

Visit to Key Elementary, Arlington, VA 1/12/2000

Background

On January 12, 2000 I had the pleasure of visiting Francis Scott Key Elementary in Arlington, VA. The visit was arranged by Regla Armengol of the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) in Washington, DC. The purpose of my visit was to observe a public elementary school operating a partial immersion program in Spanish and English. This model is close to the approach being planned for the new John Stanford International School in Seattle, WA.

Principal Marjorie Myers and Assistant Principal Evelyn Fernandez spent the day answering questions that I brought from the teachers at the John Stanford International School in Seattle. They also arranged several class visitations. This report summarizes responses to the Questions from the John Stanford International School Teachers, Observations and Notes during the Visit, and a list of Resources Obtained from the School.

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Questions from John Stanford International School Teachers

1. What themes are (international) schools using?

Since the school teaches subject content in Spanish, the concept of "themes" is not really relevant in an immersion program the way that it might be in a FLES program. (comment from Regla Armengol)

2. What subjects are taught in immersion languages?

Math, Science, and Spanish language are taught K-5 in Spanish.

3. Why these particular subjects?

Science was selected because of the hands-on activities that are beneficial for language learning and the availability of materials in Spanish for science.

Originally, they taught Social Studies for the first three years, but when they got to the 4th grade level, where study of Virginia state history is required, they realized that there were no adequate materials in Spanish. So they switched to Math in Spanish for grades 4-5. Eventually, they found that Math was a better fit all the way through because it is so tangible. Now they do Math K-5 in Spanish.

4. What is the extent of use of non-native speakers/teachers?

All of the Spanish immersion teachers except one are native speakers of Spanish, and the one non-native speaker is close to native. All of the English language teachers are native speakers of English. Almost everybody speaks Spanish and English. There are a few monolingual teachers (Art, Music, PE, a couple of Special Ed teachers and two or three classroom teachers). Some of the native language Spanish speakers are not very fluent in English.

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5. Where are you recruiting native speaking teachers from?

Many Spanish speakers are available in the DC area. They have used ads to attract teachers and word-of-mouth. With PTA support, they've been able to bring in exchange teachers through the Spanish Embassy to work as assistants. (Parents provide room and board to the teachers.) They also have an exchange program with El Salvador.

6. What are the challenges you've had?

The day is too short. Not enough time with all the special classes – PE, music, etc. – and interruptions.

Recruitment of students takes an ongoing effort. Administrators go out and meet prospective kindergartners. It is necessary to sell the program each year, especially to the English families. (The Hispanic families are already attracted.)

Sometimes recruitment of teachers is challenging.

Materials in Spanish? - This has not been a problem for them.

7. What is the socio-economic-academic student population?

49% of kids qualify for free or reduced price lunch; however they also have upper class kids (children of ambassadors)

35% qualify for ESL help (all are Spanish speaking)

Now they are attracting more African-American kids. Parents realize the benefit when they see how well their children do. The Montessori preschool attracts more kids with other languages besides Spanish.

8. How are lower achieving students accommodated?

Children in special education are integrated into the program and study both Spanish and English.

They have developed a program called HERTS that allows them to offer small group reading for children at every reading level. During the HERTS time, children with special needs leave to work with a specialist, and the remaining children work (on English reading) with their main teacher. This smaller class-size for reading attracts kids from families who want their children to have more challenging reading. For Spanish-speaking kids who still need support, they can get extra ESL help during this time.

KEY: Know every child and where they're at in both languages.

9. Where do you get curricular materials from?

Science: *Encyclopedia Britannica* has materials (Foss kits) in Spanish; McMillan science units (booklets) They follow the county curriculum for Science, which includes 4 concepts per grade level.

Math: *Everyday Math* from University of Chicago (spiral curriculum that requires of lot of language for problem solving and thinking), complemented by Addison-Wesley.

Piñata series of Spanish readers.

10. How do you meet academic needs of weak students?

HERTS, plus paid assistants in the classroom; volunteers; K12 tutors through partnerships.

Homework club – every day for about 40 students grades 3-5 – English and Spanish.

Important: offer workshops to prepare tutors.

11. What kind of student and teacher turnover do you have?

Students: English speaking population is pretty stable (about 5%); Spanish population is more mobile.

Teachers: varies – sometimes teachers get transferred or their husbands change jobs.

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12. How do you handle students who enter the school after K/1?

They don't take English-only students after 2nd grade (unless there's a big commitment from the family to provide extra tutoring).

