

Introducing the City School District of Albany's Dual Language Program

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Introduction

On March 29th at the Capital Organization of Language Teachers' (COLT) Regional Meeting, cosponsored by COLT and NYSAFLT, I had the opportunity to attend Nancy Ketz's keynote presentation "Let's Promote LOTE" (Languages Other Than English). One of the bulleted remarks in Nancy's PowerPoint presentation was "Blow your horn!" Nancy later attended a workshop that I presented entitled "Dual Language Education: A Great Approach to Second Language Acquisition" in which I highlighted the successes of the City School District of Albany's dual language program. After attending my presentation, Nancy encouraged me to "blow my horn" about our program. To promote development and expansion of successful second language programs statewide, it is critical that we share information about what we do. If language educators statewide can learn about innovative and successful programs such as our dual language program, then they will be in a better position to advocate within their school districts to implement successful language programs like ours and/or incorporate some of the ideas that we have employed in their own school districts across the state. I hope that some of you will consider working within your districts to either implement a dual language immersion program and/or, in the event that is not feasible, that you give strong consideration to implementing a content-based or related Foreign Language at the Elementary School (FLES) program.

First, I will begin by sharing a brief historical overview of my program, and then I will discuss the strategies, techniques, and resources I have used that have been helpful in developing successful second language learners. As I embark upon describing my program, it is important to

note that the strategies that my dual language colleagues and I employ in our small city school district dual language program in upstate New York have resulted, year after year, in our dual language students not only successfully acquiring a second language—both native English speakers and native Spanish speakers—but also, just as important for the success of our program, our students have consistently achieved a level 3 or 4 on the New York State English language arts assessment, along with the New York State math, science and social studies assessments.

In the spring of the 1999 school year, my previous superintendent allowed me to collaborate with the district grant writer in developing a proposal to plan for what was called at the time a “NYS Two-Way Bilingual” program (also referred to as a “Two-Way Immersion,” “Dual Language Enrichment,” or “Dual Language Immersion” program). A team of district staff then visited three successful dual language immersion programs on Long Island, and with my former principal, I also coconvened a planning committee that conducted research on best practices in dual language instruction and dual language programs. We then requested and received from the state Department of Education a three-year implementation grant that allowed us to begin implementing the program in the fall of 1999. The second year of the program, we also collaborated and submitted a proposal for a three-year Title VII enhancement grant, which was approved and which provided for additional support for parental involvement and literacy development for native Spanish-speaking students in the program. The New York State funds completed their cycle at the end in the spring semester in 2002, and the federal funding cycle ended in 2003.

Since the spring of 2003, my district has essentially continued the program without external funding, offering one linguistically integrated class per grade with roughly 50 percent Limited English Proficient (LEP), or English Language Learners (ELL), and 50 percent English

proficient (EP) students acquiring Spanish as a Second Language. Beginning in 2006–2007, my district began receiving Title III supplemental funds for half the salary of our building’s home school coordinator, and this year, beginning in January, Title III funds allowed us to add a bilingual teaching assistant to provide additional literacy support for the dual language students. Title III funds also helped provide for a dual language immersion school program last summer, along with some funds for supplemental Spanish language materials.

During the 2007–2008 academic school year, we had the following enrollments: 55 ELLs and 56 EP students acquiring Spanish in grades K–5. New Spanish-speaking ELL students may join our program any time during the school year and at any grade level. New English-speaking students enter our program generally at the kindergarten level. Older English-speaking students are enrolled in the program on a case-by-case basis beyond first grade due to the rigorous academic demands of learning content area curriculum through Spanish every other day. The children in the program may come from any part of the City of Albany and are provided transportation if they live at least 1.5 miles from the school.

Over the years, we have also served children whose families have come from China, Turkey, the Ukraine, Antigua, and other non-Spanish speaking countries, but all of those children who were not from a native Spanish-speaking background were required to have tested out of ESL in order to be placed in our program.

Some of Our Dual Language Program’s Strengths

Dedicated Staff: Dual language teachers believe in the benefits of dual language instruction and are very committed to meeting the needs of the children and families they serve. We currently have staff from Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Peru, Guatemala, Argentina, and the United States.

Considerable Parental Involvement and Commitment: We have enjoyed consistently strong participation in parent conferences, in events held either during the school day at bilingual family nights, and active involvement in the PTA in the various buildings in which we have been housed over the years. Dual language parents initiated a dual language committee that meets monthly to support the program's mission, and one of the PTA co-presidents this year is a dual language parent.

Considerable Community Support: Community support for the program includes enhanced family support services through partnerships and resources, as well as a free in-school tutoring program provided by students at the College of St. Rose. A community-based agency, Hispanic Outreach Services (HOS), also has been providing our students with a free in-school tutoring program, which began in the fall of this year. Our program has also enjoyed linkages to health services, adult educational programs, and other community-based network through the Albany Network of Hispanic Service Providers, a group that I convene once a month during the school year. On April 2nd, we will be hosting our eighth Annual Service Providers Fair at our school to provide an opportunity for all the families in our school community to learn about services and programs that can enhance their quality of life. Over the years, we have also hosted volunteers from SUNY Albany, Russell Sage College, and other local institutions of higher education, as well as Albany High School career exploration students interested in learning about dual language education.

