7 Steps to Success in Dual Language Immersion
A Brief Guide for Teachers & Administrators

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Heinemann
Portsmouth, NH
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Introduction

The year was 1989. Las Vegas, Nevada, was buzzing with growth and change. The nightly news, denizens of the university campus, local business executives, and dinner companions all over town were focused on one particular aspect of this dramatic transformation. A non-English-speaking labor force was pouring into an area that had no plan or infrastructure to meet the needs of English language learners (ELLs), defined by Lindholm (2000) as students who come from homes in which the family speaks a language other than English.

As the ELL student population increased, we, as classroom teachers, had been directly impacted. And so, motivated to acquire new skills and new knowledge to help us meet the needs of our students, we had each enrolled in graduate school at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, in a newly established masters program in English as a second language (ESL). It is there we met.

Since that time, we have become the best of friends as well as coworkers, teaching, training, writing, presenting, and administrating programs with an emphasis on language acquisition. In the late nineties, we served as director (Lore) and coordinator (Annette) of second language programs in the fifth-largest school district in the nation, with an ELL student population of thirty-six thousand. During that time, our passionate concern for children whose instructional needs were not being met in traditional education led us to research the most effective programs for English language learners.

Specifically, we studied the research of Thomas and Collier (1997, 2001), who examined English language learners over a period of ten years. This longitudinal study focused on the time needed for ELLs to reach and sustain grade-level achievement in their second language, as well as on the types of programs and the instructional variables that strongly affected their long-term academic achievement. The study concluded that the most effective model for instruction was dual language education. As defined by Drs. Yvonne and David Freeman and Sandra Mercuri (2005), the label dual language education encapsulates the “essential component” of dual immersion, “the use of two languages for instruction.” As Freeman, Freeman, and Mercuri explain, the “goal is for students to develop full conversational and academic proficiency in two languages” (xvi). As a result, we decided to investigate dual language education across the country and around the world.
Our investigation included school visits to observe students engaged in dual language instruction at various grade levels. We interviewed and consulted administrators, teachers, parents, and community leaders in Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Illinois, Washington, Mexico, China, and Europe about the design and implementation of such programs. During these visits we also interviewed students who had achieved the goals of dual language education—students who had become bilingual (fluent in speaking two languages) and biliterate (able to read and write in two languages) and demonstrated positive cross-cultural attitudes and behavior—and we were excited by their high academic achievement. It was obvious that there were cognitive advantages to studying in two languages.

At the completion of our investigation, we were convinced that dual language programs were the most effective not just for English language learners but for all students. Our next challenge was to find the support and funding needed to change the paradigm of instruction in our school district. We applied for a Title VII federal grant (Linking Globally/Enlaces Mundiales) and obtained funding to implement the first dual language immersion program in the state of Nevada. In our application, we described a model of instruction we had developed by selecting the best instructional practices we had observed during our research: balanced literacy, integrated thematic instruction, hands-on activities, graphic organizers, and cooperative learning structures. These instructional practices and how they are used in a dual language setting are identified and explained in this book. (They can be modified to meet the needs of the school communities in which they are being implemented. Since we believe in teachers’ professionalism and creativity and in the importance of personal teaching styles, we offer a model framework rather than a dictated script.) This model currently consists of a strand of two teamed (or paired) classrooms per grade level, pre-K through fifth grade, taught by partner teachers. Students switch classes in the afternoon. (More on specific organization in Step 4.)

Two Models of Dual Language Immersion

The first model funded by the grant, implemented since the fall of 2000 at Cyril Wengert Elementary School, is a 50/50 two-way dual language immersion program. Students in the program are volunteers. Half of the students are English language learners, the other half, Spanish language learners (that is, their home language is English). This model currently consists of a strand of two classrooms per grade level, pre-K through fifth grade. The students receive 50 percent of their instruction in English and 50 percent of their instruction in Spanish. (Two Chinese sisters whose home language was Mandarin also participated in the program. We had great fun teaching them, and they soon became the highest achiev-
ers of the group. By the end of the first year of instruction, the girls were speaking, reading, and writing in both Spanish and English: trilingual and triliterate. Wow!

