

«WHY DO WE DO THIS?» A TWO-WAY IMMERSION SCHOOL PRINCIPAL'S REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLES OF PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND HER OWN, IN THE PROGRAM

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Resumen

El presente artículo ofrece las reflexiones de la directora del colegio con mayor tradición en inmersión de doble vía en el sur de California a propósito de algunos de los factores clave que afectan positivamente al programa, por ejemplo, la participación activa de los padres, el compromiso de los maestros y el apoyo de la dirección. Además, incluye algunos de los desafíos más importantes que debe afrontar continuamente en su trabajo, como la escasez de maestros cualificados y de aquellos con dominio de la lengua minoritaria, la escasez de fondos y de materiales en la lengua minoritaria, y el impacto de las leyes federales y estatales educativas sobre la autonomía del programa, para finalizar con varias sugerencias, basadas en su experiencia profesional, para aquellas escuelas interesadas en la implantación de este innovador enfoque educativo. La información provista aparece conectada a lo largo del artículo con aportaciones recientes de la bibliografía sobre los programas de inmersión de doble vía en Estados Unidos, para finalizar con algunas conclusiones de cara al futuro.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Inmersión de doble vía, educación dual, bilingüismo.

Abstract

The present article offers the reflections of the principal of the longest-running two-way immersion school in Southern California on some of the key factors positively impacting the program, namely parental involvement, teacher commitment, and principal support. Additionally, it includes some of the critical challenges she must continuously face as part of her job, i.e., scarcity of qualified and minority language proficient teachers, lack of funding and adequate materials in the minority language, as well as the impact of federal and state education laws on the autonomy of the program. She also gave some recommendations, based on her professional experience, for those schools interested in the implementation of this innovative educational approach. The information provided throughout the article is connected to recent research on two-way programs in the United States and finalizes with some conclusions for the future.

KEY WORDS: Two-way immersion, dual language education, bilingualism.

1. Introduction

According to the Center for Applied Linguistics (2009a), two-way immersion is «a form of dual language education in which native English speakers and native speakers of another language are integrated for academic content instruction through both English and the partner language.» In placing together speakers from both language groups for all or most of the day, the program aims to help students develop high levels of linguistic and academic proficiency in both languages, as well as positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors toward members

of other ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups, while maintaining identical academic standards and curriculum to those in place in regular programs (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2009a; de Jong, 2002; Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003).

Scholarly research has shown the positive impact of two-way immersion on students' linguistic and academic abilities. Thus, students in these programs consistently outperform their peers academically (Alanis, 2000; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Lopez & Tashakkori, 2004), achieve bilingualism and biliteracy (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006), develop favorable attitudes toward bilingualism, the programs, and other cultural groups (Cazabon, Lambert, & Hall, 1993; Lambert & Cazabon, 1994; Lindholm-Leary, 2001), and cultivate a more positive sense of identity (Reyes & Vallone, 2007). Naturally, this compendium of benefits has largely contributed to the expansion of this educational approach in the United States. According to recent data (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2009b), there are 346 such programs in 27 states of the nation.

Two-way immersion may adopt different models, although the most widespread are 90/10 and 50/50 (Howard et al., 2003). In a 90/10 model («minority language dominant»), students spend 90% of their time in the minority language initially; the presence of this language progressively decreases, and that of English similarly increases, as students advance through the grades until, usually by 4th grade, both languages are used in equal amounts of time. On the other hand, a 50/50 model («balanced») provides students with instruction in both the majority and the minority language in equal amounts of time from the beginning of their schooling (Howard et al., 2003).

The actual implementation of these programs demands a significant time commitment on the part of parents, teachers, and administrators because, generally speaking, the programs begin in the lower elementary grades and extend a minimum of five to seven years, reaching in some cases up to 12 years if implemented as well in middle and high school (Espino-Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2003; Lindholm-Leary, 2001). Additionally, an effort of this magnitude requires sufficient time for planning and development; a sound theoretical, research-based, foundation; adequacy and availability of resources and materials; an involved group of stakeholders, and well-trained faculty members who possess, additionally, high proficiency levels in the languages of instruction (Howard, Sugarman, Christian, Lindholm-Leary, & Rogers, 2005).

