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Grace Livengood

Western Oregon University

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A Guidebook to a Bilingual Education System from a Firsthand Perspective

By
Grace Livengood

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

Dr. Jaime Marroquín,
Thesis Advisor

Dr. Gavin Keulks,
Honors Program Director

June 2019

Acknowledgements

There are many different people I would like to thank in the support of creating this scholarly piece. First, I would like to thank my advisors Jaime Marroquín and Gavin Keulks in guiding my thoughts and ideas for this project and being very flexible with his support when it got crazy near the end. Next, my crazy family, that has pushed me to be a better person from day one, and that have constantly had my back when it came to the tough love I needed sometimes to get through this paper. Not to mention the constant rock of support I was given from each of them. I would also like to thank my boyfriend for having endless patience with my erratic indecisiveness, as well as the ability to make me smile even in my lowest points during this last term of school and writing this thesis. Lastly, I would like to show my appreciation to the communities of the Salem/Keizer School District and Western Oregon University that presented me with the experiences I did in order to write this piece.

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Abstract

Bilingual instruction has swept the educational system in the last few decades, and gained a lot of attention even though the idea has been present for a very long time in our country. I had the opportunity to be a part of a bilingual educational system in my public school experience and was one of the first cohorts to complete this kind of program in my hometown of Salem, Oregon. This first-hand look has given me insight into how certain aspects of the program are excellent and how others may need to be improved. In this guidebook, academic research as well as my own personal thoughts based on my experiences will give a thorough view on the various parts of the bilingual education programs in the Salem Keizer School District. My goal in this project is to look into different components of an educational immersion program that will benefit all types of learning but are mainly targeted at those that are being taught in two languages. Teaching a second language should not vary so much from our typical English instruction, though I concede some things may differ. If we are truly wanting to make our children bilingual, some of the components of the second language education should coincide with that of the mainstream education, because that aids in a deeper understanding of both languages and illustrates how both languages are shown as equally important to the families participating in immersion programs. This handbook looks to open a larger discussion on bilingual education so that improvements could be discussed in order to create programs that benefit people of diverse backgrounds, learning styles and those seeking to truly become bilingual.

Introduction

Before you write this off as another jab at how we are failing our students in the public education system, let me state that I am a public school graduate myself and I thought it was a wonderfully fulfilling education. I am very happy with the type of schools I attended, but I will say that I had a unique experience. I had the opportunity of partaking in a Spanish/English Dual Language program in the Salem Keizer District, which allowed me to become bilingual and bicultural. I never thought that my dad happening upon an advertisement while on his golden throne would turn out to be one of the greatest things to happen to his three kids. It has even led to my dream of becoming a Dual Language teacher after I graduate college, which should be saying something, since I am returning to the germ infested, hair pulling monsters that are going to inherit the world someday. I either must have enjoyed at least part of my experience or I have some major psychological concerns that should be looked into.

The program opened up when I was going into the first grade, and was one of the first programs implemented in the Salem-Keizer district at the time. This meant that me and the people I entered the program with were the guinea pig cohort group, which were going to test subjects of this new program. We were a charter school at first which had a lottery entry. We were also a school that was half a Dual Language Program and half a regular English only school. The English half was a majority Caucasian demographics while the Dual Language classes were more half and half of Caucasian and Latino students being the major ethnic backgrounds present in the classroom. This changed as the years ticked on, and many of my fellow *amigos* dropped out of the program. We started with more than 40 students in my particular grade and only 8 of us graduated with a Dual Language seal. This begs the question as to why we had lost so many students along the way. Being a future Dual

Language teacher, I want to be able to recognize the characteristics that show the most risk of dropping a wonderful program like this and discuss what may be some strategies to make people more willing and inspired to continue on and complete this type of program.

And that, my friends, is where I bring you now. I have created this guidebook of recommendations from the perspective of someone who has gone through the program in its entirety. I know that education and strategies of improvement already make your eyes glaze over and your “conflict of interest” red flag shoot right up but I promise that I will make sure this as entertaining as I can with my anecdotes from the best moments in school intermingled amongst the advice a Dual language graduate has for improvement in this type of program. Maybe my first-hand perspective will shed a different light on a topic that is near and dear to my heart and that can add to the ongoing discussion of what type of components and strategies work best for the exponentially growing number of bilingual students in this country. Diversity is something that should be celebrated and we need to start finding more ways of appreciating it in our schools, which includes finding the best ways of educating diverse languages in bilingual programs in order to help create more multilingual and multicultural students in our country.

As a disclaimer, I am only speaking on behalf of my own experiences, that of a middle class, white female with both parents living at home and siblings. I am NOT speaking for all students that have gone through this program that come from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The references I make towards other peers are only a matter of what I had asked them during our time in school are not quotes from them that explore these topics in more depth.

And a second disclaimer, I am also NOT going to be discussing the political aspects of this argument, as there is not enough room in this paper to focus on that wide array of

topics and arguments. I will purely be looking at the research that has been done in what different programs have to offer and the effects those have produced. I will only be adding to the discussion of what we can do to improve bilingual education programs and not discussing the political part of the argument of whether or not they should be implemented everywhere. This is a guidebook of recommendations that I am making as a future bilingual teacher and what changes I have found that could be implemented with predicted improvements. There is a lot of research about the controversial effectiveness of Dual language programs and bilingual programs in general, but there are not very many researchers that can say they themselves have completed and experienced first-hand what bilingual education looks like now and seen how it has evolved in their own family. That is something I hope to contribute to the discussion of bilingual education.

Literature Review

Introduction

Bilingual education seems to be something that has been a recent educational advancement in our country. But maybe that's because it was something relatively new in my own district when I entered grade school. In reality, these kinds of programs have been around for a long time, and have undergone several changes and challenges as people pushed back against the acquisition of other languages other than our coveted English. This conflict is still present today and is the main opposition that faces furthering the bilingual programs in our country. With the stress of keeping up with standardized tests in order to maintain funding, many schools are turning to the fast result solution of eliminating such programs from their schools in order to have our English Language Learners fast tracked into proficiency in English, thinking that it will better our scores. This type of thinking is very short sighted and contradicts the supposed priority of the student comes first. With this type of thinking, policymakers and administrators are so concerned with saving face that they are taking away a valuable tool for both minority (non-English speakers) and majority (native English speakers); the acquisition and mastery of a not on but two languages. Many of these people making the decisions are also not informed on the data, since they are looking at the results and not the factors that may be causing the problem. They see English learners not getting English-only instruction and failing on their tests and they do not stop to think that maybe it is a systematic problem that is causing these children to struggle. This review of research will analyze the benefits, challenges and the implementation of better practices that go into creating an effective bilingual immersion program.

Benefits of bilingual education

I believe that most people would consider having the mastery of more than one language as an advantage, even the most opposed cannot disagree that it gives you quite a bit of headway in the workforce. At least I know that one of the main advantages I was told when I was a kid. There has been a lot of emergent research that has studied the cognitive effects learning a second language does for the brain. Much of it indicates that people who are bilingual have more executive control of the brain, have more restraining their impulsivity which allows them to critically think through their situation in a more reasonable way, and even points to a slower deterioration of the brain itself as memory and plasticity dwindles with age, (Barrow, 2016). Being able to receive information, process it and then have the capacity to formulate thoughts and express them in not one but two languages would stretch that grey matter just a tad. And due to the fact that you have to switch from one to the other and decide which of the two linguistic structures you need to respond in would give you more time to think about what your next move will be giving less time to our impulsivity.

There has been a significant amount of research that has concluded that childhood bilingualism has a positive impact on the cognitive processes of children, with higher results in intelligence tests, higher levels of creative thinking as well as in other more complex processes such as analytic thinking and understanding. In a recent study it has also been concluded that long term and short term memory levels were increased in bilingual children and it has been speculated that it has positive correlations and effects in older people as well, as the brain was slower to regress in bilingual candidates, (Kormi-Nouri, et. al., 2008). Exercising your brain is the same as exercising your body. The more you do it, the more it

grows in strength and less it deteriorates. But if you leave it, without any further movement or challenge, it is going to stay exactly how it is. Letting itself go, it will get the brain's version of a beer belly and is more susceptible to early death. So if we want our brains to live happy lives, we need to constantly challenge in order to keep the plasticity moving and rearranging, as mental practices help keep it on it's toes and less likely to lounge around watching Pawn Stars and dying of lethargy.

In another study analyzing the cognitive advantages bilingual students had over their monolingual counterparts, memory and problem solving, as well as control, characterized by attention, focus, and conflict management were compared. While there was not a large variation in results in the representation testing between the two sample groups, the bilingual students outperformed their monolingual counterpart in the control sections as well as in their abilities to overcome conflict that arose out of the problem given in the testing. The results of this particular set of testing showed how bilinguals had a general increase in cognitive command and curiously, increasing the intensity of the problem presented emphasized the bilingual effect which indicated that bilingual students had a higher capacity of dealing with conflict. The study also discredited the notion that the amount of benefits of being bilingual is dependent on what socioeconomic status the child has. The entire sample group consisted of children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who lead lives with a significant amount of external factors that can impede healthy cognitive development, but instead they proved to still excel in areas of executive functioning despite the obstacles they face in their home environments, (Engel de Abreu, et al. 2012).

