Contextual Challenges to Dual-Language Education: A Case Study of a Developing Middle School Program

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Title: Contextual Challenges to Dual-Language Education: A Case Study of a Developing Middle School Program.
Abstract
BIlingual education has gained a vital level of importance, not only at a private level, but also at a public level. Bilingual education is described as an innovative teaching. However, the purpose of this article is to reflect the difficulties and handicaps that the bilingual education presents nowadays. To do it, this article is based on a case study carried out by Rebecca Freeman. This case study reveals those handicaps that would demonstrate the divergence regarding the theory and the reality.
Keywords: bilingual education, english, teaching

Título: Desafío a la educación bilingüe: un caso práctico del programa en desarrollo en Middle School.
Resumen
La educación bilingüe ha adquirido un nivel de importancia vital, no sólo a nivel privado sino también a nivel público. Se muestra como una enseñanza innovadora. Sin embargo, el objetivo de este artículo es reflejar las dificultades que presenta la educación bilingüe en la actualidad, basándose en un caso práctico real que llevó a cabo Rebecca Freeman. El cual refleja diversos handicaps que demostrarían la discrepancia entre teoría y realidad.
Palabras clave: educación bilingüe, inglés, enseñanza.

The author, Rebecca Freeman, managed a study of the introduction of a bilingual program at Julia de Burgos Bilingual Middle School in North Philadelphia. The main aim of this dual-language program was to teach English and Spanish. This project was carried out in a society characterized by their lower socioeconomic status.

In the course of her study, the author dealt with the importance of bilingualism and she distinguished three main models of bilingualism: transitional, maintenance and enrichment. Also, Freeman found three external fields of influence on instituting bilingualism: structural, sociolinguistic and ideological contexts. Then, the importance of bilingualism was another topic covered in her essay and it was directly related to how prejudices or rejection of a language could influence its learning and teaching. Moreover, Freeman included some projects related to bilingualism and the techniques used by teachers during classes at Julia de Burgos Bilingual Middle School. All these points will be analysed in the course of this essay.

Firstly, dual-language education is defined by Freeman as 'a type of enrichment bilingual education that targets language minority and language majority students' (2000, p. 204). However, as Freeman stated at the beginning of her article, the definition of what bilingualism means, among other issues, is controversial. Concerning this question, the pragmatists Dewaele et al. (1982) also stated in *Bilingualism: Basic Principles* that 'bilingualism as a concept has open-ended semantics' (p. 1.). This statement makes reference to the nonexistence of a global and unique definition of the concept of bilingualism.

The objectives required to be bilingual are not fixed and equal for everybody since some people consider being bilingual as the capacity of speaking two languages and others also consider that it is not only a matter of language, but also a matter of culture or ideology. It means that being bilingual is also taking part or accepting the customs of the foreign language. This question is what makes the definition of bilingualism as an aspect difficult to fix. Other authors such as Harding and Riley also support this idea when they consider 'bilingualism as complex since it is directly connected with multiple social questions' (1998, p. 45).

Moreover, related to the importance of bilingual programs, Freeman considered that their benefits were mainly three 'bilingualism and biliteracy, academic achievement through two languages, and appreciation of and ability to work with cultural diversity' (Freeman, 2000, p. 204). It could be said that these advantages are in general what speakers try to

achieve when learning a target language. It can be seen that it is not only a question of linguistics or language, but other external factors are also important. For example, more specifically, another bilingual project called Head Start also distinguishes cognitive, social-emotional, learning and global advantages as it is stated in the article *The Benefits of Being Bilingual* (n.d.).

However, Freeman distinguishes not only a specific model of bilingual education, but three different ones: transitional, maintenance and enrichment. The model of bilingual education used at Julia de Burgos School was enrichment, since it was the model characterized by the goals that this school wanted to achieve.

> Enrichment bilingual education programs require a high level of community support and involvement, both financial and human, by both majority and minority speakers. They are more complicated to set up, and the scheduling of students, teachers, and classes requires more effort (Roberts, 1995).

This citation was also shared by Freeman, who considered that bilingual education was not only influenced by linguistic issues, but also by structural, sociolinguistic and ideological contexts.

With regard to this point, it is important to highlight too the importance of prejudices towards a language when learning it. In this case, Freeman showed how difficult was to teach Spanish when most part of students rejected this language. Therefore, an important goal of the dual-programme at Julia de Burgos School was to eliminate those prejudices giving the same level of importance to both the minority language (Spanish) and the majority language (English). It is clear that ideological prejudices have the capacity of complicating the process of bilingualism.

To do it, this school developed the PORTAL Programme. Its main goals were related to academic achievement, but also to the reorganization of the school into small learning communities. These communities were composed of four or five teachers every 100 or 125 students. Each community was free of choosing teams, teachers and area of interest. In this way, this freedom was supposed to be useful to motivate students and, as a consequence, to get a higher level of academic achievements.

When developing this program, the expectations were positive. Nevertheless, it also demanded several requirements not only for students, but also for teachers. On the one hand, it was essential the formation of teachers. To do that, they were part of sessions of observation and learning how to teach context and language using a different language. Also, they were provided with materials and videos.

Then, concerning students' requirements, the short duration of this program demanded them to have learned Spanish previously in other programs. Therefore, as Freeman stated, 'the dual-program at Julia de Burgos cannot function in isolation' (2000, p. 215).

The good intentions were frustrated when some rules of the PORTAL program were not accomplished. For example, teachers tended to use both languages during lessons instead of just one or the division into communities was made by administrators or teachers instead of by students themselves. As a consequence, catching students' attention and increasing motivation could not be totally achieved. Moreover, code-switching practices were also common during lessons. It consisted of moving from Spanish to English or vice versa during lessons in order to clarify a specific term or explain it. The positive point is that teachers did not resort to direct translation, a usual technique when teaching content and a foreign language since it is the easiest and the fastest form of making students understand an issue.

Then, Freeman also reflected some useful techniques for teachers when taking part of a bilingual project. Some of them consisted of the division of students into groups depending on their level of the language or a deeper preparation or training of teachers into bilingual projects. Also, as a form of promoting students' motivation and eliminating prejudices, it would be useful the connection of bilingualism with other interesting issues such as technology or the media. Besides, Freeman also highlighted the implication in the process of learning not only of teachers, but also of administrators and parents.

To conclude, the techniques provided by Freeman mainly imply as the key point the formation of teachers since students have to feel that teachers are totally safe when teaching content in a foreign language. Security and motivation are feelings that have to be expressed by teachers in order to make students feel and express too during lessons. However, in most new bilingual institutions it has not been an important point to take into account, at least in Spain. Many teachers are teaching content in English without having the proper level of English to do it, what frustrates them. Therefore, as I have previously said, the instruction of teachers is the key point when planning a bilingual project.

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