

Montessori Bilingual Education

Prevalence and Type of Bilingual Montessori Programs

Montessori bilingual programs are increasing in number in both the private and the public sectors. In the private sector, a bilingual school, typically, follows an **enrichment** model. The intent is to provide the children of professional and/or middle class parents a head start in becoming linguistically diverse, a characteristic with much cachet in our interconnected world.

The [Renaissance School](#), for example, is a private Montessori school in Oakland with tuitions that range from \$17,000 to \$26,000. They call themselves the best private school in the Bay area. The schools offer a trilingual program that begins at age three. In the primary program children are in a classroom that teaches either English and French or English and Spanish. At least one of the classroom teachers speaks the second language at all times. At the elementary level the third language is introduced. English, French and Spanish-speaking teachers are present in the classrooms.

With the increasing prevalence of Montessori as an urban public school reform model, Montessori public schools, by necessity, are implementing programs that allow non-native English speakers the opportunity to be successful learners and speakers of English. Many schools do not officially have a bilingual program, even though they may have a large population of English language learners. These schools do, however, provide two teachers in each classroom (or a teacher and an assistant), one of whom is a native English speaker and one who is a native speaker of the language brought from the home environment. Frequently, the aim is to provide a **transitional** support that will allow student to eventually participate fully and solely in English while in school.

Increasingly, though, public Montessori schools are developing dual-language immersion classrooms where the goal is to affirm the native language while providing the support necessary to allow students to become successful in English. **Maintenance** of the primary language is sought, even as more class instructional time is conducted in English as children grow older.

As we cast our net to learn about public Montessori bilingual programs, one school, the Latin American Bilingual Montessori Public Charter School (LAMB), was mentioned over and over as the top school using this approach. LAMB delivers its Montessori curriculum bilingually in Spanish and English. Primary students receive the majority of their education in Spanish, with English literacy and vocabulary formally introduced in the Kindergarten year. In the Lower Elementary classrooms, 60% of instruction is delivered in Spanish and 40% is delivered in English. In the Upper Elementary community, Spanish and English instruction is delivered 50-50. The student demographics for LAMB are 22% African American; 58% Hispanic; and 21% White.

In sum, Maintenance and Enrichment are the most common bilingual models in place. Two-way immersion programs vary greatly yet share three key characteristics:

1. Instruction in two languages.
2. One language at a time.
3. Peer-to-peer facilitated language sharing.

Types of Bilingual Education¹

Model	Aim
Transitional	The aim is monolingualism. Instruction in the student's language (L1) is temporary because the aim is to leave that behind and teach only using English (L2). The dominant culture and identity is affirmed.
Maintenance	The aim is bilingualism and biliteracy, albeit somewhat limited. The student's L1 is maintained so that it can

¹ Pacific Policy Research Center (2010). *Successful Bilingual and Immersion Education Models/Programs*. Honolulu: Kamehameha Schools, Research & Evaluation Division. <http://www.ksbe.edu/spi/pdfs/bilingual%20immersion%20full.pdf>

	become the basis for L2 learning, but the L1 is not developed or extended. The student's culture and identity is affirmed.
Heritage	The aim is rejuvenation of an indigenous language. The aim is usually bilingualism and biliteracy, although the heritage language can take priority.
Enrichment	The aim is bilingualism and biliteracy as well as extension of the minority language and culture into the community and nationally.

Outcomes for Children Educated in Bilingual Montessori Programs In this 2003 study, children educated in a bilingual Montessori pre-kindergarten program were compared to children educated in a non-Montessori bilingual pre-kindergarten program. Both groups continued in a transitional bilingual program through second grade. Researchers found that the students who completed the Montessori program significantly outperformed the non-Montessori group on tests of reading in both Spanish and English.²

The [Latin American Montessori Bilingual Public Charter School](#) in D. C. reports similar outcomes. Here are the test results from the 2011 District of Columbia Comprehensive Assessment System (DC CAS).

	% at or Above Proficient on DC CAS					
	Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5	
	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math
WASHINGTON, DC 2011						
All Schools	41%	37%	44%	45%	44%	43%
LAMB PCS	71%	24%	77%	78%	83%	75%

Best Practice for Montessori Bilingual Education

The following must be present in prekindergarten Montessori bilingual programs to be successful in public schools: (a) strong teacher training by quality training programs, (b) parent support, (c) administrative support and understanding of Montessori, (d) ongoing staff development and research and study by the Montessori staff of both what Montessori wrote and current research findings, (e) Montessori programs that are integrated with district benchmarks and assessment, and (f) private and public programs that cross the boundaries and offer their strengths to each other by co-training and other initiatives that can strengthen the bonds.

Several important findings can be drawn from the research on language and literacy development in two-way immersion programs:

1. There seems to be a native language effect, such that native English speakers (NES) generally perform higher than second language speakers in terms of both oral and written language proficiency.
2. Not surprisingly, there seem to be slightly different patterns for NES and language minority students, with NES always showing a clear dominance in and preference for English, and language-minority students demonstrating more balanced bilingualism. Sometimes the language-minority students tend to perform slightly higher in their native language, and other times slightly higher in English. In general, however, their performance on language and literacy measures across languages is much more similar than that of their NES peers.
3. There is some evidence for transfer of skills across languages, with some studies reporting similar writing processes and products across the two languages. This is not the case in the writing study conducted in a Korean/English program, however, and may point to differences in the amount of potential cross-linguistic transfer and/or interference that may occur depending on the similarities or differences in orthographies in the two languages of instruction.

Both the Korean reading study in this section and the reading studies presented on academic achievement point to inter-relationships between language and literacy skills within and across languages.

² Rodriguez, L. Irby, B.; Brown, G.; Lara-Alecio, R.; Galloway, M. (2003). *Prekindergarten Bilingual Montessori Program: An Analysis of a Public School Prekindergarten Bilingual Montessori Program*. A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.
<http://ldn.tamu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/publications/AERA%202003%20Montessori%20Education.pdf>

Model Montessori Bilingual Programs

Public

Latin American Montessori Bilingual Public Charter School
1375 Missouri Avenue • Washington, DC 20011 • Tel 202.726.6200
<http://www.lambpcs.org/>

Independent

Castle Island Bilingual Montessori
1 Delaware Avenue • Albany, NY 12210 • Tel 518.533.9838
<http://castleislandmontessori.org/en/content/bilingual-montessori-school-albany-ny>

La Casa Montessori School
514 West Adams • Oak Park IL 60304 • Tel 708.613.0514
<http://www.lacasamontessori.org/index.html>

American International Montessori School
3339 Martin Luther King Jr. Way • Berkeley, CA 94703 • Tel 510.868.1815
<http://www.aimmontessori.com/>

Recommended as an expert in bilingual Montessori education

Alice Murray Renton, http://inotherwordsamr.com/Alice_Murray_Renton.html