

Bolstering Bilingualism: **White Paper on Advancing Oral Proficiency** **in Dual Immersion Education**



Language instruction is the object of increasing scrutiny in the US, and for good reason—English Language Learners comprise the fastest-growing school-aged population,¹ and rapid globalization establishes multilingualism as a requisite skill for coming generations of Americans. One promising movement toward meeting the goals of bilingualism and biliteracy for a variety of students is educational programs that feature instruction in two languages. Particularly, dual immersion programs, which provide instruction in English and a partner language to students with various language backgrounds, aim to bolster academic English among all students while simultaneously cultivating proficiency and literacy in a second language, whether that language is learned at home or in school.

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Dual immersion education does not come without its challenges.² Schools must determine whether instruction will start at 90% in the partner language in Kindergarten,

eventually leveling out with English at 50:50 in upper elementary, or whether instruction will be delivered 50:50 from Kindergarten on. The two languages may be split up within a school day, alternate every day or every week, or rotate by subject.³ There may be a one-teacher, one-language approach, or a single teacher that instructs in both languages.⁴ While such decisions seem merely logistical in nature, in order to be successful, dual immersion pedagogy must entail more than a “two-for-one” deal that simply swaps out the language in which content is delivered.⁵ In order to ensure academic success and high proficiency in both languages, educators and administrators must provide explicit, quality language instruction and a variety of contexts⁶ in which to utilize and grow the linguistic resources of students.

Form-Focused Instruction is the New Incidental Learning

Even with the understanding that second language (L2) learning happens differently from first language (L1) acquisition,⁷ the idea that language instruction is more effective when it's spontaneous, incidental, and student-led

is appealing.⁸ The intuition that language learning should be “natural” and unconscious, combined with a general distaste for antiquated grammar-translation and memorization-focused methods, make it easy to see why teachers tend to shy away from systematic, explicit language instruction.⁹ Even so, in an age of rigorous academic standards, educators can't rely solely on incidental learning when it comes to L2 learners. While many aspects of language can be internalized due to sheer exposure, research has indicated that learners require up to a dozen meaningful opportunities before finally incorporating a new word or language feature into their productive language repertoires.¹⁰ Indeed, creating opportunities for immersion students to notice, practice, and become aware of academic language terms and features has had notable effects on the L2 acquisition of vocabulary, derivational morphology (e.g., patterns among words such as “beauty,” “beautiful,” “beautify,” “beautifully,” and “beautification”), gender, pronouns, and verb tenses among various populations.¹¹

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Such form-focused instruction is useful for aiding mastery of the L2 language, but more importantly, explicit language practice cultivates metalinguistic awareness among budding bilinguals. While dual immersion pedagogy may entail clean divisions between input languages, the brain does not compartmentalize so easily, and bilingualism, in fact, is an “integrated system,”¹² in which languages “interact, support, and influence one another in a bidirectional manner.”¹³ Any time student attention is called to an L2 property, an understanding of its L1 equivalent should arise, and so, learning is enhanced by leveraging all of a student's linguistic resources.¹⁴ Such cross-linguistic “bridging” and metalinguistic awareness-raising should reinforce the sense among learners that both the L1 and L2 are tools for extracting knowledge from their classes, whether that



knowledge is linguistic or content-specific.¹⁵ Proficient bilinguals are eventually able to consciously analyze linguistic input, but not without ample modeling in emergent stages of learning.

In order for dual immersion students to claim strong proficiency in the L2, they must also have fluid, productive language skills.

Shatter Shallow, Shoddy, Shaky Skills by Sharpening Student Speaking

Explicit language instruction, complete with high-quality input and varied contexts, is critical to developing receptive language skills, but these are only half of the bilingual equation. In order for dual immersion students to claim strong proficiency in the L2, they must also have fluid, productive language skills. When students are focused on learning content, it's easy to manipulate existing linguistic resources, rather than focus on and grow new language skills.¹⁶ Additionally, in many classroom activities, only a handful of self-selecting students are able to practice oral language.¹⁷ However, producing extended, classroom discourse is key to the growth of dual immersion students, particularly in situations where new language features are being introduced,¹⁸ and one of the best opportunities for practicing such discourse is to incorporate interaction into learning. By actively producing language, learners automatize new language forms, gain awareness of gaps in their knowledge, experiment with language, reap the benefits of self-, peer-, and teacher-monitoring, and problem-solve while talking with peers.¹⁹ As oral language skills grow, L2 learners gain stronger literacy skills, are better writers, and witness cross-language reading achievement, so clearly, speaking is more than ancillary in the dual immersion classroom.²⁰

What's a Teacher to Do?

Balancing the right kind of input to fuel meaningful oral language practice while ensuring that content is not neglected is no small task when it comes to scaffolding students with varying language proficiencies. As soon as a teacher finds that sweet spot, it's gone again, because scaffolding is ever temporary, providing "just the right amount of support to make the [L2] comprehensible,"²¹ while being demanding enough for students to acquire more advanced features of the language and utilize higher-

order thinking skills.²² What's more, teachers know that there's more to academic language than mere vocabulary,²³ but moving beyond word lists and into the nitty-gritty, grammatical components of language is a particular challenge for content teachers. And then there's the perennial question: What do you do with the students that "already know the language" while you're instructing the rest?

Hang on, Don't Panic

Lingual Learning has designed curriculum that you might design yourself in order to solve the riddles of dual immersion. ELD Links™ and Enlace de Español™ are complimentary, English/Spanish, pre-task programs, designed to explicitly expose students to new academic language and provide them with meaningful practice as they assimilate increasingly complex linguistic structures and specialized vocabulary. Both ELD Links™ and Enlace de Español™ can be used with L1 and L2 learners, affording the nonnative population serious time-on-task in the L2, while the native population gains metalinguistic awareness by having their attention called to the building blocks of language. These programs also support a tenet of dual immersion education—harnessing student linguistic resources for peer learning—because the primary focus is oral language. By leveraging students' natural motivation to socialize and collaborate, ELD Links™ and Enlace de Español™ allow students to co-construct experiences and make meaning while both *using* language and *reflecting* on language via "metatalk" with their peers.²⁴

ELD Links™ and Enlace de Español™ aim to develop content knowledge alongside linguistic knowledge, focusing on subject-area vocabulary, complex grammatical structures, and the linguistic features particular to academic language, all of which are "not typically encountered in a nonacademic setting,"²⁶ yet are essential to high proficiency and academic success in two languages.²⁵ Such a dynamic approach to purposeful bilingualism can enhance the goals of your dual immersion program without over-burdening its hard-working educators. ELD Links™ and Enlace de Español™ were designed by teachers, for teachers, with the goal of providing students the practice they need to succeed in using academic English and Spanish. Let Lingual Learning support you, and you'll be thrilled to see your students do the talking—in a second language.

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Notes

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