While it seems difficult to disentangle the intertwining effects of these factors, the literature on the topic appears to point to administrative support, the presence of highly qualified teachers, and parental involvement as critical keys in the success of the programs (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000; Espino-Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2003; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Shannon & Milian, 2002). With these premises in mind, the present article intends to add to the body of research in the area by interviewing the principal of one of the most successful (also the longest running) two-way immersion schools in Southern California on the role of the aforementioned stakeholders (administrators, teachers, and parents) in the continuously, uninterrupted, success of her program.

2. Methodology

2.1 Setting

The study was conducted in a K-5 elementary school located in a small school district in Southern California. During the 2008-2009 school year the school's student body was listed at approximately 700 students, slightly more than 12% and 10% of whom were classified as English Language Learners (ELLs) and qualified for free or reduced lunch under programs federal Title I, respectively. Kindergarteners through 3rd graders participated in California's class size reduction initiative, which limits to 20 the maximum number of students per class. Class sizes in 4th and 5th grades, on the other hand, were slightly higher, averaging 29 pupils each. Among those students providing their ethnic origin on enrollment, nearly 30% of them were classified as White, 19% as Latino, and 16% as Asian.

Due to declining student enrollments in the past, the school was closed temporarily, yet was reopened by the district in 1994 as a specialized language school to house the district's long-established two-way immersion programs: Spanish-English, and Japanese-English. Currently, 22 of its 32 classrooms are part of the former and the remaining 10 of the latter¹. Both programs are implemented schoolwide, which means that every student must participate in one or the other.

The school enjoys a well-earned reputation for academic excellence. In fact, it was ranked at the 10th decile statewide, and its Academic Performance Index² (API) reached 903 out of a possible 1000 at the end of the 2007-2008 school year. Moreover, the percentages of students scoring at the «proficient» level, as established in the federal educational law No Child Left Behind (NCLB), reached 75% in Language Arts, 85% in Math, and 79% in Science. Finally, disaggregated data showed its English learners from low socio-economic status outperforming their district peers. As a result of these figures, and of the fact that the school is not considered a neighborhood school, numerous parents from the various zoning areas of the district have eagerly attempted to enroll their children in it. Yet, to prevent overloads, school administrators have implemented a rigorous procedure to maintain their cap. Thus, first priority is given to siblings of current students at the time of enrollment, followed by native speakers of Spanish and Japanese. Applicants not meeting either requirement participate in a general lottery, designed to avoid favoritism while guaranteeing equal selection opportunities³ for all participants. This includes students with learning disabilities. In fact, some autistic, handicapped, hard-of-hearing, and speech-impaired students have participated, and been selected, in the lottery in recent years. Once enrolled, they are served, as any other student, by district specialized personnel, such as speech therapists, psychologists, and nurses, or by part-time resource specialists working with individual cases on an «as needed» basis.

1 Although comments in the «Findings» section of this paper may allude to the Japanese immersion program, it is really the Spanish immersion program that constitutes the purpose of this investigation.

2 The API is a coefficient that summarizes the performance of each California school in the annual statewide Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program.

3 Students' proficiency in Spanish is assessed with a standardized test in this language (Pre-LAS español), which is administered in the spring prior to their entering kindergarten. Should the results of the test determine that the students do not possess native-like proficiency in Spanish, they are placed in the general lottery.

Parents of newly accepted students participate in an orientation meeting, held prior to the start of the academic year, during which they are informed of the goals and objectives of the two-way immersion program, the time distribution of the languages of instruction through the grades, and general curriculum specifications. Special emphasis is placed at this time on making parents aware that though the school curriculum is initially taught almost completely, and later partially, in either Spanish or Japanese, its content is similar to that of any other public school in the district.