For Spanish speaking kids, if they're in the neighborhood they take them. If they need ESL, they get 3 weeks intense language instruction, then they are integrated into the program. They also receive language with the HERTS teachers and/or extra help (pull-out) if more help is needed.

There is some attrition among the English speaking population. At K, there is 50% English/Spanish. By grade 3, closer to 45% English/55% Spanish, and by grades 4-5 40% English/60% Spanish. (They have 4 classes in grades K-4; 3 classes in grades 4-5.)

13. How does target language affect ethnic diversity of school?

Half the population is Hispanic. They also have some African-American students. They are attracting more each year.

14. How does the elementary language program articulate with middle and high school?

The county coordinator and a task force, including parents, have been meeting to design a program to articulate with middle school. There are three immersion elementary programs that feed into that middle school – you need critical mass to make it work.

15. How do they accommodate ESL students?

Intensive language instruction, then integrate into the immersion program part of the day. Some are integrated into the English part of the day right away; some go to a HILT (High Intensity Language Training) class part of the day. It depends on their level, background knowledge, etc. They try to really know the kids.

16. How does the school connect with the community?

PTA; partnerships with local business, Dept. of Energy. Also a Spanish Immersion network (for the 3 elementary schools and 1 middle school) that meets monthly connects with both English and Hispanic parents.

17. Cultural expression – how do they celebrate festivals, etc.?

Yes – connect with the community.

Do a Halloween parade out to local businesses.

Band plays.

Poetry Contest – where students write or memorize an author's poem.

Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month.

Hold a Spanish-only book fair, and invite all schools to attend.

18. Is there any mentoring by high school students in the elementary school?

They're so involved in school it's hard to attract them. Recently they have had three high school students tutoring kids after school.

Better – they have 75 tutors from businesses.

19. How do immersion and non-immersion teachers work/plan together?

Meet weekly in team meetings by grade (during "specials" – Art, Music, PE).

On Wednesday, school has early release (1:40) for teachers to do own planning or to meet by language.

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20. Can we get copies of schedules and curricula?

Yes [see Resources]

21. What kinds of business partnerships exist?

Tutoring and other support.

22. Does the entire school have one program or is it a school within a school?

They started as a school within a school, but now the entire school is using the 50% Immersion model.

23. How are they assessing language proficiency?

Use rubrics for oral language and writing, with a simplified version to send home. [See Resources]

Look at best practices.

Used CAL assessments.

24. Are students achieving standards?

Yes – Virginia has “Standards of Learning” (SOLs).

They offer workshops in the SOLs, taught by the teachers, in Reading, Writing, Math, and Social Studies.

Teachers are supposed to predict which kids will need help achieving the standards based on their own assessments and test scores. They use Running Records and *Degrees of Reading Power*.

State assessments: 3rd grade Reading, Writing, Math; 4th grade Social Studies; 5th grade all; high school – every subject – students must pass in order to graduate.

25. What are the (language) goals for the fifth grade?

[See Resources - Rubrics]

Students leaving this program have placed in Spanish 3 or 4 or even AP.

There are high school students, who after 3 years, communicate less well than the 5th graders (although they know more grammar).

26. How do they determine (language) goals for each grade?

[See Resources – Curriculum Frameworks]

27. How long have they been at it?

Started in 1994 with the whole school partial immersion program. The partial immersion program (school within a school) started in 1986.

28. If they were to start over, what would they do differently?

Do Math in Spanish (rather than Social Studies).

Pay attention to your community. They started by trying to attract Anglo “gifted” kids. Now – integrate special ed students and mainstream them.

No regrets.

29. Any suggestions?

- Assess your program every year. Identify what worked and what didn't
- Helpful having an outside group (e.g., Center for Applied Linguistics) evaluate their program for the first 5 years. The staff got used to it, and were able to carry it on.

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30. Other Information

- They have a Montessori daycare on site. Fees for 3-4 year olds (\$29-\$350/month); free for 5 year olds (Kindergarten). They have some Spanish, but it's not immersion.
- Evelyn felt it was critical to have at least 10-15% of the kids be Spanish speakers to be role models for the English-speaking kids. (They have 50% and feel it's more balanced.)
- #1 is commitment to make it work (among teachers, administrators, students, and parents). It is necessary to manage the expectations of parents. The child must be committed, and the parents may not be able to help as much with homework in the usual way (e.g., if they don't understand the Spanish or English).

