

Visit to Burnt Mills Elementary, Silver Spring, MD 1/13/2000

Background

On January 13, 2000 I had the pleasure of visiting Burnt Mills Elementary in Silver Spring, Maryland. The visit was arranged by Dr. Myriam Met of Montgomery County Public Schools. 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.

Coordinator Linda Torres spent the morning answering questions that I brought from the teachers at the John Stanford International School in Seattle. She 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?

Certain themes are covered at each grade level.

2. What subjects are taught in immersion languages?

They teach everything in both Spanish and English. They alternate which subjects are taught in Spanish and which in English at the semester break. For example, fall might be Language Arts and Social Studies in English, and Math and Science in Spanish; spring would be Language Arts and Social Studies in Spanish, and Math and Science in English.

3. Why these particular subjects?

Generally, the easiest subjects (to teach in Spanish) are Math and Science, although Science and Math are harder in first grade because the kids don't have the vocabulary yet. Social Studies is easiest in first grade because it is integrated into Reading and involves things they understand.

Math works well because kids are able to adjust to number sense and it's easy to transfer.

Science has a lot of vocabulary, and you have to be careful about books. Books and materials from the state are not available in Spanish.

Social Studies is nice for talking, but sometimes the vocabulary is hard.

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

Most of their teachers are native speakers. Non-native speakers must be very fluent and have had experience living in a Spanish-speaking country.

5. Where are you recruiting native speaking teachers from?

The county recruited teachers from Puerto Rico about 6-7 years ago. Now it is more open.

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6. What are the challenges you've had?

Getting materials. It takes time to translate and teachers stay late to do it.

When curriculum changes, they have to scramble to adapt it for Spanish.

Big concern of the parents is how to keep the Spanish language up during the summer. (They are thinking of offering a 2-week summer camp.)

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

There is a large Hispanic population in the area, many of whom qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.

There is also a large Jewish population (about 90% of kids in the neighborhood, but only 20% of kids in the school).

8. How are lower achieving students accommodated?

Special education. They practice inclusion.

The Education Management Team is used to identify needs and provide one-on-one help and accommodations in the classroom.

9. Where do you get curricular materials from?

They had nothing at the beginning and had to create their own. Some they translate and adapt (it's not enough to just translate). Now that there are more Hispanics in the area, they use catalogs to order translated and adapted materials.

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

In the kindergarten Spanish class, an aide can help students in English if they need it.

If problems, have one of the (Spanish-speaking) children translate (at first).

Use lots of visuals.

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

There is some attrition, but it's been OK since there's a general trend towards smaller class size. Currently they have 24 kids in Kindergarten, but only 17 in grade 2 (down from 24).

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

They don't accept any English-only children after 1st grade. Spanish-only children are sent for help in English as a Second Language, but allowed to join the immersion program.

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

[Not discussed here]

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

This is a concern of parents. There are assessments in Spanish to help with placement.

15. How do they accommodate ESL students?

No special ESL classes (except for Spanish-only kids joining the immersion program).

16. How does the school connect with the community?

[Not discussed here]

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

[Not discussed here]

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

[Not discussed here]

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

Once a week grade-level meetings to share ideas, materials. Also, once a week dual language meetings.

20. Can we get copies of schedules and curricula?

Yes [see Resources]

21. What kinds of business partnerships exist?

Some – work with the counselor. When they started, the Spanish Embassy sent people to read to the children. They have senior citizens who came (until transportation became a problem.)

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

School within a school.

23. How are they assessing language proficiency?

Daily and weekly report on homework, classwork, and use of Spanish.

24. Are students achieving standards?

Latino, African-American, and Anglo children are doing as well or better at meeting the standards as kids in the regular program. In general, achievement is lower in 1st grade, then higher in 2nd and 3rd grades.

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

Students could be bilingual by 6th year of study.

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

There are learning objectives by grade level by subject, e.g. ISM Standards for Math [see Resources]. There is a Scope and Sequence adapted for Spanish to guide the curriculum.

27. How long have they been at it?

Five years as a dual language immersion program.

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

[Not discussed here]

29. Any suggestions?

[Not discussed here]

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Observations and Notes during the Visit:

1. **Classroom Work.** Put kids work outside the classroom to share. Put Spanish information on the wall.
2. **Library.** Few books in Spanish. Many translations are not done well.
3. **Integrating Culture.** Begin everything with something culturally related. Integrate folk tales and culture.
4. **Visit to 3rd grade English Math Class.** I reviewed some student Math journals. The English writing seemed quite good, showing their ability to write about how they solved the problem. They had questions about learning styles (the way you learn math best) – student responses were quite insightful. *[The Math journal itself looked like a great tool. Compact, everything that you've learned is in one place. MA]*
5. **Parent Involvement.** There is a core group of parents who are very supportive and “always there.” Teachers send home a weekly newsletter. This is not a magnet school, so they have to draw from their neighborhood. In terms of outreach, they do an orientation program for kindergarten families about the dual language program, but mostly people hear word-of-mouth. They offered special classes for parents at the beginning.
6. **Homework.** Teachers only give work to take home that was taught in class (since parents may not be in a position to help with new material).

Resources Obtained from the School:

1. Burnt Mills Elementary School

This brochure in English and Spanish describes the school program and the school's Vision Statement.

2. Escuela Elemental Burnt Mills – Programa en dos idioma Español - Ingles

This document in Spanish describes the dual language program.

3. Scope and Sequence for Spanish Immersion Programs

This document from the Dept. of Academic Programs of Montgomery County Public Schools (Maryland) outlines the learning goals (e.g., Understanding sentence structure, Reading, Verbs, etc.) and at which grade levels different functions should be introduced. It indicates three levels of instruction: Introduce, Emphasize, and Refine, and covers both total and partial immersion programs.

4. ISM Objectives (K-5)

This document outlines Math objectives by grade level. (These represent standards that all students in Maryland must reach.)

5. MSPAP Tips: Writing to Inform, to Persuade, to Express Personal Ideas

These are rubrics used for scoring different types of writing, based on four traits: Development, Organization, Attention to Audience, and Language.

6. Unlocking the Dual Language Mystery: How to Start and Maintain a Dual Language Program

This is a presentation handout by Sonia Soltero, Ph.D. of Chicago Public Schools at the 23rd Annual Statewide Conference for Teachers of Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students (Dec. 1999). (For example, includes Successful Instructional Approaches in Dual Language Programs)