

Starting an Immersion Program Dos and Don'ts

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Agenda

- Introductions
- Background
- Research methods
- Results
- Dos and Don'ts Activity
- Recommendations
- Q & A

Introductions

Please share

- What's your name?
- Where are you from?
- What is your current role (parent, teacher, administrator, district level coordinator, etc.)?
- Why did you come to this session?

Background

- Rationale for educating bilingual and biliterate individuals;
- Program and demographic comparisons between my district and neighboring districts;
- Benefits of immersion:
 - Cognitive/Academic
 - Linguistic
 - Socio-cultural

Background Continued

- Clear definition of language immersion education:
 - Program models (focus on 1-way & 2-way models);
 - Whole school versus strand program
 - Immersion participants
 - Thinking ahead to the secondary years

The Study: Participants

- Identification of participants
 - instrumental in starting an immersion program
 - recommended by faculty at U of M
 - contacted first by email then by phone
 - they represented:
 - Twin Cities metro immersion schools
 - 3 one-way programs (2 Spanish, 1 Chinese)
 - 1 Spanish two-way program
 - 2 district-supported schools
 - 2 charter schools
 - pseudonyms used throughout

Research Methods

- Data Collection
 - In-depth, semi-structured interviews
- Data Analysis
 - Transcribed interviews and coded according to the common steps in the process and pieces of advice that were shared.

Results: Overview

1. Parent angle (Light Green)
2. Steps for district-supported schools (Blue)
3. Charter school considerations (Dark Green)
4. Overall recommendations (Pumpkin)

Getting Started: The Parent Angle

- Remember that a parent is seen as an outsider (Mitchell)
- Treat the proposal as a delicate balancing act
- “Find a champion in the district” (Smith)
- Gather the support of other parents (Smith)
- Create a simplified, easy to digest proposal
- Present it as an idea: get the district's thoughts (Mitchell)

1. Establish a Task Force

“Invest in people who would be touched by the program in some way, coming together, giving their perspective and shaping it as it goes forward.”

(Mitchell)

1. Establish a Task Force

- This group officially spearheads the project and represents the interests of the program throughout the planning phase (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000)
- Mitchell recommends putting the task force together based on the structured network of the district.

1. Establish a Task Force

- Task Force members:
 - Director of curriculum and instruction
 - Director of assessment
 - Lead elementary principal
 - Different grade levels throughout the district
 - Parents
 - Foreign Language coordinator or equivalent
 - ELL coordinator or equivalent (for two-way)
 - University representation (e.g., from CARLA)

(Larson, Mitchell, Smith)

1. Establish a Task Force

- Smith's Task Force benefited greatly from expertise from area immersion schools.
 - Area immersion administrators were invited to be part of a panel discussion
 - Visits to area immersion schools were set up for the task force members to see immersion in action

2. Gather parental support

- Parents have an important role in advocating for and supporting immersion education
- Parents can have a lot of influence over district decisions
- Parents need to know what to expect (emphasize research-based realistic expectations!)
 - language development
 - academic progress in the immersion context (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000; Met, 1987)
 - Possible impact on early test scores/English development (Genesee, 1987, p. 34)

2. Gather parental support

- Parental support for two-way programs:
 - Both language-majority and language-minority parents must be included in all meetings
 - Meetings must be conducted in both languages
 - “TWI programs are successful when parents of the target language are placed on an equal status with majority culture parents.” (Espino-Calderon and Minaya-Rowe, 2003, p. 34).

3. Gather community support

- Community members can help build support or become barriers to program implementation.
- Find local businesses to support the effort.
- Talking points include
 - the economic advantages of knowing another language
 - understanding other cultures
 - the success of multilingual education throughout the world, particularly in Asia and Europe
 - relationship of property value to the quality of the school system.

(Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000)

4. Hold informational meetings

“Informational meetings help clarify and demystify what [immersion] is and isn't.”

-Larson

They facilitate a clear understanding of language immersion education.

