The Benefits and Limitations of Two-Way Bilingual Education Programs

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When analyzing the strengths and limitations of any program designed to support the English language acquisition of English Language Learners (ELLs), the goals of the program, the requisite elements needed to achieve those, and the results of the program in the real world must be examined. Among the array of programs developed and implemented in order to support ELLs, Two-Way Bilingual Education Programs are unique in all three categories: the scope of the goals is sweeping, the resources needed for success are many, and the results are positive and promising. While the successful outcomes of many Two-Way Bilingual Programs may well be desired by all school districts, implementation of the program may not be feasible for all, whether it be due to lack of resources or the limitations of the program model itself. Still, when implemented in communities that are compatible with the program's limitations and when supported by ample resources, Two-Way Bilingual Education Programs can provide linguistic and academic development of the highest caliber for ELLs and native English speakers alike, and provide far-reaching benefits to students and community members.

As is the case in most ELL programs, one goal of Two-Way Bilingual Programs is the development of the ELLs' English language skills; however, these programs equally prioritize native English speakers' development of proficiency in the a second language (that is, the native language of the participating ELLs). What's more, Two-Way Bilingual Programs aim to promote strong academic achievement for both language groups, and foster "positive cross-cultural attitudes" (Christian, 1994). In order to attain these goals, the two language groups are integrated but the separation of the languages is maintained, and content is taught in both languages in varying rations, most commonly 50:50 or 90:10 (Collier & Thomas, 2004; Christian, 1994). Creating a group of students that is composed of a balanced number of native English speakers and ELLs is also essential to achieving the goals of the program, and for this reason, most

programs are both selective on the part of the school and voluntary on the part of the students and parents (Collier & Thomas, 2004; Christian, 1994). Research suggests that in order to receive the full benefits of the program, students, families, and the school system must commit to six consecutive years of the programming (Collier & Thomas, 2004).To ensure that content is learned by all students from both language groups, teachers commonly use sheltered strategies and organize units by theme, providing students with multiple opportunities to learn academic content and new language in different ways (Christian, 1994; Quintanar-Sarellana, 2004).

Extant research suggests that this combination of goals and methods produces strong results for ELLs and that this program model has the potential to produce stronger results for ELLs than other ELL programs, both academically and linguistically. One longitudinal study has found that "effect sizes for dual language are very large compared to other programs for English learners"; in fact, the data indicates that a Two-Way Bilingual Program is "the only program for English learners that fully closes the [academic achievement] gap" between ELLs and native English speakers (Collier & Thomas, 2004). This academic achievement is made possible by including content instruction in the shared native language of the ELLs, which allows them to "gain important content knowledge" that will "make the English they encounter more comprehensible" and support greater proficiency (Christian, 1994). By developing each student's native and second language, it appears that it is possible for ELLs to achieve greater results in both language and content learning in Two-Way Bilingual programs than in other types of ELL programs.

The academic and linguistic benefits of Two-Way Bilingual Programs extend beyond English Language Learners and impact the native English speakers that participate. Collier and Thomas found that Two-Way Bilingual Programs "stimulate students to make more than one

year's progress every year, in both languages," resulting by the end of the program in proficiency in both languages for both groups (Collier & Thomas, 2004; Lindholm-Leary, 2004). Integration of students from both language groups ensures that all students have access to "native speaker models," which in combination with the content delivered in both languages ensures that all students receive academic and colloquial input in both languages, supporting dual language proficiency (Christian, 1994). Academically, students from both language groups who participate in Two-Way Bilingual Programs are held to "rigorous content standards" of the "curricular mainstream," and several studies indicate that both groups tend to perform above grade level in content areas including reading and math (Alanis & Rodriguez, 2008; De Jong, 2002; Lindholm-Leary, 2004). For students in both language groups who participate in the full length of a quality Two-Way Bilingual Program, it appears that in spite of the fact that English is not used for the majority of instruction, there is no cost to English language learning (Collier & Thomas, 2004). Indeed, these programs seem to engender high achievement in English speakers, as well as the native language of ELLs and in academic domains.

In addition to promoting academic in linguistic achievement, Two-Way Bilingual Programs help to foster positive self-images in students, as well as healthy relationships and empathic attitudes between students of different linguistic, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Inherent in the philosophy and design of Two-Way Bilingual Programs is a respect for both languages used for instruction in the program, the cultural heritages of the languages' speakers, and the speakers themselves (Collier & Thomas, 2004). Consequently, students of both language groups report high levels of self-esteem and satisfaction with themselves and their academic achievement (Christian, 1994). Also, the integration of students of both language groups and equal respect given to both languages helps eliminate the "social distance…discrimination, and

prejudice" that has too often developed towards ELL students enrolled in other types of bilingual programs (Christian, 1994). Two-Way Bilingual Programs position students from both language groups as "experts" in their native language and "novices" in their second language, encouraging "students from each language group…to respect their fellow students as valued partners in the learning process with much knowledge to teach" (Christian, 1994; Collier & Thomas, 2004). This classroom climate can help students developmulticultural sensitivity and competence, skills that can transcend the classroom and impact their families and communities for the better.

