

Effective Dual Language Programs: Planning & Implementation



March 3, 2026

Sheridan Way, VUSD

Karen Beeman

Center for Teaching for Biliteracy

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Agenda:

- **Students in dual language programs**
- Comparison of Language Education Programs

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Neuroscience Research: The Advantages of Being Bilingual

(Ellen Bialystok, Pat Wolfe, among many)

- Enhanced cognitive benefits: Ability to classify and develop analytic reasoning
- Enhanced visual spatial benefits
- Increased abilities to focus: executive functioning (know how to prioritize, select the right language for the right context)
- Deeper critical thinking and problem solving
- Strong creativity skills

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This is the goal of dual language – students who are bilingual, biliterate, have high academic achievement and socio-cultural competence.



Students develop a bilingual identity and can therefore make metalinguistic decisions.

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“Having translanguaging spaces for instruction does not in any way dismiss the need for separate spaces in which children are asked to perform in one language or the other.

These separate spaces have been created so that the teacher knows what language to use, and so that students have to expand their language practices to meet the exigencies of communication with monolinguals.” Dr. Ofelia García

Hesson, S., Seltzer, K., Woodley, H., (2014) [Translanguaging in Curriculum and Instruction: A CUNY-NYSIEB Guide for Educators](#). CUNY-NYSIEB, The Graduate Center, the city University of New York.

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Students who enter the dual language program

New Strategy: Numbered Heads Together

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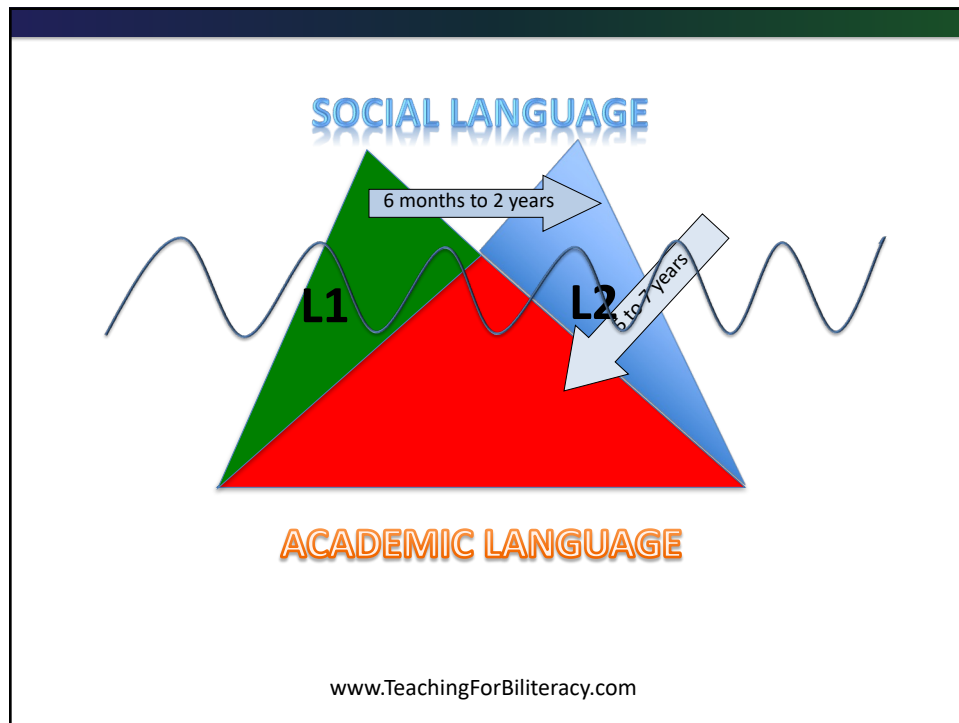
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Students who enter the dual language program



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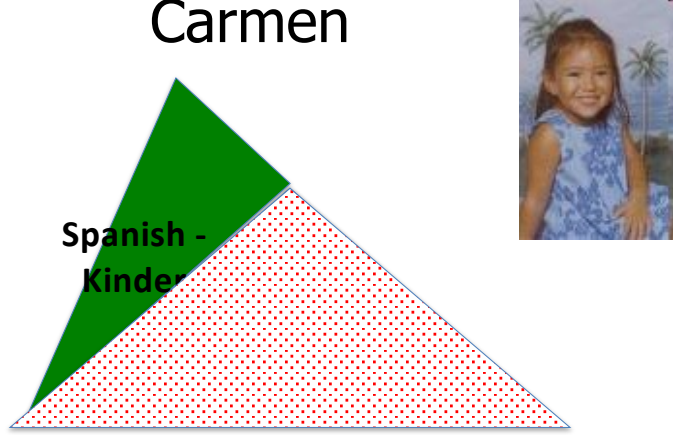
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Students who enter the dual language program



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Carmen



-Fui al centro de Chicago. Es bonito.
(I went to downtown Chicago. It's nice)