The second model, implemented since 2001 at J. Marlan Walker International School, is a 50/50 one-way dual language immersion program. The first year the school opened, all but three of the kindergartners who participated in the program were Spanish language learners. They received 50 percent of their instruction in English and 50 percent of their instruction in Spanish. Every year an additional grade level has been added. Currently there are more than 1,100 students in the program, which provides a challenging and enriching curriculum.

(Since the inception of the aforementioned programs, five other schools located in the Clark County school district have also implemented dual language immersion programs.)

About This Book

This book is divided into seven steps for implementing a dual language immersion program. A concluding chapter describes an international dual language immersion school.

Step 1, “Understanding and Planning for Dual Language Immersion,” provides the theoretical framework for these programs. It also describes instructional strategies that focus on language acquisition and literacy skill. You can create transparencies and/or handouts for staff development training with the numbered and bulleted outlines found in this chapter.

Step 2, “Organizing the Classroom,” identifies the five essential components of a properly prepared environment: physical arrangement, established rituals, peace and serenity, freedom with responsibility, and classroom awareness. Teachers’ biggest challenge and most laborious task is preparing their classroom for student-directed learning. This entails arranging furniture and content-area centers so that students, in manipulating their environment, will build both gross and fine motor skills. Students need to be able and encouraged to move freely and safely about the classroom if they are to become responsible, independent learners.

Students become confident and feel secure in an environment of consistent rituals and procedures. They know what is expected of them and become socially successful. Another important consistency that supports students and their success in acquiring bilingualism and biliteracy is mirrored classrooms: the classrooms of the dual language teachers use the same rituals and procedures and have similar furniture arrangements and center activities.

Step 3, “Planning Instruction,” emphasizes the importance of the collaborative effort between partner teachers and the sharing of thematic units among grade-level teachers. Thematic units are based on science and social studies topics.
determined by grade-level standards and unique to the grade level. These theme units, which are stored in large bins, include big books, lesson plans, trade books, concrete center activities, and a variety of supplemental materials. Content areas of reading, writing, and arithmetic are integrated within the theme units.

The theme topic is supported in each partner teacher’s classroom in similar ways to promote a natural development of concepts and vocabulary. Teachers activate prior knowledge through the use of graphic organizers in class discussion and draw interest from students with visuals and real objects.

Partner teachers plan a theme unit together using a two-page web organizer. Sharing the responsibility of planning reduces stress, especially for teachers new to the program. Thorough planning includes brainstorming ideas and predetermining weaknesses before instruction begins. Joint planning is essential for successful teaching.

Step 4, “Teaching Through Best Practice,” looks at a day in a dual language immersion classroom. It describes both morning and afternoon primary and intermediate schedules and details academic instruction. It also addresses necessary instructional strategies for language acquisition. Dual language teachers develop lessons with two objectives in mind: the first is based on concept development, the second, language acquisition. Teachers of second language learners need to provide lessons in a low-risk environment and scaffold their instruction with graphic organizers, academic word walls, visuals, and concrete materials to ensure student understanding.

Step 5, “Learning Through Hands-On Activities,” emphasizes the importance of hands-on activities as a means to engage students in learning and support the goal of a student-directed classroom. These interactive activities make abstract concepts clear and concrete. Children become independent workers who are developing an internal sense of worth, self-discipline, and a lifetime work ethic.

In using these activities, students make personal choices as well as explore and investigate their interests. Each activity is purposeful and is tied to grade-level standards and appropriate time lines. Activities must be displayed in an orderly, appealing manner (a basket or tray is recommended) and include everything necessary to complete the activity. Some type of boundary cloth is usually included to define the students’ work space.

