



## Why Dual Language Works for Everyone, PK-12



By  
Virginia P. Collier, Ph.D.  
Wayne P. Thomas, Ph.D.  
*George Mason University*

### California bilingual educators, your time has come!

With Proposition 58 in place, California is waking up to the possibilities that Dual Language education provides for all students! We are thrilled to watch this school initiative now spreading into many states. Bilingualism is becoming popular as more and more parents demand bilingual schooling for their children. English monolingualism, encouraged in the U.S. during the 20th century and stimulated by the English-only movement of the 1980s and 1990s, is diminishing as the internet connects all humans around the planet. At the state level, governors and state boards of education are dramatically expanding the number of Dual Language schools along with financial resources for this expansion. They can justify the expenditure because graduating more proficient bilingual/biliterate students boosts state economies in the long run.


In California, when Proposition 227 attempted to eliminate transitional bilingual classes for a period of two decades, over 400 schools continued to offer bilingual classes by drawing on the support from English-speaking parents to apply for waivers to offer “two-way” bilingual classes that included native English speakers. This determination on the part of English-speaking parents illustrates the popularity of these types of schools. Now the challenge for California educators is to make sure that all English Learners are enrolled in Dual Language, and that other underserved groups, such as Latinos proficient in English,

African American students, and students of low socioeconomic background, be given the opportunity to attend Dual Language classes. In this article we’ll show you why.

**Program names.** What are we talking about when we use the term “Dual Language” and how does it differ from transitional bilingual classes? In California, names for this program vary, so to clarify, when we talk about “Dual Language education,” California educators may call this type of schooling through two languages “Dual Immersion,” “bilingual immersion,” or “two-way bilingual immersion.” In this article we’re using a shorter name, “Dual Language (DL),” to refer to all of these models of bilingual schooling, and we’re contrasting DL with the older program for English Learners called “Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE)” that existed in California prior to Proposition 227.

**DL compared to TBE.** Dual Language education was initially started in a few U.S. schools in the 1960s but over the last half-century it has evolved dramatically. TBE was a remedial program. DL is a mainstream enrichment program—the standard grade-level curriculum is taught through two languages. TBE was only for English Learners. DL is for everyone, including English Learners. TBE was provided for only a few years. DL starts in preschool or transitional kindergarten and grows grade-by-grade each year, until it is implemented in all grades PK-12. The ultimate goal for students attending TBE classes was English





proficiency, resulting in loss of first language. DL graduates are proficient bilinguals, prepared to use their biliteracy in their professions. Longitudinal research on TBE found that English Learners only closed half of the achievement gap in English. Longitudinal research findings on DL show that by the middle-school years all DL student groups reach grade level and above in two languages (English Learners, native English Speakers, students from poverty, all ethnic groups) (Collier & Thomas, 2017).

**Benefits for DL students.** DL is not a separate, segregated program only for English Learners. All students work together, teaching each other, benefiting from cooperative learning activities in pairs, small groups, and learning centers. DL students are happier, more engaged with instruction, more confident, attend school more regularly, and their high school graduation rates are dramatically higher than for students not attending DL classes (Collier & Thomas, 2018; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 2012, 2014). DL is exciting, stimulating, and fun!

**DL teachers rule!** What kind of teaching innovations have emerged in DL classrooms? DL is so powerful that it is changing teaching practices for all teachers, because research shows it works for all students, including at-risk groups. DL teachers must teach very heterogeneous groups of students—of different socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicities, and varying proficiency levels in the language of instruction, as well as varying amounts of prior schooling. To manage all these diverse student needs, DL teachers must use many varied strategies based on cooperative learning, with teachers modeling routines and procedures in the process of guiding new curricular experiences, and providing clues to meaning through mime, gestures, pictures, word charts, chants, music, movement, graphic organizers, and much more. As the lesson moves on, peer teaching among students in pairs and small groups then stimulates cognitive development through collaborative problem-solving and critical thinking across the curriculum (Collier & Thomas, 2009, 2012).

