

Providing a Framework for Bilingual-Bicultural Education: A Profile of the Japanese Bilingual-Bicultural Program at Clarendon Alternative Elementary School

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Introduction

In this paper, I write about a visit I made to Clarendon Alternative Elementary School in San Francisco, California. The purpose of my visit was to learn more about Clarendon's Japanese Bilingual and Bicultural Program (JBBP) and to see firsthand how the teaching of the Japanese language and culture is integrated into the school's regular curriculum. I briefly describe the school, the Japanese program and its goals, the teachers, the role that parents play in the school and program, and the JBBP curriculum. I also write about several of the JBBP classes that I observed during my visit to Clarendon and conclude the paper with a short discussion of the benefits of a bilingual-bicultural education.

Clarendon Alternative Elementary School

Clarendon Alternative Elementary School is part of the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) and is located in the Twin Peaks area of San Francisco, California. It offers class levels ranging from kindergarten to 5th grade and has an enrollment over 550 children. The SFUSD has designated Clarendon as an alternative public school, which means that it is open to all students who reside in the city of San Francisco. Because the ratio of applicants at Clarendon exceeds the places for admission, entering kindergarten students are selected by a computer lottery. The elementary school is well known among San Francisco residents for its high academic standards. According to the state's most recent (2007) Academic Performance Index (API) ratings, Clarendon is ranked in the top 10 percent of California public elementary schools (Rocha, 2007). The API is an annual

measurement of the academic performance and progress of public schools in California. Clarendon is also the proud recipient of California's Distinguished School Award. Part of the uniqueness of Clarendon is that it offers children the opportunity to study in Japanese or Italian language and culture programs.

Japanese Bilingual Bicultural Program

The Japanese Bilingual Bicultural Program (JBBP) was originally founded in 1973 to serve as a heritage language program to maintain and nurture the language and culture of the many Japanese and Japanese-American residents of the city of San Francisco. Although the JBBP is still regarded as a heritage language program, the majority of the students are now from families of non-Japanese backgrounds. At present, only 15-30% of the children entering at the kindergarten level come from families with native Japanese speakers (SFUSD, 2007). Clarendon's JBBP has developed into a program that is primarily designed to enrich the multicultural educational opportunities available to children in grades K-5 in the public school system (JBBP brochure). Approximately 250 children of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds are presently enrolled in Clarendon's JBBP program encompassing a little less than half of the whole student body. The program employs 11 teachers and one Japanese Program Coordinator. There are a total of 11 classes in the program with a set maximum number of 20 students in the kindergarten to third grade classes and a set maximum number of 33 students in the fourth and fifth grade classes. There are two classes for each grade level with one split-level fourth/fifth grade class. Children remain in the JBBP for their entire time at Clarendon. Clarendon students take part in annual speech contests jointly held by the Consulate General of Japan and the Japanese American Association of Northern California. After completing elementary school, students may continue studying Japanese language and culture in Japanese programs in two middle schools and three high schools in the San Francisco Unified School District. In 2006, the Japanese Consul awarded the Japan Foreign Minister's Commendation Award to Clarendon for the promotion of mutual understanding between Japan and the United States.

Goal of the JBBP

The main goal of the JBBP is to promote a positive attitude among children

toward learning the Japanese language and culture so that they will continue their studies in the future.

JBBP Teachers

The JBBP teachers are fully credentialed elementary school instructors qualified to teach multiple elementary-level subjects. They teach all the regular core subjects in addition to teaching Japanese language and culture. Although the teachers have the primary responsibility for teaching the Japanese core curriculum to the students, they are assisted by the Japanese Program Coordinator, and community and family volunteers. The JBBP teaching staff is currently made up of two native-speaking Japanese teachers, while most of the other teachers, except for one, have some family connection to Japan. The JBBP encourages its teachers to take Japanese language courses for improving and upgrading their Japanese language skills.

Role of Parents

Parents play an integral role at Clarendon and are strongly encouraged to become actively involved in the JBBP by applying their skills to a variety of projects and activities. They are expected to help in classes, assist with fund raising, promote events, participate in organized activities and attend monthly meetings. The parents stay informed on the latest JBBP news through the publication of a Japanese/English biweekly newsletter.

JBBP Curriculum

Clarendon's JBBP is a content-based Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) program. FLES programs are distinguished from other second language programs by the type of goals and amount of time spent on instruction in the second language. The instruction is proficiency-oriented and is integrated within the regular subject areas at the respective grade levels with a greater focus on meaningful and purposeful communication than on grammatical mastery. Students in a typical FLES program spend between 5-15% of their class time in the foreign language. The goals of FLES programs are for students to acquire proficiency in listening and speaking in the target language and to acquire an understanding of and appreciation for other

cultures. Some proficiency in reading and writing is also emphasized (Curtain & Pesola, 1993). FLES programs are not to be confused with immersion or partial immersion programs in which the instruction of the target language is more intense.