This positive and cooperative classroom environment that often accompanies a quality Two-Way Bilingual Program may help students develop positive attitudes towards education that last well beyond the years of the program itself. Teachers in Two-Way Bilingual Programs report higher student engagement and fewer behavior problems in class than they experienced with students in other classroom contexts (Collier & Thomas, 2004). Students in these programs assert that they have positive attitudes both towards school in general and towards their Two-Way Bilingual Program specifically (Lindholm-Leary, 2004). Importantly, research suggests that participating in a Two-Way Bilingual Program in elementary school may reduce Latino students' self-expressed likelihood of dropping out of high school (Lindholm-Leary, 2004). Other surveys of high school students who have participated in Two-Way Bilingual Programs find that these students report that they value education, are motivated to succeed in school, and want to earn a college degree (Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2002). Although the impact of these students' attitudes on their educational outcomes were not included in this study, these surveys suggest that Two-Way Bilingual Programs may help to create in students the desire to succeed in high school and pursue higher education, especially for ELLs from populations that have some of the highest high school dropout rates in the United States (Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2002).

Thus, although Two-Way Bilingual Programs can deliver impressive results for ELLs, the programs are not designed to solely benefit English Language Learners. Instead, they provide students from both language groups with the opportunity to develop bilingualism, attain high academic achievement, and develop positive attitudes towards education and towards diverse cultures, all of which prepares students to succeed in the increasingly globalized economy (Quintanar-Sarellana, 2004). However, implementing a Two-Way Bilingual Program that delivers such results is a demanding endeavor, and may not be attainable for all school systems due to the amount of resources required and the limitations of the program itself.

One significant limitation and challenge inherent in the design of Two-Way Bilingual programs is that in order to achieve many of the benefits of the program, a specific student population is required. Although there is not an exact ratio of native English speakers and ELLs required, research suggests that in order to "stimulate the natural second language acquisition process" so that both language groups gain proficiency in both languages, an approximate 50:50 balance of students from each language group is ideal (Collier & Thomas, 2004). Clearly, there are many communities that have ELLs but that are not composed of an even number of ELLs and native English speakers; as a consequence, interested students may need to be turned away for Two-Way Bilingual Programs in order to maintain the ideal balance of students from the two featured language groups. For the students that are able to enroll in Two-Way Bilingual Programs, a six year commitment to the program is typically required in order to attain the full benefits of the program. If a student's participation in the program is interrupted before the six years are completed, it is unclear what the consequences could be on the student's transition into a different ELL Program or General Education Program; one study suggests that certain Two-Way Bilingual models may delay English reading ability, which could put the student at a

disadvantage if they have to prematurely exit the program (Christian, 1994; Drozdowicz, 2012). Also, many programs have restrictions on the age at which newcomers can join and be integrated into the program (Christian, 1994). The specific population ratio needed to achieve the maximum benefits of the program often results in a lack of flexibility, availability and functionality of programming for some groups of students, including those who are entering and exiting the program at intermediate stages.

Two-Way Bilingual Programs also may not be able to comprehensively and effectively serve communities that are composed of less common language groups or a variety of language groups. The majority of Two-Way Bilingual Programs in the United States instruct in English and Spanish, but the availability of resources such as qualified teachers and textbooks in languages other than Spanish is in some cases limited (Christian, 1994). It is also unclear if Two-Way Bilingual Programs are effective for or compatible with students and communities with great language diversity. Indeed, some studies suggest that students who speak two non-English languages at home and who are not fluent in English may not thrive or achieve well in immersion programs such as Two-Way Bilingual Programs (De Jong, 2002). For communities composed of dozens of language groups, a Two-Way Bilingual Program either must exclude students from certain language backgrounds or surrender its goals of preserving and developing the heritage language of participants. It appears that most Two-Way Bilingual Programs simply cannot guarantee inclusion and support of all ELLs, and as a result, the implementation of Two-Way Bilingual Programs may always need to be accompanied by alternative ELL programs in the school system.

In addition to a specific and consistent student population, Two-Way Bilingual Programs require the investment of resources by many involved parties in order to succeed. Teachers in

Two-Way Bilingual Programs require specific training and credentials, as well as "enormous amounts of planning time" in order to coordinate programming (Quintanar-Sarellana, 2004; Collier & Thomas, 2004). Community support for Two-Way Bilingual Programs is also essential, and it is necessary for community members "to see a value in learning…the language in question so that they will support the program by…committing resources to it" (Christian, 1994). These programs also require a time commitment from the parents of participants, and parents may be asked to attend meetings, volunteer in the classroom during school hours, assist in fundraising, or assist students with homework (Drozdowicz, 2012). For parents who lack specific language skills, who can't take time off of work, or who have mobility constraints, this expected contribution of time could cause anxiety and discourage them from enrolling their child in the program. School systems are also often expected to provide additional resources to the parents such as language workshops, and again, this expected contribution of resources could inhibit certain school systems from implementing the program (Quintanar-Sarellana, 2004). Successful Two-Way Bilingual Programs are regularly supported by the investment of a great amount of human—and even financial—resources, and it is uncertain if communities or families that cannot provide those resources are able to effectively implement such programs.

There are certainly important limitations to Two-Way Bilingual Programs, including the requisite resources and the potential exclusion of certain students or groups of students. As promising and impressive as the achievements of Two-Way Bilingual Programs may be, I do not believe that they can be successfully implemented in any and all communities, and I am not confident that they can be made to adequately serve all ELLs. However, for communities composed primarily of two language groups, Two-Way Bilingual Programs can be an enriching option to provide to students and their families and can deliver significant academic and

linguistic growth for participants. I value the goals of Two-Way Bilingual Programs, including the efforts to produce bilingualism and biliteracy, as well as the accompanying methodology rooted in participatory and cooperative learning. I believe that the emphasis Two-Way Bilingual Programs place on positioning minority languages as resources to develop rather than problems to fix is important and ought to be fundamental to the theory and methodology of all ELL programs. Though Two-Way Bilingual Programs cannot be universally implemented or serve all ELLs, the programs can provide academically and personally transformative experiences for students, their families, their school systems, and their communities.

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