When it was first established, the school replicated the Canadian immersion model (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). Thus, students were immersed in Spanish since the start of their schooling, except for a daily hour of English instruction beginning in 3rd grade. However, the faculty's later push for a two-way immersion model resulted in both Spanish and English being provided on a daily basis. Currently, the school implements a 60/40 model, in which students spend 60% of their instructional time in and through English and the remaining 40% in and through Spanish by 5th grade. Naturally, these percentages are achieved progressively. Thus, Kindergarteners and 1st graders receive academic instruction only in Spanish, while English is restricted to their visits to the computer lab or the library, and to parents' readings in class as part of the district's literacy campaigns. Second and 3rd graders, on the other hand, receive one hour of English instruction a day; finally, the curriculum for 4th graders stipulates either one content area being taught in English or an extension of the daily English literacy block to increase students' exposure to this language.

2.2 Subject

The school principal is a veteran educator with more than 30 years of experience in the district as a teacher, bilingual coordinator, English Language Development (ELD) coordinator, district advisor, and principal. Her educational background includes a B.A. and an M.A. in Education, a permanent California teaching credential, and a Spanish bilingual credential. Additionally, she had held different officer positions in various teaching organizations as part of her own professional development.

She became principal at the school after having been personally contacted by the district superintendent, who was aware of her outstanding performance in the aforementioned jobs. Her predecessor had decided to pursue a new job opportunity in the middle of the academic year, and the school needed an experienced individual to fill the vacancy on an interim basis until a replacement could be found. She accepted the challenge on condition that she could return to her regular position at the end of her short tenure if she so desired. Yet, at the time of the interview, she was well into her 4th year in the job.

2.3 Instrument and Data collection and analysis

The instrument used to gather information for this project was a semi-structured questionnaire developed by the author, consisting of various questions related to the role of administrators, parents, and teachers in the daily workings of the two-way program. The interview, conducted in the principal's office, lasted approximately 90 minutes and was recorded, and later transcribed, by the author's research assistant. Open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) was used to identify the main themes emerging in the responses.

3. Findings and Discussion

According to the principal, and concurrent with the literature on the topic, parental involvement, teacher commitment, and principal supervision played key roles in the success of the two-way immersion program, as well as in students' continuous linguistic and academic improvement in two languages (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000; Espino-Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2003; Lindholm-Leary, 2001).

3.1 Parents

For the principal, the success of the program was largely dependent on two factors revolving around parents: the stability of the student population and parents' own involvement in school activities and routines. Maintaining low student transiency rates for six years, which was the expected duration of the program, was crucial because it allowed teachers sufficient time to develop students' linguistic and academic skills in two languages. To reinforce the importance of this factor, an orientation meeting was held every spring, during which parents of prospective applicants were informed that, should their job prospects be unstable and, thereby, their stay in the city an uncertainty, the program might not be the most adequate option for their children. Notwithstanding these efforts, it was not always possible to prevent families from leaving the area. When this happened, vacancies were filled in the least obtrusive way possible. Thus, kindergarten openings were filled with students from the existing waiting list. Yet, Spanish proficiency was crucial for the remaining grades, because the principal wanted to make sure that selected students were good models of the language: «Typically, we take students who just came from, and have been educated in, their country of origin; the teacher will interview them and, if she feels that they can be successful, we will take them.»

The school's accountability report card showed an almost incredible 88% of parents holding graduate degrees. Naturally, the school attempted to take advantage of this fact by inviting parents to volunteer in classrooms, chaperon fieldtrips, offer insights prior to purchasing instructional materials, help with art displays, music performances, and the design and publication of classroom and/or school newsletters, and engage their business contacts in the organization of school fundraisers, carnivals, and festivals. Moneys collected at these events were used to fund the school's computer lab, an Art teacher, and classroom field trips, among other activities. For the principal, the parents' contributions to these events were priceless; because they showed parents appreciation for the program and its benefits: «They are the ones who best understand the advantages of speaking another language and want the best for their children.»

