Make the Ideal a Reality: All Teachers Are Language Teachers

PLUS:

Why I Kept My Kids Out of Preschool
Facilitating Language (Chinese) and Context Development in a Visually Rich Context
Dual Language Immersion in High Education: An Introduction
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Introduction
Hispanics are the fastest growing minority group in the United States. According to the most recent census, they account for 16.7% of the total population in the United States and its community is projected to more than double by the year 2060 (United States Census Bureau, 2014). This growing trend has provoked dramatic changes in our schools and colleges prompting school administrators, and particularly, professional educators to develop a new set of practices that can best address the particular needs of these students (Taylor, 2004).

During the 19th century, large waves of European immigrants contributed to the incorporation of bilingualism in the United States. Immigrant communities adopted bilingualism with the purpose of promoting their language, religion, and cultural loyalties. Bilingual education programs were introduced as an opportunity to close the education gap and promote literacy in English and in the students’ first language (Ovando, 2003). Since then, bilingual education programs have grown significantly (Ovando, 2003; Wilson, 2011), and currently the majority of dual language programs in the United States teach English and Spanish. This work explains how bridges have been built to adapt dual language models used in the K-12 setting to the college environment, thus guaranteeing students of all levels access to bilingual education. Further analyses evaluate facilitators’ and students’ perceptions of the effectiveness of different teaching and assessment techniques used in the implementation of a dual language model at the college level.

Bilingual Education
Bilingual education is an instructional approach that focuses on teaching students a second language (L2) while strategically using and strengthening their skills in their first language (L1). There are additive and subtractive forms of bilingual education. The additive bilingual education model seeks to maintain and develop the students’ primary language while simultaneously adding a second language. In contrast, the subtractive model provides primary language instruction temporarily before transitioning to exclusive English instruction. Dual language education in the United States is a strong additive form of bilingual education that uses the students’ L1 in meaningful ways to help them develop literacy skills in the second language. This model is culturally responsible and promotes appreciation for the cultural heritage of students as much as for the American culture. When schools provide quality education in the students’ primary language, “they give them two things: knowledge and literacy. The knowledge that children get through their L1 helps make the English they hear and read more comprehensible. Literacy developed in the primary language transfers to the second language” (NABE, 2014; Thomas & Collier, 1997; Cummins, 1981).

The main objective of bilingual education programs in the United States is to form bicultural, bilingual, and biliterate individuals. Instruction is equally divided in English and students’ natives languages because, with the appropriate teaching techniques, knowledge acquired in the students’ L1 is transferred to the their second language (L2) with relative ease (Perkins & Salomon, 1988). This process requires the
implementation of multilevel strategies that facilitate the retrieval of prior knowledge and its use in the new context. Perkins and Salomon (1988) argue that teachers in a bilingual education setting must serve as mediators to help students make the bridging connections between their knowledge in L1 and the principles that must be taught in L2. In this process, listening, writing, speaking, and reading skills are equally enforced to ensure balanced proficiency. The most common bilingual education program presently available in K-12 is known as the dual language 50-50 model or two-way immersion program (Gomez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005).

Different dual language immersion programs are in place in different schools. The choice of one dual language model over another depends on how much time of exposure to students’ native tongue and the target language is initially desired. Ultimately, strengthening language proficiency in the students’ native language will facilitate the process of acquiring and learning the target language or L2 (Krashen, 1999; Cummins, 1996). Thus, strategic exposure to the students’ native tongue is recommended. “In the 50–50 model, students learn in each language about half the time throughout the program. In many programs, all students learn to read in their primary language and then add the second language” (Gomez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005, p. 149). The instruction time in each language may be divided in different ways as long as it is equal. For example, instruction in a dual language setting can take place half day, alternate days, and even alternate weeks in each language. Translation is not used when switching from one language to the other. Students are expected to learn and know the information in both languages in all classes. This last component makes the two-way immersion approach a realistic model because the students are taught all classes in English 50% of the time. This enables learners to learn the vocabulary, keywords, and language skills needed to succeed at their academic level.

A substantial body of literature shows the positive impact that bilingual education has in the academic achievement of students (Thomas & Collier, 1997; Morrow, Rueda, & Lapp, 2009; Krashen, 1997; Ramos & Krashen, 2013). Lindholm-Leary (2004) found that “reading and writing proficiency of upper-grade elementary students in Spanish/English bilingual immersion programs indicate that both groups of students progressed to high levels of reading and writing ability in both language in composition, grammar, and mechanics” (p. 58) inside a dual language setting. Roberts (1995) argues that the goal of this type of bilingual education program is pluralistic because it values cultures and develops strong literacy skills in both languages. The outcome is that neither language is displaced because special value is deposited on both languages taught.