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Numbered Heads-Together

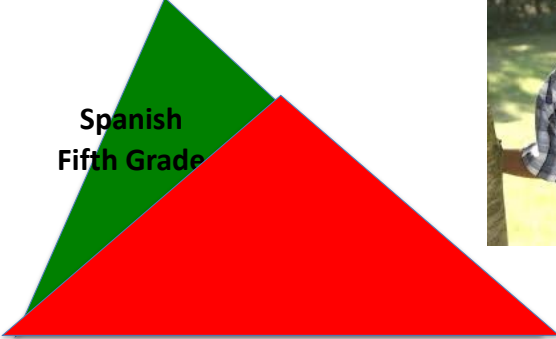
- How can we best support Carmen's academic development? In what language should she learn new content? Why?
- How can we best support Carmen's English language development?
- What role should Spanish play in her education and why?

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Antonio



Spanish
Fifth Grade



-Visité la zona metropolitana de Chicago, lo cual es sumamente bonita. Me siento muy dichoso de poder vivir en una zona urbana tan resplandeciente.
(The metropolitan zone of Chicago is extremely beautiful. I feel very lucky To be able to live in an urban setting that is so resplendent.)

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Numbered Heads-Together

- How can we best support Antonio's academic development? What language would be best for him to learn new content? Why?
- How can we best support Antonio's English language development?
- What role should Spanish play in his education and why?

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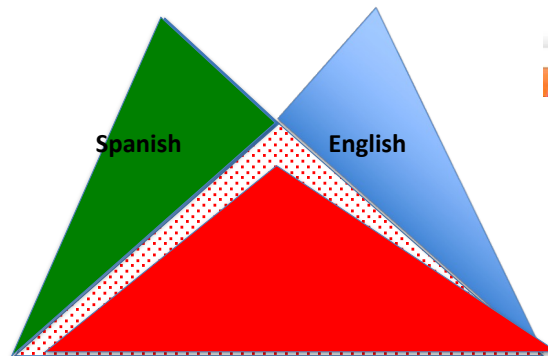
Students who enter the dual language program



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Hannah-Third Grade



-Fui a la casa de mi Tío José. Mi amiga María fui también.
(I went to my uncle Jose's house. My friend María I went, too.)

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Numbered Heads-Together

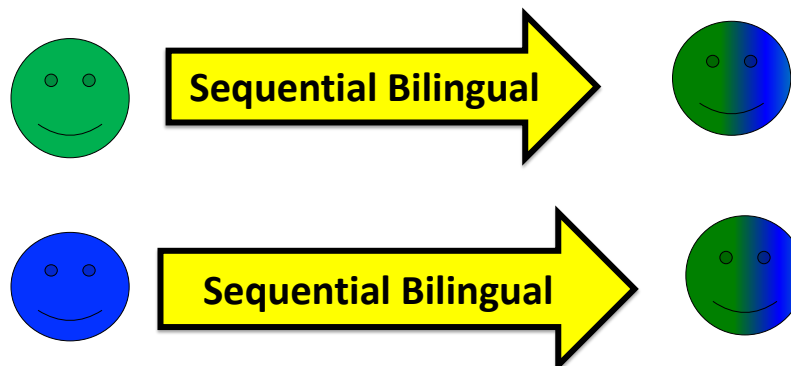
- How can we best support Hannah's academic development? In what language would be best for her to learn new content? Why?
- How can we best support Hannah's Spanish language development?
- What about her English?

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Students who enter the dual language program



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Developing Bilinguals Go Through Predictable Stages of Language Acquisition in their L2

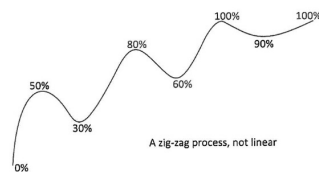
- First language (L1)
- Preproduction in L2 (Starting – Receptive Language)
- Early Production (Emerging)
- Speech Emergence (Developing)
- Beginning and Intermediate Fluency (Expanding)
- Advanced Fluency (Bridging)

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Figure 4.2

Pattern of Acquisition of Grammar Structures in Second Language



Percentage of times student produces correct form as proficiency in second language increases.

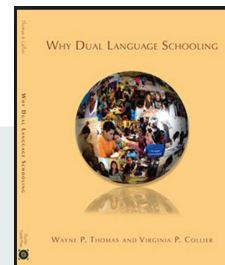
Second language acquisition is a natural, gradual, long-term developmental process.

For the early stages of second language acquisition, it is ...