Respectful movement around the classroom and the cautious transporting of materials builds both gross and fine motor skills. Additionally, children learn to move in space gracefully without spills or damage and acquire respect for the boundaries of other people. When students work independently, with peers, or in small groups at center activities, the teacher has the freedom to observe, record, assess, and redirect their learning. In third through fifth grade, centers become process based in order to stimulate higher-order thinking skills: students invent,
research, investigate, and explore, and teachers expect students to be able to justify, defend, and debate their results.

Step 6, “Assessing as a Way to Better Instruction and Accountability,” explores a variety of assessment tools that facilitate data-driven instruction. Current federal accountability has necessitated an increased focus on individual student progress. Teachers must accommodate every student, recognizing individual learning styles and whatever special considerations are required. An accurate analysis of student knowledge also requires a variety of authentic assessments. By observing students, teachers become aware of each individual student’s ability to problem solve, accomplish goals, and master learning objectives.

Norm-referenced assessments are required by individual states and allow the test scores of immersion education students to be compared with their peers across the nation. Criterion-referenced assessments give teachers the data they need to plan their instruction. Authentic assessments give students alternative ways to demonstrate what they know when traditional tests do not.

Step 7, “Building Community Support,” addresses the needs of the current business community, gives suggestions on how to secure the support of this community, and offers examples of how to seek out positive media coverage and contact local businesses. This step also reinforces the critical role parents play in maintaining immersion programs and offers suggestions for educating parents about such a program; describes the kind of leadership needed to ensure the program is successful; and itemizes the characteristics of immersion teachers and the attributes of students educated in a dual language immersion school.

The book’s conclusion describes the J. Marlan Walker International School and its curriculum concentrating on language, geography, global concepts, academic achievement, information analysis, communication skills, citizenship, technology, and career preparation. It emphasizes how important it is for students to gain bilingual and bicultural competence, therefore allowing them to become successful participants in the global community and economy.

**Why Dual Language Immersion? (Or, Better, Why Not?)**

When Annette was fifteen, her father enrolled her in boarding school, Santa Maria del Camino, in Puerta de Hierro, Madrid, Spain. Attendance at this unique international school was a world-class educational opportunity. It was there she fell in love with learning and then with sharing what she learned with others. The teachers at Santa Maria del Camino used many of the instructional methods advocated in this book. They modeled a love of learning Annette found to be contagious. Through the experiences these teachers provided, the students absorbed knowledge. They were taken to museums, historical monuments, plays, concerts,
operas, factories, markets, courts, government buildings, and so on. Anthropologists, scientists, architects, artists, and dancers conducted seminars. Students performed regularly in dance and musical concerts, theatre performances, and sports events. They investigated, experimented, discussed, debated, cooked, sewed, knitted, and painted. Excursions to the mountains, the seacoasts, the plains, and the forest stimulated the senses. Through this natural approach to learning, Annette became bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural. She also realized she would be a teacher.

Why not provide these experiences to every child? Why not provide this kind of education for free in public education? It can be done. Especially now, with the virtual opportunities available through technology, students can experience the world even if confined within the walls of the school building.

There is an immediate need for an education that prepares students to be able to take a global perspective. Thankfully, dual language immersion programs are gaining momentum throughout the United States as an exemplary means of educating all students and enriching their educational experience. Through dual language programs, students not only become proficient in two languages but also develop an understanding of and appreciation for the cultures associated with the languages—and very often in the process demonstrate high achievement in all core academic subjects (Cloud, Genesee, and Hamayan 2000). The doubts and stresses of the general public caused by the paradigm shift from traditional education to dual language immersion are typically relieved by the success dual language immersion students and teachers both experience.

Our own passionate quest has taken us on an exciting journey. We have enjoyed traveling, interviewing other experts, and teaching in dual language programs, but above all we have enjoyed seeing our students become fluent and literate in more than one language. We invite you to journey with us through the seven steps to a successful dual language immersion program. Turn the page and join us.
Step 5

Learning Through Hands-on Activities

I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.