Building Bridges: Dual Language at the College Level

Although the dual language model was originally created for the K-12 environment, its success has made it possible for a university to modify and implement it in the higher-education setting. Considering that the educational needs of the Hispanic population surpass the K-12 environment, the Ana G. Méndez University System (AGMUS) developed the first regionally accredited program at the university level to make bilingual education in higher education more approachable for the Hispanic community. AGMUS implements the Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model®, which gives adult learners “the opportunity to obtain their university degree at the same time they develop both their English and Spanish language skills” (SUAGM, 2014).

The Ana G. Méndez University System was born in 1941 as the Puerto Rico High School of Commerce. Mrs. Ana Gonzáles de Méndez, Mrs. Florencia Pagán Cruz, and Mr. Alfredo Muñiz Souffront joined forces to create an academic institution that would provide educational alternatives for disadvantaged students. Several years later, the institution became known as the Puerto Rico Junior College and received the accreditation of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. The Junior College grew rapidly and, in 1969, it became the Ana G. Méndez Educational Foundation. With much effort and consistent work in favor of Puerto Rico’s academic population, the Educational Foundation diversified into three institutions of higher education that offer undergraduate and graduate degrees. Today, the Ana G. Méndez University System is comprised of three fully accredited universities – Universidad del Turabo, Universidad Metropolitana, and Universidad del Este – and the Center for Telecommunications and Distance Education.

In September 2003, the Ana G. Méndez University System (AGMUS) expanded its horizons and opened its first campus in the continental United States. AGMUS is a pioneer in providing its adult students an accelerated program that focuses on the teaching of language skills throughout the curriculum. The Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model® is the first and only dual language immersion program for adults in the United States. It provides students with a multicultural, bilingual, and bi-literate academic environment that facilitates the development of academic language skills through both language arts and core curriculum courses in the discipline of their choice. Dual immersion in both English and Spanish guarantees that students strengthen their native tongue while learning a new language, or gain communication skills in two new languages. The university has been in the continental United States for over 10 years and the increasing amount of locations opened across the United States shows the success this model is having nationwide.

The Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model®

The Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model® is founded on seven major elements that determine how education is imparted to promote language learning through content (See Figure 1 below). Students first take a placement test in both languages to ensure that language instruction is provided at their level of language proficiency.
proficiency. While teaching of language skills is not limited to the language courses, these courses guarantee that students develop mastery of necessary skills that they will implement in their content courses. State-of-the-art technological tools that facilitate the acquisition and practice of language skills support student learning. The E-Lab provides students with tools such as Tell Me More, Net Tutor, and the Virtual Library to help them develop and practice their language skills. With the help of fully bilingual staff, students can obtain the benefits of a truly bilingual academic environment everywhere on campus.

The academic environment inside the classroom resembles the existing milieu on campus. In the constructivist, student-centered setting that focuses on integrated, collaborative, and problem-based learning, teachers become facilitators of the learning process rather than owners of information. All facilitators must be proficient in both English and Spanish and, through proper professional development and instruction, facilitators of content become language educators as well. A group of language, curriculum, and teaching experts provides facilitators with necessary training in teaching and assessment techniques that are implemented in the classroom. Learning assessment is structured so that 70 percent of the students’ grade is related to discipline objectives and 30 percent to language objectives. In designing the curriculum and coursework, care is taken to ensure that students develop skills in all four language dimensions: speaking, reading, writing, and listening. To achieve this goal, all courses follow a strict design whereby 50 percent of all learning occurs in English and 50 percent in Spanish. The subject matter is not repeated but the design structures materials, activities, and assessments so that they are evenly distributed between the languages on a weekly basis.

The implementation of these seven elements results in a comprehensive model for

![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figure 1.** Elements of the Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model

The end product of this model is bilingual, bicultural, and bi-literate professionals that comprehend and respect diversity, and can effectively and meaningfully put into practice their acquired knowledge.
teaching and assessing content and language skills through hands-on activities that place students in the center of their learning process. Differentiated and sheltered instruction help facilitators implement the model in a way that the needs of students at different levels of language and cognitive proficiency are satisfied. Students actively engage in the development of their knowledge and acquire practical and theoretical skills that are relevant and meaningful to their professional lives as adult learners. The curriculum responds to the needs of the current job market and to standards of excellence established by the accrediting agencies. Further research looks into the techniques and strategies that both facilitators and students deem more appropriate for the implementation of this instructional model.

