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Author's Note

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Abstract

While Latinos make up 18% of the American population, many analysts are noticing a problem with their education (Flores, 2017). One attempt to confront this problem is by the implementation of Dual-Language Immersion programs. The attempts to successfully transition first generation Spanish-speaking children into a predominantly English-speaking society like America have produced negative effects on their cognitive development. This establishes the premise for educational hardship throughout their scholastic development. Research has shown that Dual-Language Immersion has become an answer for this issue addressing the gaps and pitfalls that first generation Spanish-speaking children experience in a basic educational platform (Valdes, 1997). As an example, schools in Portland, Oregon have implemented many Dual-Language programs that operate using a lottery system, yet some elements of these programs have sceptics suggesting that this could be leaving Latinos behind. In particular, this paper will be exploring the impact of dual language programs on Latina/o's and how Caucasian families are also seeing the benefits of having their child attend Dual-Language Immersion programs by giving them the opportunity to be proficient in a foreign language at a young age, possibly benefiting them professionally in the future. Studies have shown that there are many benefits to Dual-Language Immersion programs not just reflected in standardized testing, but also enriching local society and developing well rounded students.

Keywords: Education, Development, Language, Culture, Dual-Language Immersion.

Dual-Language Immersion

In today's society, we still see many difficulties surrounding our education system, particularly with children of non English-speaking backgrounds. This is a particularly complex situation, but one solution that has been proposed is called Dual-Language Immersion. This idea of this program in the United States emerged from studies conducted in Canada over the past few decades. These programs are called the Canadian Immersion Program, starting with research by Genesee (1979-1984), Lambert and Tucker (1972), Swain and Lapkin (1982). These studies, among others, were eventually evaluated by Valdes (1997). The program incorporated both English-speaking and French-speaking students. The goal was to provide first language instruction for children with non-English speaking backgrounds while offering monolingual children access to non-English languages (Valdes 1997, p. 394). This style of program has many supporters, however there are skeptics that believe that this Dual-Language Immersion approach may have negative impacts, such as the quality of instruction in the minority language. Valdes (1997) researched Dual-Language Immersion programs that started as early as kindergarten and brought two different language groups together. There are several styles of these programs. One consists of a 90/10 approach, where 90% of classroom teachings is in non-English and 10% is English; another is a 50/50 approach, where the instructors speak in each language equally. The goal for this program is to teach Anglo children a foreign language and for the minority students, who speak little English or no English at all, to interact in their native tongue and acquire English in order to better interact with their Anglo peers (p. 391-392).

A related study was conducted in California in 1996 by Guadalupe Valdes of Stanford University. The researcher observed kids and their peer interactions within a Dual-Language Immersion school that consisted of half English-speaking children and half Spanish-speaking

children, primarily first generation students of Mexican origin. Valdes noticed the fragility of the relationships between these children, where even at a very young age, some of the students understood the socioeconomic power they held over the others. Some skeptics, specifically those of Latino heritage, are concerned that Anglo children from a more powerful socio-economic background will take advantage of the opportunity to learn the Spanish language, essentially pushing the other students out of the program. The idea is that, if the Anglo students already have an advantage over Latinos in knowing English, these types of programs now allow them to take advantage and get linguistically ahead of the Latino children, as well. Some Latinos feel that this is a threat to the maintenance of their heritage, as they worry about the education their children should receive in Spanish is being allocated to the children of the powerful (p. 392).

Some researchers make the argument that the disadvantages that these children face in school are due to the parents' ability to support their children's education. Valdes (1997) spoke with advisers that were focusing on parental involvement in education and parents' attitudes towards schools and education, as well as their maternal teaching styles. These contributing factors play into the perspective that high risk children do poorly in school because of their parents beliefs and behaviors. The idea is that non-mainstream parents do not have the proper attitude towards the value of education and that they do not prepare their children well for the scholastic environment within the United States. Others argue that the educational institution is set up particularly to produce good, upstanding Americans from wealthy backgrounds and to work as more of a sorting machine rather than a bridge between classes (p. 398).

Steele et al. (2016) reported that the *Center of Applied Linguistics* estimates that the number of immersion schools in the United States grew from 278 to 448 between 1998 and 2011. However, more recent studies have shown that it's quite possible that there are anywhere

between 1,000 to 2,000 immersion programs currently operating in the United States.

Specifically, there has been large growth of these programs in the states of Utah, home to at least 118 language immersion schools, and North Carolina, which has nearly a 100 programs. One of the more diverse cities that offers immersion programs is New York, which houses between 82 to 192 immersion schools between the years of 2012-2013 and 2015-2016 (p. 283). This shows that the popularity of these types of programs is gaining across the country in today's diverse culture. Steele et al. (2017) writes that these programs have emerged in a critical time in America where our culture is changing rapidly. Between 1980 and 2013, the amount of young adults who spoke a language other than English at home more than doubled from 11% to 25%. The Pew Research Center has indicated that by the year 2065, first-generation immigrants and their families will make up 36% of the U.S. population, compared to 26% today (p. 284). They also report that receiving a good education at a young age is crucial in predicting if one does well or not in a society. One must build a foundation during elementary school in order to springboard into middle school, and then on to high school. With proper guidance and support, a student may one day have the opportunity to go to college. However, within specific subcultures of our society, children are missing the boat and being left behind, especially those with a language barrier.