—Chinese Proverb

Journal Entry
January 16, 2005

I consider the best teaching strategy of this dual language model to be the use of shelf activities. It is because of these shelf activities that I know my students’ needs are met. It is my way of challenging, providing remediation, and differentiating instruction. Today I observed Stephen naturally gravitated to the language activity center in order to practice his alphabetizing skills. I saw him repeatedly practicing in order to learn to mastery. I witnessed his inner desire to master this concept.

When my students are working at shelf activities everyone becomes an independent or cooperative learner and no one wastes time. They are completely engaged in the activities and through my observations I can see that they are constantly thinking and are being challenged by these multileveled shelf activities.

—Kindergarten Teacher
At the core of dual language immersion programs are meaningful hands-on shelf activities that allow students to become actively engaged in learning. They include interactive materials that make abstract concepts clear and concrete. By experimenting with concrete materials, students internalize academic concepts. The world can be grasped only by action, not by contemplation. The hand is more important than the ear and the eye. The hand drives the subsequent evolution of the brain. The hand is the cutting edge of the mind (Bronowski 1974).

In the primary grades, using real tools to perform real jobs encourages children to view themselves as workers rather than pretenders. People who are passionate about their work and who enjoy it are engaged and challenged by their job. When adults find no pleasure in their work, it is usually because it lacks challenge, interest, choice, and variety. Children are no different. Classroom shelf activities provide students with this challenge, interest, choice, and variety.

In the intermediate grades students work at process-based centers inventing, researching, constructing, analyzing, and solving real problems. Workbooks and worksheets don't bring skills and concepts to life. In order for students to gain a true understanding of academic concepts, they must become active learners rather than wait passively for a teacher to provide them with knowledge.

Teachers who observe children notice that they like to mimic adult behavior by doing things for themselves. Children who are allowed to be independent become self-disciplined. Students who are allowed to choose and work on meaningful shelf activities or process-based centers in the classroom develop a sense of worth and forge a work ethic, values that will benefit them throughout their lives. The effective teacher designs shelf activities or process-based centers that support a student-directed classroom, taking into consideration diverse learning styles and providing opportunities for each student to work at her own level. While working on activities, students can move about freely, choose the type of work they will do, and determine whether they will work independently or with others. They are held accountable for demonstrating respect for others, taking care of materials, working in a contained space, and returning activities to the shelves in the condition in which they found them.

The teacher's job is to model and encourage children to become observers of detail. This allows the children to discover knowledge and manage their environment. Rather than teaching facts, the teacher provides the freedom for children to develop interest and enthusiasm in their own work. Children enjoy making choices, exploring, and investigating. However, freedom includes limitations as well as boundaries and is earned through a child's ability to demonstrate responsibility. The teacher needs to make clear the structure and expectations for successful student-directed activities.

According to Maria Montessori, the most striking teaching tool, almost a magic wand, for releasing the normal expression of a child's natural gifts is a task
that requires movement of the hands guided by the intellect. Activities like these reveal the true child. We see children kindled with joy and indefatigable in their toil since their activities are intimately connected to their life and growth. Choice is now their guiding principle (Futrell 1998).

Classroom activities are arranged on open, reachable shelves, referred to as centers, so that students can access them easily. (If your classroom does not include durable wooden shelving, you can purchase inexpensive plastic shelves at hardware stores.) Each center houses activities related to a specific area of the curriculum: life skills, language arts, math, science, international studies, library, technology, and so on. All of the necessary materials for each activity are stored on a tray or in a box or plastic container. Visual appeal is important: activities must be presented in an orderly, inviting manner.

**Content-Based Centers**

A content-based (math, language arts, science, etc.) center should have a minimum of six shelf activities, available for at least six weeks (usually coinciding with a thematic unit), designed to give students hands-on practice toward mastering grade-level standards in the subject area. While homogenous (at the same reading level) guided reading groups are receiving small-group instruction, heterogeneous groups of students (ideally, one excellent reader, two average readers, and one struggling reader) rotate through the learning centers at twenty-minute intervals. Students should be allowed to interact and share ideas with one another using whisper voices.