- Less important to focus on error correction
- More important to focus on communication and content
- Less important to focus on acquisition of discrete points of language
- More important to focus on:
 - thinking in the language
 - extensive development of vocabulary in context
 - integrated listening, speaking, reading, writing across the curriculum

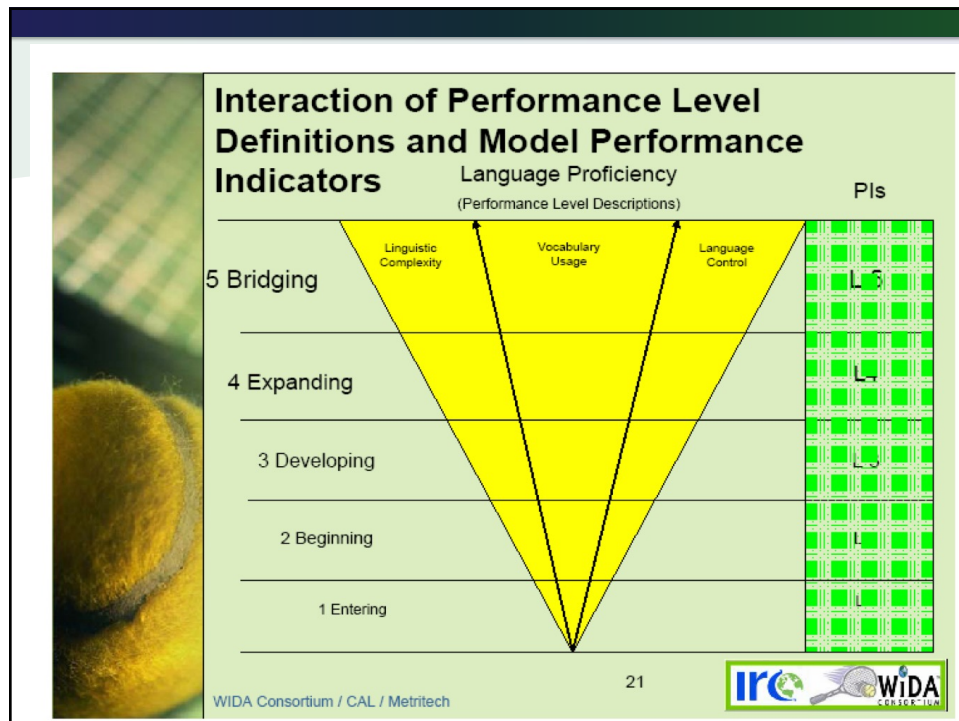
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Language Learning is non-Linear



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Developing Bilinguals Go Through Predictable Stages of Language Acquisition in their L2

- First language (L1)
- Preproduction
- Early Production
- Speech Emergence (Developing)
- Beginning and Intermediate Fluency (Expanding)
- Advanced Fluency (Bridging)

It takes 5 to 7 years to acquire academic language in a 2nd language.

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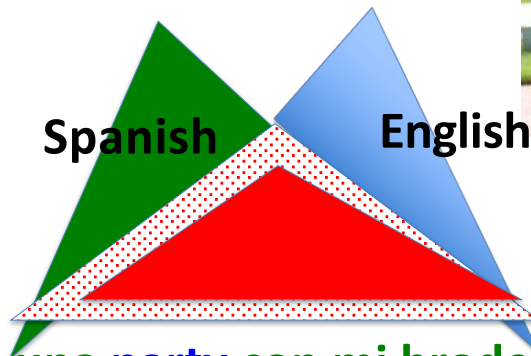
Students who enter the dual language program



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Paulo - Second



Fui a una **party** con mi broder. Se
me mojaron mis **soquetines**. Then
comimos **lonche**.

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Numbered Heads-Together

- How can we best support Paulo's academic development? In what language would should he learn new content? Why?
- How can we best support Paulo's English language development?
- What about his Spanish?

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Students who enter the dual language program



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Simultaneous Bilinguals English Language Learners in the US

- In **2009** - **75%** of students who qualified as ELLs in PreK through 5th grade in the US were born here (Education Week, 2009).
- In **2015**, that percentage was **82%**
- In **2023**, that percentage grew to **85%**.

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Simultaneous Bilinguals Learn Two Languages at the Same Time

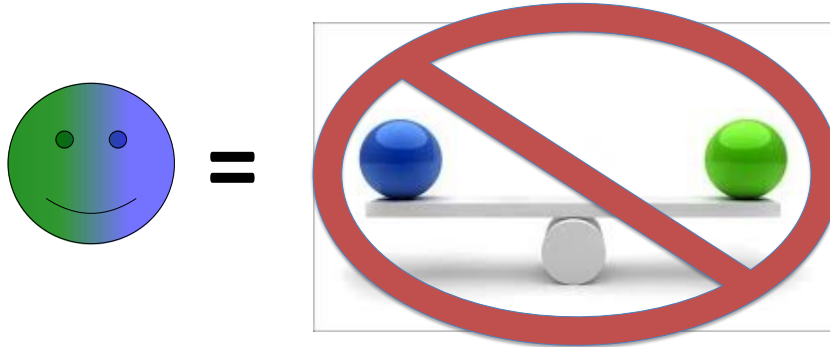
- Learn language similarly to a monolingual student but do so in 2 languages.
- Know some things in Spanish (or in a different non-English language) and other things in English.
- The child's vocabulary knowledge is shared across two languages.
- The child's language use is deliberate and reflective of the context.

