



HOW DATA BOOSTS DUAL-LANGUAGE LEARNING

Dual-language instruction best serves students and educators when it includes data that allows assessment and intervention all along the way.

Teaching in the dual-language setting calls on educators to reach deep into their bag of educational skills and tools. Students might speak different native languages, but they all need to learn the same concepts. Yet, what often happens is that non-native speakers are expected to perform like native speakers. Those students may comprehend a topic, but when asked questions, there may be a gap in replying because they lack the knowledge of the language being used.

In that scenario, does silence relay confusion, ignorance or simply hesitancy about replying in a language other than the one they speak at home? How the teacher responds in that situation can make a big difference in how bilingual students' learning progresses and how they view their own

capabilities to grow. One of the main goals of bilingual education is to build on the strengths that students bring to school to foster biliteracy and multiculturalism.

Empirical evidence has shown that students acquire a second language faster when they are proficient readers in their native language.

"Research has proven over and over again that bilingual kids or kids who are non-native English speakers will do better when you provide an environment where that student is able to express himself or herself in a way that's understandable," explains Liliana Suero, curriculum director at [Istation](https://www.istation.com), which produces assessments, curriculum and teacher tools for the dual-language classroom.

To be able to succeed, students need two things, she says. First, they need a "risk-free environment where they feel they can express themselves and they're not nervous about speaking the second language, so they can worry less about how to say something than they do about the content and the academics." Second, "Students need plenty of opportunities to interact with peers in all four language domains: listening, speaking, reading and writing."

The most effective programs, she suggests, are those that allow the students to develop academic knowledge of concepts at the same time as they're learning the second language. As an example, in the earliest grades, preK-3rd, Spanish-speaking students might receive most of their instruction or content in Spanish with a small portion of learning done in English, including a mix of activities: songs, rhymes, animations, games and fun books to read with many illustrations. In those grades, perhaps only math is done purely in English. The goal is to build on the foundational skills across subjects — like science and social studies — with subsequent grades.

The best approaches are also backed by research. A good example of this is the concept of guided reading, a small-group reading model developed by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell. The basic idea is to expose young readers to books and passages on themes they care about that are at their instructional reading level. Also, they need to be exposed to books that honor their heritage, traditions and culture.

"Books used at the younger levels should be simple to read and provide plenty of visual reference to make sense of the text they read," says Suero. By grades 4 and 5, both passages and teacher-directed lessons are needed to help students gain an understanding of different genre characteristics and give them opportunities for small-group instruction. All of that is relevant to the dual-language class.

The Daily 5, a framework created by educators Gail Boushey and Joan Moser to guide learners in becoming independent readers and writers, promotes the regular use of several key components for encouraging students to learn how to read. It starts with looking at the pictures, then reading the words and finally retelling the story. Each of the Daily 5 tasks (*Read to Self*, *Work on Writing*, *Read to Someone*, *Word Work* and *Listen to Reading*) can be handled at a separate learning center or station in the classroom.

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ISTATION READING AND ISTATION ESPAÑOL

Istation produces two reading programs of its research-based dual-language instruction software, one in English and one in Spanish. Both include formative assessments, personalized data profiles and abundant collection of teacher resources to help educators measure student learning and introduce new reading skills. However, each also includes distinct literacy lessons that are culturally authentic for the language in use.

The design of the lessons in each reinforces language skills both for the native speakers and second-language learners, using computer adaptive technology to customize the individual student's learning. Once a month, each program automatically assesses the student's overall reading ability in that language, a process that takes about 30 minutes. As the student progresses through the assessment, the program will ask more or less challenging questions

until the software can pinpoint the specific areas of struggle. Then Istation will place the student into a spot of instruction that meshes with his or her abilities and allows for additional work on those skills.