The JBBP curriculum is structured so that the primary Japanese language focus is on fostering students' Japanese listening and speaking skills, although students are exposed to some reading and writing. However, the vast majority of the teaching is conducted in English with students receiving Japanese instruction for about two to three hours over a week. The Japanese language instruction is incorporated in the teaching of the general subject areas and the teachers have the flexibility to teach Japanese when and how they want. General subjects include reading, math, social studies, language arts, physical education, art, music, and multicultural studies.

The JBBP curriculum coordinator and teachers designed the Japanese curriculum with assistance from FLES and Japanese language experts from outside the school. The language curriculum is outlined in JBBP's *Scope and Sequence*, which contains six thematic units. Each unit includes specific language benchmarks or topics that are used throughout the grade levels with new topics added for each successive grade level (as seen in Table 1).

The teaching of Japanese culture forms the second component of the JBBP curriculum. The multiple aims of this instruction are to promote an understanding of cultural diversity and respect for others, nurture expression and communication abilities through the arts, foster intellectual growth and develop solid problem-solving skills (JBBP brochure). Students learn about such Japanese holidays and festivals as *Otsukimi*, *Taiku no hi*, *Oshougatsu*, *Setsubun*, *Hina Matsuri*, and *Kodomo no Hi* and the traditional games and food associated with each particular celebration. Students are also involved in activities such as *Ikebana*, tea ceremony and sumo and correspond with students in other schools in the U.S. and Japan. They participate in the Performing Arts Night, Culture Day and the Cherry Blossom Festival in San Francisco's Japan Town. Instruction is not only limited to Japanese culture. In keeping with the aim of promoting cultural diversity and respect for others, students also learn about cultural festivities and holidays in other countries.

Table 1: *Clarendon JBBP K-5 Standards-based Japanese Scope and Sequence*

	K	1	2	3	4 / 5
SELF	Name Color Numbers 1-20 Animals	Name Grade Birthday Animals	Name Grade Birthday Animal Colors Body, health	Name Grade Age Birthday Food Colors Body, health	Name Grade Age Birthday Food Pets Hobby, sports Instruments Future plans Fashion show Body, health
FAMILY	Members Colors Food	Members Colors Food Animals	Members Colors Food Animals	Members Colors Food Animals Birthdays Hobbies	Members Age Birthday Hobby, sports Food Pets Phone number Address
SCHOOL	Directions Objects Greetings colors, shape	Directions Objects Greetings Colors Calendar 1-30	Directions Objects Calendar Weather Numbers 1-50	Directions Objects Calendar Weather Numbers 1-100 School rooms	Directions Objects Calendar Weather School rooms School subjects
FOOD	Fruits Vegetables Colors	Fruits Vegetables Colors	Fruits Vegetables Favorite dish Family	Fruits/vegetables Favorite dish Family American food	Fruits/vegetables Japanese food/dishes Ingredients Shopping Money 1-10,000 Restaurant, ordering
HOME	Family Colors Shapes Animals	Family Bed, chair Big, small Animals	Phone numbers Family members Animals Own room Objects	See family unit	Daily routine Wake up ... sleep Rooms in the house Objects in the room Location of objects
NATURE	Pet animals Zoo animals Farm animals	Ocean animals Story animals	Bay area animals Habitats Food they eat	Bay Area animals Habitats Food they eat Movements	Weather Pen pal letters Community Holiday

Observations of JBBP Classes

Kindergarten Class

The atmosphere in the class was very kid-friendly. The classroom was very large and bright with many colorful posters and pictures on the walls. During my visit, the children sat on a comfortable carpet on one side of the room. The teacher led the children in a Japanese song first singing one verse in English and then the next one in Japanese. The children seemed very adept at singing in both languages. After finishing the song, the teacher read lines from the book titled *Who Stole Cookies from the Cookie Jar?*. She incorporated the Japanese words for father, mother, brother and sister into the reading of the book as in “*Otokonoko stole the cookies from the cookie jar*” to which the children replied “*Who me? Couldn’t be*”. In the next lesson, the teacher reviewed the colors of the rainbow and asked the children to name the colors in English and Japanese. The children replied quickly and in unison. In the last lesson, the teacher introduced the Japanese celebration of *O-tsukimi* or Moon Viewing and explained how it is celebrated in Japan. She then led the children in a song about *O-tsukimi* written out on a poster board. Finally, she asked the Japanese Program Coordinator to read a book in Japanese about *O-tsukimi* to the children. The children were very attentive and sat quietly while he read. After the reading, the teacher informed the children that she would read them the book in English the next day.

First Grade Class

In the first grade class, the students were in the middle of a science project about their local habitat. Their teacher had instructed them to observe and draw items that were found in yarn circles in their schoolyard. Although I did not observe them speaking Japanese, I did notice that they wrote their names in Japanese on their worksheets. The children were hard at work completing their assignments, so I did not observe much verbal interaction among them. However, the class was lively and students felt free to approach their teacher for comments or questions. After reviewing one student’s worksheet, the teacher reminded him to write his name in Japanese.