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Bilingual Pathways –
Simultaneous bilingual doesn't
 necessarily mean balanced bilingual.



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Dual Language Students

**What is the L1 of
 simultaneous
 bilinguals?**

Simultaneous bilingual

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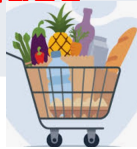
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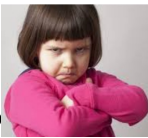
Bilingual Use of Language

- Mamá, ¿cuándo vamos a comprar las groserías?
- Mi hermano me puchó.
- I want to go to the house of Lucía.
- I have to do my tarea de matemáticas.
- Dile a mi abuela, que I don't want to go.





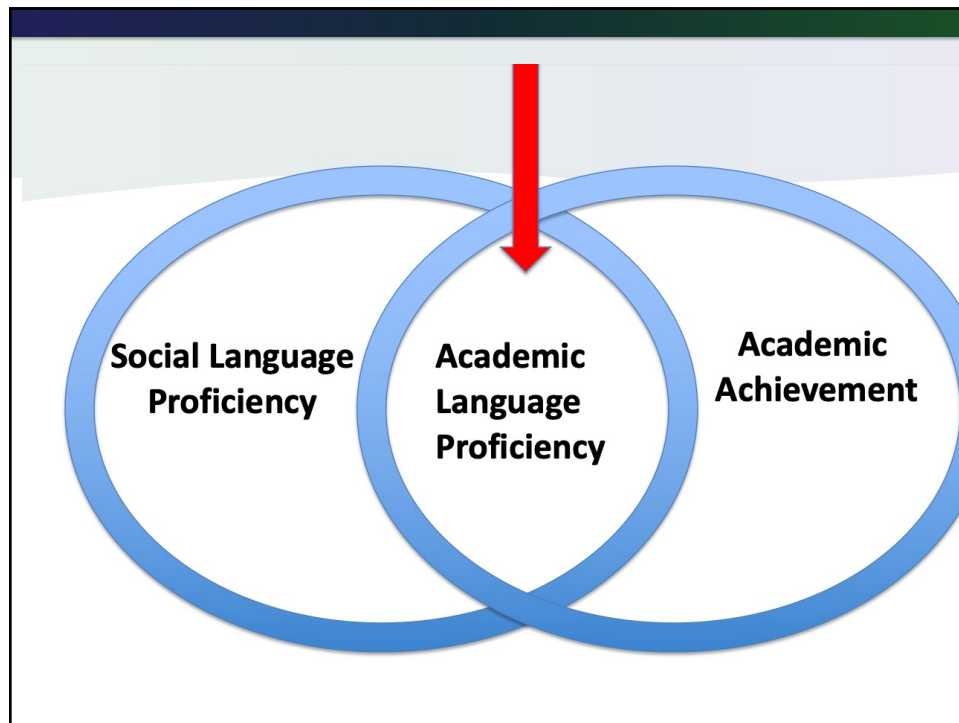
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 $8 \times 6 = 48$





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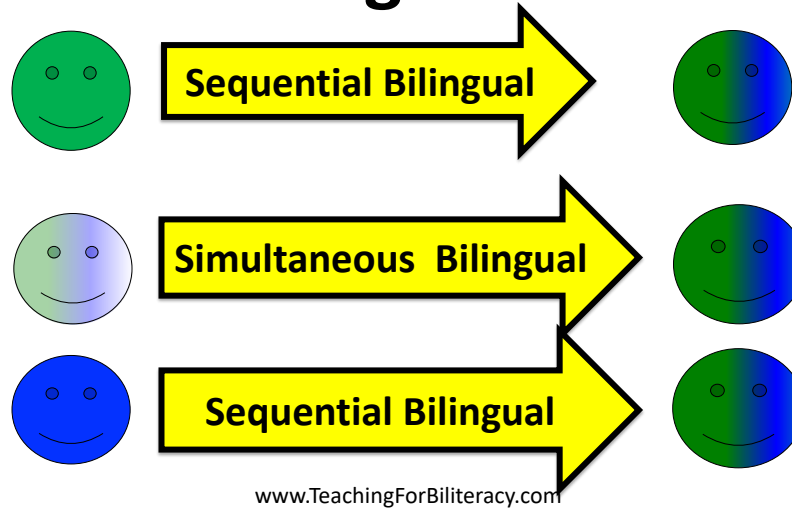
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**Biliteracy educators
are first and foremost
language educators!**

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Students in Dual Language Programs



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Students in Language Acquisition and Biliteracy Programs	
	Green students – Students who enter the program with linguistic resources all in the non-English Dual Language program language. • These students enter the program as ELs • These students are typically sequential bilinguals
	Orange students – Students who enter the program with linguistic resources in a language other than the Dual Language program languages. • These students are typically sequential bilinguals. • These students qualify for EL services
	Blue-green students – Students who enter the program with linguistic resources in both program languages. • These students may or may not qualify as ELs • These students are typically simultaneous bilinguals
	Blue students – Students who enter the program with linguistic resources all in English. • In dual language programs, these students are sequential bilinguals

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Numbered Heads Together

- Who are your students? Do they enter as simultaneous or sequential bilinguals?
- What are your students' strengths?
- What are their challenges?
- Is there anything you could do to better meet their needs?

