

# Two-Way Immersion Education: The Basics

**D**ual language programs use two languages for literacy and content instruction for all students. In the United States, programs use English and a partner language, often Spanish. The programs provide the same academic content and address the same standards as other educational programs. They provide instruction in the two languages over an extended period of time, from kindergarten through at least fifth grade. Instruction is in the partner language at least 50% of the time.

Two-way immersion, a kind of dual language education that combines students from two language groups for instruction in both of their languages, has been in existence for nearly 40 years, and its popularity has grown. During the first 20 years, the number of new programs remained relatively low. Only 30 programs were known to exist in the mid-1980s (Lindholm, 1987). Over the past 15 years, however, the number of programs has risen rapidly. Recently, 315 programs were documented (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2005). The majority of them are Spanish/English programs in public elementary schools.

## Features of Two-Way Immersion Programs

High quality two-way immersion programs share certain features.

The programs include fairly equal numbers of two groups of students: native English speakers and English language learners (native speakers of another language, such as Spanish, Korean, or Chinese). Two-way immersion is a unique kind of language education because it involves two languages in two ways: Two languages are used for instruction, and two groups of students are involved—students who are native English speakers and students from another language background, most often Spanish.

The programs are integrated. The native English speakers and English language learners are grouped together for core academic instruction (i.e., math, social studies, and science), not just physical education and music, for all or most of the day.

The programs provide both groups of students with core academic instruction in both languages. There are two main program models in two-way immersion education that are generally referred to as “90/10” and “50/50.” In a 90/10 model, 90% of instruction in the first year or two is in the partner language and 10% in English. Over the course of the primary grades, the percentage of instruction in the minority language decreases, while the percentage of instruction in English gradually increases. By about fourth or fifth grade, instructional time in each language reaches a 50/50 ratio. In the 50/50 model, instruction in English and the partner language is divided evenly at all grades.

## Goals of Two-Way Immersion Programs

Programs typically aim for these general goals:

Students will develop high levels of proficiency in their first language. This goal means that native English speakers will develop high levels of listening, speaking, reading, and writing ability in English, and English language learners will develop these same abilities in their native language (e.g., Spanish). Neither group of students will have to forego development in the native language as second language proficiency improves.

All students will develop high levels of proficiency in a second language. Native English speakers will have the opportunity to develop high levels of oral and written proficiency in a second language. English language learners will have the opportunity to develop high levels of oral and written proficiency in English. The English language development of English language learners will not be diminished because they are also receiving instruction in their native language. Two-way immersion programs are called additive bilingual programs for both groups of students: they give all students the opportunity to maintain and develop oral and written skills in their first language while they simultaneously acquire oral and written skills in a second language.

Academic performance for both groups of students will be at or above grade level. Dual

language programs maintain the same academic standards and curricula that are in place for other students in a school district. Academic requirements are not diluted for dual language students, and the same levels of academic performance are expected for them as for other students in the district. Evidence that this goal is attainable has been documented in empirical studies (Cazabon, Nicoladis, & Lambert, 1998; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

All students will demonstrate positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors. Because TWI classrooms bring together students from different language, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, they allow students to learn first hand about cultures that are different from their own. Research has shown evidence of positive cross-cultural attitudes being developed through TWI programs (Cazabon, Lambert, & Hall, 1993; Freeman, 1998). Other studies point to the dominance of the English language and the native English speakers in the TWI classroom (Amrein & Peña, 2000; Carrigo, 2000; McCollum, 1999), suggesting that particular attention may need to be paid to this goal.

Well-implemented two-way immersion programs are among the most impressive forms of education available in the United States. Students who participate in these programs gain grade level academic ability, well-developed language and literacy skills in two languages, and cross-cultural competence.

For more details about the basics of two-way immersion, read *Two-Way Immersion 101: Designing and Implementing a TWI Education Program at the Elementary School Level*, an Educational Practice Report published by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE). For the full text of *Two-Way Immersion 101*, visit <http://www.cal.org/twi>.

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