
The Dual Language Dualism: ¿Quiénes Ganan?

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Abstract

This article poses questions to help educators critically analyze different aspects of dual language programs in K-12 classrooms. The underlying question in this analysis involves issues of power: Who stands to benefit most from the micro-level, curricular, and pedagogical practices of dual language programs? More specifically, and for the purposes of this article, we examine two areas of concern: placement strategies and parent involvement.

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Introduction

Texas law mandates schools to implement a language program any time a school has 20 or more English language learners (ELL) in the same grade level (Collier, Thomas, & Tinajero, 2006). Traditionally, the language programs Texas schools have offered include transitional bilingual education (TBE) (49%) and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs (38%) (Alanís, 2000). This trend is slowly changing, however. School administrators, teachers, and parents are learning of the long term benefits dual language programs offer that TBE and ESL programs do not. The first statewide compilation of Texas data on dual language implementation indicated that 61 school districts were using it, and a total of 166 two-way dual language programs were operating in the state (Lara-Alecio et al., 2004). Four years after that report, dual language program implementation continues to grow, with a total of 263 programs currently registered on the Texas Two-Way Dual Language Education website (<http://texastwoway.org/>).

These numbers represent a dramatic increase in dual language implementation over the last decade and a half in Texas. In 1995, fewer than 10 dual language programs were registered with the Texas Two-Way Consortium (Gómez, 2006), representing more than a 3,000% increase over the last 14 years. These numbers continue to increase as more and more school districts are piloting and implementing dual language programs. In 2007, Governor Rick Perry signed into law a plan in which ten school districts, and up to thirty campuses, would pilot dual language programs for a period of six years (Oleck, 2007). In 2006, the Dallas Independent School District implemented a dual language model in the lower grades of its elementary schools; other North Texas districts, including Irving and Grand Prairie, are doing the same (Ayres, 2007). Austin Independent School District (AISD), one of the largest school districts in Texas that has

not implemented a dual language model, will potentially open a dual language charter school, called Austin Community School, in the Fall of 2009 (<http://www.austincommunityschool.org/>).

The popularity of dual language programs in Texas, as well as nationally, makes for an exciting time in education history. Not only do dual language programs heighten the educational achievements, including literacy levels, for both language minority and language majority students, but the dual language model also provides a foundation for equitable education outcomes for language minority students. Excitement about the potential of dual language programs and the achievements that have been documented in the dual language research are balanced, however, by concerns that practitioners, researchers, and the media may be building up the dual language model as the universal cure for the achievement gap. When dual language programs are described in overly optimistic terms, educators may be discouraged from critically examining the distinctiveness of individual dual language programs or from identifying particular programmatic practices that may perpetuate the achievement gap.

This article poses questions to help educators critically analyze different aspects of dual language programs in K-12 classrooms. The underlying question in this analysis involves issues of power: Who stands to benefit most from the micro-level, curricular, and pedagogical practices of dual language programs? More specifically, and for the purposes of this article, we examine two areas of concern: placement strategies and parent involvement.

Dual Language Programs and What They Have to Offer

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an extensive literature review, we would like to highlight the major components of the programs and the salient positive research outcomes.

The Dual Language Model

Dual language programs in practice, as well as in research, are referred to by several different names, including dual language education (DLE), developmental bilingual education (DBE), two-way bilingual education (TWBE), two-way immersion (TWI), dual immersion (DI), and enriched education (EE) (Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2005). These variously labeled programs consist of classrooms where roughly half the students are native English speakers and the other half are native speakers of a language other than English (e.g., Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Navajo, French) (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003). These integrated classrooms are spaces where both languages are considered academic, and wherein students learn academic content through both languages while working toward oral and written literacy in their target language as well as their native language. In effect, the school curriculum is taught in both languages, without translation, which means language development is not separated out, as it is in many ESL and foreign language classroom designs. In general, dual language programs have the following common characteristics (Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2005; Gómez, 2006):

1. Participating students include English speakers and native speakers of another language.
2. Students are integrated during most content instruction.
3. Instruction is provided in two languages.
4. Students become proficient in two languages.
5. Student achievement in English for all students is equal to or exceeds that of students learning in English only.