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Agenda:

- ✓ Students in dual language programs
- **Comparison of Language Education Programs**

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Language Programs in the United States

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English Learner Academic Achievement:

A Synthesis of Research Comparing Transitional Bilingual and Dual Language Programs

Introduction

The education of students who are Emergent Bilinguals (EBs)/English Learners (ELs) has long been a subject of debate and research in the United States. Among the most consequential questions for school districts, policymakers, and families is which instructional program model best supports EBs/ELs in developing both English language proficiency and strong academic achievement. Two of the most widely used models are transitional bilingual education (TBE), sometimes called early-exit bilingual education, and dual language (DL) programs, also known as two-way immersion or developmental bilingual education. This synthesis reviews the major body of research comparing EB/EL outcomes across these two program types, with a particular focus on English academic achievement.

Transitional bilingual programs typically provide initial instruction in a student's home language while progressively shifting to English instruction, with the goal of transitioning students into English-only classrooms, usually by the end of second or third grade. Dual language programs, by contrast, provide sustained instruction in both English and a partner language (most commonly Spanish) throughout a student's schooling, serving both native English speakers and EBs/ELs in the same classroom. The research record strongly and consistently favors dual language programs for EBs/ELs' long-term academic outcomes, including English proficiency and achievement.

Program Models: Key Distinctions

Early-exit or transitional bilingual education uses the student's native language as a bridge to English. The native language is employed for initial literacy and content instruction but is gradually phased out, typically within two to three years. The underlying assumption is that native-language support facilitates the transition to English-medium instruction, but that long-term maintenance of the home language is not needed nor is it a program goal.

Dual language programs, by contrast, aim for bilingualism and biliteracy as explicit outcomes, along with high levels of academic achievement in both languages as well as the development of socio-cultural competence. They typically begin with a heavy balance of instruction in the partner language (often 80% in kindergarten) and shift toward a more even split (50/50) by the upper elementary grades. Two-way immersion models integrate native English speakers with EBs/ELs, while one-way developmental bilingual programs serve primarily EBs/ELs. Both are considered "additive" bilingual environments, meaning that the home language is maintained and developed alongside English, rather than replaced by it.

Short-Term vs. Long-Term Achievement

One of the most consistent and important findings in the research is that comparisons between TBE and dual language programs must account for the time horizon. In the early elementary years, EBs/ELs in TBE programs sometimes demonstrate comparable or even slightly stronger English test scores than those in



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Transitional Bilingual vs. Dual Language Programs

A Synthesis of Key Research Findings

Sources: Collier & Thomas (2004) · Steele et al. (2017) · Umansky & Reardon (2014/2015) · Lindholm-Leary (2008, 2010) · Fortune (CARLA)

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TWO PROGRAM MODELS

Early-Exit / Transitional Bilingual

Goal: Transition ELs into English-only instruction as quickly as possible

Duration: 2–3 years of native-language support, then exit

Approach: Home language used as bridge to English; phased out quickly

Philosophy: SUBTRACTIVE — home language replaced by English

Setting: EL students only

vs

Dual Language / Two-Way Immersion

Goal: Develop full bilingualism, biliteracy, and academic proficiency in both languages

Duration: Sustained K–5 or K–8 (often 90/10 → 50/50 split)

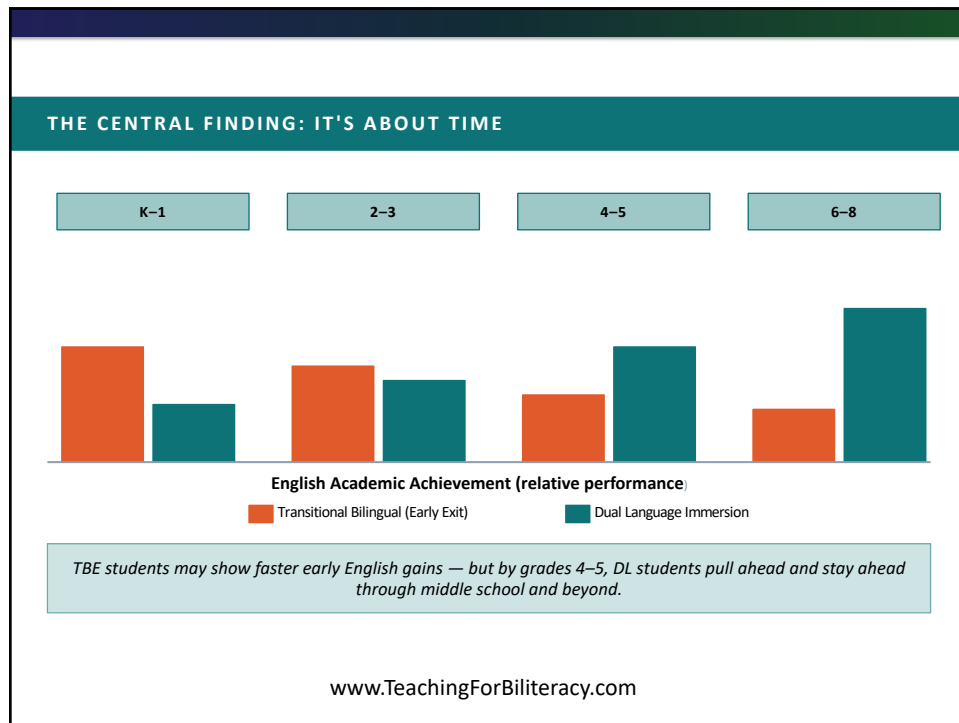
Approach: Both languages maintained and developed throughout

