

The Alicia Chacón International School

Portrait of an Exemplary Two-Way Immersion Program

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Dedication

This article is dedicated to the memory of Conchita Medina, the former Head Coordinator at Alicia Chacón International School, who passed away during the 2001-2002 school year. Conchita was a committed and talented educator, and I learned a lot from her in the short time that I knew her.

Acknowledgements

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the parent coordinator at Alicia Chacón, who reviewed it for accuracy. Their comments were invaluable and substantially improved the quality of the manuscript.

First Impressions

Alicia Chacón International School is a K-8 two-way immersion magnet school in Ysleta Independent School District in El Paso, Texas. Started in 1995 with students in grades K-2, the program has expanded one grade level per year until becoming an inclusive K-8 program. As is typical of many two-way immersion programs in the Southwest, the majority of students in the program are Latino, but there are sizeable numbers of European-American and African-American students as well, and the student population is well balanced with regard to native language, with roughly equal numbers of native English speakers, native Spanish speakers, and students who enter with native-like proficiency in both languages. As the name of the school implies, multilingualism and multiculturalism are stressed at the school, and to that end, instruction is provided in a variety of languages. In addition to receiving instruction through both English and Spanish, students also elect to study a third language from their time of entry

into the program – Russian, Chinese, Japanese, or German. As a result, the program model can be referred to as an 80/10/10 model, based on allocation of languages of instruction in the primary grades, with 80% of instruction being provided in Spanish, 10% in English, and 10% in the third language. While the ratio of instruction provided through the third language remains steady at 10% at all grade levels, the ratio of Spanish to English instruction shifts over time until reaching a 45%:45% ratio at fifth grade.

I first visited Alicia Chacón International School in the spring of 1997. The school had recently been selected as one of the twelve programs involved in the CAL/CREDE Study of Two-Way Immersion Education, and in my role as Project Director, I traveled throughout the country that spring visiting all of the programs. From the moment I entered the building, I was impressed with the welcoming, family-like atmosphere; the professionalism, commitment, and knowledge of the administration and staff; the clearly articulated high academic expectations; the respect and caring shown to students and their families; and the clear emphasis on internationalism, multilingualism, and multiculturalism. Since that time, I have had sev-

eral additional opportunities to visit the school, and those additional visits, combined with the positive findings that have emerged from the study, served to strengthen my favorable impression of the school. In the following case study, a brief overview of the CAL/CREDE Study of Two-Way Immersion Education will be provided, followed by a thorough

of TWI programs in the United States.

The language development and academic achievement component of the study is the largest and has three sub-components. The first sub-component is a longitudinal study of TWI students' language, literacy, and academic achievement outcomes in English and Spanish. In this sub-

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description of the ways in which Alicia Chacón provides a model of an exemplary two-way immersion program through its adherence to the defining criteria, achievement of the primary goals, and demonstration of key components.

The CAL/CREDE Study of Two-Way Immersion Education

Since 1996, the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) has been carrying out a seven-year study of two-way immersion education funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, and administered through the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE). This study is focused on three main areas: 1) the language development and academic achievement of students enrolled in two-way immersion (TWI) programs; 2) the professional preparation of TWI teachers; and 3) the ongoing growth

component, a sample of 343 students in 11 Spanish/English TWI programs across the country was followed for three years, from the beginning of third grade through the end of fifth grade.

The second sub-component is a qualitative investigation of four exemplary TWI programs in order to identify the characteristics of effective learning environments. The third sub-component is a two-phase investigation of the long-term impact of TWI participation as discerned by secondary students' self-perceptions, academic and career aspirations, and academic outcomes. Alicia Chacón participated in all three sub-components of the language development and academic achievement component of the study, as well as the professional development component, and as a result, we have a substantial amount of data on this particular program to draw upon in creating this profile.