An interesting outcome of the increasing parental involvement in school activities was the development of strong bonds among families in the area, which resulted in a visible sense of community revolving around the school. As the principal explained, «it comes to a point when the school becomes a small part of the social life of each family.» This positive atmosphere, coupled with the school's reputation for academic excellence, had an unexpected repercussion in the neighborhood: the principal had witnessed a significantly upward change in the socioeconomic status of the population of the area, generated by newly arrived, middle and upper-middle class, parents, eager to enroll their children in the program:

Well, a lot of parents have moved here because of our school in general. Our schools were like a little island surrounded by Los Angeles Unified (School District), but our quality is probably a bit higher than a lot of their schools, and our test scores are pretty high. So, there are always parents that come and tell me, 'I just moved to this area and bought a house in the neighborhood so that my child can come to this school.'

However, the comfortable standard of living of a majority of the families also brought along serious disadvantages related to the district's assignment of specialized personnel to the school. As the principal explained, this was a contentious issue because the district appeared to rely on parents' own initiatives to address their children's individual needs instead of proactively assuming its own responsibilities:

We end up getting the least resources because we least need them, because we end up having the least needy population. For example, most of our kids have health insurance; if they have a health problem, their parents will take care of it. Here, we only have the nurse one day a week and it is a short day. My staff does not understand that other schools have a nurse for two days because that nurse is trying to find resources for a needy family. That is not an issue with most of our families because, due to our demographics, our nurse does not have a lot to do when she is here. Most of our kids are taken care of at home.

Despite this challenge, parents' involvement appeared to pay off. Children continued to excel academically, and new families continued to be drawn to the area thanks to the positive comments and feedback of those already reaping the benefits of the program.

3.2 Teachers

Teachers who are proficient in the minority language are especially valuable in two-way programs because students model and refine their linguistic development after them. Thereby, while most of the teachers in the Spanish immersion program were native Spanish speakers, those who were not were required to possess very high levels of proficiency in this language in order to be able to provide instruction in it. This was necessary because, according to the design of the program, students remained together in self-contained classrooms during the day and did not change classes or teachers. Only in some isolated cases did teachers team-teach. For example, a 2nd grade teacher from Spain did not feel comfortable teaching English reading because of the complexities of the language required to provide some grammar explanations. After sharing her concerns with a more English-proficient colleague, they decided to switch their respective students after lunch time and thereby teach in their native languages to the two student groups.

However, finding proficient Spanish-speaking personnel posed two challenges that were difficult to circumvent: a scarcity of qualified individuals possessing linguistic and academic skills in Spanish to teach in this language in the upper elementary grades, and federal and state mandates regulating the necessary credentials to teach in languages other than English in schools. In regards to the former, the principal explained that the absence of foreign and second language teaching in U.S. elementary and middle schools had restricted the number of individuals able to develop or maintain their foreign or second language skills. To illustrate her contention, she provided an example involving a recent interviewee:

We just interviewed for an opening in the Japanese immersion program. The candidate was really strong and we liked her very much. She was an American-born Japanese who had attended Japanese Saturday school and had teaching experience. She also answered questions well, had really good references, great ideas for classroom management, and a good understanding of curriculum and content; the problem was that, in the interview, we require a writing sample and we also ask several questions in Japanese. Well, she just didn't have it. When we evaluated afterwards, I asked how her Japanese was and they [committee members] said that it was not strong enough for our program. She was a really strong applicant, but we just can't compromise that. The teachers are the language models for our children.

Complying with federal and state laws requiring teachers to be in possession of appropriate credentials to teach in languages other than English was an additional challenge for prospective candidates. Ironically, this situation resembled a vicious circle in which Spanish proficient individuals might not be in possession of the necessary teaching credential, while those in possession of the credential might not have the Spanish proficiency of the former. The principal explained that, when pressed to choose, she preferred candidates with appropriate language skills. Proficient speakers of the minority language could always gain the experience and knowledge they needed while on the job and by enrolling in credential courses. Language proficiency, on the other hand, was more difficult to attain:

We can't find people who can communicate with the students at certain levels. They don't have the vocabulary. They need both languages and now they need to have a California credential with No Child Left Behind. So, it is really a challenge. It is hard enough to find staff because, when I am looking to hire, I am looking for a strong target language and a California credential. But, sometimes, it is like, 'which of those do you give up?' And we usually give up the credential. If they are strong in the target language there are ways in which we can place them or ways that we can support them so that we can keep them. So, then, we have people who are working and trying to get the credential at the same time.