While nearly all dual language programs have these characteristics in common, there are various features in the dual language model that can vary from program to program. In short, some of the ways dual language programs can vary include the following:

1. Languages used in the program (e.g., English and Spanish or English and Mandarin).
2. Student demographics, including ethnicity, social class, gender, etc., as well as the ratio of language minority and language majority students participating in a program.
3. Language distribution, including the percentage of time each language is spoken (50:50 and 90:10 models) and how language use is divided among subject areas and alternated throughout the class, day, week, etc.
4. Placement practices schools use to select the students who participate in the program.
5. Support network from administrators, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders.
6. Bilingual and minority language resources, including texts in classrooms and libraries, technology, teachers, administrators, community members, etc.

Dual Language Outcomes

Research consistently demonstrates that students enrolled in dual language programs gain a high proficiency in core curriculum knowledge, develop strong bilingual and biliteracy skills in native and second languages, heighten their metalinguistic and metacommunicative awareness, and acquire positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors (Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2007; de Jong, 2002; Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2005; Howard & Christian, 2002; Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003; Lindholm, 1992; Olmedo, 2005; Senesec, 2002; Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002, 2003). Aside from academic gains, dual language programs also potentially lift the stigma that has traditionally been attached to bilingualism and bilingual education.

Whereas traditional language programs, including ESL and TBE, segregate language minority students from their English-dominant peers, dual language programs integrate both sets of students as they work together toward the goals of bilingualism and biliteracy. In this context, bilingualism is not a deficiency to overcome so that students can be mainstreamed in English

classes. Rather, bilingualism is embraced as a goal that all students work toward and often serves as an indicator of giftedness (Collier, Thomas, & Tinajero, 2006). Schools that commit to long-term bilingualism via dual language programs reconfigure school practices in ways that affirm language minority students' identities, potentially increasing language minority students' investedness and participation in school culture and curriculum.

Despite the consistent research that positions dual language programs favorably, educators should not necessarily extrapolate that dual language programs guarantee educational equity for language minority students. As Gómez (2006) has argued, "No program for English language learners is a panacea" (p. 51). In addition to the many practical problems that can arise in hastily implemented programs (e.g., under-prepared teachers, lack of ongoing support systems, and insufficient materials in the non-English language), this article suggests that even the more well-prepared and successful programs need to be analyzed for practices that may unfavorably position language minority students.

This article posits that the very design of dual language programs (i.e., enrolling a racial and language mix of students) produces power dynamics that are under-researched and under-theorized in the bilingual education literature. It has been more than ten years since Valdés (1997) raised cautionary notes concerning the racial dimensions of dual language programs. Considering the absence of significant research in this area since Valdés' work, the goal of this article is to pick up and continue discussion of the possible subtle, yet marginalizing practices that may emerge in dual language programs for language minority students. There are a number of practices that may create or reproduce deficit and/or assimilationist discourses and pedagogy. The focus of this article is narrowed to two different practices: placement strategies and parent involvement.

Placement Strategies

The integrated classroom design in dual language programs contributes greatly to the uniqueness and overall success of the programs. The dual language classroom is usually split among language and ethnic/racial groups, allowing students to utilize peers who do not represent their language and/or ethnic/racial group as a resource for language learning as well as for developing effective cross-cultural interactions. As stated previously, this integrated model, for the most part, produces a positive outlook on bilingualism.

At the same time that integrative placement strategies provide learning opportunities in the dual language classroom that are largely absent in other language programs, they can also produce inequitable power dynamics. In short, the power dynamics surrounding issues of race, class, and language in a given school and social context can make for less than desirable outcomes in the placement strategies of dual language programs. The race, class and language power dynamics in these programs do not always signify the same level of prestige for all learners involved. Valdés (1997) similarly documented in her cautionary notes on dual language programs that the value placed on students' developing bilingualism is likely to be different for native English speakers than for language minority students. She explained that, "For minority children, the acquisition of English is expected. For mainstream children, the acquisition of a non-English language is enthusiastically applauded" (Valdés, 1997, p. 417).