Observations and Notes during the Visit:

1. **Displays/Resources.** Everywhere there are signs/flyers in English and Spanish. At the entrance to the school are a series of 40 "cubbies" with a variety of information and resources about the YMCA, daycare, enrichment, special education, Virginia state Standards of Learning, joining PTA, etc.
2. **Speaking Spanish.** The office staff all speak Spanish to each other. They speak English to younger students (if necessary to help them solve a problem). The principal speaks Spanish well, though she is not a native speaker. The rule of thumb in the school is for students to respond in the language spoken to them by the adult. (So, if the principal says something to them in Spanish, they should respond in Spanish, even though English is her native language.) The "language of choice of the kids" is normally English.
3. **Parent Involvement is very important to them.** Last year they offered weekly classes of interest to parents, taught by teachers or community members. That was a bit too much. This year they are offering classes twice a month. Attendance varies (4-40 people), but people know that the classes are consistently available. They may only come once or twice a year, but after a couple of years, they are ready to become more involved in the school, volunteer, join PTA, etc. It takes time for a family (esp. immigrant) to develop that comfort level with the school (and have sufficient English). This year they are adding computer classes for the kids on Wednesday evenings to attract the Hispanic families.
4. **Integrated Curriculum.** They try to integrate curriculum so that both Spanish and English get covered. For example, a unit on China and Egypt or the Environment might be covered in Math (in Spanish) and Social Studies (in English). Although Science is taught in Spanish, the students go to the Science Lab twice a month where the teacher speaks English and reviews concepts and vocabulary in English.
5. **Assessment.** They develop a portfolio for Language Arts (part of a county-wide program) in Spanish and English. It's only used for that year (i.e. not passed on to next year's teacher, except for ESL, they might leave a couple of writing samples). Tests (in Science, for example) are given in English because all students are required to pass the Virginia Standards of Learning, which are in English.
6. **Classroom Arrangement.** The building is organized so that the 4 classrooms (at each grade level) are next to each other, and are paired English with Spanish: English <--> Spanish – Spanish <--> English. It is important for students to go to a physically different space to do Spanish (rather than do Spanish in their English classroom). In the Spanish classroom, there was a big rug for the kids to sit on that had pictures and both Spanish and English words (e.g., airplane – el avion), and lots of signs with Spanish cues on them (Today is... Tomorrow will be ... etc.).

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7. **Addressing Teachers/Children.** In the Montessori school, children address teachers by their first names. In grades 1-5, they address English speaking teachers as Mr., Ms., etc. and Spanish speaking teachers as Señor, Señora, etc. In terms of how the teachers address the kids, they ask the children what they prefer. Do they want to be John or Juan? There is no particular effort to pronounce American names with a Spanish accent.
8. **Spanish Language in the Classroom.** Generally, the Spanish teachers spoke Spanish to the children (this is the expectation in an immersion classroom), but I noticed that about 10-20% of the time in the earlier grade classes, the teacher might follow on with an English cue (e.g., "Uno per uno... One by one). *[It did not seem bothersome to me, but it is something to clarify with teachers. It would be easy for teachers to slip into providing more English cues than necessary, thus reducing the need to work (and learn) on the part of the students. MA]*
9. **Varieties of Spanish.** Teachers come from several countries and speak different varieties of Spanish. (e.g., Cuban Spanish is different from Castilian, which is different from Bolivian.) Even though there are differences in pronunciation, the kids seem to adjust fine. It is probably more important for kids to have access to native speakers (or near native) than it is for them to be exposed to only one variety of Spanish.
10. **Special Education.** Their IEPs specify access to the Resource Room or self-contained. They do not have any children with behavioral disabilities requiring them to be in a self-contained classroom. They try to modify the regular curriculum to accommodate these children (and they can take the state tests on the SLOs with special accommodations).
11. **Library.** Currently about 25% of the books are in Spanish. They are hoping to add more. There is a bilingual writing center (computer) and Spanish online encyclopedia. They integrate the books by topic (so that students might find a Spanish-language book on dinosaurs next to an English one). The easy reading books in Spanish are labeled so that students can pick them out. They have some books with both languages.
12. **Interview with Parent.** *[I stopped a parent on the way to picking up her child and asked her impressions. MA]* It is challenging for monolingual parents to follow their children's schoolwork. Commitment is key. One concern (minor) is that there are different conventions for writing numbers in Spanish and English. Will that affect their students' performance on standardized Math tests?
13. **Site-Based Management.** There is no formal site council or similar type of site-based management. *[When I asked the parent about this, she did not even know what I was talking about. MA]* Parents feel that the principal is approachable.