The most impressive part in this whole study was the fact that the results yielded in favor of this bilingual effect even with the low socioeconomic background the test subjects had. Low socioeconomic backgrounds are one of the indicators of poor academic

performance, but this study helps highlight the fact that academic success is possible for all, no matter what the background. And bilingual immersion can be an effective way of closing the academic gap we have seen trending in our at risk students, whose backgrounds have trended towards being on the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder. If there are so many cognitive benefits to bilingualism, why is there so much pushback to programs that help foster bilingualism?

There are many different types of bilingual education programs, and there is a lot of debate on which is most effective. Much of the concern of the proponents of English-only instruction is rooted in their misconception that teaching an English Language Learner in another language besides English is detrimental to their English development. Now there are various sources that point to the conclusion that teaching these students at least part of the time in their own native language is academically beneficial for them. According to Marian, Shook and Shroeder (2013), the evidence they gathered points to two-way immersion, or dual language programs to be the most effective programs for ELL students as well as majority language students in all areas of education, not exclusively in language skills. I know that at least when I was in school, this fear of the delayed development was a real concern of parents. I had various friends get pulled out of the immersion program because their parents were not seeing the fact that their children were learning two languages at once, but saw that their English was faltering compared to our monolingual classmates. What they did not understand and failed to see since they were impatient was that the development was delayed due to the fact that our brains were learning two different languages at once and they were processing two languages at the same time. So of course our progression was going to be slower, but once we had a firm grasp of both languages, our literacy skills grew exponentially and many of us surpassed our English-only classes in our school. And we are not the only

ones to take advantage of teaching our students more than one language and reaping the benefits of multilingual and multicultural student population.

Immersion programs are growing in popularity worldwide, as we are seeing an exponential increase in implementation of specifically dual language programs in many different countries. Besides the overall consensus that it is an advantage to be able to speak two languages in our shrinking world, we are also seeing how their academic achievement is also being affected by this type of educational program. Dual language programs promote acquisition of a second language, and studies show that we are seeing simultaneous impacts in the academic achievement of students overall. Teachers in these programs are promoting the importance of both the first and second language instead of focusing primarily on the second language. Instead, they build connections between the two languages and foster an environment where continuous learning in both languages influence their overall academic development. This simultaneous learning helps nurture more understanding of essential foundational structures in both languages and across other subject areas (Murphy, 2016). This last part is something that we are struggling with in our own country, as we will explore later on in this text. We have come to a silent consensus that the two languages taught in these programs were going to be entirely separate, with no interaction or overlap of either of them. This is a public misconception that drives this thinking of if we mix them, it will be detrimental to the development of both languages and is seen as something that could cause a lot of confusion in bilingual students. But the bridge we build to both languages could actually help students make more connections with the languages and other content areas, which would help further their academic achievement as a whole.

Another potential benefit that has been quite overlooked and not used as a proponent for these types of programs is how learning another language helps us connect to

the world. Nelson Mandela once said that “if you speak to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.” Language is a medium in which we communicate with others, which is why it makes all the more sense that we learn more languages in order to connect with those around us and around the world on a deeper level. People are starting to catch onto the concept that learning another language proves to have a great deal of advantages in an increasingly globalized community of changing countries as our borders grow smaller and our networks reach further. And a program that helps create an environment where two cultures collide and intertwine and learn from one another have shown researchers a strong implication that it has a positive effect on students’ growth and overall success in both cultural groups, (Murphy, 2016). That is why it proves to be a little confounding that we do not capitalize this in our drive for immersion programs. This is especially important in today’s age as our connections to other countries continue to grow and evolve. Our children are going to take this world someday, and it would be helpful if they could connect and interact with the people that share it.

Challenges of implementation

There have always been controversy tied up in this particular aspect of our education system. People disagree a lot but on this topic, every person has their own opinion of how they think we should educate children. And especially how we are going to educate those that are not proficient in English as well. One of the biggest arguments is what type of program best serves English Language Learners and their biliteracy. There are two main overarching groups of programs, one considered English only instruction programs and the

other English and another language programs. Under the English only approach, there are programs that focus primarily on the development of English, in different programs that teach all content areas in English, content with a focus in vocabulary development, and pull-out classes for ELL students. This type of system is considered a subtractive model, as English is the only focus and the native language is taken out of the picture. In the English and another language approach, English and that other language are taught simultaneously, with the end goal being biliteracy and bilingualism in both tongues. Since English is mainly added to the education of the native language, these types of programs are considered additive (Barrow, Markman-Pithers, 2016). This variety of program subcategories have proven to be one of the biggest pokers stirring the hearth of the fire of this debate. We cannot agree on the most effective way of teaching those who seek to become more proficient English. And this desire has grown stronger as people have begun to realize the impact knowing at least some English has on your overall success in the United States. But how should we teach them?

The main two arguments surrounding this issue revolve around the idea of integrating them into the culture slowly and with support from their native tongue like you see in Dual Language Programs or if it is better to streamline their English education to make them proficient in the fastest manner possible. With the implementation of the “Lau remedies” in Title VI of the Civil rights Act implementing loose regulations for bilingual education, school districts could interpret that vague policy in any way they wanted which did not bode well for English Language Learners because the government made it more efficient for them and not the student, (Jarvis, 2006). This has been the largest brick to make up the wall wedged between state and federal government when it comes to the manner in which they educate and accommodate their minority language students. The conflict of

interest has resulted in the constant and present struggle of power in who should get to determine what is best for our minority language students present in our schools. What has been lacking in our considerations as well, has been where our students are coming from. What are their backgrounds and how can we use our knowledge of their culture and history to help mold and adapt their education to be the most effective possible? We are beginning to lose sight of what our true value should be placed when considering education, and that is the student themselves.

The parental education has proved to be a strong indicator of how well an English Language Learner student performs in school. And those that have a minority speaking parent at home are shown to be more likely to be further down the socioeconomic scale. I think that it is probably a fair guess, or common knowledge in regards to education that disadvantage socioeconomically has a correlation with lower academic success. Socioeconomic status has been shown to be a major indicator of academic success in students, as the resources they have at home are limited to those who rank higher on the SES scale. There has also been a correlation in parental SES and the effect it has on students since it is directly correlated with the status of the child. But a recurring challenge impeding research in this area is that the academic achievement is already influenced by the socioeconomic levels in the rural areas where these studies are being held, so it is difficult to measure the effect bilingual education has on these children. One thing was current throughout the study, and that was the overall higher performance of bilingual students in biliteracy and overall academic performance, whether they be reclassified English Language Learners who had gained proficiency or Latinos who were a part of a Dual Language program. They scored higher in various areas like both languages being learned and overall academic success than the other students that were not participants in such programs.

Further research needed to be done in the effect background influences such as parental education and home influences. There has always been controversy on the most effective way of educating our ELL students, but this study further adds to the research supporting immersion programs that integrate native language with English language education for a more effective education, (Lindholm-Leary, Hernandez, 2011).

Just like we had discussed previously, this is another source that points towards the assertion that bilingual education can be a great option for students from diverse backgrounds to promote further education and increased academic success. It can also be seen as a possible solution to help further the goal of closing the academic gap between students on both ends of the socioeconomic scale. In order for this to become a reality, we not only need to make these programs available for these students, but we also need to provide them with high quality teachers that are professionally trained in bilingual education.

Bilingual teachers are in high demand due to the fact that bilingual immersion programs are becoming increasingly more popular in the mainstream educational system. But even with their advantage, they are still facing a variety of obstacles to their own teaching. Aside from the standards they strive to meet, there is also the unique challenge of balancing the instruction of language as well as other content areas like science and math. This means that the teacher must know how the linguistic aspects related to both languages being taught, know the content area, and know how to teach that content area in the minority language, (Cammarata, Tedick, 2012). It takes a certain person to become a teacher, as you have to know the content, know how to communicate that knowledge, and do so in such a way that your audience understands. Now imagine doubling that load by adding the extra layer of another language. Plus, you have to figure out what you are going to teach in which language as it is very important that bilingual students be presented with content areas

in both languages. Being able to navigate this labyrinth of language and content structure and the relation they have with one another is one of the largest obstacles bilingual teachers face. Another obstacle these teachers face is something you knew was coming the moment you saw “Education” in the title, but standards and state testing.

There are good intentions behind creating standards that schools should adhere to, since an accountability system needs to be in place to ensure quality education. But this also means that schools are so worried about meeting their standards, that they are taking away other “expendable” components of children’s education in order to make more time for instruction of the material that is being used to evaluate the school. Just like other branches of the arts, language education has faced the conflicts that have risen with the chain and shackle of deadlines and regulations. In some places, they have even begun to eliminate immersion programs entirely to make way for English-only programs in response to these policies.