4. Hold informational meetings

- Set up meetings with all those affected by the proposed change:
 - the superintendent of schools
 - principals
 - school board members
 - teaching and support staff
 - community members
 - most importantly, parents of prospective students (representative of the diversity in district)

(Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000; Met, 1987)

4. Hold informational meetings

- “We try to make it clear that these programs are not a challenge to the existing culture of the environment and the right support for the children.” (Larson)

4. Hold informational meetings

- Advertise
 - Help of district PR director (Mitchell)
 - Newspapers (Mitchell)
 - Website (Mitchell)
 - District newsletter (Mitchell)
 - Community bulletin boards (Smith)

4. Hold informational meetings

- Met (1987) asserts that misunderstanding of immersion can undermine the program.
- Meetings should be ongoing – even after the program starts (D. Tedick, personal communication, October, 1, 2008).

5. Choose the immersion language carefully

The benefits of language immersion remain no matter what language is chosen as the target language for the program.

5. Choose the immersion language carefully

- The most commonly taught languages in U.S. immersion programs:
 - Spanish (42.6% of immersion programs)
 - French (29%)
 - Hawaiian (8.4%)
 - Japanese (7.1%)
 - Mandarin (3.9%)
 - German (3.2%)

(Lenker & Rhodes, 2007).

5. Choose the immersion language carefully

- TAKE CAUTION WITH PERCEPTIONS!!!
 - Spanish is seen as very useful
 - Chinese is seen as innovative/necessary for future
 - German and French are seen as less useful
- Don't let parents pick the language (most likely it will be based on perceptions)

(Mitchell)

5. Choose the immersion language carefully

The choice of a language is best made by a committee that has parents as well as district personnel offering differing perspectives as opposed to just a perception of one group.

Consider three areas...

5. Choose the immersion language carefully

1 Availability of materials in the immersion language:

- French and Spanish materials are *relatively* easy to come by according to (Mitchell ; Met.,1987).
- German and Chinese were identified by Mitchell as more difficult languages to find suitable materials for the immersion context.

5. Choose the immersion language carefully

#2 Availability of qualified staff

- Elementary certified
- Native or native-like proficiency in the immersion language.
- Knowledge of how to teach in immersion setting is best.
- The ease or difficulty of finding qualified staff should be a factor in deciding what the language for the immersion program should be.

5. Choose the immersion language carefully

#3 Availability of Federal and State Grants

- FLAP Grants (Foreign Language Assistance Program)
 - Special consideration is given to immersion schools
 - Currently, even more priority is given to schools that choose critical languages
 - Arabic
 - Chinese
 - Japanese
 - Russian
 - For a complete list of these "critical" languages

5. Choose the immersion language carefully

- Magnet School Grants (Federal)
- World Language Pilot Program Grants (MN)
- Check with your state to see what grant funding they have available

6. Determine location for the program

- Principal is key!!
- Central location in district for easy busing
- Space – Room to grow!

(Mitchell)

7. Consider district staff

- Provide sessions directed specifically toward all teachers and staff (Cloud, Genesee and Hamayan, 2000)
- “It is very important so that the people who actually work in the immersion program feel supported throughout the district” (Larson).

7. Consider district staff

- The whole school needs to support the program even if it is only a strand within a school (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000).
- Relocation of teachers can be minimized as much as possible by:
 - Considering staff attrition (retirement, etc.)
 - Possibly utilizing monolingual teachers for English instruction (but ensuring they get professional development) (Met, 1987).

8. Don't skimp on staff development!

- Intense staff development initially (Met, 1987).
 - Include visits to other immersion schools. Look for:
 - building practices
 - teaching strategies
 - the results of immersion first hand. (Mitchell, Smith)
- Continue with *ongoing immersion specific* staff development throughout.

8. Don't skimp on staff development!

- Contact University faculty in area who can help provide staff development opportunities.
 - CARLA summer institutes are great!
 - CARLA and U of M faculty are available for in-house staff development
 - Dual Language and Immersion Certificate program (not yet online so only available in MN)
- (Kane, Larson, Mitchell, Smith)

9. Consider costs

- Grants help out a lot. Apply and make them a part of the decisions (Larson, Mitchell).
- Staff is not the big ticket item. Although no extra teachers are needed (as in a FLES program), some additional recruitment/visa costs may be incurred. (Mitchell; D. Tedick, October 1, 2008)

9. Consider costs

- Start-up costs are the biggest difference between immersion and monolingual programs.
 - Staff development
 - Curriculum and library/media center materials in the immersion language
 - Outfitting classrooms
 - Website

The Charter School Route

- Should the school district decide not to start an immersion program, a charter option is a possibility.
- In MN, charter immersion programs have done well. (Kane)
- There are advantages and disadvantages to being out from under a district's umbrella.