Many DL classes are team taught, with each teacher providing instruction in one language, and the two teachers exchanging their two classes. Team teaching requires coordination and planning, but two heads are better than one for developing innovative teaching strategies and problem-solving regarding individual student needs. Some DL classes are self-contained with one deeply proficient bilingual teacher providing instruction in the two languages, but not translating or code switching, unless that is the specific object of a lesson. For elementary schools, amount of instructional time in each language is designated by the program model chosen by the DL

school (90:10, 80:20, 50:50), and these variations can influence the choice of either sequential or simultaneous biliteracy development. Secondary DL classes are planned by offering core curricular courses and electives taught in the non-English (partner) language, along with ELD content courses for the newly arriving immigrants.

In our North Carolina research, we conducted interviews with principals that confirmed our surprising data-analytic findings regarding DL teaching practices. These types of second language teaching strategies developed by DL teachers are powerful, not only for the English Learners, but also for other students who in the past had not done well in school. Professional development opportunities in DL schools now help monolingual English teachers to master more varied teaching strategies based on DL teaching innovations, to serve all learners' diverse needs (Thomas & Collier, 2014, 2017).

**DL administrative reforms.** Since DL is the mainstream curriculum, teaching all subjects through both languages over each two-year period (e.g., if math is taught in English this year, next year math should be taught in the partner language), this reform pushes all central office curricular heads into collaboration and shared financing. Textbooks in each subject area must be chosen thoughtfully, so that the curricular materials in the partner language are cross-culturally appropriate, authentic, and match the curricular goals of the grade for the subject being taught. Also financial and logistical support should be provided by all departments—to hire high-quality, certified bilingual staff, to secure library resources in the partner language, and to provide DL professional development for teachers and administrators. Uniting all administrative divisions also requires collaboration across elementary, middle, and high schools, because all K-12 educators contribute to DL students' long-term success. This can occur only when the superintendent, chief academic officer, school board members, and principals fully understand and support the DL program.

**Extending DL to secondary.** DL courses need to continue into the feeder middle and high schools for many reasons. Our longitudinal research shows that it takes groups an average of six years to reach grade-level achievement in their second language (Collier & Thomas, 2009). Some students get there in a shorter amount of time and others take longer. Extending the DL program into middle school gives all students the opportunity to catch up to grade level in their second language and to excel in their first language. Proficient bilinguals usually outscore monolinguals on any test you give them in either language, so once the DL students reach grade-level achievement, they typically outscore native speakers by as much




as one or two grades. Principals of DL middle and high schools watch their scores go up as increasing numbers of students who attended the DL elementary program reach secondary school. This success should help to address concerns about accountability. DL is clearly a win-win for students, teachers, and administrators.

Most important, though, is that the DL secondary courses are where newly arriving immigrants belong when the DL partner language is their native language. Courses taught in the partner language allow the new arrivals to catch up and keep up with schoolwork while they are acquiring English through the ELD content courses, taught by ELD faculty who are part of the DL program. We have some astonishing stories of student success for young people arriving in the U.S. at secondary level in our book on secondary DL (Collier & Thomas, 2018). Since bilingually schooled students are high achievers, DL students should be offered many core courses for AP credit in the partner language, as well as popular electives. DL high school programs lead to high graduation rates, big reductions in dropouts and misbehavior, and no more Long-Term English Learners.

**The Bilingual Seal.** Congratulations, California bilingual educators! You started this in 2011! Since then, state by state, the Bilingual Seal has become so popular that as of August 2019, 37 states have approved a Bilingual Seal and 12 more states are working on developing the Seal. This credential added to a student's high school diploma helps DL students gain admission and scholarships to four-year universities, professional credibility, and higher salaries in their professional lives.

**Languages of DL programs.** Since Spanish is the primary language of 77 percent of English Learners in the U.S., Spanish-English programs are quite popular. Spanish is the second largest language of the world after Mandarin as defined by number of native speakers. The U.S. now has the second largest number of Spanish speakers in the world, after Mexico. There are also DL programs in the U.S. taught in English and Arabic, Armenian, Bengali, Cantonese, Filipino, French, German, Greek, Haitian-Creole, Hebrew, Hmong, Italian, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Mandarin Chinese, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Ukrainian, Urdu, and Vietnamese, and the list is growing every year. In addition, DL programs are provided in the following indigenous languages of the U.S.: Arapahoe, Cherokee, Crow, Diné (Navajo), Hoopa, Inupiaq, Keres, Lakota, Nahuatl, Ojibwe, Passamaquoddy, Shoshone, Ute, and Yurok (U.S. Department of Education, 2015; Center for Applied Linguistics, 2017).

