

BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN EARLY MONTESSORI: A CASE STUDY OF TWO SCHOOLS

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LITERATURE REVIEW

- The term bilingual education is used to describe programs that foster students' proficiency in a second language, as well as programs that produce the ability to speak, read and write in two languages with equal proficiency (Baker, 2007).
- Baker describes "strong" forms of bilingual education, which include total immersion, one-way developmental bilingual education (DBE) and two-way/dual language (TWI) bilingual education.
- Baker (2007) argues that "children best become bilingual at school via 'strong' forms of bilingual education" (p. 131). He also describes "weak" forms of bilingual education, which include transitional forms of bilingual education (TBE) (Baker, 2007, pp. 132-133).
- Research on bilingual programs and its effects on students indicates that effective bilingual programs that provide instruction in the students' home language helps native speakers reach proficiency levels not just in their home language but also in the second language (Schwartz, Koh, Chen, Sinke, & Geva, 2016).
- According to the North American Montessori Teacher Training BlogSpot, Montessori schools typically adopt one of the two models: one that is typically exploratory in nature and involves a short time once or two times a week which does not result in language fluency; or two, an immersion model that is more intensive and therefore results in bilingual fluency. <http://montessoritraining.blogspot.com/2013/09/montessori-teaching-learning-foreign-language.html>).
- Research on Montessori bilingual education is scarce and few studies have assessed the program implementations of the Montessori bilingual schools.
- With scant research examining the efficacy of implications of two-way immersion and transitional bilingual models in the Montessori environment, this research leads to the exploration of how these two bilingual settings differ.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the major differences between two-way immersion bilingual and transitional Montessori classroom areas of practice and specifically in the target language?
2. How do teachers incorporate the target language into the areas of practice in a two-way immersion bilingual Montessori classroom versus a transitional setting?
3. What is the overall classroom responsiveness to the target language in terms of the students' linguistic and social interactions with the teachers and each other in both contexts?

PROCEDURES

- A qualitative research design was utilized.
- Two bilingual Montessori schools in the Northeast, one in a large urban area and the second in a suburban area, participated in this research.
- One school, School S, utilized a two-way immersion bilingual education program (English and Spanish), and the other school, School M, utilized a transitional bilingual program (English and Mandarin).
- Data collected included observation of the teachers and students within the classrooms at each school, and interviews of the teachers and the school directors.
- The observations and interview data provided triangulation of data and thus address issues of validity.
- The purpose of the current study was to explore early bilingual education within Montessori's three key components: (1) prepared environment, (2) adult, and (3) child in terms of their delivery of second language instruction (Spanish and Mandarin), their bilingual education model, the fidelity of the Montessori education, and the diversity of student population.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Findings indicated that the two programs differed in their experiences in the implementation of the bilingual model regarding curricular materials, incorporating the target language, students' prior knowledge of the other language, and parental expectations. In addition, challenges regarding balancing English and the other language in teacher and student's interactions were also found.

1. In the Spanish-English two-way immersion bilingual model (School S, full member of AMS):
 - There was equal teaching time devoted to teaching both language.
 - A specific shelf was devoted for Spanish language materials in the Language area as well as Spanish children's books in the library stand area. [Answer Q1]
 - The Spanish teachers interacted exclusively in Spanish with students including demonstration of all the Montessori lessons in Spanish. [Answer Q2]

The challenges included:

- incorporating the target language into other areas of practice such as Math and Geography
- maintaining the language separation model,
- and students interacted with each other in English only. [Answer Q3]

2. The Mandarin-English transitional bilingual model (School M, partial member of AMS) faced more challenges in the implementation process:
 - bonding and building trust between the students and teacher
 - meeting the needs of native-English speakers.
 - Teaching reading and writing in Mandarin
 - lack of Mandarin Montessori resources
 - maintaining a balance between English and Mandarin curriculum,
 - and Chinese students (the majority) often communicated in Mandarin with each other. [Answer Q3]

3. In practice, English seemed to be the priority language, though both schools articulated their goal was to maintain the other language.

4. Parental expectations regarding the language competencies in the target language were met in both settings.

DISCUSSION

The overall results highlight the importance of studying the unique challenges and concerns regarding implementing bilingual education within the Montessori context.

- There is a need for diverse population of children from different home language backgrounds for best practice of a bilingual model.
- Challenge of maintaining the 'language separation model'. In both schools despite their different bilingual program, the target language teachers used translations or code-switching as a tool for scaffolding words in the weaker language.
- The transitional bilingual Montessori is more challenging in terms of pragmatic value of the target language compare to two-way immersion bilingual model.

LIMITATIONS

- Small sample size
- This is a preliminary analysis
- The two schools had different bilingual models, which makes it difficult to compare

FUTURE RESEARCH

Need to examine a randomized samples of the bigger context of Montessori Education with respect to how the practices of addressing bilingual education is translated into its three components:

1. Prepared environment
2. Adult
3. Child

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