Incidentally, she explained that enrollment in credential courses benefited new faculty hires as well as the school itself, because these courses exposed attendees to current second language acquisition research findings, theories, and methods, thereby familiarizing enrollees with recent developments and trends in the field. The pedagogical component of the coursework was of extraordinary importance for the principal because she thought that the success of the program largely depended on innovative teaching methods:

The better the methods, the higher the achievement. Some teachers don't have a background and got fixated on bad methods. The pedagogy might be off, or management of the pedagogy might be boring with worksheets and poor vocabulary. The teaching methodology must be differentiated and fun. Children do better in the target language if and when the methodology is better.

To ensure that only qualified teachers taught at the school⁴, the principal became deeply involved in the teacher hiring process. Generally, the school initiated this process by

4 All the teachers at the school were fully credentialed. They averaged 12.1 years of teaching experience while their average number of years teaching in district schools was 9.4.

publicizing its openings on both its and the district's website. After the deadline was over, district office clerks preselected those applications pertaining to individuals with the highest Spanish abilities; they then facilitated this information to the principal who, in turn, paper screened and rank-ordered the applicants and, together with the school selection committee, conducted subsequent personal interviews with each candidate. During the interview, applicants were asked about their attitudes toward teaching and two-way programs, personality traits, flexibility to adapt to unexpected circumstances, ability to collaborate with others, and knowledge of teaching theory and second language acquisition methods. They were also presented with practical scenarios involving real-life classroom situations in order to evaluate their reactions while under stress. For the principal, this was necessary due to her having «lost a lot of teachers who came here not realizing how hard [the job] was going to be.»

To avoid the loss of qualified yet inexperienced personnel, the school provided all faculty members with various degrees of support. Thus, new hires were initially paired up with experienced mentors who exposed them to the intricacies of two-way programs, and both new hires as well as current faculty members were encouraged to attend training sessions related to dual language education. Additionally, faculty planned lessons together during the school day by grade level and within language. These joint sessions intended to benefit novice teachers by augmenting their knowledge and understanding of different program components and by familiarizing them with proven second language teaching strategies and techniques. As an additional perk, the sessions also minimized tensions with some parents, who were reluctant to have their children placed in classrooms with new, inexperienced, teachers. As the principal explained, «...that makes the parents happy too, because a lot of them say, 'Oh! I don't want the new teacher. I want so-and-so.' Well, as I tell them now, so-and-so is doing the planning for both of them.»

3.3 The principal

In regards to her own responsibilities, the principal saw herself as the supervisor and coordinator of the program, as well as its main advocate. Consequently, she strived to disseminate information about the program among faculty members, provide the latter with adequate textbooks and materials, and encourage them to attend conferences and workshops, while working tirelessly to ensure that students' academic achievement improved year after year. As for her relationship with the parents, she attempted to create a welcoming atmosphere that valued their contributions and participation. Her command of Spanish was an important advantage in this regard, because she was able to address many of them in their respective native languages (English and/or Spanish) without translation. In fact, she thought that second language learning experience should constitute an additional requirement for her job:

...you do not have to be the most proficient second language person, but you have to understand second language acquisition and like it. So, it is hard for me to imagine someone who has never bothered to learn a second language wanting to be the principal of an immersion school. I love being able to communicate in Spanish and use my Spanish. And now, I am learning Japanese. It is very exciting. And I love it.

When asked to identify those factors contributing to the success of the program, she explained that, first and foremost, the school must develop a clear vision and mission («What are we about? What do we want to accomplish? What do we emphasize?»), as well as be able to count on faculty who are wholly sold on the program. In regards to the first aspect, she described the mission of her school as developing well-rounded students who, besides becoming bilingual and biliterate, learned to enjoy the arts as an integral component of their education («Our kids do a lot of singing, they play instruments, and they do a lot of visual arts. We have a lot of visual activities and music»). Secondly, counting on teachers who believed in the program was critical for her because, after all, they were ultimately responsible for the progress of the students: «You've got to believe that it works and that it is a good thing for the children.»

