

Two-way Immersion: A Title III Model Program

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Two-way immersion is an enrichment model for both language majority and language minority students. Two-way immersion programs provide instruction to language minority and language majority students in both English and a foreign language. The goal of two-way Immersion programs is for language minority students to acquire proficiency in English while maintaining and increasing proficiency in their primary language. In addition, English-only students gain proficiency in a second language while maintaining high levels of academic achievement in English.

Two-way immersion programs are not traditional bilingual programs. In traditional bilingual educational programs language minority students are given an educational 'boost' by using their primary language to support the transition into English for one to three years. This results in the loss of the primary language and is a deficit or remedial model of instruction.

Two-way immersion programs are a proven better method of addressing the issues facing educating language minority students in California today. They not only provide an effective model of instruction for English learners, where students achieve at or above academic achievement levels of their language peers, but they also increase the number of English speaking students proficient in a foreign language. Additional benefits of two-way programs include appreciation of people from different cultures and increased parent involvement. As our educational system strives to educate all students to high standards, two-way immersion programs offer great promise for the future.

Research Evidence

Two-way immersion programs have been in existence for over thirty years and a growing body of research indicates two-way immersion programs are the most effective English language and foreign language development programs. Based on research evidence, Thomas and Collier (1997) concluded that developmental two-way programs are more effective than traditional bilingual programs and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. In addition, a study by Lindholm and Gavlek (1994) of four two-way immersion schools found that by fifth or sixth grade 75% to 92% of English learners were rated as fluent in English on the Student Oral Language Observation Matrix and 67% to 100% of English speakers were rated as fluent in the foreign language. When comparing language majority and language minority students to peer norm groups not served in two-way immersion programs, Mahrer and Christian (1993) concluded that students (in two-way immersion programs) did as well or better than their fellow students in other programs.

Students in two-way immersion schools thrive academically and emerge from elementary school truly bilingual. In California, examples of two schools implementing effective two-way immersion programs include River Glen Elementary in San Jose and Fiesta Gardens in San Mateo. River Glen has been implementing two-way immersion for more than seven years and has a 2002 state-wide Academic Performance Index (API) ranking of 6 and a similar schools ranking of 7 on the . Fiesta Gardens has been implementing two-way immersion for more than six years and has a 2002 state-wide API ranking of 6 and a similar schools rank of 6.

Resources for Implementation

Under the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (2002), No Child Left Behind, Title III funding primarily focuses on moving limited English proficient students to English fluency. The current language and funding structure of Title III promotes the implementation of innovative language programs by trading freedom for accountability. Title III gives districts more flexibility in using bilingual funds in exchange for effectively transitioning LEP students into English fluency and improving their achievement. Under Title III the funding is available through performance based grants to states and local districts with performance objectives for improving English fluency and sanctions for poor performance.

Language policies in the United States have varied over the last century from a sink-or-swim policy to one of inclusion and appreciation for the needs of English learners. However, the policies of the federal government have not been comprehensive in nature. The federal government has poured billions of dollars into bilingual education with an emphasis

on transition into English while also putting significant amounts of money into ineffective foreign language programs at the middle and high school level.

According to Torres-Guzman (2002), indications are that language instruction alone is not an indicator of program expense, but rather the extent to which programs are supplementary or integrated in the school curriculum. The author sites the most popular example, pullout English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction as the most expensive option. This option is has also been cited as the least effective program design (Thomas & Collier, 1997). The implementation of language programs that are both effective for the learner and cost effective is imperative to receive Title III funds.

Expand and Improve Two-way Immersion Programs

In California, all English learners need to become proficient in English while meeting state standards across the curriculum. Research indicates two-way immersion is the most effective model for doing so while mastering a second language. Two-way immersion programs create bilingual, bi-literate citizens with increased awareness and tolerance of and for people of different cultures. In addition, students from both language groups have higher achievement levels than their peers in monolingual programs. Two-way immersion programs can be made cost effective through the use of Title III funds combined with additional state level funding for second language learners.

A policy is needed that would place a high priority on using Title III funds to expand and promote proven and effective educational practices associated with two-way language immersion programs. Included in this policy would be the recruitment and training of qualified teachers, professional development for current teachers, and research into effective practices and school models of two-way immersion programs.

References

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