Even though this article is a bit dated as it examines the effect the No Child Left Behind policy, which is now not in place as policy anymore, it can be used to compare the views our policymakers have in regards to educational success, especially with the implementation of state standards. In this article, Menken and Solorza (2014) analyze the reasons behind the drastic decrease in the amount of bilingual immersion programs present in New York after the implementation of the NCLB policy. Since the federal government implemented regulations that enabled them to keep school accountable for their education, many schools were worried about their students’ performance and saw the slower progression of bilingual students and their English acquisition as a threat to their quotas, which is what provoked them to revert the schools back to English only programs. The administration of these schools saw the inclusion of native languages with the English

instruction as a detriment to English instruction, and when they noticed the ESL students were not performing as well on standardized tests, they blamed the lack of primary focus on English, instead of reevaluating the effectiveness of the programs themselves. This points out the concerning fact that these decisions are being made based off of beliefs and misconceptions rather than the actual research and data that should be driving these decisions.

We are a people who are quick to blame for our shortcomings, so it doesn't come as a surprise that we make immersion programs our scapegoat in this situation. We look for a quick solution so we eliminate anything we see could be a possible problem before really analyzing how it was actually affecting the system. If more research was done in the schools' systems themselves, they would find that the problem the minority language students were facing were most likely caused by a flaw in the English acquisition education. But instead of fixing it to improve the bilingual program and therefore influencing their overall academic performance, we take away one of the greatest academic supports with the elimination of the instruction in their native languages. While this may cause a short term solution, since they will have primary focus in English instruction and will likely perform better in standardized tests, in the long run they will suffer academically as they lose proficiency of their native language. It also creates a disincentive for schools to have their main focus be serving their students as the priority becomes meeting the standardized test scores necessary to keep their school running on federal funding. Not only that, but these programs face a lot of fight in terms of their ideologies as people have their own perspectives of the value of language and their own views of minority languages.

Bilingual education has an interesting and rocky history. We saw the emergence of bilingual education in the United States when Anglo-Saxon settlers moved to Mexican Texas.

The state government created immersion programs in order to help the children become integrated into the culture they now lived in and to accommodate their education. But later, there was a sweep of nationalism that enforced English-only learning, and advocated for eliminating such programs since English was the most spoken language at the time in the country. This is where the political controversy began as the national and state governments disagree on the best program to implement that are most effective or in some cases efficient for English acquisition. This enforcement of one-language learning is deeply rooted in segregation and can still be seen in the opposition of these programs today, (Getz, 2005). Now there is a different problem students learning English are facing, and that is that different school districts are entrenching students in their own “native” language in order to help maintain the school’s image of being culturally tolerant, but the students who are forced into these classrooms are also being segregated from their English speaking peers and missing opportunities to develop their second language.

These ideologies have also been highlighted and more have come to light with the actions of our own current political system. More people are voicing their opinions about the education in minority languages, but the main conflict arises from how the federal government and school believe is the most effective way of educating our growing population of minority language students. While the federal government wishes to streamline the English acquisition, schools disagree with this method and agree more with the notion that educating the in both their native language and English is beneficial to both language proficiencies and well as overall academic performance. As mentioned before, the history of bilingual education is long and rocky and is hopelessly intertwined with that of segregation and the values behind this thinking are still present today in the stigma we have against minority language students as well as bilingual education as a whole. Even with this army of

challenges that seek to take down bilingual education, it is still a thriving and growing aspect of the education system that has intrigued the nation with the promised benefits it presents for students in an ever changing world. However, in order to make the most effective immersion programs for our students, there need to be changes implemented in order to make it the most effective dual language for both minority and majority students that seek bilingualism.

Best Practices

As stated before, bilingual education has been around for a long time. Even though a little dated, we see the analysis of rationale in dual language programs in the late twentieth century. The main goals of immersion program present at the time included biliteracy, fluency in both learned languages, excellence in all areas of academic achievement and positive perspectives and understandings of other cultures. Even in this later research, there was still pushback in the argument of the effectiveness if minority language students were not learning English in the fastest way possible. And still the evidence pointed towards a greater academic and developmental achievement in immersion programs. This article also analyzes some of the most effective ways of implementing these programs, as it is seen that to yield the best results, instruction of the native language should not strictly be in language classes, it needs to be in all content areas. When they are taught math and science in Spanish, their math and science skills are furthered as well as their development in the instructed language, (Christian, 1994). So the research behind the rationale of teaching children in both languages has a long history that have the same results that we see today, which makes the argument against this type of program a bit obsolete, since it has functioned for so long.

When simply put like that, it is easy to see what the main goals are for bilingual students. The question remains if we are still adhering to those same goals for students that we had in the twentieth century. Notice that biliteracy and instruction of both languages across the subjects is something that should be strived for. If we were advocating for that so long ago, maybe it is worth reevaluating the structure of our bilingual programs. And further, we can also see that understanding across cultures is something perceived as valuable as well, so how have we devolved back to our intolerant mannerisms from the darkest parts of our history?

And even with the support of these programs, many do not know how to separate out the instruction of both languages, the subject of much speculation in the educational field. One thing has been shown across the board is that the instruction of content area needs to be in both languages so that students are able to develop proficiencies of the content in both languages. This is also very important in that it allows students to understand and create more connections across subject areas if they are presented with various content areas in multiple languages. This interdependence and interconnection allows for a deeper understanding of the content as well as a strengthening of both languages being taught. Yet, it is essential that we do not take this to the extreme. We still are in need of language classes in both acquired languages as well. In the bilingual education field, there is a common misconception that if you teach content in the second, acquired language, the language development will be a secondhand effect for bilingual students, so that the language development classes are seen more as an optional component to the instruction of the second language. This falsity is rooted in misunderstanding of language acquisition. But don't we take 12 years of English classes, is it not the area in which we cannot escape some sort of effect every year of our educational career before college? This implies that the

continual learning and progression of English is a journey that does not end after proficiency is reached. So why do we treat the second acquired language as though we can stop at mere proficiency? This indicates that we not only need a change in the system but also a change in our views and perceptions of bilinguals and their education.

There are certain changes we need to make in order to create effective and meaningful bilingual immersion programs for our students. The first thing we need to do is change the way we think about bilingual education and actually do research in order to eliminate the misconceptions present that have driven our decision making in regards to these programs. We need to stop segregating the languages, as we risk falling into the “two for one” misconception that if the content is presented in the targeted language, the student’s language skills will rise out of the instruction of the content, when in reality studies have shown how the minority language skills fall behind as education continues without effective language instruction. The need for a more comprehensive support system for teachers also needs to be put into place in order to help them formulate effective lesson plans, curriculum development help as well as collaboration with other members for the school’s community. And lastly, they need to continue furthering their professional development in order to stay up to date on the most current educational practices and know the most current research. This way we can ensure that our bilingual students are getting the best education available since their teachers are going to be of the highest quality and knowledgeable of the most effective way of balancing language and content instruction, (Cammarata, Tedick, 2012).

It seems to be that teachers may be the people that are more forgotten the most when it comes to support. Especially when they have taught the same grade level or the same subject over again, most would probably think they have the hang of it and can manage

well on their own. What many don't realize is that being a teacher is an ongoing learning experience and that content is constantly changing as our student population changes and our world evolves. In order to effectively teach our bilingual students, teachers need to have a good support system that helps them create meaningful curriculum as well as provides them with further professional development so that they are aware of the best practices that are available for their students, including the social influences that they encounter when in bilingual classrooms.

There is not a lot of discussion about the social effects that bilingualism can have on students. In one study created by Cazabon, Lambert and Hall (as cited in Christian, 1994), of multiple immersion classrooms, children tended to make friendships with no regard to race of other students and their questionnaires indicated strong desires of having relationships with people with cultural backgrounds different than theirs. They also had more positive perceptions of their own education if they were in the bilingual immersion classrooms. These particular findings may not seem as important as classroom achievement and test scores, but with cultural clashes that are present in our country at the moment, especially with our Latino populations, it will be of vital importance to help foster these positive attitudes in order to nurture a culturally accepting environment. With better interactions and connections with people from other countries, we will begin building and reconstructing bridges as we come to the realization that our similarities are more important than our differences.

Being able to foster positive attitudes towards the differences present among them and their classmates is a goal that is rooted in our values towards cooperation and acceptance. When placed in the right environment in effective immersion classrooms, students will have higher levels of empathy and understanding which will influence their own

personal identity and how they fit into the world. Galileo once said that “you cannot teach a man anything, you can only help him find it within himself.” This should be something that every teacher understands, as our goal is not to teach knowledge but create an environment that coaxes out understanding in our students and with that, help them find their place in the world. They will appreciate the comparisons with others from disparate backgrounds than their own which will help nurture a population of leaders that will be more connected to the people around them, and may just change the way our world interacts with one another. The question is how to create such an environment as a teacher?