For the white and/or native English speaker, the dual language program usually signifies an academically enriched program (Collier, Thomas, & Tinajero, 2006). It is a program that challenges them and offers academic opportunities beyond what their white and/or native English-speaking peers are receiving within the same school. Thus, for these students, the opportunity to participate in a language program and become bilingual at a young age is usually

associated with giftedness and translates into a currency that will afford these students more academic and employment opportunities later in life. As a result of the elitism and privilege white and/or native English speakers usually associate with dual language programs, there is usually a large demand for the spaces reserved for native English speakers. This demand creates long waiting lists and a number of screening guidelines to gain entry into the program. The screening practices usually consist of testing procedures wherein students are assessed prior to admittance, and those students who score the highest are among the set of students who are selected to participate in the program.

Contrasting placement practices for native English speakers and language minority students are noted in Howard, Sugarman, and Christian's (2003) work. They state it is not uncommon for all Spanish speakers at a particular school, unless their parents request otherwise, to be placed in the school's dual language program. Research demonstrates that the resulting sets of students (language minority and language majority) who participate in dual language programs therefore often have disparities or gaps in students' social class, academic readiness, immigration status, and parents' educational levels (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003; Howard, Sugarman, Christian, Lindholm-Leary, & Rogers, 2007; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2001; Lindholm-Leary & Ferrante, 2003). Howard et al. (2007) state, "As a group, Spanish-speaking children in dual language programs in the Southwest can be characterized as largely immigrant and with parents who are working class and have five to six years of formal schooling" (p. 33). Similarly, as Howard, Sugarman, and Christian (2003) explain,

The language minority students are more likely to come from homes where there is poverty and where parents have limited formal schooling, and the native

English speakers are more likely to come from homes that are solidly middle class and where parents have substantial formal education. This difference in the backgrounds of the two groups of students makes internal comparisons of student performance difficult, as the students frequently differ by more than just native language (p. 8).

Needless to say, the placement of top-scoring, economically more affluent, native English speakers to participate in an already perceived elite academic program reinforces the conceptualization of native English speaking students in this program as gifted and privileged. This practice also produces a clear disjuncture of academic ability between the two sets of students along racial, ethnic, economic, and linguistic lines.

This disjuncture in student enrollment can potentially produce outcomes that work in contradiction to dual language goals. One of the primary goals and positive outcomes of dual language programs is that the minority language and culture is held in high esteem in a school that has made a commitment to value and nurture these skills. Since the language minority students' language and culture are featured aspects of the program's curriculum, this student population is perceived as knowledgeable and resourceful, especially to native English speaking peers who want to achieve fluent bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural skills in their native language and culture. This favorable positioning of language minority students is jeopardized, however, in a classroom where their white and/or native English-speaking peers are classified as "gifted" and can often outperform them in everyday class assignments and activities. For example, in situations where native English speakers outperform their native Spanish-speaking classmates, the potential for native English speakers to perceive their native Spanish-speaking peers as academically resourceful is weakened.

Evidence for this finding is provided in Pimentel's (2006) ethnographic study of a Spanish/English dual language classroom. In this study, Pimentel found that the placement strategies utilized at the school created a dual language classroom wherein white, native English-speaking students outperformed their Latina/o Spanish-dominant classmates, not only in activities conducted in the English language, but in activities conducted in Spanish as well. Pimentel (2006) also found that whereas "high performing" white, native English speakers were placed in the class, the Latino, Spanish-dominant students who were enrolled in the class were perceived by the school as students who were achieving below grade level, acting out, and generally "unteachable." Given that there was no other language program in place at the school, teachers often referred the Spanish-dominant students who were not adequately adapting or learning in their English mainstream classrooms to this dual language classroom. They reasoned that these "at-risk" Spanish-dominant students would fair better in the dual language classroom where at least they could understand some of the instruction being partly delivered in their native language (Pimentel, 2006).

