

Burbank Elementary's Dual Language 50-50 Model

Model

Since our model is a 50/50 model, it's easy to remember the percentages of language of instruction and demographic makeup of the students. Approximately 50% of the language of instruction in our program is Spanish, and the other half is English. Any less Spanish does not provide the students, whose second language is Spanish, enough practice time in a language they may only speak at school. There are other models out there, Burbank's model works for our student community.

The 50% also addresses the makeup of the classroom. Approximately 50% of the students in the class should be English speakers and the other 50% Spanish speakers. This is subject to be tailored to the community that is being served. Our community serves families for whom Spanish may be the language of their heritage. Burbank takes a lot of pride in the fact that we are teaching some of our students their heritage language therefore helping to recuperate the Spanish language back into their homes.

It also feels pretty special to know that we are providing an opportunity for other students to learn a foreign language. Many Bay Area families spend thousands of dollars every school year to enroll their children in private schools that provide the same language instruction our students receive.

The students who are Spanish speakers in our classrooms are sometimes also English learners. The most recent meta-research on acquiring a second language tells us that an English learner learns best and quickest in the language that they speak the best. The second language learning has a place to stick, so to speak, if the child learns it in her first language. Our English learners are being best served in this program.

So, in summary, dual language immersion or two-way immersion is a program that works for all those students involved.

Theoretical foundations

Lev Vygotsky (a Russian psychologist that lived in the early 1900s) found that there exists a Zone of Proximal Development in learning. This theory tells us that learning happens when we do tasks that are neither too hard nor easily done on our own. There is a zone where we experience "cognitive struggle" and this is when learning happens. This may be an overly simplistic way of describing Vygotsky's theory, but all teachers learn about this in Teaching 101. They learn to help their students by using a strategy called "scaffolding". In the same way a construction worker uses temporary platforms to be able to build

higher and higher on a building, a teacher uses a temporary scaffold to help a student reach higher learning. Some scaffolds are pictures or signs in the classrooms. Other scaffolds are even simpler, like showing a child how to add and subtract by using the fingers on their hands. Second language learning must be scaffolded in ways that allow the students to practice the language with the concept being taught.

Dual language teaching is based on lots of different bodies of research. The most recent research done by Virginia Collier and Wayne Thomas found how dual language programs are a proven way to close the achievement gap that exists between learners of different racial backgrounds.

We also look at a lot of early literacy research from the Reading world, specifically, Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell. They have given us a method to teach reading by identifying what sorts of mistakes students may be making while they are reading and how to notice those miscues in order to teach.

We also look at and base our model using Cooperative learning research and the strategies that are best practices from those studies. We also use strategies that come out of the English language development field. They help a student practice a language with the scaffolds they need to be able to do it correctly.

Because our program brings together students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, we also look to the multitude of writings in the multicultural and diversity research world. We look to the work of such researchers as Lily Wong Fillmore, Sonia Nieto, Lisa Delpit, Paulo Freire, Jim Cummins to strengthen our program and resolve.

Individual schedules

Each teacher works best when she/he develops their schedule and can adhere to what they say will happen at certain times during the day. This is important to ensure that enough of the “target language”, which in our case is Spanish, is being used as the language of instruction. These schedules are either the same or similar to the other teachers at their grade level. Teachers usually post their own daily schedule in their classroom.

Student differences

All learners are different. What may help one child learn something new may not help the next child learn the same concept. This is where the teacher’s toolbox of strategies or knowledge and experience may come in. A teacher is able to present a concept in different ways. For example, a Kindergarten teacher, knows she is speaking to learners who do not yet have knowledge of letter formations and sounds, a word card or flash card may not teach Kindergarteners the vocabulary for the items in the classroom. A Kindergarten teacher will know that a non-linguistic representation (or drawing) of a vocabulary word will help students remember concepts.

There are many other strategies teachers use to help students learn a concept in a language they do not understand. A strategy called Total Physical Response, or TPR, is a method where a teacher uses their body to act out or pantomime the actions or concepts they are trying to teach. This is another beginning strategy that a dual language teacher may use to teach students with all types of differences and learning styles. If a teacher needs to, they ask for help from other specialists at the school or seek assistance from their colleagues.

Dual language programs are for all students. We do not test students to pick and choose who should be in the DLI program. Entry into the allotted spaces for the program is solely based on parent's choice from the Burbank area, attendance at an introductory meeting, and when a complete registration packet was returned (first come first served where space is available we will take families from outside the Burbank area).

Homework

Homework in the dual language program, as in other types of classrooms, is usually extra practice of work the child should be able to do on his/her own. Because we know that not all parents speak both languages in our program, we provide instructions for the parents in both languages.

Motivators/Engagement strategies

There are strategies that most teachers use to encourage student participation. A dual language classroom always has two goals in mind for the lesson; a language goal and a concept goal. This is especially important to remember because in a dual language classroom there is never a time where all the students are being taught in their dominant language all at once. We like to say, "There is always a second language learner listening to you in a dual language classroom." This makes the work doubly hard.

A language classroom is a noisy place. Teachers know that students must be the speakers the majority of the classroom time. Teachers use different ways of making students practice the language of instruction. A positive reward is the best way to motivate a student to answer or practice a language goal. As students get older, they have internalized that they are in a special program. They are not just here to go to school, they are here to go to school and learn another language/strengthen both of their languages. It's important to let the students know, even in the earliest grades, that this is a special program. They are special students learning in a special program. This may help reduce the number of students reluctant to practice Spanish. Although, once students get older, reluctance to speak Spanish is a phenomenon that is prevalent in most dual language programs. Therefore the task in the upper grades is to keep kids motivated to practice the target language.