Adhering to the definition of two-way immersion education

At the most basic level, it is impossible to be an exemplary two-way immersion program without first adhering to the three central defining criteria of two-way immersion education. These three criteria are: 1) a population of students that is balanced in terms of native language, with no more than 2/3 being from one language group and no less than 1/3 being from the other; 2) integration of native English speakers and language minority students for academic instruction for all or most of the day at all grade levels; and 3) both content instruction and literacy instruction must be provided to all students in both languages (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2002). Alicia Chacón clearly meets these three criteria. First, the student population is balanced fairly equally among native English speakers, native Spanish speakers, and native bilinguals, following the '1/3, 1/3, 1/3' rule of thumb that is common in the Southwest. Second, students are integrated all day, every day at every grade level. Third, all students are provided with content and academic instruction in both languages over the course of their time in the program. Since the school follows a Spanish-dominant instructional model (with more instruction in Spanish than in English in the early grades), initial literacy instruction and the majority of academic content instruction take place through Spanish in the primary grades. Social studies is taught through English in the primary grades, and as the students move into the upper elementary and middle school grades, formal English literacy instruction is introduced (while formal Spanish literacy instruction continues), and increasing numbers of academic subjects are also taught through English.

Achieving the goals of two-way immersion education

While there is a great deal of variation in program features among different TWI programs, all programs share

the following three common goals:

- 1) academic achievement that is on grade level or higher;
- 2) the development of bilingualism and biliteracy;
- 3) the development of cross-cultural awareness (Christian, 1994).

As a result, one measure of success of any given TWI program is the extent to which it attends to and achieves these three goals. Student outcome data collected as part of the CAL/CREDE study attest to the achievement of the first and second goals, while observations conducted for the same study attest to the achievement of the third.

First, in terms of grade-level academic achievement, students at Alicia Chacón, like all students in Texas, are required to take the TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills), a criterion-referenced assessment that is administered to students every year. Results for TAAS scores collected at the end of fifth grade (the last year of data collection for the CAL/CREDE Study) indicate that Alicia Chacón students did very well indeed, with close to 100% of the students meeting minimum expectations for the two key academic areas of math and reading, and 95% meeting the minimum expectation for all tests taken (see Table 1). These passing rates were higher than the already impressive passing rates of the school district and the state. What is perhaps most impressive about these high passing rates is the fact that the 5th

grade TAAS is administered in English to all students at Alicia Chacón (with the exception of recent arrivals). In other words, these scores indicate that the students, many of whom are not native speakers of English, are capable of attaining and demonstrating high levels of academic competence in English, despite attending a school where three languages are used for instruction and the use of English is minimal until third grade, and despite living in a border community where the dominance of English is not as strong as it is in other parts of the United States. In other words, these students stand as strong indicators that sustained multilingualism, developed and maintained at home, school, and in the larger community, does not impede academic achievement in English.

Second, with regard to the development of bilingualism and biliteracy, oral language and narrative writing measures in English and Spanish were collected from students participating in the CAL/CREDE study at various intervals over a three-year period from the beginning of third grade (Fall 1997) through the end of fifth grade (Spring 2000). Both measures were developed specifically for the study by project staff and consultants. The oral language measure was a modified version of the SOPA (Student Oral Proficiency Assessment) and consisted of an interview conducted with pairs of students that required the use of social and academic language in a

variety of contexts. A trained staff person at each school site conducted the interviews, while I rated the oral language proficiency of the students on a number of components related to conversational fluency and grammatical accuracy. Total scores ranged from 0 to 5 points, with 0 indicating no production of oral language whatsoever, and 5 indicating full fluency, with the vocabulary, grammatical ability, and rhetorical sophistication to perform well in a variety of situations.

The narrative writing measure involved an open-ended writing task where students were asked to write a true story about themselves. These assessments were collected in the classrooms by the classroom teachers and mirrored typical writer's workshop procedures, with the group brainstorming for topics prior to the writing task and the students being allowed to interact with each other and use resources such as dictionaries. Writing samples were scored at CAL by trained raters who were all experienced two-way immersion teachers or researchers, using a rubric that assessed a variety of components related to composition, grammar, and mechanics. Again, total scores ranged from 0 to 5 points, with 0 indicating no writing at all and 5 indicating a well-developed, multi-paragraph narrative with few or no errors in terms of grammar or mechanics.