As a result of the placement strategies being employed at the school Pimentel (2006) studied, Latina/o, Spanish-dominant students often underperformed their white, English-dominant counterparts. Since many of the Latina/o, Spanish-dominant students in the class read several grade levels below average, it was often the case that the students were not perceived as knowledgeable and did not serve as resources to their white, native English-speaking classmates. After spending some time in the class, Pimentel (2006) also found that the white, native English-speaking students often started to read in Spanish at grade levels that surpassed their Spanish-dominant classmates, clearly a result of the English-dominant students' already established literacy skills in their native language.

The placement strategies described here by no means represent the placement strategies in all dual language programs. However, in schools where these placement strategies are being implemented, and/or when students associate different meanings and/or different levels of social status with the program, there are educational equity implications that must be examined.

Parent Involvement

Dual language programs usually require parents to be actively involved in their child's education, even more so than other educational programs. It is not uncommon for parents to sign a parental agreement or contract, in which parents ensure the long-term enrollment of their child in the program, as well as commit to a number of parent-involvement tasks. Some of these tasks can include parents offering time and assistance in the classroom, providing their child opportunities to hear/speak the target language to be exposed to different cultures, mentoring during after-school activities, and participating in school committees, PTA, and parent academic workshops. While parent involvement has traditionally translated to students' increased academic achievement, the amount and type of parent involvement dual language programs expect may present an additional challenge for poor, ethnic and/or language minority families struggling to function within the constraints of their jobs, child care, transportation, etc. While not all Latino students participating in dual language programs are Mexican, this section is narrowed to focus on some of the cultural barriers Mexican immigrant parents have faced in U.S. schools. It then moves on to discuss some of the specific obstacles dual language programs may present to parents.

When considering Mexican parents' level of involvement in U.S. schools, it is important to examine the Mexican education system, which many Mexican immigrant parents have attended. As noted in Valdés (1996) and Bollin (2003), the Mexican education system has

required Mexican parents to be passive in the schooling process and simply concentrate on the behavior patterns of their children. It has only been since 1998 that the Mexican education system has asked Mexican parents to play a much more active role in their children's education. Before then, the Mexican education system generally urged parents to focus on teaching their children to be "respectful, well-behaved, and hard working children," and not to interfere with the teachers' work (Bollin, 2003, p. 200). This conduct orientation to parent involvement and Mexicans' overall high regard for teachers often carries over to Mexican parents' involvement in their children's U.S. educational experiences.

Valdés (1996), in her ethnographic work with Mexican immigrant families, found that parents' interaction with school personnel, including teachers, was limited to discipline-specific issues. Valdés (1996) stated, "Parents considered it to be their proper role to ask: "*¿Cómo se porta?*" (How does he behave?); Mexican parents thought it to be their duty to be informed of the children's *conducta* (conduct)" (p. 165). As a result of the parents' conduct orientation to their children's education in Valdés' (1996) study, the parents interacted very little, if at all, with teachers in settings not specifically addressing student discipline. Valdés (1996) notes, for example, that parents did not regularly attend open houses, and when they did, they saw it more as "a pleasant social event that children liked to go to" (p. 161)— than as an opportunity to get to know teachers, gain knowledge about the school's program, or understand their students' progress within that program. As can be seen in Valdés' (1996) work, Mexican parents, as a result of being educated in a qualitatively different educational system in Mexico, may have very different conceptions about where and how they should be involved in their children's education in the U.S.

As a result of limited access to schooling, some Mexican parents' educational level is often much lower than parents who were schooled in the United States. Worthy and Rodríguez-Galindo (2006) found that the average education level for Mexican parents in their study was a sixth grade education. Mexican parents' educational level in combination with their limited English skills can create a reluctance to interact with school personnel. Valdés (1996) explained that the Mexican parents in her study often avoided one-on-one interaction with school personnel and even ignored notes asking parents to call or come in because these parents felt inadequate to respond. Valdés (1996) explained, "In many families, ... neither of the two parents felt competent enough to deal with school personnel. They were embarrassed, and found almost any excuse not to go to the school and "*ponerse en evidencia*" (show how ignorant or incapable they were)" (p. 162). In addition to achieved educational levels, Mexican parents' education in Mexico differs in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy, which may cause incongruence between the ways parents and teachers think children ought to be prepared for school. As described in Valdés' (1996) study, participating parents did not see the value in teaching their children the ABCs—as opposed to the sounds of vowels—because the latter is what was emphasized in their own schooling experiences.