Bilingual students have a gift of having two languages to communicate within their own toolboxes, and often engage in translanguaging. Translanguaging, or the fusion of the languages in their communication system, helps shape how they interact with the world around them and their own bilingual identity. Even though we are seeing the fusion of multiple cultures and the two languages of focus in bilingual program, there tends to be an implication that the two languages be separated in instruction in order to not confuse students and to help them develop both languages independently of one another. But this can actually prove to be dangerous in inadvertently creating negative perspectives of ever seeing the connections between the languages. There have been positive correlation of teachers that give time for dynamic bilingual practice time and they themselves present themselves as a learner as well and allow students to translanguage and interconnect all aspects of the languages in their repertoire. This presented students with an open space to communicate and allowed them to celebrate their complex manner of expression, and thus the students responded by being more open to communicate tougher subjects like human rights and also allowed them to feel more comfortable exploring languages like in trying to

translate or conjugate. If this is the type of environment translanguaging pedagogy helps create, why are we so against it? (Palmer, et. al., 2014).

Similar as with the presentation of joining the forces in our classrooms, we should also be joining the forces of the people that are involved in the education of these students. You would think that with two disparate communities coming together in the classroom, that there would be some collaboration outside of the classroom as well. But this is not necessarily the case, in fact there is very little collaboration of the community and other members of the educational system other than the bilingual teachers themselves. The engagement of all members of the communities, especially the parents and teachers of bilingual and English-only students is important in order to help inspire an environment of cultural acceptance and understanding of both parties. This increased interaction would also help increase levels of parental connection with their children's education. These are all important factors that influence the academic success and cultural understanding among students in both types of programs, (Murphy, 2016). It takes a village to raise a child, so there has to be more collaboration in raising classrooms full of future leaders. We need to stop seeing ourselves as separate entities within the school and instead focus on the fact that we are a living breathing system that are all interconnected in a web of interdependence. I remember how there was a separate name for the bilingual students in my primary school compared to our monolingual counterparts. I also remember that I did not get much interaction at all with them until we entered middle school. We need to stop segregating our classrooms according to the type of education we are receiving and instead look for ways we can help and support one another on our own personal journeys through our education. And by including all members of our community, we will help create an atmosphere of

understanding that will help create a more culturally accepting environment for the whole community.

Conclusion

Bilingual education is something that will continue to flourish and grow throughout the world as we become more connected and our need to communicate with one another becomes essential in the creation of a global community. The bilingual education system present in the United States began with our arrival in a land where we did not speak the majority language and has evolved on the large scale nationally from there. There are various types of bilingual education programs, from English only instruction to fast forward English proficiency to two-way immersion where the native language of the minority population is taught simultaneously with English. Countless studies provide support for the benefits that bilingual immersion programs present for students, but there is still a great deal of opposition against bilingual education that have proved difficult in creating the most effective programs. If we are to implement a program that allows for the attainment of bilingualism, biliteracy, academic achievement and cultural awareness, there need to be better practices put into play. Bilingual teachers are in need of more support in order to instruct the most up to date material in the most efficient and meaningful manner for students, our overall beliefs in regard to bilingual education need to be reevaluated and our communities need to become more involved in the process so that our bilingual student can see the connections among cultures that will help them develop their own identity to carry with them into the world as they help construct and mend the bridges we share with our fellow man across the globe.

Who I am:

I am a graduate of one of the first Dual Language Program that was implemented in Salem-Keizer District, and was created the year I was entering the first grade. Harritt Elementary School had two different educational programs when I first attended, with half of the school being Harritt Elementary, and the other half being the West Salem Language Academy, which is the Dual Language Program I attended with my cohort. We were the first class to go through this Dual Language Program in the West Salem schools, alongside our traditional English only taught peers that we would then join in other non-Dual Language Program in middle school. This was a little awkward because I honestly did not realize that I had gone to elementary school with peers that I graduated with until I looked back at elementary school yearbooks after graduation.

In the program, we were a culturally diverse population of students, with a variety of ethnic groups in our student make up. In the English only program, there was a lack of diversity overall as this part of Salem was not well culturally represented. What I found was that as we progressed through our program, we slowly lost many of our *compañeros* as they thought they had gotten as much out of the program as they thought they could, or they wanted to have an extra elective as they had already gained what they were going to out of the program. The first to go were the students who were native speakers, and when I reflected in this when I was younger, I thought it was because they thought they had already mastered the language. When I started to think about it for this paper as well as what I have learned in the Education Program at WOU, I started to think about what they may have been taught in school that may have pushed them to quit the program. Many times in class, teachers would differentiate the two sides of our class between native and non-native

speakers. In my earlier years as well, when we were learning the basics of the language they would say things along the lines of them having to bear with us as they probably already knew what they were teaching as well as having them teach others as they believed they did have an understanding of the content being taught and could help the teacher. While many times the native speakers were more knowledgeable of the conversational and vocabulary of the language and were of help to their non-native peers, I think this differentiation may have been to their detriment.

When I think about this I ask myself, why? Why are students dropping a program that is designed for them to be immersed in another culture and make them fully bilingual and bicultural? What does that say about the program itself and the manner in which they are retaining members? When I started this program, we began with around 45 members, or two class' worth of students, and only 8 made it to the end and graduated with the Dual Language seal on their diploma. Maybe part of the program was to weed out those that may not have been fit for the rigor of the program of having two main language courses at the same time, but losing over 80% of the students is not just weeding out those who cannot handle hard academic work. So why are children participating in these programs but them dropping out before completing them? What is that saying about the system in general? Are there improvements that can be done to increase the positive outcomes across the board for all learners?

There is a lot of research about the controversial effectiveness of Dual language programs and bilingual programs in general, but there are not very many researchers that can say they themselves have completed and experienced first hand what bilingual education looks like now and seen how it has evolved in their own family. That is something I hope to contribute to the discussion of bilingual education. So I hope that the combination of the

research I have done as well as the personal cringy experiences I have had the lovely opportunity to experience in my immersion program keep you entertained. This is a guidebook of recommendations that I am making as a future bilingual teacher and what changes I have found that could be implemented with predicted improvements.

Some would ask why I have chosen to make my senior thesis about this topic while in the midst of student teaching as well as working as a Resident Assistant. My advisor has even warned us that we should pick something that was going to be important enough for us because every one of us is going to hate our topic at some point. We are going to need to make it as near and dear to our hearts now so that we can remember that in the hard times, a.k.a. when I am working to get my teacher licensure in the winter. Being bilingual as well as bicultural and the education that I experienced in order to get there has been such a large part of my life and has had a great impact on the person I have become. Even now, I don't even know who I would be if I wasn't bilingual, and hadn't had the experiences that have been made possible because I am bilingual.

I also think that since I am a graduate of such a program that is actually present in this state, I could provide some good "feedback" as to how I think as a participant in such a program we could change the program so that we keep our students in the program and do the best we can for those that are in the program. From the confusing process of attempting to find research from a participant in such a program, my extensive library hosts were not very user friendly and did not come up with anything related to finding someone who had gone through a program. Even specify exactly what I wanted ended with no results. So at least from what I was able to unearth from the depths of the InterWeb, I was not able to find someone who had written something about their own experiences in an immersion

program. I am hoping that the experience I have will give me some credibility even if I do not have five doctoral degrees in education, and still completing my first.

The other reason that this topic is so important to me is that the twelve years I was in this type of program actually inspired me to go into bilingual education as an educator. Other than the fact that our thesis had to have something to do with our major in undergrad, I was also very curious as to what I could find that would help improve a program that I both experienced and plan on teaching after completing my higher education and training. I have always wanted to make a difference, and I realized in high school that the best way I could do that was to become an educator and inspire the students that come through my door. So the research that I have done was also spurred by my search for more knowledge in how I can serve my students in the best way possible. Part of being an effective and influential teacher is being able to be reflective in our practices and constantly seeking how we can improve. Based on my education and what I was taught throughout the program, I am seeking more knowledge in how I can better serve my students in the future so that I can inspire them to stay in such an amazing program and open their eyes to the importance of being bilingual and bicultural.

And so you don't think I'm being conceded and only thinking about how this is important to me, it also matters to everyone in this country as well. We are changing. We are continuously evolving and becoming more diverse as people from different cultures move to this country. We began as a country of immigrants and we are still adding to those numbers today and there is a growing number of people that speak more than one language. This is being accommodated with more and more schools adopting immersion programs that are teaching languages other than English to native and non-native speakers alike. In order to make these programs the most effective possible for all types of learners of different

backgrounds, there need to be some changes that will give our students the best possible education to become the most well rounded and educated bilingual global citizens. Bilingual immersion programs “are geared toward responding to a wide variety of societal challenges that may range from repairing injustices committed in the past as a result of colonization, as in the case of indigenous language immersion, to responding to needs stemming from the metamorphosis of societies into multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual entities that must find ways to cohabitate and collaborate with each other,” (Cammarata). So, my dear friends, I introduce you to the what I have delved deep into my psyche to tell you, attempting to find what types of recommendations a former Dual Language student has for possible improvement to our programs.

