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KAMEHAMEHA SCHOOLS

An Overview of Bilingual Education

A Summary by Justin Hong

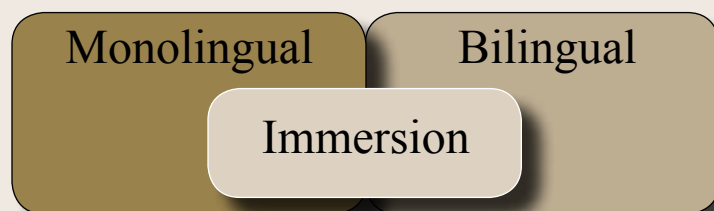
Introduction

Currently, there are numerous bilingual programs operating here in Hawai‘i and across the nation. There is a long history of bilingual education for the purposes of enrichment (e.g., private schools in the United States where students are taught in European languages) or as transitional programs for students whose home language is not the language of instruction at school. Recently, public school programs have been established in response to growing populations of people seeking to preserve their native languages.

This brief provides a framework for understanding bilingual educational programs and highlights findings from a literature review (Pacific Policy Research Center 2010) on the topic and the conditions under which it appears to be most effective.

Definitions

There are three main concepts used in bilingual education that reveal important distinctions in practice: language immersion, monolingual, and bilingual. Bilingual education is sometimes referred to as language immersion; however, language immersion can be either bilingual or monolingual. The goal of language immersion is to achieve second language proficiency by using the second language as the primary medium of instruction: monolingual education accomplishes this goal by utilizing only one language as the medium of instruction; bilingual education, on the other hand, utilizes two languages as mediums of instruction with the goal of language proficiency in one or both of the languages used.



It is important to understand that although most monolingual educational institutions teach a second language, these schools are not bilingual because the second language taught is done so as a “foreign” language and not used as the medium of instruction in other major classes (e.g., math, science, history, etc.). Thus, a program is bilingual if the courses taught use two languages.

Models/Programs

According to May (2008), bilingual education programs can be divided into one of two categories, either additive or subtractive. A subtractive program promotes monolingual learning in the dominant language and in that sense is only bilingual during the programs transitional stage from one language to another. In contrast, an additive program aims to help students achieve bilingualism over the long term.

May also suggests other ways to categorize bilingual education, including: transitional, maintenance, enrichment, and heritage models.

- Transitional bilingual education programs aim to replace the learner’s native language with that of the dominant culture.
- Maintenance models focus on developing both the learner’s native language and a target language.
- Enrichment programs are similar to maintenance models as they are both intended to develop the learner’s native language as well as a target language. However, the enrichment model extends beyond the scope of language acquisition and seeks to incorporate cultural pluralism and autonomy of cultural groups.
- The heritage model shares characteristics with both the maintenance and enrichment models with special emphasis on the recovery of a lost or endangered language.

Philosophies and Goals

Bilingual education program philosophies and goals are largely influenced by the sociohistorical, cultural, and political contexts from which they emerge. These philosophies may be categorized into two schools of thought; one sees minority language as a problem to be solved and the other views it as a resource to be tapped (Freeman 1996; Hornberger 1991).

Building Community and Identity

In heritage bilingual education two core components of bilingualism are community and identity. Literature on bilingualism consistently points to community support as being equally important to, if not more important

than, language learning in the classroom. Not only does community have a positive effect on the language learning of students, but the bilingual program itself has a positive effect on the community, made evident by a revival of linguistic and cultural identity. In some communities, such as in Hawai‘i, bilingual programs are partly responsible for the revitalization of the Hawaiian language and culture.



Promoting Academic Achievement

Positive outcomes in academic achievement are linked with bilingual education programs. For instance, research has shown that students who perform well in their native language also perform well academically in a secondary target language (Collier 1992; Lanauze and Snow 1989). As a result, additive bilingual education programs have enabled students whose native language is a minority language to achieve greater academic success. Conversely, transitional or subtractive models not only weaken the learner’s bilingualism, but learners also show decreased levels of academic success (May 2008).

Preserving Native Language

In some communities where heritage languages are threatened by extinction, efforts are made to revitalize the use of those languages. The heritage model of language learning mentioned earlier formed as a response to threats of heritage language extinction. Often times these programs emphasize, not only functional use of the heritage language, but also cultural heritage awareness. In the case of Hawai‘i,

the emphasis on cultural awareness is evident through language programs' teaching of Hawaiian values and practices.

Hawaiian Language Immersion

In the wake of colonization, the Hawaiian language was displaced by English as the dominant language in Hawai'i. This process was accelerated in 1896 with Act 57, which promoted English-only instruction in public and private schools (Benham and Heck 1998, 107). In 1983, nearly a century later, 'Aha Pūnana Leo was formed to perpetuate the Hawaiian language ('Aha Pūnana Leo 2006). What started as a grassroots movement with Hawaiian immersion preschools has expanded to grades K–12 and the university. It is estimated that over 2,000 learners participate in Hawaiian language immersion programs each year (Kawai'ae'a 2007 and Ka Papahana Kaiapuni Hawai'i 2008).

Key Lessons from the Bilingual Research

The following lessons are adapted from Lindholm (1990) by Howard and Christian (2002).

1. The target (non-English) language should be used for instruction a minimum of 50 percent of the time (to a maximum of 90 percent in the early grades), and English should be used at least 10 percent of the time.
2. The program should provide an additive bilingual environment where all students have the opportunity to learn a second language while continuing to develop their native language proficiency.
3. Classrooms should include a balance of students from the target language and English backgrounds who participate in instructional activities together.
4. Positive interactions among students should be facilitated by the use of strategies such as cooperative learning.
5. Characteristics of effective schools should be incorporated into programs, such as qualified personnel and home-school collaboration.

Conclusion

A survey of the research literature reveals that there are several types of bilingual educational programs, which range from transitional to heritage models. These differences reflect the conditions from which the program emerges. Programs that are truly bilingual in nature (i.e., additive rather than subtractive), designed well, and are supported by their communities are likely to result in academic success for their students.

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