Table 2 compares the average performance of Alicia Chacón students to the average performance of

Table 1: Grade 5 (Spring 2000) TAAS performance for all students - state, district, and campus comparisons

	Number of Students Tested	% met minimum expectation for all tests taken	% met minimum expectation for math	% met minimum expectation for reading	Number of students needing any remediation
Texas	266,709	84	92	87	41,464 (15.5%)
Ysleta ISD	2484	89	96	91	264 (10.6%)
Alicia Chacón	61	95	97	97	3 (4.9%)

Table 2: Spring 5th grade (2000) English and Spanish writing and oral language proficiency scores for native Spanish speakers (NSS) and native English speakers (NES) at Alicia Chacón compared with all native Spanish speakers and native English speakers in the CAL/CREDE Study of Two-Way Immersion Education

Variable	Group	All Students			Alicia Chacón Students		
		n	m	sd	n	m	sd
English writing	NSS	166	3.8	.59	18	4.0	.55
	NES	162	4.2	.66	21	4.2	.47
Spanish writing	NSS	161	3.8	.66	16	4.1	.46
	NES	160	3.7	.71	20	3.9	.58
English oral	NSS	122	4.9	.08	16	4.9	.05
	NES	112	4.9	.06	19	4.9	.10
Spanish oral	NSS	123	4.8	.17	17	4.9	.08
	NES	111	4.1	.63	19	4.7	.14

all students in the study at the end of fifth grade, when data collection for the study ended. Here, information is disaggregated by native language, so that the mean performance of native Spanish speakers and native English speakers can be viewed independently of one another. As the data in the table indicate, for all measures of oral language proficiency and narrative writing in English and Spanish, mean scores of both native Spanish speakers (NSS) and native English speakers (NES) at Alicia Chacón were as high as or higher than the mean scores of all NSS and NES in the study as a whole. Moreover, the standard deviations of the Alicia Chacón group tended to be smaller, indicating less variability around the mean.

Regarding the goal of bilingualism, both the NSS and NES at Alicia Chacón clearly attained that goal by the end of fifth grade, as both groups had average scores close to the maximum of 5 points for oral proficiency in both English and Spanish. In addition, the standard deviations for both groups on both oral language assessments were very small, indicating that these high average scores were reflective of the scores of individuals as well. In terms of biliteracy development, the mean scores of both groups were again quite high, always hovering around 4 points, a score that indicates a reasonably well-developed

narrative that has some mistakes in grammar and/or mechanics.

Finally, the third goal of all TWI programs is to promote cross-cultural awareness, and there is abundant evidence that Alicia Chacón International School is successful in meeting this goal as well. As the name of the school implies, the emphasis is clearly multicultural, and this is demonstrated in a number of ways. One clear physical indicator of multiculturalism is the prominent display of flags from nations around the world that is located in the main hallway. More importantly, the infusion of the third language/culture component into the program definitely expands the cultural parameters of the school beyond the more typical Mexican-American bicultural experience of many schools along the border. The teachers of Russian and Chinese are native speakers of these languages, and the teachers of Japanese and German have lived in Japan and Germany respectively for extended periods of time, so they are all able to impart cultural information to students while they help them to develop language skills. Finally, the school promotes cross-cultural awareness on a larger scale by sending students out into the world to explore other cultures first-hand. To date, students have ventured to a number of national and international destinations, including Germany,

mainland China, Venezuela, and San Francisco's Chinatown.

Demonstrating the components of effective dual language programs

In her recent book *Dual Language Education* (2001), Kathryn Lindholm-Leary highlights several key components of effective dual language programs. These components include effective leadership, school environment, teachers and staff, instructional design and features, and students. Alicia Chacón provides a compelling portrait of a program that pays attention to all of the key components and actualizes them to very high levels.