Second Grade Class

The walls of the second grade classroom were decorated with various Japanese

education posters such as a *hiragana* recognition chart and a days-of-the week chart in Japanese. The teacher informed me that she liked to use Total Physical Response commands in Japanese with her students and that she also used educational games to reinforce Japanese vocabulary. While visiting the class, I observed two boys speaking Japanese. One of the boys made an utterance in Japanese. As he spoke, his friend mimicked his comments in a friendly manner.

Third Grade Class

When I visited the third grade class, the students were involved in a writing activity. Upon entering the classroom, the teacher had the students stand up together and bow to me. He then asked two students to introduce themselves to me in Japanese. Because the students were shy to do this in front of the whole class, the teacher decided it was better that I circulate in the classroom and approach students one on one instead. I circulated among the students while they were involved in their writing activity and asked them for their names, their ages and basic questions such as “What color is this?” or “What are you doing?” in Japanese. Students were able to answer back in very comprehensible Japanese.

Fifth Grade Class

The fifth grade class was in the middle of their math lesson when I visited them. The students sat in groups of four to a table. I noticed boxes of *hiragana* and *katakana* flash cards on each table. The teacher asked me to introduce myself to the class in Japanese. After introducing myself, the teacher remarked to the class that I used the formal *watashi wa* in my introduction and pointed out how it differed from the informal first person *boku* that they tended to use with each other. She then resumed the teaching of her math lesson. The majority of her instruction was in English, but she did intersperse her teaching with comments and questions in Japanese. For example, I heard her use the phrase, “*kore wa nan desu ka*” (What is this?) when asking students for their answers to square root problems. She also called on students to read specific problems by using the command “*yonde kudasai*” (please read). I observed that the students were very comfortable with their teacher’s usage of Japanese in her instruction.

The Benefits of a Bilingual-Bicultural Education

The benefits of bilingual-bicultural programs are as varied as the backgrounds of the children who take part in them. For minority language students, a bilingual-bicultural education program offers them the opportunity to learn the language and culture of their parents, grandparents or ancestors. The advantages of a bilingual-bicultural education go beyond just maintaining a family's language or culture. Research has shown (Cummins, 1993, Dutcher, 1995) that minority language school students in bilingual programs typically show stronger maintenance of their heritage language than those students who attend mainstream schools. This point is not altogether surprising to many educators and parents, but the same research also indicates that heritage language learners tend to perform as well as, if not better than, their mainstreamed counterparts in non-language subjects such as mathematics, history and science.

Beyond the benefits that are strictly educational in nature, heritage language programs provide a psychological boost to the self-image of minority language students. Most of these students view their second language abilities more positively than mainstreamed minority language students simply because of the greater emphasis put on their heritage language which usually results in an enhancement of the children's self-esteem and sense of identity (Lee, 2002, Vadas, 1995). Conversely, minority language students enrolled in mainstream schools are more likely to reject their heritage language because the lack of recognition of their heritage language negatively impacts their motivation to continue learning it.

Perhaps the most revealing point that the research of bilingual-bicultural programs has found is in the area of English language performance. The English language performance of minority language children enrolled in bilingual programs has been shown to be equal to the performance evidenced by mainstreamed minority language children (Cummins, 2000, Krashen, 1998). Again, the reason for this difference points to enhanced self-esteem and a promotion of language and intellectual skills that transfer from the minority language to English (August & Hakuta, 1997).

Heritage language students are not the only students who benefit from a bilingual-bicultural education. Like the majority of students at Clarendon, most bilingual-bicultural programs are made up of students whose families do not share a common history with the target language or culture. In many cases, parents have

decided that their children should learn a new language and culture because they are knowledgeable about the advantages that such an education brings. Some of these advantages are that students of foreign languages score statistically higher on standardized tests conducted in English, have access to a greater number of career possibilities, develop a deeper understanding of their own and other cultures, are more creative and better at solving complex problems, and are more sensitive in communication (Baker, 1993).

In short, a bilingual-bicultural program can enhance children's education, give them the additional skills with which to compete in an increasingly competitive and integrated global society and provide a basis of understanding and respect when interacting with people whose backgrounds are not the same as theirs.

Conclusion

Clarendon's JBBP shows how the instruction of a foreign language and culture can be successfully incorporated into a school when there is strong commitment and support for such a program in the community. The development of a bilingual-bicultural program requires a high degree of involvement on the part of the students, parents, teachers and school administrators. In order to ensure a program's continued success, it is vital that all participants put forth the extra effort that is required for it to maintain its high standards over the long term. Once this has been achieved students can receive all the benefits that come with an education that teaches them not only another language and culture, but so much more.

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