

TWO-WAY-IMMERSION PROGRAM WALNUT HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: 2005-06

EA06-127-3

At a Glance

Two-Way Immersion (TWI) program is an alternative instructional approach that integrates native English speaking students and students speaking another language. It provides instruction to both groups in both languages. The objective is to provide all students the opportunity to maintain and develop their first language while simultaneously acquiring proficiency in a second language. It helps both groups achieve academic performance at or above grade level and obtain positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors.

TWI Program at Walnut Hill

Walnut Hill Elementary is a neighborhood school located in northwest Dallas. It served 470 students in Grades EC to 6 in 2005-06. It was the first school in DISD to implement the TWI program starting seven years ago at Pre-K. In 2005-06 it enrolled 119 students in 6 self-contained TWI classes in Grades PK-4. Almost half (44%) of TWI students were non-LEP (native English speakers) and 56% were LEP (native Spanish speakers). The LEP vs. non-LEP ratio reversed along grade levels. In Grade 4, 3 non-LEP students remained while LEP students increased to 15.

A considerable gap in students' economic status was seen between LEP and non-LEP students. More than 90% of TWI LEP students had low economic status compared to half of non-LEP students. Few TWI LEP students had parents with college degrees.

Program Implementation

All 6 TWI teachers were BE certified. Using a 50/50 model which involves equal amounts of instructional time in the two languages, teachers alternated weeks in which English or Spanish was used, with different time allocation patterns according to students' age and language ability. TWI teachers employed BE/ESL strategies and offered after-school tutoring for students who needed help.

A high level of student responsiveness and engagement was observed, especially at Grades 3

and 4. Students showed a high level of excitement when they were challenged and were at ease in both language situations. For both native English and Spanish speaking students, lower grade students experienced a "transition" period, from struggling with the second language to being comfortable with it.

Despite high quality work, TWI teachers were faced with several instructional challenges, including instructional time efficiency, textbook alignment and lack of Spanish materials, heavy workload, reduced number of English speaking students at upper grades, and parental involvement.

Academic Performance

ITBS in spring 2006. Cross-sectional and cohort longitudinal *ITBS* data showed above grade level performance for TWI students across grades and an academic advantage of TWI students over non-TWI students at Grades 3-4. Starting at similar performance levels at Grade K, a gap between TWI and non-TWI students began to emerge at Grade 2 and markedly widened at Grades 3 and 4 (Figure 1).

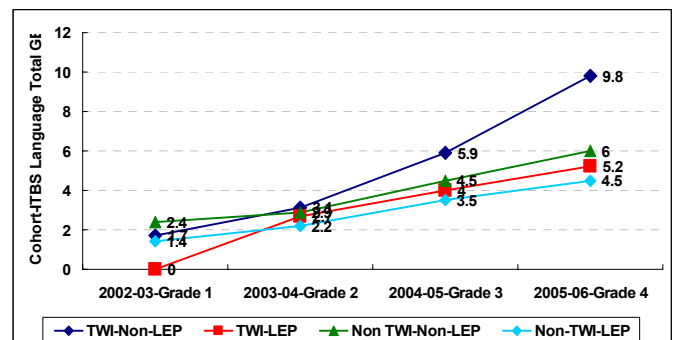


Figure 1. Cohort data by TWI and LEP status.

LEP and non-LEP gaps within the TWI program remained. *ITBS* scores for Grades 3-4 non-LEP students significantly exceeded their counterparts; partially due to the small size of this group who were continually enrolled in TWI for 5-6 years.

Logramos cross-sectional data showed that TWI LEP students (native Spanish speaking) maintained

above grade-level performance in Spanish. Native English speaking students performed below grade level in Spanish in Grades 1-2, but were significantly above grade level at Grades 3 or 4 (Figure 2).

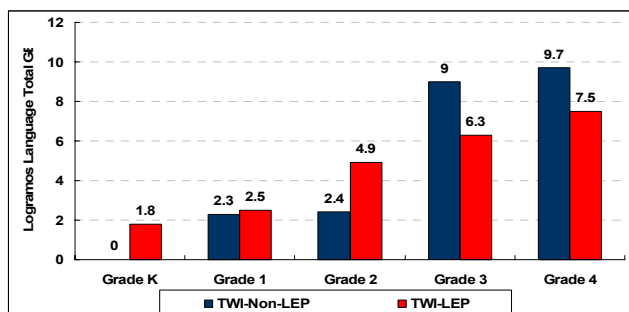


Figure 2. TWI *Logramos* data by LEP status.

Responses from TWI Teachers and Parents

Survey data indicated that TWI teachers and parents felt TWI was an excellent program. For teachers, it helped students become bilingual/biliterate and led to accelerated learning due to mental processes involved in developing a second language. They also saw increased cross-culture awareness and better problem-solving skills in students.

Parents liked TWI's diversity, interactions with other cultures, and the close-knit feeling of growing-up together. They felt children were challenged to the fullest potential and pushed to achieve more than they would have in regular classes.

Recommendations

Management

- Implement TWI in campuses with a diverse student population with approximately equal amounts of LEP and non-LEP students, and a tradition of active parental involvement.
- If possible, use one year of planning before implementation, focusing on publicity, parent awareness, staff training, and preparation of matching materials in English and Spanish.
- Establish a strong school leadership, especially a principal who has passion, understanding, support, and involvement with the TWI program.

Student Placement

- Plan a minimum of six years of bilingual instruction starting from Grade PK or K with equal numbers of LEP and non-LEP students.
- Recruit PK or K students on a voluntary basis. Parents' commitment, understanding, and support are the keys for the continuation and

success of the program, especially when students experience difficulties in Grades 1-2.

- If possible, screen students' native language ability to avoid future dropouts. Students with low first language skills have difficulties coping with the TWI instruction.
- Anticipating a considerable student attrition rate, especially among native English speakers, double the number of TWI sections at the lower grades (K-2) to ensure program continuity at the middle and upper grades. Allow smaller TWI class sizes at the upper grades.

Staffing

- In addition to owning bilingual fluency and solid subject matter knowledge, select TWI teachers who are creative, flexible, articulate, good at planning and time efficiency management, and believe in the program.
- Explore alternative approaches such as team-teaching because the self-contained class structure works well for lower or middle grade TWI classes but may not be suitable for upper grades.
- Plan TWI specific staff development sessions at the M-LEP and campus levels. Encourage TWI staff to share individual teaching experiences.

Instruction and assessment

- Select an appropriate TWI model (90/10 or 50/50) based on the school's context and student demographics. Use the Spanish language at least 50% of the instructional time and as much as 90% in the early grades. Separate the two languages with no translation or repeated lessons in the other language.
- Focus on core academic curriculum. Use high quality instruction in both languages and integrate thematic units to ensure content alignment.
- Central instructional departments should revise respective Scope and Sequences tailored to the TWI program and prepare training on collaborative and interactive teaching strategies.
- Locate parallel textbooks in both languages for all content areas including math, science, and social studies. Ensure sufficient supplemental materials, especially for upper grade classes.
- Increase instructional time efficiency. This is especially true for middle and upper grades, where managing all materials in both languages in the limited time allotted was most difficult.

- Use *WMLS* annually to assess TWI students' dual language proficiency and yearly growth as they go through the program.