This doesn't remove the teacher from the equation but amplifies their efforts. Both Istation Reading and Istation Español take a blended-learning approach in dual-language classrooms to allow for differentiated

instruction. Given the results of assessments and based on classroom activities' performance, the teacher may choose to work one-on-one with a student needing individual attention, sit down with small groups or turn to the interactive whiteboard for whole group lessons.

As part of the blended learning solution, downloadable Teacher-directed Lessons are provided in digital format to accommodate 1-to-1 and/or small group intervention. All TDLs can be printed out and made available to use in learning centers or stations as well. ■

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Learn more at
<https://www.istation.com>

The use of "decodable books" in English and Spanish in this setting both guide and provide reading strategies for students that can be reinforced in the learning centers format. The books are easy to read since they contain words the students can decode and sight words commonly found in English and Spanish texts.

A CHECKLIST FOR LITERACY

Staying on top of these myriad practices can be complicated for a teacher with dual-language learners.

What they need is a platform that delivers reporting at strategic moments to help them understand each student's progress and offer links to specific lessons for targeted interventions.

But what does that platform look like?

Here's a checklist of baseline features to look for:

- Activities inspired and backed by educational research and proven studies, while also making learning fun for the kids
- Both English and Spanish reading programs tailored to help learners make connections through prior knowledge and cultural identity
- Formative assessments that employ blended learning and are adaptive for efficiency – these should provide responsive reteaching and
- immediate identification of the right follow-on instruction as well as use game-like functionality so students don't notice they're being tested
- Data profiles for each student that offer immediate, accurate results that are understandable and usable by teachers and that track progress across tiers, groups, classes and campuses so administrators can monitor the effectiveness of the overall program
- Teacher resources that include complete scripts for the educator-directed lessons, online lesson libraries, assignments, grouping mechanisms, printables and interventions
- Connections made between school and home by equipping students as they head out of the classroom with entertaining interactive lessons, printable books and practice activities that encourage them to navigate their own learning; as well as a parent portal that gives quick access to their child's progress
- Timely, customizable professional development that is available face-to-face and online, along with technical support within easy reach

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HELPING TEACHERS LEARN WHAT THEIR STUDENTS KNOW

The [School District of Palm Beach County](#) serves Spanish-speaking students who are learning English, as well as English-speaking students working to become fluent in Spanish. According to dual-language instructional specialist Lisa Capra, the district's No. 1 priority is to help students "become fully bilingual and biliterate." The district's two-way immersion program follows a 50-50 model — core academic instruction is divided equally between languages. Also, Spanish-speaking English learners and native English-speaking students come together in the classroom so both groups serve as language "model" and "learner" at different times of the day. When Capra and her Florida team discovered Istation, they found a tool that could tell teachers exactly what students knew in their first language. As she recalls, "Differentiation in the classroom became easy after that."

A similar story was unfolding across the country. Teachers at [Harney Elementary School](#) in Vancouver,

Wash., were on the hunt for an all-in-one assessment tool that would help them measure their dual-language students' abilities to listen, read, write and comprehend. A pilot of Istation (which they came across at a trade show) convinced Principal Lucy Estrada-Guzman of the program's merits. Within just a few months of fully adopting Istation, the educators could identify recurring trends in student progress and map individual growth and skill development. Also, teachers could hold conversations across grades using a common language to talk about assessment and instruction, facilitating much better collaboration.

"Students bring knowledge and experience with them when they come," says Palm Beach's Capra about dual-language learning. "They are not blank slates where teachers have to start all over." Through the use of a program such as Istation, teachers can help their dual-language students tap into what they bring with them into the classroom. As a result, she says, "Students have an easier time transferring that knowledge to English." ■

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ABOUT ISTATION

Istation's computer-adaptive intervention and instruction for [reading](#), [math](#), and [Spanish literacy](#) helps over 8,900 schools predict student success and more. Research-based and aligned to [state standards](#), Istation's computer-based diagnostic and screening programs, progress monitoring, and interactive lessons provide formative data that give teachers the insight to prioritize interventions, differentiate instruction, and reveal student potential.

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