and events. A welcoming front office staff and cadre of teachers is correlated with increased parent willingness to become an integral part of the school culture (Acosta-Hathaway, 2008). Program leaders should take specific action to provide learning opportunities to parents in their native language that focus on how best to support their children's participation in the dual language program (Unkenholz, 2007). Potential topics include dual language research, language acquisition, cross-cultural competence, curriculum, instructional strategies, assessments in the dual language classroom, and content–language integration methodologies used in the classroom.

It is imperative that dual language educators embrace their role not only as instructional leaders but also as advocates for each child, the child's family, and the community they live in. This requires that every dual language educator be willing to go into the community and interact with family and community members. Dual language program educators strive to strengthen bonds with families by engaging in a variety of activities that may include meeting with parents in neighborhood centers rather than at school, conducting neighborhood walks throughout the school year, serving as a liaison to social service programs, and offering English and partner language classes for parents (including both parent groups in two-way dual language programs) as well as citizenship classes for those working to gain full U.S. citizenship. Through this work, dual language programs can ensure that all stakeholders are active participants in the program and, more importantly, that they know how to access information and leverage resources to better advocate for themselves and their families.

What is the role of program leaders as dual language advocates and what is their impact on effective implementation of dual language programs?

Educational leaders rarely receive guidance, professional development, or mentoring that prepares them specifically for the role of dual language pro-

gram leader. Nonetheless, program leaders must embrace their role as advocates to ensure that the dual language program is viewed as an integral part of the school rather than as a mere appendage. This is particularly important in schools in which dual language programming is implemented only as a strand rather than school-wide. An inability to take on this role, or a lack of understanding of dual language programming and instructional best practices, will result in ineffective program implementation (Medina, 2015).

The Wallace Foundation (2011) identified the ability of educational leaders to serve as strong program advocates as a key factor in realizing the educational improvement goals they set. In dual language contexts, school leaders in particular must embrace their role as the driving force for school success. Leaders of dual language schools must stay abreast of current research and best practices in dual language education. Furthermore, they must be skilled in explaining all aspects of dual language programming and instruction to a variety of diverse stakeholders to build program support through understanding.

Dual language administrators must also continuously advocate at the school and district levels for financial and instructional resources that make effective dual language program implementation possible (Alanís & Rodríguez, 2008) and allocate those resources in ways that will allow program goals and objectives to be met (Howard et al., in press). Another important role of program leaders is capacity building. By tapping into the pool of expertise that exists in teachers already serving in dual language programs and helping them become teacher leaders, program leaders build extended systems of support and ensure program sustainability over the long term.

Conclusion

This brief provides answers to commonly asked questions in the field about effective implementation of dual language programs. The responses draw from the research base as well as the authors' observations of effective practices in dual language programs across the United States. The research clearly indicates that dual language education is associated with increased levels of bilingualism and biliteracy and academic achievement among participants, including both English learners and students who are fully fluent in English. The brief aims to support leaders and practitioners in the field as they plan for, implement, sustain, and advocate on behalf of dual language programming in their unique community settings.

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