Success of the Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model®

Several indicators of success evidence the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model® in developing skills for professional advancement. The academic programs pass muster of state, regional, and professional accrediting organizations. Total enrollment across the four campuses in the Continental United States has steadily increased, measured by the average change over the past five years. Over 3,000 students are currently enrolled in the different campuses, and, with the current graduating classes, more than 2,150 students will have obtained their college degrees in one of the System’s bilingual settings. The branch campus in the heart of Washington D.C. specializes in culinary arts and has quadrupled its enrollment since its opening in March of 2014, and a new campus in Dallas, Texas opened its doors with course offerings in diverse areas such as business, social sciences, education, nursing, and technology at the undergraduate and graduate levels, all of which are also offered at the different sites across the country.

The Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model® promotes cultural and linguistic diversity at the college level. Students from 21 different countries including the United States are in the rosters of one of the five campuses: Metro Orlando, South Florida, Tampa Bay, Capital Area, and Dallas. Similarly, 16 different countries are represented among faculty members. This allows for culturally responsive pedagogy in an environment that is equitable and inviting to students. Students’ heritage is cherished and facilitators make conscious efforts to cater to the cultural and linguistic needs of all students. Through differentiated instruction, facilitators create enticing and inclusive curricula that motivate students to learn, and that develop in students a sense of belonging.

External evaluators who assess the proper implementation of the model at the college level validate this contention. Dr. Sonia Soltero, Chair of the Department of Leadership, Language, and Curriculum at DePaul University argued, “Students who were interviewed reported overall satisfaction with the university and their respective academic programs. Students recognized the advantages of graduating with a fully bilingual degree and expressed how this will open more doors for them and make them more competitive in the job market” (personal communication, 2014). Similar recognitions of excellence have come from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Examples of Excelencia, the only national initiative to identify and promote programs and departments at the forefront of advancing educational achievement for Latino students in higher education, and Dr. Margarita Calderón, Professor Emerita at Johns Hopkins University, and developer of ExC-ELL, a program to train teachers on integrating academic language, reading comprehension, writing skills, and content knowledge. This illustrates the successful implementation of the Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model® and acknowledges the significant impact that this model for teaching in higher education has had on college-level students. The Ana G. Méndez University System has, thus, come to provide an alternative to many students, mostly Hispanic, who would not have otherwise had the opportunity to succeed academically or professionally. The end product of this model is bilingual, bicultural, and bi-literate professionals that comprehend and respect diversity, and can effectively and meaningfully put into practice their acquired knowledge.

Closing Arguments

The acquisition and learning of a second language requires time, patience, and effective instructional practices set in place to
propel the pupils’ knowledge to the next level. Over the last three decades we have experienced unsuccessful policies that fail to provide Hispanic students with the necessary grasp of the language to further their studies and attend higher education. As the Hispanic population continues to grow in the U.S., the existent achievement gap between this and other ethnic groups in the nation becomes more apparent. This disproportional gap continues to influence the educational stability of the nation and shows the necessity for up-to-date policies that address the needs of this group of learners. The realization of the above mentioned has triggered a necessary change in the educational field, and the teaching practices of languages have improved considerably in recent years.

Fitzgerald (1995) and Kohler & Lazarín (2007) argue that Hispanics are the major population of ESL learners in the United States. Currently, 69% of all adult ESL learners are Hispanic (Fitzgerald, 1995). Perspectives on adult education have changed exponentially over the last decades, and today more adults are embracing the idea of going back to school to seek a degree or become proficient in a new language. Adult education, or andragogy, as it is commonly known, focuses on promoting the acquisition of knowledge through critical thinking, and encourages the application of that knowledge into real-life practical settings. Andragogy has become a second chance for many adult learners to go back to school and become more competitive in today’s business-driven world. However, there are many barriers associated with adult education that prevent adult Hispanic learners from seeking education. Some of these barriers include language and socioeconomic factors. It is necessary to further research in this area to acquire a higher understanding of how to overcome these barriers.

The Hispanic community has been “virtually invisible in the adult education research literature” (Jeria, 1999, p. 49), but there are innovative educational leaders who are leveling up the playing field and giving this disadvantaged population a second chance to seek higher learning. One such educational leader is The Ana G. Méndez University System. This is a pioneer institution in the United States that has actively been involved in closing the achievement gap within the Hispanic population by implementing the Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model at the university level. For over 10 years Ana G. Méndez has offered affordable education to bilingual professionals who seek higher education in English and Spanish, simultaneously. Some of the contributing factors to the success of this program have been the integration of the constructivist approach with the implementation of elements that are tailored to fit our adult learners’ needs and enhance their motivation to learn. Throughout the existence of this program, The Ana G. Méndez University System continues to demonstrate that bilingual adult education is possible and that the Discipline-Based Dual Language Immersion Model is an effective program that equips bilingual Hispanic professionals with the right tools to succeed in the workforce.

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