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Resources Obtained from the School:

1. Virginia School Performance Report Card

This document is similar to the School Report Card required by Washington State. This report shows how this school compares to the Division and State in terms of overall student achievement on the Virginia Standards of Learning Testing. (For example, in grade 3, 85.71% of students at Key met the standard, vs. 69.13% for the Division and 54.73% for the State in 1997-98.)

2. Arlington Public Schools Local School Report 1998-99: "Escuela Key"

This document is the local report card and lists the school's goals, instructional highlights, awards and recognition, special activities and community service, opportunities for parent involvement, technology, school safety, transportation, and school population. (For example, 242 out of 544 students receive ESL support; 50% of students receive free or reduced price lunch; average class size is 22.9)

3. Key Elementary School Master Schedule SY99-2K

This shows the schedule and breakdown of time. (For example, 2 hrs. 27 min. in each language each day)

4. The Ins and Outs of the Immersion Program

PowerPoint notes from Evelyn E. Fernandez on the Two-Way Partial Spanish Immersion Program. (Includes reasons why parents enroll their children in immersion and how a partial immersion program is designed.)

5. Elementary Partial Immersion Spanish Language Arts Curriculum Framework

This document is published by the Division of Instruction Foreign Language Dept. Arlington Public Schools (1996). It includes: Philosophy Statement; Mission Statement; Spanish Language Arts Goals for a partial immersion program; Language and Communication Goals by Grade Level and across the developmental continuum; Language Forms (grammar) by grade level; Teaching Activities by grade level in the skill areas of Listening and Viewing, Speaking, Reading, and Writing; and Language Contexts (School, Family and Home, Environment, Time and Numerality, Food, and Clothing) and Functional Skills by grade level.

6. Arlington County, VA Spanish Partial-Immersion Program Rubrics for Writing and Speaking in English and Spanish for Grades 1-5 (1997)

This extensive guide, in English and Spanish, includes: Scoring Guide for Rubrics; Rubrics for Speaking and Writing Grades 1-5; and Classroom Matrices for Speaking and Writing Scores, along with sample rubrics.

7. Spanish Oral Language Progress Report

These documents for grades 1-5 are a simplified version of the scoring rubrics in Resource #6, suitable for use as a send-home progress report assessing the student's oral language progress in the areas of fluency, vocabulary, and grammar.

8. Assessment Portfolio Two-Way Spanish/English Immersion Program

This document provides a thorough introduction into portfolio assessment and how to design a portfolio, select pieces to include, keep a Running Reading Record, etc. It includes many sample forms (in both English and Spanish) and questionnaires for students and parents, as well as a bibliography.

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9. Questions That Encourage Development of Vocabulary for Science Process Skills

This 1995 Summer Curriculum Project includes a wealth of process skills, questions, and vocabulary in English and Spanish designed for use in elementary Science. (Example process skills: Observation, Collecting Data, Making Graphs and Charts, Interpreting Data, Communication Oral and Written, Classifying, Measuring, Predicting, Investigating, Making a Drawing or Model, and Inferring)

10. Best Practices and Exemplary Lessons – Elementary Two-Way Spanish Immersion Program

This 1999 document from Myriam Stein of Arlington Public Schools provides a series of sample science lessons (for grades 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) incorporating linguistic and content objectives. (Examples: What Do Scientists Do?, How does Nature Change in the Spring?, How do Plants Absorb Water? etc.)

11. Key School Parent Involvement Plan

This document outlines Key School's parent involvement plan for 1998-1999. Their approach is based on the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement (published by National PTA) and the research of Dr. Joyce Epstein at Johns Hopkins University. The plan focuses on five areas: Parents and Schools as Communicators (Communicating), Parents and Schools as Supporters (Volunteers), Parents and Schools as Learners (Parenting Skills), Parents and Schools as Teachers (Learning at Home), and Parents and Schools in Shared Governance (Representing Other Parents).

12. Miscellaneous Parent Involvement forms found at the School

Padres Unidos Para Triunfar Calendar of Activities for 1999-2000 (programs offered twice a month for families during the school year); English classes for Adults; "I spy"; "Bright Ideas"; Key PTA Membership Form and Volunteer Form (English and Spanish versions); Project Family Classes flyer.