Philosophy: ADDITIVE — English added alongside home language

Setting: ELs + native English speakers together

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COLLIER & THOMAS (2004, 2017) | Landmark Longitudinal Research

7+

NCE points advantage
for DL over TBE

Scale & Scope
Tracked hundreds of thousands of ELs across multiple large U.S. school districts over several decades — the most expansive study of its kind.

When DL Students Overtake TBE Peers
DL students begin outperforming TBE peers by grades 4–5. The advantage grows through middle and high school — not diminishes.

On-Grade-Level Achievement
DL graduates performed at or above grade-level norms in English — an outcome rarely seen among ELs in transitional programs.

Why? Academic knowledge built in the home language transfers to English, creating a stronger academic foundation.

Collier & Thomas (2004). NABE Journal of Research and Practice, 2(1).

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STEELE ET AL. (2017) | RAND Corporation — Gold-Standard Evidence

The only lottery-randomized study of its kind — eliminating selection bias

Random

Assignment

Portland Public Schools students assigned by lottery — closest to true experimental design

+13%ile

Grade 5 English Reading

DL students outscored comparison peers by 13 percentile points on state tests at 5th grade

+22%ile

Grade 8 English Reading

Advantage grew to 22 percentile points by 8th grade — with no drop in math or science

Key insight: Time spent in the partner language did NOT harm English achievement — it enhanced it.

Steele et al. (2017). American Educational Research Journal, 54(1S).

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ADDITIONAL KEY RESEARCH

Umansky & Reardon (2014/2015)

Large quasi-experimental California dataset. ELs in immersion programs outperformed ELs in transitional bilingual programs on English Language Arts — advantages clearest from 4th grade onward. DL students may develop English literacy slightly slower in K–1 but surpass all comparison groups by the upper elementary years.

Fortune / CARLA (U. of Minnesota)

Literature synthesis. Latino ELs in two-way immersion showed higher GPAs and increased post-secondary enrollment compared to TBE and English-medium peers.

Lindholm-Leary & Howard / Block (2008, 2010)

Studied predominantly low-income and Hispanic dual language schools. Finding: DL advantages are NOT limited to advantaged families. ELs from high-poverty schools in well-implemented DL programs showed strong gains in both English and Spanish. The equity argument for DL is robust.

IES / ERIC Longitudinal Study (ED566267)

Compared ELs across four program types through middle school. DL and developmental bilingual models associated with stronger long-term English literacy than early-exit TBE — differences growing over time.

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IMPORTANT CAVEATS

The evidence favors dual language programs — but with nuance:

01

Selection Bias

Most studies (except RAND) cannot fully rule out that DL families differ from TBE families. The RAND lottery study is the strongest causal evidence we have.

02

Program Quality Matters Enormously

Poorly implemented DL programs do not produce these advantages. Qualified bilingual teachers, coherent curriculum, and consistent language allocation are essential.

03

Long-Term Enrollment Required

Benefits accrue to students who stay in DL programs through upper elementary grades. High-mobility students — often the most economically disadvantaged — may not gain equally.

04

Limited Head-to-Head Studies

Few studies directly compare TBE and DL with matched samples. The research would benefit from more randomized or quasi-experimental designs specifically targeting this comparison.

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What the Research Tells Us

1

Short-term vs. long-term:

TBE may produce faster early English gains. DL students pull ahead by grades 4–5 and maintain the advantage.

2

English achievement:

DL graduates more consistently reach grade-level English norms — rarely achieved by ELs in transitional programs.

3

Causal evidence:

The RAND lottery study confirms advantages are real, not just selection effects: +22 percentile points in 8th grade English reading.

4

Equity:

DL advantages extend to low-income ELs in high-poverty schools when programs are well-implemented

5

Policy implication:

The research case for expanding access to high-quality dual language programs — while acknowledging implementation demands — is strong.