Pedagogical practices such as grading and ways of dividing up and labeling content (e.g., social studies and language arts) may also be unfamiliar to Mexican parents. Valdés (1996) pointed out that report cards were sometimes unfamiliar and inaccessible to the Mexican parents in her study, and thus had relatively no correlation to the parents' understanding of their children's progress in school. Even though many Mexican parents may not use U.S. standards (e.g., a report card) for keeping track of their children's progress in school, many parents do develop and utilize alternative methods to gauge their children's academic progress. Worthy and

Rodríguez-Galindo (2006) show that in contrast to teachers' perceptions, the Mexican parents in their study were commonly aware of their children's progress in school. They state, "Even though they knew very little English, parents seemed keenly aware of how well their children were managing English and were able to report with detailed description of their children's progress, and surprising accuracy that was supported by our classroom observations" (p. 590). Worthy and Rodríguez-Galindo also point out that their Mexican parent participants developed techniques outside of the school setting to evaluate their children's academic progress.

In addition to the barriers resulting from the contrasting U.S. and Mexican schooling experiences, there are a number of other structural barriers commonly prohibiting Mexican parents from participating in schools in the ways schools may expect. Mexican parents, and especially recent immigrants, commonly struggle to find substantial work in the U.S. As a result, Mexican parents often have to work extended hours or work two or three jobs to make ends meet. These extensive work schedules create difficulties in transportation, flexibility in work schedules, and babysitting that schools rarely take into consideration in their expectations for parent involvement (Worthy & Rodríguez-Galindo, 2006; Zelazo, 1995).

There are a number of barriers that commonly inhibit Mexican parents from participating at the level of parent involvement schools generally expect. When a child is enrolled in a dual language program, the expectations for parent involvement are even more demanding. Parents' involvement in dual language programs usually starts well before the student even begins the program. For example, it is usually up to the parent to investigate where dual language programs are implemented and how to enroll their child in the desired program. This information is most readily available on the Internet *via* the school's webpage. These web sites are usually very explicit in stating what parents and students need in order to gain entry into the program, listing

deadlines for testing and applications as well as the required criteria for entry. These web sites are usually almost entirely in English and require access to a computer and web services, obstacles that low-income and Spanish-dominant parents may not be able to overcome. These barriers alone may be enough to send the message that dual language programs cater more to middle-upper class, English-dominant students.

As was explained in the previous section on placement strategies, the demand for native English speaking spaces is often high, requiring native English-speaking parents to become involved early on in ways that language minority parents are not encouraged or expected to. As a result of native English-speaking parents' high levels of parent involvement at the onset of enrollment, these parents become more visible to school personnel and appear more invested in their children's education. In schools where there is a high demand for native English-speaking spaces, native English-speaking parents are likely to be in contact with the school of choice long before the child even enters the program, prepare the child for necessary entrance criteria (e.g., preliteracy and oral literacy exams), as well as take the child to the school for dual language orientations, testing, and to fill out the necessary paperwork. For these parents, the kind of parent involvement and the way children are expected to be prepared for school have been made very clear by the school.

The result is that parents participating in dual language programs may be preparing their children to enter school in sharply different ways. Whereas native English-speaking parents are likely to make sure their children meet the school's stated entrance criteria, Mexican parents are likely to base their children's preparation on Mexican education experiences, namely discipline and qualitatively different content preparation (Valdés, 1996). Thus, the kind of involvement that native English-speaking parents display, especially at the onset, may make language

minority parents' seeming uninvolved appear inadequate to school personnel. More specifically, Mexican parent involvement, in contrast to that of native English-speaking parents, may be misread as not invested, uncaring, uninterested, and generally lacking the cultural and linguistic abilities required for adequate parent involvement.

