



New York State Education Department
Bilingual Education Toolkit

Guiding Principles and Educational Philosophy of Bilingual Education

Topic Brief # 2



OBEWL@NYSED.GOV

The Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages (OBEWL), with the support of our Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERNS), the ELL Leadership Council, and the Bilingual Education Advisory Panel, has prepared this series of related topic briefs that will comprise a Bilingual Education Toolkit to assist established and newly created bilingual programs in understanding the history, programming, theory, and pedagogy inherent in building effective bilingual education programs. The OBEWL presents this and other topic briefs as part of its continuing mission of promoting bilingual education and bilingualism as assets to both schools and students.

Principles and Educational Philosophy of Bilingual Education

Research has found that the bilingual brain has better attention and task-switching capacities than the monolingual brain (Marian and Shook, 2012). Bilingual and multilingual individuals become better at inhibiting some responses, promoting others, and emerging with a more flexible and agile mind (Konnikova, 2015). For children, developing bilingualism has multiple positive effects on the brain. Numerous studies cited by the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages show that bilingual elementary-aged children scored higher on tests that measured divergent thinking, cognitive flexibility, perceptual strategies and improved verbal memory capability. These benefits appear to extend over time, as bilingual adults may experience less cognitive decline (Marian and Shook, 2012).

All language learners develop language abilities in four distinct modalities: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. While each of these modalities develops at different rates, achieving proficiency relies on the acquisition of interdependent language skills; like knowledge of sounds that belong to a specific language or the organization of ideas in a sentence. Therefore, it is important to differentiate between bilingualism and biliteracy. A person who is bilingual may be able to communicate orally in both languages using effective listening and speaking skills but may be unable to read and/or write in one or both languages.

Biliteracy is achieved when literacy and communicative skills are attained in both languages, with proficiency in each language modality. The goal of Bilingual Education in New York State is for students to develop biliteracy to the greatest extent possible, affirming the value of diversity in a multilingual society and preparing the next-generation workforce of a global economy.

Leveraging Bilingual Education for ELL Success

In recent years, Bilingual Education has been recognized as representing a bridge between linguistically diverse students' home and school experiences with language. Cummins (2007) has suggested that the strength of this bridge relies on integrating the two languages to teach literacy and subject area content, rather than compartmentalizing instruction in the two languages. For ELLs, the goal is to develop literacy in the students' home language which can be leveraged to support their acquisition of English (Cummins, 2001; Cummins, 2007; Krashen & McField, 2005; August & Shanahan, 2006), and to facilitate access to grade-level content area by promoting the use of both languages for instruction and learning (Rodriguez, D.Carrasquillo, A., and Lee, K.S., 2014).

Bilingual Education also marks a paradigm shift toward providing Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education by embracing cultural and linguistic diversity and equity as vehicles for student success. Through the implementation of a culturally sustaining pedagogy, students now view their own cultures as an asset and are able to navigate when and how to utilize their linguistic skills. Bilingual programs involve a dynamic, rigorous, and equitable academic curriculum, an understanding and respect of another language and associated cultures, and foster a positive self-image and self-esteem among all students, along with numerous other positive outcomes for all stakeholders.

- ***For Students***

ELLs and MLs, including those whose home language is English bring a wealth of knowledge, strategies and processes to communicate in their native language. Providing instruction in the home language develops and strengthens the content knowledge while also strengthening their skills in both languages. In a bilingual program, teachers encourage students to use the knowledge of rules and structures of their entire linguistic repertoire to comprehend and generate new language. The growth of both languages together is the dynamic

process of developing biliteracy (August & Shanahan, 2006). This is one of the major reasons researchers posit that ELLs and MLs who are proficient in their home language demonstrate greater ability to transfer cognitive and linguistic skills, processes and strategies to additional languages. As bilingual students develop proficiency in English, they often out-perform their monolingual peers on standardized tests and other measures of academic achievement (Lucido & McEachern, 2000).