Advantages

- Charter schools are independent (Smith).
- Charter board of directors are concerned with the immersion school alone (Smith).
- Freedom to choose a curriculum that fits best with the immersion context and the target language (Kane, Smith).
- Freedom to hire a more desirable candidate because there is no tenure or seniority (Kane).

Disadvantages

- Time consuming
- No access to district resources
- Choosing a curriculum and developing the sequence takes time (Kane, Smith).
- At first it is difficult to attract students because there is no established reputation (Kane).

Disadvantages

- Difficult to find teachers: "Candidates go to the districts because they know them by reputation. We have to go to the candidates." (Kane)
- Hard to compete with teacher salaries because charters don't have as much revenue (Kane, Smith).

Charter School Resources

- Check with the education department of your state for similar resources:
 - Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)
 - Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS)

Vision/Mission Statements

- A strong mission and vision will get the charter school off to the right start (Minnesota Association of Charter Schools, 2008)
- Founders decide and the board comes on board knowing the direction of the school.

Board of Directors

- This group of people will be the decision-making body of the school.
- The board should consist of a variety of different people with differing areas of interest.
- The board's size should be decided to account for attrition: 8 – 12 (Kane, Smith).
- Boards should expect that serving will be a lot of work (Kane, Smith).

Board of Directors

- Participants suggest people in the following areas:
 - Attorney or law expert
 - Realtor
 - Accountant or number cruncher
 - Marketing expert
 - Educators (MN Charter Law requirement)
- (Kane, Smith)

Sponsors/Authorizers

- Hard to find sponsors because immersion might not fit their mission.
 - Most sponsors are looking for schools that serve at-risk populations.
 - “There aren't a lot of organizations that are working to help suburban kids learn a second language.”
(Kane)
- Finding a sponsor takes a lot of time and is hard work (Kane, Smith).

Charter School Costs

- It is expensive (Smith).
- Grant start-up money helps significantly
 - In the first year one can't access money until July – only weeks before doors open (Minnesota Association of Charter Schools, 2008).

Charter School Costs

- “Spend money in the classroom” (Kane):
 - Textbooks
 - Literature
 - Computers
 - Things that will directly affect the students' learning

Charter School Costs

- Don't buy everything new (Smith).
- Check out district auctions (Smith).
- Set aside money for an impressive website (Kane).
- Look into lease aid - available for Charters.

Charter School Costs

- Expect 1/3 of the students who enroll to show up that first year.
 - People get “cold feet” because it is a charter (Kane)
- Once the reputation is established, then students start pouring in (Kane).
 - Charters get slightly less money from the state than districts. In MN, the only difference is the levy funds (Smith).

Dos and Don'ts Activity

- Take the implementation scenarios and recommendations from the center of your table.
- Decide where each one belongs: Dos or Don'ts?
- Send a group member to place it in the correct category at the front of the room.
- Once all groups have put up their scenarios, we will discuss the placement.

Recommendations

- Base program model on district demographics and program needs:
 - In my case, I will be recommending a total one-way model
 - What model is best for your district?

Recommendations

- Plan for at least 1 – 2 years of planning
 - Projected opening in the fall of 2010.
- Start small but plan for attrition
 - Consider how many sections the district can realistically support

Recommendations

- Consider which grade(s) will open the program
 - Begin with Kindergarten, add grade each year
- Create a plan for lateral entry
- Start early to begin plans for the immersion students once they hit middle school and high school.

- “You have to be absolutely convinced that what you are doing is not harmful for [your] students from an academic and native language point of view because if you have any qualms... it's going to impact on your delivery of the program and that hesitation will...be more worrisome than the program per se.”

–Fred Genesee

(as quoted in the ACIE Newsletter, May, 2007)