Accomplishing the program's objectives was not easy. On the contrary, the principal faced ongoing challenges such as budget issues, supply of adequate materials, federal and state mandates, students' linguistic and academic progress, as well as teacher burnout. For her, financially-related issues were troublesome because the district did not provide the school with extra funds despite its additional expenses on materials, textbooks, and resources in three languages, or the necessary extra teacher preparation and training. She questioned this decision and blamed district officials for not having been able to find an acceptable solution to this situation: «To provide materials to the Japanese teachers, we have to order things from Japan; also, we spend a lot of money in translations and copying because we create our own materials. Problem is... we have never had people in the district who truly understand what the program is about.»

Access to high quality materials in Spanish adapted to the needs of the school was also problematic. Materials in Spanish were not hard to obtain, thanks to the school and the area's proximity to Mexico; yet, as the principal explained, «there are so few immersion schools that they are not a good market for publishers. None of them has written a Spanish-language-for-immersion textbook. There are not enough of us to make it worthwhile.» As a result, the school used regular textbooks written in Spanish, which teachers had to adapt to their specific circumstances in order to improve students' understanding of the material.

Complying with federal and state laws placing increasing accountability demands on the school was stressful for teachers and students because, every year, students' scores in their annual standardized tests were expected to surpass those of the prior year. Yet, authorities did not appear to consider that having to cover common district curricula in two languages had an impact on students' outcomes and that these outcomes could be misleading. As an example, students received Math instruction in Spanish at the school, but their annual standardized Math tests were administered in English; hence, students might not necessarily demonstrate all the Math knowledge they possessed in their responses because of their lack of command of the specific English terminology. The principals' position in this regard was understandable:

A lot of pressure on the accountability side and very rigid curricula in all areas? It is almost impossible to cover, let alone in an immersion school with a second language but not enough money. High expectations and fewer resources? Hello? Do more with less? It is really hard.

The principal was aware that, despite having been immersed in Spanish since kindergarten, monolingual English students were not achieving high levels of proficiency in this language («Linguistically, our children have basic communication, listening, and comprehension skills in the target language. They are also able to do many academic tasks in it, but I wouldn't say every single thing»). However, for her, these students were in an enviable position when compared with their peers enrolled in mainstream English programs in other public schools of the district. Witnessing first-hand children's progress in two languages on a daily basis reinforced her belief in the need for the spread of dual language education nationwide:

Everybody should have another language and, if you help children when they are children, it is much simpler and more effective than trying to add later on. The most horrifying thing I can think of is that we have these Spanish-speaking children and we are rapidly extinguishing their Spanish due to our short-sightedness. I would certainly like to see every bilingual child in a program like this, where they can remain bilingual and extend their language and literacy. I think it is wonderful for the English-speaking children too, so we can become a less monolingual country.

Finally, the demands of the program frequently acted as a deterrent for faculty to remain at the school long into their tenure. Even among candidates showing «a strong work ethic, an understanding of the principles of second language acquisition, and a willingness to do the extra work needed to put in language acquisition beyond just teaching the curriculum», the qualities the principal valued the most, only those with a very strong personal commitment to two-way immersion could overcome the difficulties associated to the program:

Why do we do this? Here we work twice as hard. You do it because you love it. Because you love being in a multilingual environment. The first thing you need in order to be, and remain, here is to believe in the program. Otherwise, it is not worth it.

Notwithstanding these challenges, and thanks to her supervision and the hard work of its stakeholders, the school continues to reach the highest standardized test scores overall in the district. When asked to share her insights on the foundations of this success, the principal offered the following recommendations:

- start with kindergarten and don't compromise the target language;
- maintain teacher quality and train your teachers on second language acquisition;
- supply adequate material;
- prepare your parents for the long haul and don't bow to the pressure of watering down the curriculum, because there will be pressure to do so;
- network with other two-way immersion schools and learn from the pioneers;
- attend professional development sessions and be informed of research; and
- believe that all children can learn and that they are not going to sacrifice their English. That it is not an either/or in brain development. Above all, believe in additive bilingualism.