When teachers recognize the skills that students already have in their first language, they can individualize their instruction more effectively, allowing students to transfer linguistic knowledge across languages (August et al., 2002). Language is a social construct and as such, learning two or more languages extends beyond developing linguistic proficiency. Bilingual learners must also navigate between the cultural expectations and norms associated with each language to proficiently initiate and reciprocate social interactions, including the culturally appropriate communication of emotions and feelings (Halle et al., 2014). Students who have access to supportive Bilingual Education identify positively with being bilingual and identify themselves as belonging to more than one culture (Cumming-Potvin 2004; Molyneux 2005; Fielding, 2015). This positive identification helps students develop strong bilingual identities where they are better able to navigate their school communities, laying a foundation for high academic achievement.

- ***For Schools***

While many districts are required to provide a Bilingual Education program based on the number of enrolled students who speak the same language in the same grade as mandated by Commissioner’s Regulations Part 154-2, there are significant advantages that Bilingual Education could provide to all schools.

Implementation of a Bilingual Education program can support the efforts of a school to become culturally responsive by recognizing multilingualism—including the home language of ELLs—as an asset. Educators working in Bilingual Education programs are provided with opportunities to deeply understand the unique perspectives, practices, values and traditions of other cultures as they work with their ELL students and communicate with their families. Encountering others from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds increases all students’ ability to interact with students and parents using greater cultural responsiveness. Accordingly, it is essential that educators develop culturally responsive practices and implement culturally sustaining curricula that build upon the funds of knowledge students bring to the classroom (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). This affords meaningful opportunities for collaboration among teachers, families, and the community, to form the basis for multicultural education, from which all their students can benefit.

Regardless of their home language, students who are developing bilingualism in two-way immersion programs outperform students in monolingual classes in measures of both reading comprehension and math. Bilingual students are also developing metalinguistic knowledge; a greater conscious awareness of language structures and use correlated with enhanced reading skills (Marian et al., 2013). Research has shown that schools that have implemented bilingual programs have created an avenue for parents, who are multilingual learners’ primary advocates, to engage in their children’s education which leads to students’ improved attitudes about learning and to higher academic achievement (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018).

- ***For Parents and the Community***

Living and thriving in a diverse society requires the ability to interact with people of multiple languages and cultures. As stated earlier, cross-cultural competence is essential in our increasingly diverse society and in the global economy. Cultivating relationships with parents and community members is a cornerstone of effective Bilingual Education programs. These programs highly value the languages and cultures of the community, affording the school personnel and parents optimal and ongoing opportunities for communication, understanding and collaboration between its members. Bilingual Education programs may offer parents and

families a wide range of resources and relevant services in their home language that are responsive to their interests and needs. They also strengthen the home-school connection, offer the opportunity to engage parents in their children’s education by helping them navigate through the school system and assist parents in making informed decisions about the education of their children including their post-secondary education. Actively engaging parents in school events and activities acknowledges the valuable resources they bring to the school community.

Bilingual Programs in New York State

According to New York State Regulations “Bilingual Education program shall mean a research-based program comprised of three components: (1) a language arts instruction component, including Home Language Arts and English Language Arts; (2) an English as a New Language component; and (3) a bilingual content area instructional component (including all bilingual content areas, i.e. math, science, and social studies, depending on the Bilingual Education program model and the student’s level of English language development, but must at a minimum include at least two bilingual core content areas, i.e. math, science, and social studies.”

In addition, “English as a New Language (ENL) program shall mean a research-based program comprised of two components: a content area instructional component in English (including all core content, i.e. English language arts, math, science, or social studies) with home language supports and appropriate scaffolds, and an English language development component (Stand-alone and/or Integrated English as a New Language).”

Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) programs offer students of the same home language the opportunity to learn to speak, understand, read, and write in English while continuing to learn academic content in their home language. The student’s home language is used to help them progress academically in all content areas while they acquire English.

Language programs provide content and literacy instruction in both English and another language. The goals of dual language programs are academic achievement and proficiency in both languages leading to biliteracy. There are various models of dual language that exist ; the most commonly implemented models are Two-Way Immersion and One-Way Immersion.

Two-Way Immersion (TWI) is what most educators think of when they hear the term dual language. In general, TWI classes are comprised of both native English speakers and ELLs, ideally at a 50-50 ratio. In this scenario, each half of the class is learning a new language and learning from each other.

One-Way Immersion (OWI) programs are gaining in popularity as the idea of dual language becomes more appealing to the greater public. OWI classes consist of students of one language group learning a new language. A class might be all native-English speakers learning a new language while they develop English Language skills or all ELLs learning English while they continue to develop home language skills.

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