A possible alternative to team rotations is to give individual students weekly menus of activities they need to complete that week. A menu like this allows the teacher to guide children who lack self-direction. It can be created by the teacher, arrived at collaboratively during a student-teacher conference, or written by the student and approved by the teacher. These menus can also be generic, listing all activities in all centers, for students to check off as they complete each one. The approach a teacher takes depends on the level of responsibility students are capable of as well as their ability to be self-directed learners.

Whenever possible, shelf activities should be designed so that students can check and verify their work themselves; activities must also be multileveled in order to meet the needs of diverse learners. Since the practice aspect of an activity is of prime importance, students in a primary classroom can revisit an activity as often as they remain interested in doing so. When children revisit an activity, they may approach it in a different manner and gain a diverse perspective. The teacher may also decide, based on assessment-on-the-run observations (see Step 6), to reteach or enrich the activity or help individual students reflect on their performance and accomplishments.
Teachers model and introduce each activity in a short minilesson before they place it in a center. First they define appropriate work spaces (not in front of doorways or in places that impede the flow of movement in the classroom) and show students how to walk to their work space with their activity container and establish a boundary (usually with a rug or placemat). Then they state and clarify the objectives of the activity, dramatically demonstrating the procedures to be followed, step-by-step. During the minilesson, teachers refer to the activity by name and make sure students know they are expected to call the activity by this name. If the activity can be corrected by students themselves, teachers explain and demonstrate this. At the conclusion of the minilesson, teachers demonstrate how to put the activity back in its storage container and return it to the shelf. Modeling and insisting on careful carrying of materials builds fine and gross motor skills in students and teaches them to move in space gracefully without spills, damages, bumps, falls, or accidents. Children become aware of what they are able to manage as well as respect the boundaries of other people. Allowing children to clean up their own accidents will build self-confidence, poise, and grace.

Sample Math Activity

For a primary-grade integrated unit on trees, a teacher created a math activity using ten blank cards in the shape of trees, ten cards on which either the Spanish number words **uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete, ocho, nueve, diez** or the English number words **one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten** were written or printed, and fifty-five Velcro apples. Students demonstrate that they understand...
stand the concept that each word signifies a particular quantity by matching the word cards with tree cards to which they have attached the correct number of Velcro apples. (You could also attach Velcro to word cards so that both the words and the apples could be attached to the tree cards.) This activity is self-correcting, because if it is completed properly, there will be no apples left. An enrichment might include removing the cards with the written number words and having the students write the correct number word on a blank card. Another idea is to have students alphabetize the number word cards. If remediation is necessary, teachers could provide a student with a number line from one to ten as a reference for sequencing the cards.

Sample Science Activity

In a science shelf activity, also related to the tree unit, students use a magnifying glass to examine different types of pinecones, the bark of a tree, and a cross-section of a tree trunk. Using their senses as they manipulate and explore the world around them, students notice the difference between the outside (bark) and the inside of the wood. They explore holding the magnifying glass closer to and farther away from the objects and determine the optimal distance. They then record their observations in the content-based journal provided as part of the activity.
An enrichment activity would be to have students create a list of words describing the organic material they are examining. Or the teacher could provide prompts: The wood looks like _______. The pinecone smells like _______. The bark feels like _______. As a remediation, teachers might provide materials for students to do texture rubbings of the items or include word cards to use in the sentence blanks.

Activities from the Early Learning Materials (ELM) Group

**Good Vibrations**

**Materials**
- 1 green oval basket
- 1 towel
- 1 sponge
- 1 tuning fork
- 1 50 ml beaker (to be filled with water at the start of the activity)

**Question**
What will happen to the water when I strike the tuning fork and insert it in the water?

**Procedure**
Open the towel and place the beaker full of water, the tuning fork, and the sponge on it. Holding the tuning fork by the ball, strike it on the edge of the table and hold it close to your ears. Strike it again and feel it gently with your thumb and index finger. Strike it one more time and hold it gently against the outside rim of the beaker. Strike it a fourth time and place it in water, dipping only the tips. Watch what happens to the water. Dry the tuning fork with the sponge and replace the materials in the basket.