Effective leadership

Lindholm-Leary pinpoints three types of essential leadership for successful TWI programs: leadership from the district administration, from the principal, and instructional leadership. Alicia Chacón has been fortunate to have had all three types of effective leadership up to this point.

At the district level, Ysleta Independent School District has a strong commitment to two-way immersion education. Currently, 20 elementary, 4 middle, and 2 high schools have TWI programs, and more programs are slated to start in the future. The first cohort of TWI

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students in the district is now in their second year of high school, and plans exist to continue the program through the 12th grade. At that point, students who graduate from the program will have a seal on their diploma indicating that they are bilingual and biliterate in addition to having achieved the academic requirements necessary for graduation. There are many supporters of two-way immersion in the district, but the most sustained leadership and motivation for the programs comes from the Director of the Bilingual/ESL Division, Dr. Lucille Housen, a committed administrator with many years of service in YISD.

At the school level, Alicia Chacón benefited enormously from having Mr. Bob Schulte as its founding principal. Mr. Schulte, who continued as principal of Alicia Chacón through the 2001-2002 academic year, had previously been the principal of another school in the district that had a dual language strand. As a result, he came to his new position at Alicia Chacón with tremendous levels of knowledge, enthusiasm, and dedication. He recruited motivated and skilled teachers and made sure that they were provided with ongoing professional development. He welcomed families into the school and involved parents in their children's education. He set ambitious goals for the school and its students and staff, and he achieved them. He was very accessible, going as far as to put his desk in the middle of the main hallway so that he could always be visible and accessible to students, staff, and parents. He created a warm, welcoming, family-like atmosphere where students learned to be respectful by being treated respectfully. In short, Mr. Schulte was a highly effective principal and it was largely due to his efforts that the program became so successful so quickly.

The administrative structure at Alicia Chacón is unique and reinforces the family orientation of the school. Students and teachers are clustered in language families according to the third

language of instruction that each student selects. Each language family is housed on its own wing of the school, off of the main hallway. In turn, each language family has its own administrator, or coordinator. This approach was developed as a way of maintaining a small school atmosphere within the parameters of a large school. Each coordinator oversees instruction, professional development, and teacher evaluation within her respective language family. In addition to the four coordinators that are responsible for each language family, there is also a parent coordinator. It is her function to run the parent component, which includes skills classes, a civic responsibility partnership with a community-based organization, the volunteer program, and the two fundraisers that are held each year in the summer and fall. Finally, in this coming academic year, a new position has been created for an instructional specialist, who will oversee instruction in all four language families and ensure that new people are being adequately trained and that model fidelity is maintained. Clearly, there is a high level of administrative knowledge and support at all levels.

School environment

A positive school environment is the second key component highlighted by Lindholm-Leary, and as was noted earlier, the environment at Alicia Chacón is very welcoming and family-like. In addition, the environment is very student-centered and respectful of children. Students are given a lot of access to school resources, are trained in the appropriate use of those resources, and are trusted to use those resources independently. For example, the upper grade students do the morning announcements every day using a morning TV show format that is televised into all of the classrooms. The students write and deliver the script in both English and Spanish, run the video camera and audio equipment, and manage all other aspects of the production. At the beginning of the year,

training is provided to an initial group of students, and after that point, the students themselves take ownership of the project and train new groups of students as needed.

Teachers and Staff

A knowledgeable and well-prepared staff is the backbone of any TWI program. Professional development data collected from teachers during the 1997-98 academic year (the third year of implementation of the program) showed that the staff at Alicia Chacón at that time was well-prepared. The 21 teachers who provided responses to the questionnaire (the whole staff at that time) had an average of 6.8 years of teaching experience, with an average of 2.2 years experience teaching in a TWI program. With regard to educational background, a majority had either advanced degrees or credits toward them, with 29% holding master's degrees and another 29% involved in graduate studies.