4. Discussion

The principal's insights offered very valuable information on the roles of parents and faculty members, as well as her own, in the two-way immersion program. Concurrent with previous research these are the stakeholders most critically contributing to the success of this type of education (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000; de Jong, 2002; Espino-Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2003; Freeman, Freeman, & Mercury, 2005).

For Espino-Calderón and Minaya-Rowe (2003), as well as for Lindholm-Leary (2005), establishing strong home-school relationships is a necessary step in children's development of bilingualism and biliteracy in two-way programs. Moreover, according to Cloud, Genesee, and Hamayan (2000), parents who attend orientation meetings, receive updated information on projects, and are invited to participate in the organization of school activities and events tend to become more involved in the daily operations of two-way programs, regardless of economic status, race, and educational background. In doing so, they gain a better understanding of the purpose, goals, and effectiveness of two-way immersion, as well as the importance of learning a second language (Ramos, 2007; Shannon & Milian, 2002). Furthermore, their newly-gained knowledge of the intricacies of the program helps them convey more effectively to their children the advantages of the continuous development of their linguistic and academic skills in two languages (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000).

Being aware of the findings of the research, the principal invited parents to participate in different conventional and non-conventional activities at the school site (Lindholm-Leary, 2001), i.e., attending regularly scheduled parent meetings, helping in the library and the computer lab, organizing fundraising campaigns, and assisting teachers in the classroom as well as during class parties, celebrations, and students' art and music shows, to name a few. Interestingly, many of these extracurricular activities were not funded by the district, which propelled several parents to take it upon themselves to contact local businesses and merchants and ask them for donations to cover the costs associated to the events; moreover, many parents were willing to work around their schedules to attend district board meetings and host community events when necessary; finally, parents also used their own expertise to provide individual student tutoring and make diverse professional presentations in various classrooms. Naturally, their socioeconomic and educational levels constituted an extraordinary advantage in this regard and many of those resources would have been unattainable otherwise. Along these lines, it seems necessary to note that parent education and socioeconomic status are directly related to school involvement; in fact, the higher the former, the more the latter (Howard & Loeb, 1998). Adding to this mix, the welcoming school environment created by the principal increased the sense of belonging for students and families, which turned parents into the two-way program's strongest supporters and most fervent advocates.

The excellent reputation of the program transcended district boundaries and resulted in many families relocating to the area. Personal friendships and recommendations appeared to be the main reasons behind this decision for many of the new arrivals. Regardless of whether their interest in the program was instrumental (positive cross-cultural attitudes, better job opportunities...) or integrative (heritage language maintenance, ethnic pride...), parents sought an opportunity for their children to enjoy the benefits of dual language education (Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Ramos, 2007).

In regards to two-way faculty, they must possess appropriate credentials, demonstrate knowledge of subject matter and curricular issues, be aware of instructional and classroom management strategies, and have native or native-like ability in the languages of instruction (Lindholm-Leary, 2005). It was precisely the latter aspect that most concerned the principal in her quest to hire highly qualified faculty, because of the scarcity of Spanish proficient personnel who could teach in this language in the upper grades. While some prospective candidates were able to converse in Spanish about issues not requiring the use of complex vocabulary and/or structures during the personal interview prior to their hiring, they struggled when asked about more academic topics. These limitations were also apparent when they were asked to provide written samples in Spanish. This clearly illustrates the existing distinction between the social and academic levels of the language, or BICS and CALP⁵ (Les-sow-Hurley, 2009). While this issue might not be as critical in lower elementary, it acquires extraordinary importance in the upper grades because the demands of the curriculum require candidates with solid mastery of the language in order to be able to teach academic content in it. Naturally, this cannot be accomplished when candidates show insecurities due to linguistic gaps affecting grammar and content for example (Ramos, Dwyer, & Perez-Prado, 2003).

