

Two-Way Immersion Program in San Francisco

The California Department of Education (CDE) has proposed that Two-Way Immersion (TWI) programs in the state do the following:

- Integrate language minority students (English learners) with language majority students (English natives)
- Develop bilingualism and biliteracy in the classroom.

The CDE provides guidelines concerning TWI programs, but the setting of the programs varies from school to school. After conducting classroom observations, I hypothesized that a school surrounded by a near-homogeneous community affects teaching conventions in San Francisco schools.

I engaged in this study to learn the following:

- Are all the TWI programs structured the same?
- How are TWI programs being implemented in each school?
- What are the drawbacks and benefits of TWI programs?

In addition to conducting research about TWI programs, I also needed to educate myself about a wide variety of topics in relation to education such as budgeting, standardized testing, school funding, academic performance index, and program improvement. I discovered that there are hundreds of TWI programs in the state of California, so I focused on the TWI program at Marshall Elementary School in the Mission District of San Francisco, my former elementary school.

Are all TWI programs the same?

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and the Academic Performance Index (API) play a significant role in deciding what is to be done about a school's curriculum. When looking at standardized tests, there are federal standards and goals for each school. If standards aren't met, then schools are put into Program Improvement (PI), where schools must change their plan of action, as Marshall School did. Each TWI program varies; there are different program models that can be used. The three most prominent models in CA are the 90/10, 50/50 and 70/30. The ratios represent the class instruction of the secondary language to English. 50% of the programs run the 90/10 model; 27% use 50/50; and 3% use 70/30. Since 1994, the number of Two-Way Bilingual Immersion programs in schools has increased from 47 to 224 in the state of California. Languages of instruction include Spanish, Korean, Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese and Chinese. 90% of the programs use Spanish as its secondary language (English being the first).

How are TWI programs being implemented in each school?

Each district may have schools with differing programs. In each school, principals, teachers and educational leaders meet twice a year to find ways to better improve their current program, to discuss ways to make the immersion more efficient. The TWI program at Marshall is now in full affect in all K-5 years. It's still a very young program and is still developing but the meetings are helpful in improving the system. The TWI program's progress is reflected in the school's API, which has increased 68 points since 2006. Marshall, a K-5 school, uses the 90/10 model for early

grades, meaning 90 percent of the day is taught in Spanish and the remaining time is dedicated to English instruction. The percentage of Spanish instruction decreases gradually each year, and by the beginning of 4th grade, the format converts to 50/50. Regardless of the model, in faculty meetings, teachers, educational leaders and staff discuss when students are prepared to make the transition from Spanish to English.

The school strives to attain an even number of English Learners, English Natives, and bilingual students. Before the 2010-2011 school year, Marshall was a neighborhood school, drawing their student population from the surrounding neighborhoods. This year however, Marshall has changed its enrollment system drawing students from other areas, making it even much easier to draw in an even number of English learners and English natives.

What are the drawbacks and benefits of TWI programs?

In San Francisco, there are 17 TWI programs. Marshall Elementary has a culturally diverse population historically drawn from the immediate school neighborhood. In the 2009-2010 school year, the student demographics by group were as follows: 1% American Indian/Alaska Native, 2% other non-white, 2% Filipino, 2.5% African-American, 5.4% no response, 8.8% White, and 78.8% Latino. The percentage of English Learners during the 08-09 year was 59%—based on surveys conducted by the state and English language assessments.

One of the regulations for TWI is that the percentage of English natives is at least 30% for the program to be successful. Ideally, in a class there would be 50% English learners (EL) and 50% English Natives (EN), but in Marshall's case, the percentage of EL surpasses 50% (yet meets the regulation of having at least 30% EN). As I researched further, I wondered if the English learners fell behind with the English language.

I found that the TWI programs not only depend on the instruction that happens within the classrooms, but also on each student's community and household. Many of the EL's parents speak only Spanish in their households, giving the students the advantage of practicing their communication and literacy skills at school and at home as well. The disadvantage of speaking only Spanish at home is that the students aren't able to practice English as frequently. In kindergarten, only 10% of the day is dedicated to English; the students practice Spanish the majority of the time, and at home they also practice Spanish.

As for the EN, these students are learning a second language, and even though English isn't emphasized during the day in their early years, ENs have the advantage of immersing themselves in English in and out of school. It isn't until the beginning of 4th grade when instruction in both languages is equal.

My questions were focused on the academic aspect of the program, but there is a second part to the program as well. Mr. Lowy, a current 3rd grade teacher from the school explained that the TWI program at Marshall helps to traverse cultures and teach the students more than academics, including life skills, and appreciation for other cultures. Mr. Lowy has served as a teacher at Marshall before the school adopted its TWI program and he has been able to observe the progress that the school has made within the program. He explained that the program has made the school even stronger by unification. Before the TWI program was implemented throughout the entire school, there were two programs: the General Education Program (whole day

instruction in English) and bilingual program (50/50 ratio of Spanish to English instruction). This old system created barriers among students as well as parents, but the TWI program has helped unify the entire school. It has strengthened social relationships among students, and each of the students has a similar experience through the current program.

Solutions

It might not be possible to change the structure of the TWI programs in the state education system instantly, but meanwhile, there are still other ways to adjust. A handful of after school programs are available, like Mission Graduates, a year-round academic after school enrichment program situated at Marshall E.S. and Bryant E.S. that provides tutoring for students all through elementary school. Programs like these help students strengthen their understanding of their work during school by providing extra academic support in English, Spanish, math and science.

I was once a student at Marshall before the TWI program was implemented in the school. I've always been curious to know about the new program and this research gave me the opportunity to learn more. I learned the students aren't only learning study skills but they are learning how to take social skills and use them outside the classroom.

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