With regard to native language, 57% were native Spanish speakers, 19% were native English speakers, and 24% were native bilinguals (speakers of both English and Spanish from age 3 or earlier). This pattern indicates a much closer match between the backgrounds of students and their teachers than is typically the situation in public elementary schools in the United States, given that the majority of all teachers nation-wide are White (non-Hispanic), and there are about three times as many Latino students as Latino teachers (12% vs. 4%) (Henke, Choy, Chen, Geis, Alt, & Broughman, 1997).

All of the teachers had some prior exposure to TWI before starting to teach in a TWI program, and most had more than one type of exposure, including university coursework and student teaching, visiting TWI programs, reading brochures and other written materials, and watching videos. All but 1 teacher said that they continued to have ongoing professional development, and again, most people had multiple forms of professional development, including university coursework, district in-services, visits to TWI programs, peer coaching, action research, and professional reading. Overall, then, the teachers in this

sample were well educated, well prepared, and well-matched to the student population at Alicia Chacón.

Instructional Design and Features

One of the most important components of a TWI program is the clarity of the program design and the extent to which attention is paid to instructional factors such as academic expectations, literacy instruction, and language development. Alicia Chacón has a clearly articulated 80/10/10 model, and this is apparent in conversations with administrators and teachers, where a high level of consensus is evident. Likewise, issues regarding academic achievement, language and literacy development, and instructional strategies are also dealt with on a school-wide basis, and there is a high level of agreement and systematicity regarding academic goals and the delivery of instructional services.

With regard to academic goals, Alicia Chacón follows the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), which is a statewide list of objectives that each student in a given grade level should achieve in each subject area. In addition, the school has a Kids First Committee, which is headed by one of the coordinators and composed of one teacher representative per grade level. The committee meets regularly to discuss curriculum and other important issues about the program and its implementation, and decisions are made by consensus of the group. This strategy helps to ensure buy-in and systematic application of the curriculum.

For language and literacy development, a high level of agreement and coordination also exists across the school, with the whole school using the Language to Literacy approach, a holistic program that combines oral language development, reading, and writing. All teachers in the school have participated in multiple in-service professional development sessions on the approach, and the fact that it is being used school-wide is evident as you walk through the classrooms and view student work. At the primary grades, Estrellita (Myer, 1995) is also used as a way of incorporating phonics instruction into the holistic, litera-

ture-based approach that is common across the school.

Regarding teaching strategies, there is consistent agreement school-wide on the importance of separation of languages, meaning that teachers do not switch back and forth between English and Spanish during instruction. In addition, teachers frequently use a variety of grouping practices, such as pairing native speakers with second language learners, strong readers with struggling readers, etc. because they feel that it is essential that students have the opportunity to work with each other and help each other. Finally, teachers use thematic units as a way of integrating concepts across languages and across content areas so that students hear similar vocabulary and concepts being discussed in a variety of contexts and in both languages.

Students

In addition to having a balanced student population with regard to native language background, Alicia Chacón also has diversity in terms of the learning needs of their students. Special Education students and those with disabilities are welcome to enroll in the program. Program adjustments are made to accommodate children with special needs, such as special education pullout classes and in-classroom support provided by a separate teacher in collaboration with the classroom teacher. In addition to special education support, all students have access to a Tutoring and Learning Center designed especially for occasions when children need additional support in homework activities or classroom activities. Reading recovery classes are available for students in the primary grades who are struggling with literacy development. Overall, Alicia Chacón provides a variety of support options for students with special learning needs.

Conclusion

Based on student outcome data, fieldnotes based on focus groups and interviews with teachers and administrators, professional development data from teachers, and first-hand impressions from my visits to the school, Alicia Chacón consistently rates as an exemplary two-way immersion program.

The program adheres to the defining criteria of TWI, meets the three primary goals, and demonstrates all of the essential components of effective TWI programs. It stands as a model of what can be achieved not only in terms of two-way immersion education, but in terms of multilingual/multicultural education more broadly defined. ●

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