My Guidebook

I was a part of a Dual Language Program, as I have mentioned before, and this type of program actually touches on a lot of issues that we are facing today in our country. This type of program is structured to teach the growing population of non-native English speaking people in this country in a system that promotes the development of both English and the minority language. This is a promise to conserve the minority languages present in the United States and is telling those that speak it that their language and their culture matters here. This also gives native english speakers the chance to learn another language and be able to connect with others of that culture. The last and probably the most essential goal of this type of program is to bridge connections between minority and majority cultures in order to foster the skill of empathy and appreciation for one another's cultures, (Christian, 1994). Dang this sounds like a sweet deal, but I wonder if we are following that goal if there were so many students to drop out of the program. I shall explore that concept now and attempt to understand the thought process of my fellow comrades as they decided to abandon ship before we reached our final destination.

The first to go were the students who had Latinx backgrounds, and when I reflected in this when I was younger, I thought it was because they thought they had already mastered the language since they are native speakers. When I started to think about it for this paper as well as what I have learned in the Education Program at Western Oregon University, I started to think about what they may have been taught in school that may have pushed them to quit the program. Many times in class, teachers would differentiate the two sides of our class between native and non-native speakers. In my earlier years as well, when we were

learning the basics of the language they would say things along the lines of them having to bear with us as they probably already knew what they were teaching as well as having them teach others as they believed they did have an understanding of the content being taught and could help the teacher. While many times the native speakers were more knowledgeable of the conversational and vocabulary of the language and were of help to their non-native peers, I think this differentiation and the comments about them already knowing what is being taught may have been to their detriment.

Of the people that stopped the program before completion, many of the first defectors were the native speakers. Many times when I had asked why, they had stated they don't think they could get anything else out of it since they had already mastered the language. While I think part of this is true, I think that the attitudes of the teachers in school towards the native speakers may have also played a role. The comments about how they probably knew this already and being treated as though they knew most of what they were being taught, who wouldn't quit if they thought they were already masters and knew what was being taught?

That brings me to my first recommendation:

We need to stop pointing out the differences between native and non-native speakers in the classroom.

We are already a little separated somewhat from one another since many of us lived in different neighborhoods. Don't I know the truth about this because I lived in a whole other district and drove twenty minutes to get to school every day until I graduated. I guess this was better than what I have now since I drive thirty five minutes to get to the school I student teach at, but for my mom it was quite a bit of driving. Let's just say she was not too sad when I turned sixteen and was able to drive me and my brother to school. But it seemed as though native and non-native speakers already kind of separated themselves out due to the language difference and the further differentiation unknowingly caused by some of the teachers only deepened the divide. Now I am not the best person to be talking about friendships in this sense because the number of people I talked to was limited already, I had a grand total of about three good friends in elementary school and was friendly enough with everyone else but it never got past the pleasantries. I was a little bit of a social hermit per say, since I was so shy and obviously seeing other people literally every day of the school week did not push me to interact more with my fellow classmates. Damn social anxiety. And with my own shyness it made it harder to interact with people who spoke my second language a lot better. I was always so intimidated by them and they seemed to have both languages down expressively. I didn't want to embarrass myself in front of them since they seemed to have everything down. And that did not help when teacher would unintentionally call out the differences between native and non-native speakers.

While this should be something that we are doing anyway, I think that it was especially apparent in the classroom where a language other than English was taught and

many teachers held a different perspective of those who spoke that language more fluently than those who were learning it as a second language. They pointed out how native speakers knew certain things that the non-native speakers did not. While native speakers do have some advantages when it comes to their first language compared to others' second, the overall perspective of the class that native speakers knew more and already had a mastery of the language may be more detrimental in how native speakers are thinking about learning more of that language. You hear a lot from English speaking students that they don't know why they are in English classes, although we are still required to it throughout the entirety of our education, and teachers do not point out how others are better at the language than others. What do you think happens when a teacher does say that you have mastered the language and you are not required to take the class? Why would they want to stay when they do not get a better answer to that question than "you should"?

Trust me when I say that those that were not native speakers, including myself, were not the people who always felt comfortable sharing in class in fear of being ridiculed by our fluent native speakers. This is a problem that many people speaking in their second language experience, and there is a responsibility of a teacher to help foster that atmosphere of acceptance in order to make sure everyone feels comfortable sharing out and practicing their use of the language, whether it be their first or second. Even now, with my brothers one recently graduated from the program and one still finishing it up, that they are not as comfortable speaking in front of their class due to the fact that they don't think they are good enough. I experienced the same thing and sometimes still have some of the performance anxiety that comes with speaking in another language. And the fact that my face flushes to a tomato red whenever I have to speak publicly is also something that made it very difficult to appear confident in speaking my second language. I believe there should be

more of an effort in acknowledging the fact that we are all still learners of a language and that practice and not performance should be the end goal of speaking and experiencing language.

Part of the Dual Language Program is learning two different languages at the same time. We began with a very large percentage of Spanish and then it slowly changes to add more English and less Spanish as we progress through the grades. One thing that I thought was interesting is that even in the English Program, we do not point out the differences in language abilities as I had noticed when I was in the immersion program. But when we were in Spanish class, it was apparent the treatment that some teachers gave the native speakers that differentiated between us and them as if they already knew everything that was going to be taught. Don't get me wrong, the majority of teachers did not do this but it was enough that there may have been an impact on the native speakers and may have added to their increased doubt about being in the immersion program. We do not encounter this as native English speakers in the English classroom. There is the thought process in the English classroom that we need to continually learn a language in order to maintain our proficiency in it, and there is always something to learn about a language, none of us are masters in the subject.

I don't believe that teachers were intentionally trying to make native speakers think they already knew everything they needed to know about the language, but I think that this seed may have been planted and grew enough to become a factor in why native speakers quit the program.

The importance that we place on English education is something that could have contributed to those who stop taking foreign languages. We place such value on the comprehension and mastery of English, that our children are brainwashed into thinking it is

the only important language that needs to be learned. It is no doubt that this has contributed to the fact that we are the country with the lowest amount of bilingual individuals in the world, our people do not hold the same value of bilingualism that other countries do. Something similar may have happened to the non-native speakers that also dropped the program. They thought they had learned what they wanted to in order to be proficient or fluent in another language and decided to drop the language. But this belief that you only need to become proficient in another language is not founded in truth and they don't understand that language is an ongoing learning process as we are always a part of and that there is always something to learn since language is always changing. And we need to stop looking at our students in different ways depending on what their first language is because that in turn affects our own expectations of them.

Enforce the same rigorous standards for all

You know, I have learned a lot about this in the last year in the Education Program here at Western. It is one of the many lessons they bring up again and again and again so that you are sure never to forget it. In order for all students to succeed, they need clear, strong and consistent expectations they are to follow in their classroom. Many students tend not to like the strict teacher in their classes, but there is a big difference between a strict and firm teacher compared to a hardass.

As teachers, there are many types of students that walk through our doors every day, and each one of them is carrying their own baggage that they nor you have any control over. And many of these students do not have the structure or support that many of us had growing up which means they seek that you in school. There are many times when it is not in a constructive manner which then tends to frustrate the teacher, and against our better judgment, we tend to place a label over those students' heads. And once we start categorizing them, there is an inherent risk that we are going to have those behaviors and negative experiences allow us to shape our perspective of them as a student which then affects our expectations of the student. Don't get me wrong, there is a lot of differentiation that goes on every single day in order to accommodate our students, but there are also those items where we have let our high expectations slip on some of these more challenging kiddos because it was the easier way out and we thought that was what was necessary. It isn't.

Once that student sees how you have changed your expectations of them, they perceive that as yet another adult that has 'given up' on them and they are never pushed further towards their true potential. They will act to meet their expectations. That is why it is

important that we are enforcing those high expectations, because even the most challenging students excel in these environments because they have an adult that is taking nothing less than the very best, and they see that as a challenge to overcome and motivates them even more to complete the work in that course. People grow into what we expect of them. That expectation would be nothing less than uncovering that inner beauty and ability that is hidden away in each child.

We need to stop treating the second language as an elective

Students are being influenced by how our country and our education system is treating language education. When you are in an immersion program, it means you need to be immersed in two languages and the implication is that both hold the same value. Which they do, although the way it is presented in schools may not convey that message. As students we are not a fan of taking things we don't have to. And I have truly gotten to know the depth of this resentment with my student teaching in both middle and elementary school. Kids are very aware of what they know and what they feel to be unnecessary and that is the biggest factor in their motivation levels. So if there is this underlying message being given to use that one of our classes may not be as valued, then why would we have motivation to take a class that harder and not as fun if it is treated as an elective? I know this is a little difficult because people always have the option of quitting the program since they are not required to partake in an immersion program, but there needs to be more motivation in why they should be taking the program.

When I was growing up, the main reason many people told me was a good reason to learn another language was that it would give me more opportunities in the way of future careers. People would want me more because I spoke another language since I could communicate with those that did not speak English. In elementary school we were exposed to the cultural importance of learning another language, and it was touched on in high school, but the importance of knowing and being educated about other cultures was not impressed upon us as it should have been. And the immense impact it can have on the connection we create with other people is also something that was not nearly brought up

enough, and I was only able to grasp the immense impact it can have when I was much older.

