

Subtractive to additive:
The implementation of a
Dual Language Immersion Program

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PLC 601
Policy Paper #1
March 9, 2006

Juan moved from Mexico 1 1/2 years ago. He's an extremely bright boy, reads above grade level in his primary language of Spanish. He finds excitement at solving challenging mathematics problems. At times, I find him pulling his hair in anguish, not wanted to go to recess. "Oh, but Ms. Machado, I almost have the answer!" he states in his native language. Juan lives outside the school boundaries. His mother drives the extra distance every day so that Juan can attend the only bilingual elementary school in the district. Juan's mother, after being educated about the program, signed a waiver to grant Juan access to instruction in his primary language.

If his mother wasn't knowledgeable about the waiver program, or didn't have the ability to drive Juan the extra distance each day, Juan would be attending his home school. There are a few Spanish-speaking teachers at Juan's home school and therefore a bilingual program does not exist. The school does not have a bilingual program because a bilingual ideology does not exist at the school site/district level. Additionally, adequate resources are not available.

If Juan were to remain at his home school, teaching him in his mother tongue would *not be practicable* because the necessary resources for a bilingual school would not be available. Therefore Juan would be instructed in the language most commonly used by the group to which he now belongs, English.

At his home school, measures would have been made to preserve his mother tongue. These small measures would have included placement in a SEI classroom, interactions with the few bilingual teachers on campus and attending a Newcomer's group in which the instructor would speak his native Spanish. *As far as possible*, his mother tongue would be preserved.

As far as possible is not good enough. In a community in which 65% of the population is Latino, there are sufficient resources to educate Juan in his mother tongue at his home school. But, the ideology of the school does not match that of a bilingual philosophy. Therefore, through *interpretation*, a school site may feel they are taking "appropriate measures, *as far as possible*, to preserve the mother tongue" (International Labour Organization, 1957). In reality, no measures are being taken at all!

Juan's example may be seen as a little extreme, especially in a Spanish dominated community. Unfortunately, it is the reality. When there is an ideological mismatch, people in power, if given the opportunity, will find 'opt-out' phrasing in which to impose their ideology or interpretation. This is exactly the phrasing I find in Article 23 of the International Labour Organization.

1. "Children belonging to the populations concerned shall be taught to read and write in their mother tongue or, *where this is not practicable*,

in the language most commonly used by the group to which they belong.

3. Appropriate measure shall, *as far as possible*, be taken to preserve the mother tongue or the vernacular language.”

The committee provides ‘opt-out’ language so that preservation is not deemed necessary as a linguistic right. Its “opt-outs and alternatives permit a reluctant state to meet requirements in a minimalist way.” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p28) “These ambiguities of policy can be seen in the variety of bilingual education programs ... as the differences in programming reflected a difference in interpretation of the goals.” (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004, p 40)

Because of this language, I believe the committee is communicating the message of a tolerance ideology in which minority speakers have the right to cultivate their mother tongue, but their mother tongue is not promoted. A tolerance–orientated ideology was common during colonial times in which more than one language was necessary for trade, teaching, spreading the gospel, and diplomacy. Although the people’s primary language was tolerated, it was considered inferior (Diker, 2000). The 1770s to 1880s were labeled as a tolerance-orientated period. German was the language of military troops, but it was “assumed that newcomers would in time abandon their native tongues and use English exclusively.” (Diker, 2000, p 48)

Within a tolerance ideology, teaching in the mother tongue is promoted, but it is not valued. It does not see the mother tongue as an asset in a diverse society. Rather, the lack of the dominant language is seen as a deficit. Brisk (as cited in Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004) views this as a compensatory education policy in which teaching through primary language is acceptable, but the overriding goal is to “teach students English as quickly as possible”. The dominant language replaces the mother tongue, thus creating a subtractive model. In Article 23, there is no talk of preserving the culture or language of the child. Instead, teaching in the native tongue (*where practicable*), is viewed as a means to transition the child into the national language. No emphasis or value is placed on the primary language.

Article 23

2. Provision shall be made for a *progressive transition* from the mother tongue or the vernacular language to the national language or to one of the official languages of the country.

This article clearly states that it is using the mother tongue to transition to the national language. There is no wording in the article that preserves the native language of the child. The goal is to become fluent in the majority language, at the cost of the mother tongue.

Juan's home school does not have a bilingual program by any means. Through my interpretation of the International Labour Organizations rules, Juan's home school is following policy. The policy being implemented has devastating linguistic and cultural outcomes. I envision semi-bilingualism, with a rapid decline of the children's primary language. Unless other measures are taken, each family's primary language would eventually be eradicated, in as quickly as one generation. "The more parents encounter the dominant culture, the more they tend to raise their children mostly or entirely in English, the language of access to that culture. Thus every step toward modernization-and away from tradition-puts the indigenous tongue at a greater disadvantage" (Crawford, 2001, p 58). With a loss of language, will come a loss of culture. Populations in concern will be forced to assimilate into the dominant group. To manage language conflict, subordinate groups assimilate, or adopt the language of the dominant group as their own. (Tollefson, 2000).