A Linguistically and Thematically Integrated Program Model/Design: The program model we designed provides for the enriched development of both native language and second language literacy, as well as content area knowledge in both languages. Dual language students enrolled in our program receive language arts instruction daily in their native language, provided

by their classroom teachers homogeneously grouped by language proficiency. English language learners also receive an hour of English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction on a daily basis from one of our two full-time certified ESL teachers, and English proficient students receive 50 minutes of Spanish as a Second Language (SSL) instruction with me on a daily basis. Content instruction in math, social studies, and science is provided by the dual language classroom teachers—who are all fully bilingual and bi-literate—in Spanish on one day and the following lesson in English the next day on an alternating day schedule.

Strategies and Techniques

The following is a brief description of the strategies and techniques that I believe have been essential in developing successful second language learners. Through years of exploration and experimentation, I have found several key concepts that have helped me develop students who are successful second language learners.

1. Developing and implementing thematically integrated instructional units provide for an ideal medium through which students acquire a second language.
2. Teaching language through content and/or literature provides a context-rich medium for second language acquisition.
3. Immersing children in the target language from the first day of class by employing more than one modality at a time—visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile approaches—support the varied learning styles of our students. For example, class rules can be taught and constantly reinforced by using “Dame cinco” or “3-2-1 Paren, Miren, Escuchen,” which incorporate both visuals and kinesthetics in addition to auditory input.
4. Addressing multiple intelligences and learning styles makes learning fun for everyone. To facilitate this, I develop my lesson plans using a very simple form that I created as an advanced organizer to serve as framework for each unit that I develop for my SSL lessons.
5. Teaching children useful “passwords”—frequently needed phrases that children can use from day one—such as “Necesito ir al baño,” “¿Puedo tomar agua?”

(See *Languages and Children: Making the Match, Third Edition*. Curtain, H. and Dahlberg, C.A. (2004). Boston: Pearson Education. or *Passwords Perfectos: An illustrated collection of passwords for the Spanish classroom*. Langer de Ramirez, L. Brooklyn, NY: Mis cositas.)

Daily Routine

In my presentation, I also describe the daily routine below, which I incorporate within the thematically integrated units that I use with my kindergarten and first grade students. I begin each lesson with a warm-up sing-along on the rug that includes a few songs that I have taught in previous lessons. Next, I segue into calendar-related activities: 1, *prepara*re, 2, *para*re, y 3, *caminen hacia la mesa*.

Then I point to the month on the calendar and ask students, “¿En qué mes estamos?” (What month are we in?) After that, I have students count up to the date written on the laminated calendar by saying, “Cuenten conmigo.” Following that, I continue by reviewing what day it is *¿Qué día es hoy?* (What day was yesterday?) “*Ayer fue...*” and (What day tomorrow will be?) “*Mañana será...*” using hand gestures pointing behind my back and/or in a forward motion to convey the concepts of yesterday and tomorrow. I then go on to reinforce the names of the days of the week by singing “Lunes, martes, miércoles, jueves, viernes, sábado, seis y domingo, siete es. Son los días de la semana” with hand signals for the numbers, and we finish up our calendar study on the rug by forming a line and singing/dancing the names of the months sung to the tune of “La Macarena.” We then march to the Spanish alphabet, singing “A, B, C, Ch...” a song written by Linda Quiroz with a tune similar to La Macarena as well. After I have taught a thematic unit on the weather, we learn a wonderful song, “¿Qué tiempo hace hoy?” by Patti Lozano, to teach/reinforce weather vocabulary. I sing while employing hand signals for sunny, cloudy, rainy, etc. that go with the song. I have also provided students the opportunity to take turn writing an X above the appropriate weather symbol(s) on a laminated weather graph.

To reinforce thematic vocabulary and concept development, I read a theme-related story.

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For example, if students are learning about farm animals, then I read fiction or nonfiction theme-related books such as *La vaca que decía "oink"* (by Bernard Most) and then follow up with a theme-related game, whenever possible, such as "A, E, I, O, U, ¿qué animal de la granja prefieres tú?" while tossing around a Spanish cloth globe. When a child ends on tú, he or she gets to pick up a theme-related realia (prop) from the center of the circle and state, "Yo prefiero un/a..."

Research indicates that one of the most successful strategies for internalizing information is through teaching others. So I often have students take turns playing the teacher in "Simón Dice." To facilitate our final transition back to the table, before beginning "Simón Dice," I present instructions for the day's art activity or coloring page(s) related to the theme. That way, as students are eliminated while playing "Simón Dice," they can pick up the art activities and supplies set out for them and get to work at their seats.

For the children who finish quickly, I have baskets of very low-level emergent readers, "*Libritos míos*" from The Ohio State University Reading Recovery/Descubriendo la lectura, focus on simple sight words in black and white picture books and a basket of predictable children's books in Spanish. While students are doing "artwork," it is an ideal time to circulate and provide more individualized instruction and/or assess how students are learning.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to share a few inexpensive but invaluable ideas I have used. Shower boards, available at Home Depot, can be cut up into multiple small white boards along with strips of old sweat pants that can be used for erasers for white boards. Science boards available at business supply stores can serve as song boards for thematic units by sticking eight sheet protectors on each board with Velcro buttons. This has allowed me to quickly post my unit's

songs. You can create thematic magnets using magnetic business cards that can be covered with pictures that you find on Google Images Web page. I use a magic box that I made from an old piñata treasure chest by cutting out its back. You can make your own from a large Quaker Oats box by following the directions included in *Languages and Children: Making the Match, Third Edition (2004)* by Curtan and Dahlberg.