**DL works for everyone!** You can see that DL is popular, and it's expanding throughout the U.S. On the website [www.duallanguageschools.org](http://www.duallanguageschools.org), as of this writing, 2208 DL schools have registered in 43 states, and there are many more developing every year. In our research in North Carolina and Texas, we have found that African American students benefit dramatically from attending DL classes, scoring as much as two grades above grade level by the middle-school years (Thomas & Collier, 2002, 2014). In our North Carolina research, DL students with learning disabilities, autism, and other categories of special need scored significantly higher than their peers with special needs not in DL. It does not harm these students to study through two languages—they benefit! Native English Speakers, new immigrants, English Learners, Latinos, Asians, indigenous groups, students of low socioeconomic status—all students thrive in DL enrichment classes. 

**References to consider:** We suggest that your superintendent, school board members, and central administrative staff check out our short book, **Why Dual Language Schooling** (Thomas & Collier, 2017; 2019 edition in Spanish). This is also a good book for convincing bilingual families to enroll their children in DL classes. Educators should ensure that newly arriving immigrants who are speakers of the DL partner language understand the importance of the program so that their children can continue to keep up or catch up to grade level in their native language while they also acquire English. The research shows that in DL classes their children will develop deeper proficiency in English than in a monolingual English program.

For details on well-implemented DL programs, see Thomas & Collier (2017), as well as our series of five books on DL, three of which have editions in Spanish. Collier & Thomas (2014) is written by and for DL principals, and Collier & Thomas (2018) provides the passionate voices of 19 contributing authors who are experienced secondary DL educators.

References are available in the online version:

<https://www.gocabe.org/index.php/communications/multilingual-educator/>

Editor's note: We invite you to check out CBE's Dual Language Immersion Planning Guide at <https://di.gocabe.org>.



p. 2

### Why Dual Language Works for Everyone, PK-12

Virginia P. Collier, Ph.D.  
Wayne P. Thomas, Ph.D.  
George Mason University

### References

- Center for Applied Linguistics. (2017). *Two-way immersion directory*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. <http://www.cal.org/twi/directory>
- Collier, V.P., & Thomas, W.P. (2009). *Educating English learners for a transformed world*. Albuquerque, NM: Dual Language Education of New Mexico-Fuente Press. Print, electronic, and Spanish editions.
- Collier, V.P., & Thomas, W. P. (2014). *Creating dual language schools for a transformed world: Administrators speak*. Albuquerque, NM: Dual Language Education of New Mexico-Fuente Press. Print and electronic editions.
- Collier, V.P., & Thomas, W.P. (2017). Validating the power of bilingual schooling: Thirty-two years of large-scale, longitudinal research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [www.thomasandcollier.com](http://www.thomasandcollier.com)
- Collier, V.P., & Thomas, W.P. (2018). *Transforming secondary education: Middle and high school dual language programs*. Albuquerque, NM: Dual Language Education of New Mexico-Fuente Press. Print and electronic editions.
- Lindholm-Leary, K. (2001). *Dual language education*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Thomas, W.P., & Collier, V.P. (2002). *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement*. Santa Cruz, CA: Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence, University of California-Santa Cruz. [www.thomasandcollier.com](http://www.thomasandcollier.com)
- Thomas, W.P., & Collier, V.P. (2012). *Dual language education for a transformed world*. Albuquerque, NM, Dual Language Education of New Mexico-Fuente Press. Print, electronic, and Spanish editions.
- Thomas, W.P., & Collier, V.P. (2014). *English learners in North Carolina dual language programs: Year 3 of this study: School Year 2009-2010*. Fairfax, VA: George Mason University. A research report provided to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. [www.thomasandcollier.com](http://www.thomasandcollier.com)

Thomas, W.P., & Collier, V.P. (2017). *Why dual language schooling*. Albuquerque, NM: Dual Language Education of New Mexico-Fuente Press. Print, electronic, and Spanish editions.

U.S. Department of Education: Office of English Language Acquisition. (2015). *Dual language education programs: Current state policies and practices*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