There are so many reasons why people should learn multiple languages other than it makes you more marketable in the career department. Knowing another language allows you to communicate with a whole other community of people. We are able to interact with them, but there is something to say about speaking to someone in their native language, “if you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart,” (Nelson Mandela). When you speak to someone in their native language, that tells him that his language is valuable and worth learning. And it shows them that you care about their culture. You can build bridges by learning other languages. Those that are bilingual are the primary connections that cultures have with one another as they are to able to communicate if they do not speak the same language. There are also many benefits for the individual, other than having a leg up when it comes to employment food chain. Your brain literally grows more and you make more neural connections when you learn another language. There are many cognitive advantages that come with learning the structures of various languages and it allows parts of your brain to develop simultaneously since you are making sense of multiple complicated systems of language at the same time. Additionally, you are exposed to another cultural lens in which you view the world. Those who do not interact with other people outside of their culture, only see one view of the world. When you learn about another culture, you deepen your understanding with a wider view of how the world works and the inhabitants that live here. You get the chance to experience things from a different perspective. You have the chance to interact and get to know other people that have led vastly different lives than you which allows you to uncover a whole other side of the world we live in.

Now why should this be considered something that is optional? We are required to learn a few of the main subjects that the overlords of education have deemed quite necessary for a teenager to master in order to be “successful” in the modern world. While these concepts are indeed very important in order to become the inspirational golden citizen we are all destined to become, there are still other equally essential, if not more so, concepts that need to be taught to our students in order to be good people. When I was in school, I definitely did not realize how much I was taught to be just a normal functioning person until I started student teaching with a third grade class for my final term of my undergraduate program. There are so many instances where you have to teach them how to just be good and act appropriately, that I feel as though I am literally the one who is going to make or break the child. It is a lot of pressure, I’m not going to lie but it has helped increase my levels of patience, let me tell you. The same type of concept can be applied to language use.

Language is a form of communication but is also a form of connection. It is the basis of how we can connect with other people and share our ideas and thoughts with others. And the skills you gain by learning how to communicate in a different manner with a disparate group of people. Part of our everyday lives is having to adapt our way of expressions to those around us, and sometimes it is a very drastic change. Knowing how we should and should not interact with our environment is one very useful skill that will continue to benefit the persons throughout their lives. It also allows the person to feel more comfortable in a variety of different environments. In turn this is going to help create a society of people that are overall more compassionate and more empathetic that will allow for more social growth and development in our individualistic and cynical world.

Many times the classes we consider electives are the classes that are seen as “fluff” or the unnecessary classes people take for fun. Since our foreign language classes are considered

this with the very meager attempt to give it more of a wisp of importance with the two year requirement of a foreign language, it is still considered “fluff”. Two years is not much at all because every single person I have ever encountered who has done only two years worth of foreign language in secondary school did not remember a lick of it. I could attribute that to a lot of things. First of all, they only had two years worth of language training with a completely different language system they needed to learn from scratch. If you were asked to learn how to completely alter the way you express everything you do and form your thoughts into cohesive and solid thoughts in a completely different system, do you think you could do it with introductory phrases and conversation starters over the course of a year (in terms of school days over the course of 2 school years)? Of course not. And it takes a certain motivation and concentration in order to comprehend this system on such a level where you are able to take the thoughts in your head in your own native tongue and then pull it through the wringer of a translator in your mind in order to make some kind of coherent sentence that somewhat resembles a rough replication of those thoughts in the other language. It takes a lot, and two years is not enough to be able to learn all of the necessary components of communicating effectively. It simply cannot be done in only two years with the little amount of immersion you need in order to be able to use another language.

Secondly, there is the aspect of it being an elective that affects the amount of importance and relevance foreign language has on education. By having this be an elective, and a forced one at that, there is a certain amount of importance that students place on the classes they perceive as choices. Since it is something they must take but the aspect of the relevance in their lives truly affects how much investment they are willing to put into something. It’s almost like having an elective, which in theory should be fun and easy, but instead is the convoluted mess of attempting and learn another language and the school

telling you that you need to take it. I'm sorry to say but most kids and people in general prefer things to be easier, which I infer is a partial reason behind why people have a certain resentment towards having to put in substantial effort in order to pass something they want to be fun. I'm sorry to call people out, but I know that it is reason that many of them were not the greatest fans of having to take our Spanish courses. But if we can show them that there are different areas in which we need to use our second language, maybe we would have more of an appreciation for what we are able to use that language for, and how it can be applied and utilized in different parts of our lives.

Create and implement more content area classes in Spanish

Something that was always very frustrating to me when I was growing up was the constant bombardment of questions we received about vocabulary. Every time you ever told anyone that you were bilingual, it was another invitation to constantly test that fragile confidence with questions of the most absurd words that would result in you feeling inadequate in your language skills. I mean, come on. Do you think they taught us the swear words in our small third grade classroom?

But there have been many instances where people have asked me what a word was and I drew up a blank. And I came to realize that a lot of them were content specific words that we knew in our native tongue but were never taught enough in our second language classrooms. Being able to communicate fluently in another language is one thing, but there are also a vast array of different types of vocabulary and language that goes with certain disciplines and communities within the language itself. We learn about how we can communicate with the different sections of the communities we live in and learn their language. We do this in our mother tongue as well, but we don't pay a lot of attention to it. One thing that we need is to be exposed to other forms of the language so that we get a more comprehensive view of that system of language. We should not just be learning about the grammar and practice basic household/everyday conversational topics.. We need to also have the opportunity to learn more about the other aspects of society and disciplines that are present in our world. Don't we have classes specifically for that in English? And why do we think we need that as well as having a separate class for English Language instruction? Interesting...

When people asked me what certain words meant, they were not always related to anything they were able to yell at their annoying younger cousins. People also tended to constantly ask certain words they needed translated that were content specific, meaning they were academic in nature, specific to certain disciplines, and not a part of the chant *Un Pececito* we learned in grade school. After getting the basics of the system down, we were taught how to refine those skills in terms of grammar since the verb tenses, are true to their myth: they are the most difficult thing to learn in Spanish. I can tell you that even the most advanced Spanish students in my class still struggled with verb tenses. But being the person that I am and the unspoken rivalry I had with another student in class, I studied a lot on my tenses in order to be successful in the language. And I can safely tell you that I now... I still struggle with it. Yep. Even with my studying, even with my tutoring experience, I am still someone who has a hard time with certain tenses.

But that is getting away from the point. I know that it is very important to learn and continue learning about the structure of our second language, but we also need to be able to learn the language of the other communities we are going to be part of and need to communicate with in our lives. This includes science, math, social studies as well as in social contexts. We cannot just learn the academic register of a language and expect to be able to make the connections we want to. Being a robot is not going to give you any opportunities in creating relationships and building upon your knowledge of the community and culture you're trying to learn from. This is why we need more than the formal Spanish language class taught in that foreign language in order to give students the vocabulary they need to thrive in all types of situations and communities. Plus, it would be nice to actually be able to answer most questions we get about vocabulary we are taught instead of having to have the humiliating pull-out the phone for SpanishDict.com moment. Especially when the person

asking is your crush. That one story is one of the strongest factors of me placing a lot of emphasis on this recommendation.

Create an atmosphere of learning for all types of learners

We are taught this time and time again in my education program at my university, and it seems to be second nature to me. But there have been instances outside of my classes where I have noticed some schools and classrooms lack this knowledge that to me seem to be something of common knowledge. In order for all of our students to thrive in the classroom, we have to foster an environment that allows those students to feel safe to express themselves and everything they stand for.

There are many simple ways that teachers can do this. If students see that part of their identities are celebrated in the classrooms, it shows them that their identities are something to be celebrated and will feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and will be more engaged with the learning that goes on in that class. This can be as simple as having decorations and sayings from other cultures, specific times where students are allowed to share their ideas and thoughts about their own lives, and making sure we are holding diversity on a place of celebration. But we cannot only do this for the “main” two cultures that we are learning about in our program. We need to make sure that we are also acknowledging the other cultures our students come from so that they can see that they are all connected and that language is one of the best ways we can bridge gaps among cultures and create a network of relationships.

We are taught how there are patterns of similarities and differences between the two main cultures present in that particular program, but where does that leave our students who come from other cultures? They see these two sides and how they connect, but how are they able to see their own personal connection to these cultures if they are never taught? Many times, our curriculum is set, and there are only about 180 days of a school year which leaves

very little room to veer too far away from teaching them what they need to know about the foreign language. But when we lack in teaching about those other cultures, students from that culture feel misrepresented and hidden. It tells them something about their worth.

I can also tell you how absolutely ridiculous and tragic it is when there are students who are also unaware of the vast amount of cultures present in one language. I cannot tell you how sore my face got from the face palms I had to administer due to the utter lack of basic knowledge, some of my friends had in terms of the cultures that include the Spanish language. Many are unaware that there are other countries that speak Spanish besides the two main sources they hear from, which are Mexico and Spain. I guess I can't be too harsh on them though, because it seems to be a trend with the ignorant in this country. But because there is no focus of the other cultures that represent a language, there obviously needs to be something going on in terms of what we are teaching in the language classes and school in general.