Steele et al. (2017) found substantial research from psychologists pointing to the cognitive benefits of bilingualism, including improved working memory and attention control. Bilingualism has also been shown to help with mathematical comprehension (p. 284-285). Burkhauser et al. (2016) found that students in Portland, Oregon who wanted to attend immersion programs were required to enter into a lottery system administered by the school district. While the number of spots available in a given program is generally established by the

school's principal, some schools establish multiple preference categories, having designated spots for native speakers and for partner languages ("Partner language" is a term used for a non-English-speaking person). Burkhauser et al.'s study in Portland spanned for six years, starting in the fall of 2004 and ending in the fall of 2010, with the data being analyzed a few years later. The sample size includes 3,457 student participants, as well as 24,841 other students who were enrolled in the district as pre-kindergarten or kindergarten during the sample years. The oldest students were observed through ninth grade and the youngest were observed through third grade. They worked with the Oregon Department of Education to obtain the data on reading skills, mathematics skills, science scores and English language learning status. The students' ability in reading, mathematics and science is measured by the students performance on the state-mandated accountability test, called the Oregon Assessment Of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS). Reading and math tests are given annually in 3rd through 8th grade, along with once in high school, while science is tested in 5th and 8th grades. The tests are presented in English and they examine the student's status as English learning (or EL) each school year after kindergarten, adjusting the student's status as a kindergarten entry. Students in Portland may be classified as EL each year based on their status the prior year and their overall performance on the English language proficiency assessment or (ELPA). The ELPA is given to the students in the months of January, February and March. Students are labeled as EL until the first full school year, at which point he or she no longer qualifies for services based on EPLA scores (p. 291-292).

In general, the study compared students that started the immersion program during kindergarten and those students who did not start as early as kindergarten, which formed a baseline for data analysis. This process is called covariate-adjustment, as the main focus in this study is to grade how effective the immersion program truly is. Steele et al. (2017) found a

significant statistic in mathematics scores, showing that non-Spanish speaking students at the 8th grade level typically scored higher on standard mathematical testing, possibly showing a negative effect of immersion programs on non-native speaking students. This was found to be a common trend after the 4th grade. The authors also found that students learning English that started the immersion program in kindergarten are 2% more likely to gain status as a proficient English speaker than their counterparts who joined the program after kindergarten. They found that even students randomly assigned to immersion programs perform better on the state accountability test in reading and writing. However, in the realms of math and science, they found no statistical significance when comparing immersion program students versus those in non-immersion schools. What is clear in their research among students within immersion programs is that they are 6% more likely to become proficient in speaking English by 5th grade and 14% by 6th grade. This implies that, at least within this test group, it is beneficial to be enrolled in an immersion program if you are a non-English speaker, as opposed to a monolingual program in which most students are native speakers of English (p. 302-301).

A major factor that contributes to an immersion program being successful is the culture of the surrounding community and the parental involvement in the schools. Burkhauser et al. (2016) found that the benefits of Dual-Language Immersion programs outweigh the negatives. The implementation of Dual-Language Immersion programs have proved that bilingualism, which requires the students to quickly switch attention from one topic to another, is paralleled with improved cognitive skills and, in turn, improved general learning across a wide range of subject areas. They found that the growth rate for Spanish-speaking students in such programs may initially show slow progress, but over time, show significant growth, allowing the students to hit higher proficiency rates later on in high school when compared to monolingual programs.

The findings of studies pertaining to Dual-Language Immersion programs is generating a national conversation and has influenced public policy discussions about the importance of implementing these immersion style schools. The general public may not know about the difficulties that first generation Spanish speaking students experience, nor about how much Dual-Language Immersion programs have benefited them by helping them attain higher rates of English proficiency. However, the research shows that the creation of more programs like these corresponds to general benefits for the students within them and for our modern society (p. 416-417).

Other states are getting on board with the Dual-Language Immersion platform, creating policies to fund and create similar immersion programs. Burkhauser et al. (2016) found that eastern states such as North Carolina and Delaware have implemented such programs, suggesting that they will be a benefit to enhance the global competitiveness of their workforce. In other words, the justification of their policy regarding immersion programs was not just to realize the medium-to long term benefits for students' language skills, but also to reinforce the obvious argument that bilingualism carries advantages in the global marketplace (p. 417). The researchers also note that bilingualism in our culture has influenced social advancement in terms of understanding the importance of social perspective and intercultural competence, concepts which cannot be measured monetarily, but are both important in creating a well-balance society as a whole (p. 417).

Conclusion

Based off of this information, it is clear that our society is going through a complex social change, setting the stage for the future of America and our culture of inclusivity. As our population grows, so does our perspective, forcing us to adapt to the new norms being created.

This forces us to erase, but not forget, how racial tension and cultural misperceptions can negatively affect minorities. As our society does indeed has many imperfections, we need to look to important things that we can actually change, like improvements in the education of our children. Dual-Language Immersion programs help grow our society and enrich our perspective of other cultures, as well as aid in identifying our role in an inclusive society. In these programs, our children grow together and create the necessary bonds and a foundation that our society has missed for so many years.

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