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SOURCES CITED

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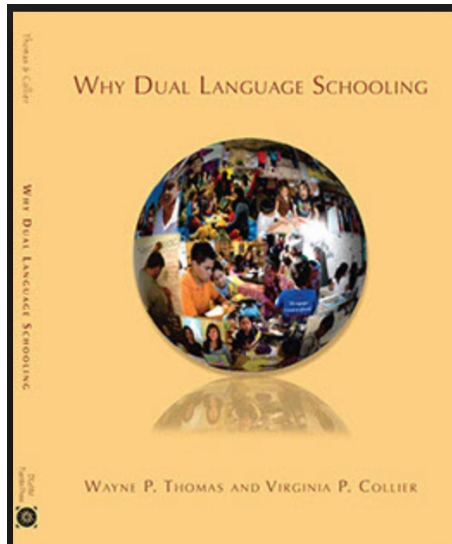
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Why Dual Language?

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The potential of dual language education

All groups of **dual language students** score higher. Students in dual language programs score higher on state and national tests than students who are attending any other type of program.

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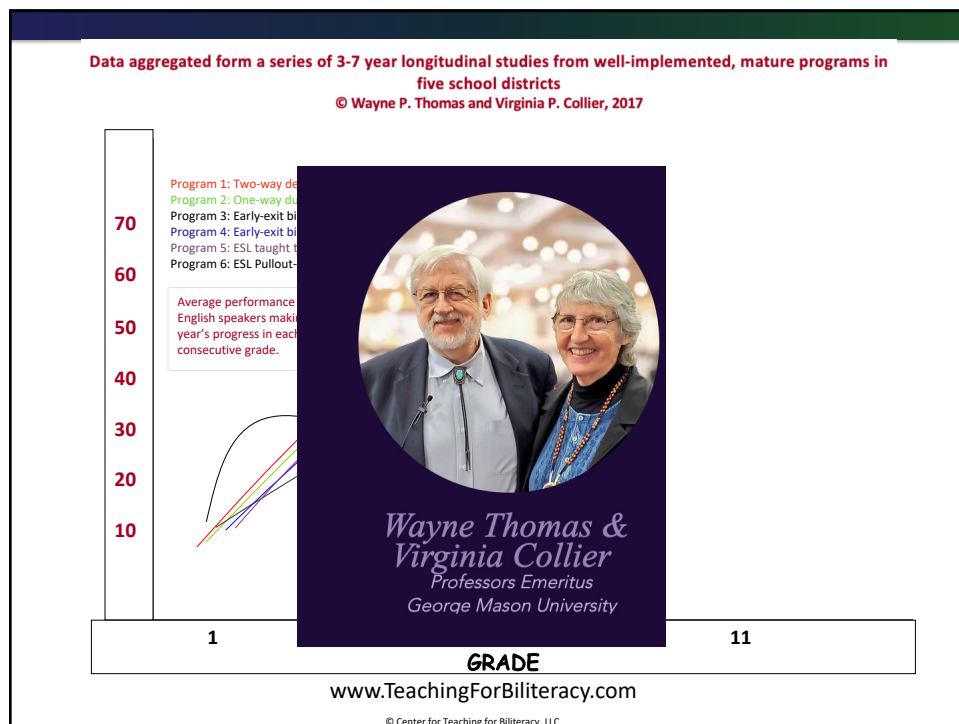
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Who does well in dual language programs?

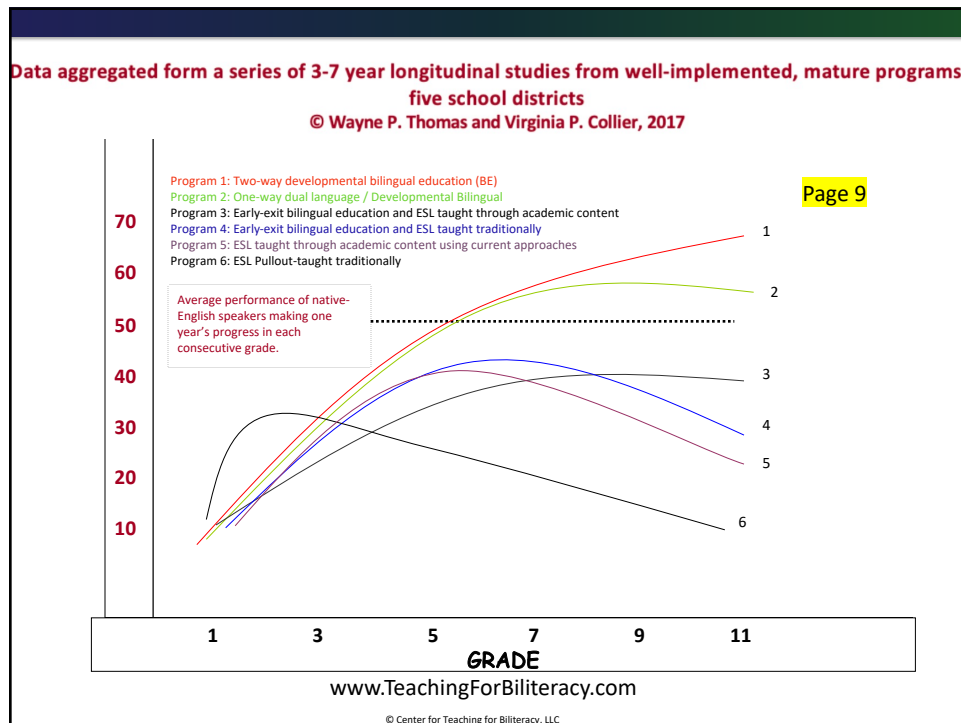
All dual language groups outscore their comparison-group peers not in dual language – including:

- English learners/ Emergent bilinguals
- Native English speakers
- Latinos
- Caucasian Americans
- Asian Americans
- African Americans
- Students of low-income background
- Students identified as qualifying for Title I
- And students with special education needs of all categories of exceptionality.

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Research Connection



In 3rd grade, ELs engaged in **simultaneous literacy** scored considerably higher than students in the **sequential literacy** comparison group on all measures.
(Sonia Soltero et al 2016)

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These are the characteristics of well-implemented dual language programs.

STRAND 1	PROGRAM STRUCTURE
Principle 1	All aspects of the program work together to achieve the three core goals of dual language education: grade-level academic achievement, bilingualism and biliteracy, and sociocultural competence.
Principle 2	The program ensures equity for all groups.
Principle 3	The program has strong, effective, and knowledgeable leadership.
Principle 4	An effective process is in place for continual program planning, implementation, and evaluation.
STRAND 2	CURRICULUM
Principle 1	The program has a process for developing and revising a high-quality curriculum.
Principle 2	The curriculum is standards-based and promotes attainment of the three core goals of dual language education.
Principle 3	The curriculum effectively integrates technology to deepen and enhance learning.
STRAND 3	INSTRUCTION
Principle 1	Instructional methods are derived from research-based principles of dual language education and ensure fidelity to the model.
Principle 2	Instructional strategies support the attainment of the three core goals of dual language education.
Principle 3	Instruction is student-centered.
Principle 4	Instructional staff effectively integrate technology to deepen and enhance the learning process.
STRAND 4	ASSESSMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY
Principle 1	The program creates and maintains an infrastructure that supports an assessment and accountability process.
Principle 2	Student assessment is aligned with program goals and with state content and language standards, and the results are used to guide and inform instruction.
Principle 3	Using multiple measures in both languages of instruction, the program collects and analyzes a variety of data that are used for program accountability, program evaluation, and program improvement.
Principle 4	Student progress toward program goals and state achievement objectives is systematically measured and reported.
Principle 5	The program communicates with appropriate stakeholders about program outcomes.
STRAND 5	STAFF QUALITY & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Principle 1	The program recruits and retains high-quality dual language staff.
Principle 2	The program provides high-quality professional development that is tailored to the needs of dual language educators and support staff.
Principle 3	The program collaborates with other groups and institutions to ensure staff quality.
STRAND 6	FAMILY & COMMUNITY
Principle 1	The program has a responsive infrastructure for positive, active, and ongoing relations with students' families and the community.
Principle 2	The program promotes family and community engagement and advocacy through outreach activities and support services that are aligned with the three core goals of dual language education.
Principle 3	The program views and involves families and community members as strategic partners.
STRAND 7	SUPPORT & RESOURCES
Principle 1	The program is supported by all key stakeholders.
Principle 2	The program is equitably and adequately funded to meet program goals.
Principle 3	The program advocates for support.

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Sequential Literacy

	K	1	2	3	4	5
90/10	90%	80%	70%	60%	50%	50%
	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	50%

Simultaneous Literacy

	K	1	2	3	4	5
80/20	80%	70%	60%	50%	50%	50%
	20%	30%	40%	50%	50%	50%

Simultaneous Literacy (but not always!)

	K	1	2	3	4	5
50/50	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%
	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%

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One and Two – Teacher Models			Page 8
Type of Model	Pros	Cons	
One Teacher Model (One teacher teaches both languages)	Teachers get to know students across both their languages Time can be more flexible	It may be harder for the teacher to stay in the target language It may be harder for the students to stay in the target language	
Two Teacher Model (One teacher teaches English and another teacher teaches Spanish to the same students)	Spanish time is protected by place, time, and person When collaboration works well, it is powerful!	It is harder for teachers to get to know students across both languages When collaboration is not effective, it is challenging for all.	

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Turn and Talk

- Were there new concepts or information in the studies and findings?
- Did anything surprise you? Why?
- How do these studies and findings help understand the DL program at Sheridan Way?
- What steps can be taken to ensure that the Sheridan Way dual language program is well-implemented?

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Exit Slip: Choose a prompt...

- I learned that _____.
- _____ was clarified by _____.
- Today's content applies to Sheridan Way/Montalvo in that _____.

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