In order to be able to call ourselves teachers and education systems that value diversity, we need to be able to show others that we are actually teaching about various cultures and their connections. I believe many dating experts have already coined the phrases such as the words don't mean anything without the actions to back them up. In order to be able to engage all learners in our classrooms, they need to feel heard and seen, which means that we make more efforts of teaching about those differences and making sure every student knows that everything they are made up of matters. That every aspect of them matters. We are not educators if we are only catering to the "norm" of our students and not all. This is why we need to be sure that we are teaching about all cultures that we can help create an upcoming society of well-rounded citizens that will be those that mend our world. This includes the cultures we should be putting more of a focus on as well.

Teach about all types of cultures and identities

Our students represent a diverse population of people and continuous growing in the amount of people that have different ethnic backgrounds every year. This is a great source of pride as many of our politicians and educators have communicated, but we are not showing that in our actions inside of the schools. We are not including that diversity in our education.

What kind of message do you think this shows our ever-growing population of diverse students that walk through our doors? They see a very limited scope of communities that are taught about in the school which translates to them that their culture is not worthy of being taught or even mentioned in schools. I know there isn't a lot of time, but there are certain aspects in life that should be taught in school besides that the mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell. We need to teach our kids about the actual world outside of their classroom walls.

One of the goals of immersion programs is to also teach the students about the culture they are learning the language of. And even with this expectation, there was still a very limited view of culture, because we learned primarily about the culture the dialect we were learning came from. We did not learn too much about other Spanish speaking countries, it was touched on and we have done projects about it, but the goal of becoming multicultural is something that should be one of the measures of success instead of just the academic grades that are assigned to us in classes. This is why it is not very surprising that many people tend to only name a couple of countries as their list of reference when playing the guessing game with Spanish speakers. It says more about the atmosphere and school environment they grew up and learned in than anything else. Being able to appreciate and

understand other cultures is an invaluable skill that could be the key to understanding our world a little better. Shouldn't this be something that we want our children to learn before they take over this world from us?

This should go past the typical basic synopsis that people do on countries in social studies classes. In order to be considered someone who is literate and knowledgeable about other cultures, you should know more than just the famous celebrities that have reigned from there. Just because you "do your research" on the cast members of your favorite TV show, doesn't make you an expert in that culture.

You need to know how the people from that culture live, what are the similarities and differences they share with your own culture, where they are located, their traditions and what their own perspectives that taint the world the picture they see. Understanding how these people fit into this world and what affects the way they see it is one of the first steps to understand what is going to help us make good connection with that culture. By exploring the identities of others, people can also learn a great deal about themselves. We need to be teaching more about other cultures so that all types of multi ethnic identities are acknowledged and validated. Part of the job of the immersion program is to create a community of bilingual as well as bicultural individuals that are aware of their own identity and how it fits in with various cultures and the complex mosaic of a network on our planet.

Teach students how they can explore and celebrate their own cultural identities

We all come from different backgrounds, especially in this vast world that is ever changing and diversifying by the year. One thing that I have learned while observing and learning more about cultures was how little people know about other cultures. I mean, think about it. We have a very limited view of what other people do and how they live their lives unless we directly interact with them. That is why there are a lot of different disputes and hatred towards others, since we only have an understanding of what the world leaders and our press show us. And since we do not have those interaction with others, we rely solely on what those that control the information want to show us. How is that any sort of way of learning and making a judgment off of not only a person, but of an entire people. And another aspect of that, is understanding how our cultures are similar and different so that we can navigate those differences and focus on how we can make both sides happy and content with the other.

The first part of that is understanding your own identity. I know that I didn't know a lot about my own side, besides the fact that I was taught about my Asian heritage by my grandmother. I only recently found out from a DNA testing site the other parts of my ethnic background since before it had just been deemed 'white'. I know that is a very controversial topic right now, and I don't wish to pull that into it but we do have to know how our own cultural backgrounds compare and contrast to those around us so that we can better know how to build bridges across the gaps that are present when you know that you have come from very different places.

Where else should kids be learning this other than in their schools? I already talked about the importance of teaching about other cultures, but we also have to take into account

that some kids are learning about their own if they are not as aware of their history as others. That can also be very helpful in building classroom community since students will understand how their cultures are affected by others in the classroom. That is why it is crucially important that we understand how our own histories are tied into the stories of others and how we can use that knowledge to create positive and caring connections with all types of people. Another place it is good to know your own history is going abroad, because you can bet that you are going to be asked a lot of questions about your culture once they see there is something exotic in town. Trust me, I got asked countless times about our new choice of president when I visited Spain a couple years back.

Continue creating opportunities for educational study abroad experiences

After one heck of a second year in high school, my Dual Language class was given the opportunity to travel to Ecuador in order to volunteer and experience the culture and language abroad. It was giving us the chance to put our skills we had been learning for the last ten years to work.

I will tell you right now that I learned more on that trip than I could have in a classroom any day. It was not my first time traveling abroad, but it was my first time traveling with other people besides my family and not having that support system with me as I navigated a foreign place. For other people, it was their first time out of the country ever, which made it even more groundbreaking for them. Being in this country threw us into an environment where our language was the one thing that allowed us to have more ease in transitioning into this experience. Being able to practice, practice and practice some more whenever we were out exploring and interacting with others around us taught us a lot about the real use of the foreign language. It gave us solid proof of why what we were learning in our classes back in small Salem, Oregon mattered. I was also given the opportunity to study abroad on my own in Spain my second year of college, where I took Spanish courses and learned about the culture through homestays and cultural activities.

When you are learning a foreign language in a classroom, you are confined to only practicing the very formal and academic form of a language. It is still being affected by the type of environment you are learning the language, and you are not experiencing the culture being learned first hand. How can you expect to truly comprehend the complexities of other languages and the cultures they are a part of if you never go and see them for yourself?

When you go and practice your second language immersed in the culture that you are learning about, you are able to place faces, and places to the text and exams that you take back at home. The content you are learning about starts to click into place, and you start to see why they require at least some experience in the foreign language department in our public education system.

Being able to travel with the people you are learning this language with too, or in fact others that are also still practicing that foreign language also makes the experience a little more comfortable, because you know they are facing the same challenges that you are. You are able to go through this learning experience with them as you explore new things in a place very far from your home. You get to try new food together, haggle prices in a market place, learn how to dance the sensual dance of Bachata with your childhood crush, and experience the culture you had only been reading about for the longest time.

I know they have continued doing these types of trips in this district, and I know it is along shot, but being able to pay for some of the students that are not able to afford the price is something that could be added to this type of cultural activity. We want our students to become bicultural, but they very well can't do that if they are not able to go and experience the culture firsthand where they are actually going to be using that language they now carry with them. But overall I think this continuation is one of the greatest parts about the program and will be one of the recommendations I will most strongly support because of the rewards it brings to our students. We cannot very well use our skills if we are not able to practice it in an environment that allows students to see how it affects them and others on that culture as well. Those who are bilingual are the main bridge that connects cultures together. Without them, there would be no effective communication, and there would be no connection or relationship between those we share this world with. But there needs to be

opportunities for us to experience that connection in the place where we are truly needed. We cannot connect without experiencing that culture firsthand and coming to a more profound understanding of how it affects them and their culture.

There is nothing I can do but say how much I know these types of experience affect and impact people. I have friends that have not been out of the country before and it blows my mind, although I understand the financial situation of some folks. I have been fortunate enough to travel because my family has worked so hard in order to have a chance at those experiences, but there are also people who are frightened to leave their comfort zone, or feel as though they do not need to see anything but their little corner of the world. These are the kinds of people I do not understand. You can read and watch videos about other places to your heart's content, but there is nothing you can read about that will compare to the amount of learning you do physically being in that other culture. You can't truly understand all the aspects of the lifestyle and societal customs until you experience it firsthand.

The obvious benefit of traveling to a country where you can practice your second language is that you are fully immersed in the culture and the language. You are forced to practice and perfect your language skills since there is not the option of just saying what you meant in your native language. It is a good type of challenge because you are forced to make use of your interpretive skills so that you can effectively live and communicate in that place. You are also told a lot about the people that live there, but you can't make an honest and informed opinion about those people until you interact with them in person. It is similar to passing judgment on people that you have never met and have just gotten biased information from others as your only source to base your own perspective on. Getting to see how these people live and thin will help create that more rounded view of a culture and

people of a country and language that will help deepen the comprehension and overall understanding of a culture.

I cannot tell you how much experience and learning I have done about the world as well as myself in my travels to other countries, both Spanish speaking as well as others. There is not enough “experience” in your hometown or even in your home country that allows you to see yourself and the world in a different lens.