Possession of the appropriate credential was another challenge that limited the number of prospective applicants for the program. State regulations mandating teachers to obtain the necessary authorizations relied on research showing that teachers with credentials, training, and experience felt more efficient than colleagues without these qualifications (Lindholm-Leary, 2001). However, this posed a problem for the principal because, in trying to comply with the mandates, she felt she was losing some excellent Spanish proficient candidates who were not adequately credentialed. Hence, after much deliberation, she was leaned towards hiring teachers with proficiency in Spanish to provide students with good linguistic models. The school offered these new hires initial training in lesson preparation and curriculum and material development. Later on, the principal's budget allocations set aside funds that allowed them to attend conferences on second language acquisition theories and methods, instructional strategies, and the organization of Teachers' Learning Communities (Espino-Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2003).

Lastly, the principal explained that she had lost a few teachers due to the inherent hardships of the job, despite their proven passion for, and belief in the program (de Jong, 2002). In an attempt to remedy this problem, she organized joint faculty meetings by grade level and specific language of instruction, as well as weekly joint lesson planning sessions to provide faculty with the necessary support (Espino-Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2003). Along the same lines, prospective applicants were presented with some factual scenarios during their interviews that, at least in theory, exposed them to real classroom situations. While it was impossible to reenact reality, candidates were able to preview some of the difficulties they might face if selected for the program, and thereby have more realistic expectations about the job.

The principal saw herself as a combination of program supervisor, coordinator, and advocate. As such, she invested a great deal of time and energy making sure that the pieces were assembled correctly and worked to satisfaction. Her general duties included providing teachers with adequate materials and resources in two languages, becoming involved in faculty and students' selection processes, and increasing parental involvement. Additionally,

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being aware of the emotional drains derived from teaching in two-way programs, she strived to make faculty members feel appreciated by providing them with positive feedback and the necessary support in every possible way. This included providing faculty with time for planning and curriculum development, funding their attendance to professional development conferences and workshops, and facilitating their visits to other two-way schools. Finally, she made the objectives of the program clear to parents, included parents from both language groups in school activities and events as much as possible, and went out of her way to respond to their needs and concerns.

As an advocate for the program, she openly shared her convictions and enthusiasm with parents, teachers, and school board and community members, making sure that her views, attitudes, and expectations were apparent to teachers, parents, and students alike (Soltero, 2004). Moreover, she personally decided to lead by example and demonstrate her commitment to the program's goals, as well as her own interest in bilingualism and biliteracy, by becoming a third language learner herself (de Jong, 2002).

In sum, in performing her duties, she demonstrated the characteristics of exemplary principals of two-way immersion programs: strong administrative leadership, knowledge of and commitment to the program, and proactive decision-making and actions (Freeman, Freeman, & Mercury, 2005).

5 Conclusion

The success of two-way immersion programs relies on the combination of many interacting components. Given the impossibility of examining all of them individually, this project focused on what could be broadly considered the impact of the human factor (namely teachers, parents, and the principal) on the daily operations and success of the longest running such program in southern California. The mixture of qualified teachers, involved parents, and a savvy principal contributed very positively to the development of students' linguistic and academic progress in two languages. For the principal, parental involvement and understanding of the program was critical in ensuring that families remained in the area for the duration of the program, that they supported the school's biliteracy efforts, and that they helped procure and secure additional funds for extracurricular activities. Teachers who understood the program and were willing to work in it were also essential since they provided students with good language models. Finally, the principal's supervision helped coordinate a well-functioning machine.

The findings of this manuscript are limited to one two-way immersion school principal's opinions on the issues being investigated. Naturally, other principals' views on the same topics might differ, depending on some of the factors noted here, namely school site location, socioeconomic status of the area, parental involvement, or support from district authorities, among others. Therefore, conducting similar investigations with other principals will augment our knowledge of the various factors impacting the design and implementation of two-way programs, while helping interested individuals gain a deeper understanding of the intricacies of a very innovative and successful, yet intricate, educational approach.

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