It is also worth pointing out that for those Spanish-dominant parents who do actively seek out spaces in dual language programs for their Spanish-dominant children, their reasons for enrolling their children in a dual language program often differ from those of native English-speaking parents. Whereas native English-speaking parents often identify instrumental motivation, such as a better career and more job opportunities, language minority parents often identify integrative attitudes, including maintenance of native language and cultural identities and being able to communicate to others in their native language (Craig, 1996; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Peña, 1998). The motivation for native English-speaking parents to enroll their children—that is, upward mobility—is often more congruent with schools' desired outcomes for dual language programs, namely, a more demanding curriculum, the prestige of an academically enriched program, and high academic achievement, all of which are usually signified to the school by high standardized test scores. These contrasts in parent motivation and school conceptions of success produce a strong alignment between the school and native English speakers, creating opportunities for native English-speaking parents to directly be involved and contribute to these goals.

In contrast, language minority parents may feel disfranchised, as was the case in Peña's (1998) study of a school that was converting from a transitional bilingual education program to a dual language program. Despite Mexican parents' interest and investment in the developing program, they felt detached from the school's planning process. Peña (1998) states that parents

resented the school's emphasis on upward mobility and felt the school administration devalued the parents' interests in promoting family values, including cultural pride.

In Pimentel's (2006) study, wherein there was a sharp contrast in native English speakers' and native Spanish speakers' academic achievement, she found that white, English-speaking parents often voiced concern about whether their children were meeting their full potential in a classroom where the curriculum was potentially watered down to meet the needs of the less academically equipped Spanish-dominant students. The pressure that white, English-speaking parents placed on the teacher in this study pushed the teacher to adopt pedagogical practices that often worked against his desires and in contrast to dual language goals. As a result of parents' demands, the teacher spoke English more than intended, made Spanish instruction more accessible, and increased his tendency to teach to the tests. Additionally, the teacher implemented a daily homework assignment called translation sheets. These translation sheets included a number of words and sentences that students translated from either English to Spanish or Spanish to English. The parents signed these completed translation sheets nightly, and they served as evidence to white, English-speaking parents that their child was making progress in their target language. These translation sheets, which appeased native English-speaking parents' concerns for their children's academic development, worked against the teacher's and program's goals to avoid the act of translating altogether (Pimentel, 2006).

Conclusion

This essay is not simply concerned with offering a critique, but with educational access, equity, and social justice. There is the real possibility that dual language programs in general are being idealized and that there is a need for practitioners and researchers to critically analyze the power dynamics that operate in individual dual language programs. This article highlights the

positive potential for dual language programs, as well as concerns for issues of power as the latter relates to placement practices and parental involvement. As explained previously, the unique quality of dual language programs lies in their ability to position language minority students' knowledge as academically valuable and resourceful. However, the placement strategies described herein jeopardize this uniquely positive positioning of language minority students' knowledge. If language minority students cannot be positioned as resources in a dual language program, and furthermore if they are being outperformed by their white and/or English-speaking classmates, they run the risk of being classified as deficient in a program that is supposed to counter their traditionally deficit status within the school. Such scenarios pose some serious problems in ethnic and language minority education that can potentially reproduce some of the same inequitable outcomes as have been observed and measured historically in traditional, deficit-oriented school programs.

In addition, many dual language programs from their very inception cater to the needs of English-speaking, middle-class white parents. By requiring time extensive commitments, especially during work hours, by not providing access to information equally in both languages, and by not addressing cultural incongruence—especially with poor immigrant Latina/o parents—dual language programs can exclude and/or preclude Spanish-speaking parents' equal and equitable participation. The outcome is that because native English-speaking parents are more likely to be involved in dual language programs, teachers and administrators are much more likely to hear their interests and concerns.

Lastly, dual language programs potentially offer language minority students opportunities to achieve academically in ways ESL, TBE, English Immersion, and even other varieties of developmental programs do not. However, in light of the potential power dynamics that operate

in dual language programs, educators are encouraged to critically analyze the everyday micro practices of their local dual language programs.

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