Provide more opportunities for real world interaction with their L2 language

Along with providing more opportunities for real world interaction, we don't need to have students traveling internationally every time we want them to have some real world experience. There are plenty of opportunities to bring in real life practice and connections directly into the classroom. This can be as simple as providing practice and using resources that are connected to current events in order to bring in that aspect of buy in and connection. This allows students to get some insight into what is happening around the world, which already makes them a more knowledgeable citizen. I mean, how many kids do you now watch the news and stay up to date on the things happening around them? I know I was not one of those kids, and the few that were had some interesting experiences being slightly ridiculed for being the "nerd". I think it is great, but since I also have gone through that phase of being very self-absorbed in the sense of only being aware of what is going on in my own life, I can understand why it is hard for some people to get in the groove of staying up to date on the latest news. I know there are ways that we can present this information in a more interesting way that would help make our students more aware as well as less likely to let the information fall out of one ear right before their AP test. As a tutor, I know this to be true. And as a tutor, I know that this information is taught to them in school, but not reviewed enough to make it stick, which has made it harder for them to make those essential cultural connections they need to in order to show their proficiency in Spanish language and culture. And there are plenty of ways that we can help solidify that cultural knowledge in those malleable minds of theirs.

There are also more tangible resources that can be used as well in order to enhance the experience of cultural connections and instruction. Many of us live in diverse

communities and have diverse people surrounding us that are filled with their own knowledge and memories and stories. From what I have noticed, many teachers and schools are so busy trying to meet all of the expectations for our students that there is hardly any other time to incorporate any other type of person into your lessons since teachers are just trying to survive in their classroom. I should know, even being a student teacher has been stressful because you are trying to attend to every student's needs while also attempting to have something stick in those brains of theirs. Putting out fires while also teaching something meaningful is probably one of the greatest challenges I have encountered especially with how distracted I can get as a person as well. Teaching is not a task for the fainthearted and easily overwhelmed, because you're constantly having to adjust your teaching and your own actions every second of every day as our students bring in their own attitudes and problems. I like to compare it to improv acting as you are constantly on the stage looking into an audience of adolescent faces that hurl as many distractions, insults and teases at you as you attempt to maintain your own composure in a place that constantly questions your own ability and intelligence. And even with that delightful metaphor to get everyone inspired to be a teacher, I would not have it any other way.

One of the aspects that we are constantly trying to incorporate into the class is our real world connections our students have to the content. Unfortunately, kids do not enjoy learning about things that do not relate to them. I already mentioned, they are very self-centered and only care about the things that directly affect them. One of the resources that is scarcely used in many school settings is inviting the outside world in. Don't get me wrong, there is career day and other things like share and tell. My dad actually just did a presentation on fire safety at my clinical site just last week, but they also need to be opportunities for our

students to see how their first or second language can be used outside of school in a society that favors the majority language.

Everyone always said that knowing Spanish would favor us in the job market, and I always understood and appreciated that. But when that's one of the only ways that they say is beneficial to us bilinguals, it gets to be a pretty weak argument to continue learning when you might perceive yourself as proficient enough for the job market. One benefit that I did not learn in school was how it helped build a community and gave you a plethora of opportunities for the community you are able to communicate and connect with. The most I remember was having some of my friend's moms come in for Day of the Dead in order to serve *pan dulce* and *chocolate caliente* in order to get that engagement for us seven year olds. But like my peers, my main concern was making sure I got the specific sweet treat that I wanted. We were briefly mentioned the importance of the bread, but honestly many times we students were too busy daydreaming about the bread they would get to eat that day. Hey, what do you expect? We have priorities as children, and it honestly pretty accurately reflects my priorities now as well. My dad just came in to my clinical placement while I was student teaching and taught a very engaging lesson on fire safety since he is a firefighter. My class absolutely loved that lesson because they saw that connection in their own community and they were taught by someone else that was not their teacher. It was hilarious to see my third graders crawling on the ground after one "demo" that was supposed to only include me then turned into a whole class practice. I heard enthusiastic comments about it for days after.

I have had the opportunity to experience how my other language is used outside of school, with my volunteer work and my travels. I mean, being thrown into an interpreter role at nine years old will really open your eyes as to how important that other languages can be when your family is pulling at your curtains for everything that they needed since I was

their only source that connected them to the people around us in that foreign country. But not everyone is going to get that opportunity, and if they do, they might not get that connection and use right away so it is very important that we introduce how their language is going to be applied to their lives outside of school. It also needs to extend past our families and friends randomly pulling us into conversations with the poor innocent bystander they are just trying to apologize for bumping into in line at the grocery store. We need to see the faces that we are going to be interacting with in real life and see how our ability is going to be used right outside our doors. Being able to see the application of skills is something that makes students very much more engaged in the classroom since they know it is going to be something that affects their self-centered little bubbles of life.

Part of those self-centered lives happen a lot at home, which is why we also need to make sure we are developing that connection between their home lives and their lives at school. We need to make sure that we are making use of the invaluable resource that parents provide us as well. They are such a large part of our children's lives, and we often times tend to overlook that 'other' part of their lives since we are also going back to our own after that angelic sound of the last bell tolls across the halls. That is another reason why there is a lot of misunderstanding between teacher and parents since there lacks a communicative connection and the parents only see the result of what teachers are so called teaching their children. This tends to be the case when the dreaded parent teacher conferences come around and the teacher has to sit in the hot seat answering questions of why each of their students did not soar through their class with flying colors and a speech was not dedicated in their honor for what a great students little Susie might have been. Well, we hate to break it to you, a lot goes on in the eight hours that your children are away than you realize.

This gap in connection and communication is something that is both frustrating to parents and teachers, which is why they should be some of the first people that teachers look to for support and the first to look to in order to help create a connection of students' home lives with their school lives. This is also a great opportunity for students to learn from one another because they will begin to understand the diverse backgrounds of their classmates come from. Having that connection will help develop our students' empathy skill set so that they are more caring and compassionate people that are kind and courageous enough to understand the different people they are surrounded by.

I will be the first to admit that I was not the social butterfly of the class. I had a very small group of friends and was kind so I had many acquaintances that knew very little of me. And I didn't know a lot about my peers either which did not help in building community the classroom or fostering a caring and empathetic environment for every student. By bringing in the outside lives of our peers, we are able to see how other people live and helps create that first step towards building true relationships. Bringing in and teaching about the experiences of others is also the first step to help burst that self-centered bubble that we surround ourselves in because we come to learn about the other people around us and how they have different lives and experiences that help shape the community we live in as well. That it is not just us. We need to learn about the people in our lives, especially those that we spend so much of our childhood years. I don't have as much contact with any of them, which pisses me off to high heaven because I know that we could have had something truly amazing. I curse myself every day for not taking those first steps, and I know that as a teacher I will be guiding that sense of community.

Measure achievement on awareness rather than statistics

As I said before, there is quite a bit of controversy when it comes to bilingual education, nevertheless, these programs are on the rise and show no signs of stopping. People are getting more culturally aware and many more people are seeing the benefits of being bilingual. But I also think that the statistics that many people are worried about are not the real logistics and facts that we should be on the search for. I know there are certain criteria that categorize success when it comes to bilingual education, but one that I think we are lacking is in the other skills that we do not test on.

Test scores and overall academic achievement are things that help measure success in the bilingual classroom. But what about the other things they do not learn explicitly from the instruction? What about the various components of culture and personal connections with other communities? Are those not essential skills that we are attempting to foster in our schools?

Because of other financial and controversial reasons I will not delve into now, many teachers feel the need to perform to a certain standard and have their students perform to a certain degree on the assessments they go through. We all know that there are plenty of other reasons and aspects that go into characterizing a great bilingual student, but when we focus solely on the academic, our students then solely see that as their means for being successful in a foreign language. Because we put the most value on that, they are going to as well.

But we need to be able to show students that the most important concepts they are learning are not the things that are turned in and graded, but the skills they learn in interpersonal relationship and the creation of connections they make with different cultures.

What is most important, is coming to an understanding of you and how your multicultural identity compliment the people and the community you live it. It is how much you understand and build connections with other cultures and people that should be emphasized as the greatest skill you should be taking out of programs like these. Bilingual people are the bridges that we have of other cultures since they are the only people to learn and comprehend the complexities of both sides. We need to be hyping up those skills in the classroom so that students are aware of the important role they play in our world and what is most important about being the bearer of multiple languages.

Concluding Thoughts

Whew, I am done talking now. I am sorry to have burdened you with such a tediously long amount of words in front of your face, but I hope that you gained something from it. There is a lot of information there about bilingual programs and their success or failure in our public education system which you can learn more about and form your own opinion on the manner, but I wanted to give some insight into what I have noticed as the tested lab rat for it in our district. I wanted others to see what suggestions a student might have for teachers based on what I went through and what I was most impacted by. Presented in a less- than-typical-thesis manner allowed me to share with you some of my thoughts in the greater discussion about how we can improve the bilingual programs that are in place. The world is an ever so diverse place, and I am so grateful that I was able to experience that program and the opportunities it has given me. My hope was that my experiences and thoughts as a student and future teacher may shed some light on what it was actually like stumbling through that program. Our students are the future, and they need to learn the ropes before they are thrown into that hell hole of the world so they can have some chance of cleaning up the mess that was left for them, and it is our obligation to prepare them for that.

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