

Research base grows with popularity of two-way immersion

TWO-WAY IMMERSION is an instructional approach that brings together native English speakers and native speakers of another language, usually Spanish, for instruction in both languages. Although this approach began about 40 years ago, it has grown significantly in the last decade or so, with 266 programs documented in 2002. With this increased use has come greater interest in its implementation, student outcomes, instructional strategies, and the experiences of students, parents, and teachers. Not surprisingly, the research base has expanded as well.

In “Trends in Two-Way Immersion Education: A Review of the Research” (Report 63), Elizabeth R. Howard, Julie Sugarman, and Donna Christian summarize that research, synthesize the findings, and point out areas in need of future research. The report also includes

profiles of successful programs. The review concludes that “much is going well in two-way immersion education:”

- # Teachers are reasonably well-prepared in education, experience, and credentials;
- # Parents and students are positive about two-way immersion and students have positive attitudes about bilingualism and multiculturalism;
- # Successful programs, such as those profiled in this review, show that the approach is feasible and provide models for those interested in starting such programs;
- # Academic outcomes are “generally favorable” in that native speakers of both languages in a two-way immersion program tend to do as well or better on standardized achievement

tests than their peers in other settings.

One issue of concern to the report’s authors is that of equitable treatment and opportunities for native speakers of the minority language, as well as for native English speakers. Many forces work against the ideal of equal status for two languages and two language groups. Among those forces, the authors cite: shortage of bilingual teachers and staff, limited teaching materials for minority languages, mandatory standardized testing in English in the primary grades, and the “current political initiatives such as English-only and anti-bilingual education legislation.”

These equity issues are among those the authors see as deserving of future research. G