**Explanation**
When the prongs of the tuning fork are struck, they vibrate. This causes molecules of air around them to vibrate, causing the water to move.

**Sink and Float**

**Materials**
- 1 red basket tray
- 1 measuring cup
- 1 petri dish
Learning Through Hands-on Activities

1 set of six-inch tongs
1 towel
1 sponge
2 cards, one labeled sink, the other labeled float

Objects
1 medium five-sixteenths-inch bolt
1 cork
1 wooden rod
1 key
1 shell
1 large three-eighths-inch nut
1 clothespin
1 paper clip

Question
What will happen to each of these objects when it is placed in water?

Procedure
Open the towel and center one card over the first half, the other over the second half. Place all of the objects in the petri dish. Fill the measuring cup with one cup of water. Begin dropping the objects in the water one by one. Retrieve the objects from the water using the tongs and place them on the towel under the appropriate card. Review with your teacher which objects float and which objects sink. Dry all materials and equipment and return them to the tray.

Explanation
When an object weighs less than an equal volume of water, it floats; when it weighs more than an equal volume of water, it sinks. The force is called displacement.

Phonetic Object Box

Materials
1 four-by-six-inch acrylic box to store miniature objects
1 felt underlayer
1 set of miniature objects
blank labels (laminated ones last longer)

Purpose
To introduce students to the idea that an object has a name that can be written to signify the object
Lesson

1. The teacher spreads out underlayer and places box above it.
2. Take out miniature objects one by one, and review each name.
3. Place the objects on the left side of the underlayer.
4. As the children watch, slowly write the name of one of the objects on a label.
5. After the children have read the word, place it next to the object.
6. Repeat for all of the objects.
7. Have the children read all the labels again.
8. Gather up the labels and have the children read them and then place them next to the correct object.
9. Staple the labels and make them into a booklet the children can use when they practice the activity independently.

Process-Based Centers for Intermediate Grades

The purpose of process-based centers is to stimulate higher-level thinking. Students are required to research, investigate, or explore a concept related to a grade-level curriculum standard and justify, defend, and debate what they discover.

For example, students in an intermediate classroom studying an integrated thematic unit on inventions might be given a toy wheelbarrow (a compound machine) and asked to determine what simple machines were used to form the wheelbarrow (an inclined plane, a wheel, an axle, and a lever).

Intermediate students studying ancient civilizations could be asked to construct a model of an ancient architectural site. First they would choose and research the site. Then they would submit an exhibit application, including a blueprint, a list of materials (and estimated cost), any special equipment needed, and an indication of which students will perform which tasks. After the teacher approves the application and the blueprint, students build their scale model. When the model is exhibited, they defend their representation, both orally and in writing, in terms of the environment and technological limitations of that era. There are self, peer, and teacher evaluations at the conclusion of the project.

I like doing center activities. They are fun to do. They help me spell words, and do math and patterns. My favorite one has Legos.

—Denver Renner, dual language first grader

I think that counting little objects in first grade and kindergarten was a fun way to learn number concept. It has helped me in the third grade with addition, sub-
traction, multiplication, and division. I have seen how much fun learning can turn into!

—Carly Catherine Renner, dual language third grader

Some of the most important educational tools I use in the classroom are multi-leveled content-area shelf activities that provide a variety of challenges for different types of learners. By providing these activities, I give the children the opportunity to work collaboratively or independently. The students are able to challenge themselves and as a result feel good about themselves and their accomplishments.

—Dual language teacher and mentor at J. Marlan Walker International School

Summary

Children learn best through personal experience and discovery. Children have a natural inner drive to manipulate and explore what is presented to them. Center activities are a venue for children to reach out, touch, and use their senses to learn. Their purpose is to encourage children to become independent workers and nurture in them a good self-image.