Blending learning and K-3 Spanish bilingual instruction for English Language Learners

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Abstract

Literature was analyzed looking for correlations between blending learning and K-3 Spanish bilingual instruction for English Language Learners. This study underlines the importance of Spanish instruction occurring in the dual-language programs at the early age. The blended learning model and the role of technology are briefly described. Also, two case studies were analyzed.

Keywords: blended learning, dual-language programs, English Language Learners, technology.

There is limited literature directly correlating blended learning with K-3 Spanish bilingual instruction for English language learners (ELL). Although, due to the intrinsic characteristics of the blending learning method, its pedagogies and the inclusion of diverse technologies can let students use favored learning modalities and receive constant and suitable feedback on their performance for a far greater quality learning experience in every subject (Horn & Staker, 2011), included Spanish. This literature review emphasizes the importance of Spanish instruction occurring in the dual-language programs in K-3. It also describes the blended learning model and the role of technology in the classroom. Furthermore, this review includes two case studies to briefly present some of the benefits of blended learning in the classroom.

Literature Review

The importance of Spanish instruction in K-3 for English Language Learners

Growing numbers of children in the United States schools come from homes where English is not the primary language spoken, and the education achievement of English language learners has become one of the most relevant issues in educational policy in the United States and other developed countries. Despite the fact that many children of immigrant families succeed in reading, several do not, and especially Hispanic children are disproportionately likely to perform inadequately in reading in school (Slavin & Cheung, 2005). According to Katz (2014), "Generally, 58 percent of ELLs in Texas school districts graduate from high school, leaving 42 percent who drop out before graduating" (para. 29). Dr. Kent Paredes Scribner, Fort Worth ISD Superintendent, stated at the Fort Worth ISD 2016 Convocation that third graders that do not read at grade-level rarely reach college. According to Slavin and Cheung (2005), "Hispanic students as a whole, including English-proficient children in the second generation and beyond, score significantly lower in reading than other students" (p. 248). Some researchers have

affirmed that for cross-linguistic transfer to occur, children need a strong foundation in their native language (Farver, Lonigan, & Eppe 2009). A Research conducted by Nakamoto, Lindsey, and Manis (2012) measured the English and Spanish reading and oral language development from kindergarten to third grade. The sample consisted of 531 Spanish-speaking ELL enrolled in a transitional bilingual, dual-language, or English immersion program indicates that the greater emphasis on Spanish instruction occurring in the transitional bilingual and dual-language programs likely had a positive impact on the students' Spanish oral language and reading skills. Decoding and linguistic comprehension, as well as the cross-product of the two, are the components of language and literacy in English and Spanish that most contribute to the later development of reading comprehension in ELL (Nakamoto, Lindsey, & Manis, 2012).

Blended Learning

Blended learning, also known as hybrid learning, mixes the best characteristics of conventional schooling with the convenience of online learning to convey personalized, differentiated instruction across a group of students (Powell & Watson, 2015). Blended learning is an efficient approach to instruction which is not totally conveyed face-to-face nor through completely online interactions, but which uses a blend of both of these modalities (Kuo, Belland, Schroder, & Walker, 2014). According to Horn and Staker (2015), "Blended learning is any formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace" (p. 34). Blended learning is designed around meeting each student's needs, and it can be implemented in many ways such as differentiated learning, projects, small-group sessions, or other classroom work. All these assignments are performed in accordance with data and proof of students showing mastery. The overall idea is that the teacher assigns a fraction of the day to direct instruction, and at other times learners

improve skills and learn at their pace via online or computer based software (Alijani, Obyung, & Yanjun, 2014).

When implementing blended learning, there are several factors to consider such as blending learning models, technology, and training for teachers, students, and parents. According to Horn and Staker (2015), most of the blended programs fall into one of four models: rotation, Flex, A La Carte, and Enriched Virtual.

Technology.

Technology is evolving by the minute, and the demand to be innovative accelerates the timeline for implementation. Lautzenheiser and Hochleiser (2014) stated that " incorporating new technologies into schooling in a way that actually improves learning is not as simple as dropping laptops into a classroom and hoping for the best" (p. 1). The primary objective of implementing technology at any school level must be with the purpose of improving student learning.

Case studies.

Heather Staker on her article: "The Rise of K-12 Blended Learning: Profiles of Emerging Models, " provide 40 K-12 blending learning case studies of which only two (2) are related to K-3.

Case study 1. KIPP LA, Empower Academy administers elementary schools in East and South Los Angeles. KIPP LA, Empower Academy implemented the Blended Rotation model where students rotate among online learning, small group, and individual instruction stations within each classroom. When this case study was conducted, KIPP LA, Empower Academy was in its first year of operations but has begun to experience promising results. At the start of the school year, only 9 percent of students tested as proficient or advanced on the STEP Literacy Assessment. Halfway through the year, 78 percent scored proficient or advanced.

Case study 2. Rocketship Education. Currently, Rocketship manages three elementary schools in San Jose, California. The founders plan to expand nationally in 2014. Rocketship Education implemented the Blended Rotation model where students learn 75% offline and 25% online. Online occurs in a separate learning lab during 2-hour block periods, where students learn reading, math, and other skills. Rocketship Education schools are among the top 15 for academic performance among low-income schools in California. According to Staker (2011), Rocketship Education saves $500,000 per school in traditional school expenditures that Rocketship reinvests in others parts of its model.

These case studies show that blended learning generates positive academic progress at early stages of implementation. Also, they have some economic advantages.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed shows that the greater emphasis on Spanish instruction occurring in the dual-language programs at the early age has a positive impact on the ELLs' Spanish oral language and reading skills. Also, the blended learning programs are not only excellent platforms to deliver instruction of core subjects, included bilingual programs; but It is a great way to reduce operating costs as evidenced by the case studies provided. Due to the lack of literature that correlates blending learning with K-3 Spanish bilingual instruction for English language learners, additional research is recommended.

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