The resulting language policy would be subtractive in nature. Students would gain fluency in English at the cost of their primary language. There are many advantages to learning English. "Language learning is a powerful way to develop new behaviors that express higher status.... using English in particular settings is a means for claiming higher status." (Tollefson, 2000, p 10) The population has increased educational and employment opportunities. It is

valuable to learn English, but not at the expense of the primary language or culture.

An educational intervention is mandatory for this population group to be successful. Any strong form of education for bilingualism and biliteracy would be appropriate. "Immersion, Developmental Maintenance and Dual Language education are the most well known forms of strong bilingual education." (Baker, 2001, p 226) "Collier's conclusion is that two-way bilingual education (Dual language immersion) at the elementary school level is the optimal program for the long-term academic success of language minority students." (Baker, 2001, p 259) Skubnabb-Kangas states "It would be only two-way programs which last from K to 12 that would qualify as programs that DO NOT commit linguistic genocide." (Skubnabb-Kangas, 2000, p 34). Therefore, my recommended intervention is that of a dual language (two-way) immersion model.

Dual language immersion programs serve both language minority and majority populations. Typically, dual language programs group approximately equal numbers of native English-speaking students and native speaking language minority students together. Various models of the program include at 90/10 model and the 50/50 model. In the 90/10 model, 90% of the school time is in the minority language, with 10% in the majority language. These percentages gradually shift through the grade levels until 50% of schooling is divided

between languages. In the 50/50 model, 50% of schooling is in each language. The language division can be established through alternating subjects, parts of day, days of week, weeks, or half semester.

The goal of a dual language immersion program is to create bilingual and biliterate students in both the language minority and majority groups. (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005) Additional goals include positive cross-cultural attitude and behaviors, students display high levels of personal and social competence, and that society will benefit from having bilingual and biliterate citizens. (Baker, 2001).

In order to create a bilingual outcome for the population concerned, there must be buy-in not only from the linguistic minority community, but also the linguistic majority community. The dominant cultural group providing access must support the program as well as multiculturalism. The program must be driven by the students' personal experience that builds the cultural-linguistic capital. In order for a dual language program to be effective, the following characteristics must be present (Mora, Wink & Wink, 2001)

1. A pedagogically sound model of instruction that fits the demographic realities and resources of the school community;

2. Fidelity to the model of instruction in all aspects of implementation
3. A means of assessing and addressing appropriately, and in a timely manner any incongruity between the model of dual language instruction, the needs of the school community, and the systems created to faithfully implement the model.

Baker believes the following interventions must be implemented: (Baker, 2001, p 215)

- The two languages of the school must have equal status and be taught as a medium of instruction.
- The school ethos will be bilingual. Displays, newsletters, curriculum resources and school functions must be bilingual.
- Biliteracy and bilingualism are the goals of the program. Therefore, reading and writing are apart of the curriculum in both languages.
- Staffing, including teachers paraprofessionals, secretaries, custodial staff and parent help, are often bilingual. Where there is difficulty staffing bilingual teachers, teachers may be paired to work as a team. Minority parents are encouraged to participate in the classroom.
- Sufficient time must be allocated to the dual language program. A minimum of four years is expected.

According to research by Mora, Wink & Wink, the following values and beliefs must be affirmed: (Mora, Wink & Wink, 2001)

- becoming bilingual and biliterate is the path to the future
- dual language programs, when implemented correctly, are far superior to English immersion programs
- failure rates in programs that do not foster full development of L1 and bilingualism and biliteracy are unacceptable.

In my eyes, it is imperative that the population concerned is taught in a dual immersion model so that they learn to read and write in their mother tongue and the national language, creating biliterate individuals under a linguistic promotion ideology in a linguistically additive setting. It is essential that the primary language and culture is valued. Funding and resources must be made available. All attempts must be made to hire well-trained, dedicated educators with similar linguistic backgrounds and cultural as the populations being served. It is ideal that all teachers participating in the dual immersion program are bilingual in both the majority and minority languages. They need to understand the nature of the languages and how language is acquired. They "must be skilled at assessing students' needs, planning appropriate goals, objective and activities to meet those needs." (Lessow-Hurely, 1990, p 18)

Under the proposed intervention, Juan's mother would not need travel the extra distance to give her son a bilingual education. Instead, Juan's home school would give him a bilingual, biliterate and bilcultural education that values his cultural background and enables him to maintain his mother tongue.

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