

MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION: RATIONALE, PRINCIPLES, PRACTICES

Susan Malone
SIL International—Asia

Dhaka, 5-7 June 2005

The Issue

The choice of the language...is a recurrent challenge in the development of quality education... Speakers of mother tongues, which are not the same as the national or local language, are often at a considerable disadvantage in the educational system...¹

Why do UNESCO and others say that learners from minority language communities are at a disadvantage?

Many learners in minority language communities have no access to education at all. If there is a school, lessons are taught in a language they neither speak nor understand and lesson content is unrelated to the knowledge and experience they bring to the classroom.

What happens to minority language learners when they are forced to attend schools in which both the language and the content are foreign to them?

For many of the learners...

- High repetition rates
- High drop-out rates
- Alienation from their heritage language and culture, from parents and home community
- Lack of knowledge and skills for employment

For minority language communities...

- Loss of their heritage language and culture
- Demoralization
- Higher rates of alcoholism, crime, suicide

For many nations and for the world...

- (Potential for) ethnic strife
- Underutilization of human resources
- Loss of linguistic and cultural diversity
- Loss of indigenous wisdom and knowledge

How can we improve educational opportunities for learners from minority language communities?

¹ Education in a Multilingual World, UNESCO, 2002: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001297/129728e.pdf>

- 1) We need language and education policies that...
 - Recognize *all* of a country's languages and cultures as resources
 - Protect the right of *all* citizens to education in a language they speak and understand
- 2) We need Multilingual Education (MLE) programs that provide relevant education for all learners, regardless of their language

Why MLE? What are its benefits?

- MLE enables learners to build a strong educational foundation in the language they know best;
- Provides them with a good “bridge” to one or more additional languages, and
- Encourages them to use both / all their languages for life-long learning.

What is involved in “building a strong foundation and a good bridge?”

We help learners build strong educational foundation when we

- 1) Encourage oral LI development (children)
- 2) Introduce LI literacy; build fluency in reading and writing the LI
- 3) Build both conversational and academic competence, confidence and creativity in the LI
- 4) Use LI as the Language of Instruction

Why start in the learners' LI (Mother Language)?

Findings from education research...

“The level of development of children's mother tongue is a strong predictor of their second language development...”

“Children's knowledge and skills transfer across languages from the mother tongue...to the school language” Jim Cummins (2000).

Regarding the long-term benefits of strong MLE

When children continue to develop their abilities in two or more languages throughout their primary school years, they gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively. They have more practice in processing language, especially when they develop literacy in both, and they are able to compare and contrast the ways in which their two languages organize reality.²

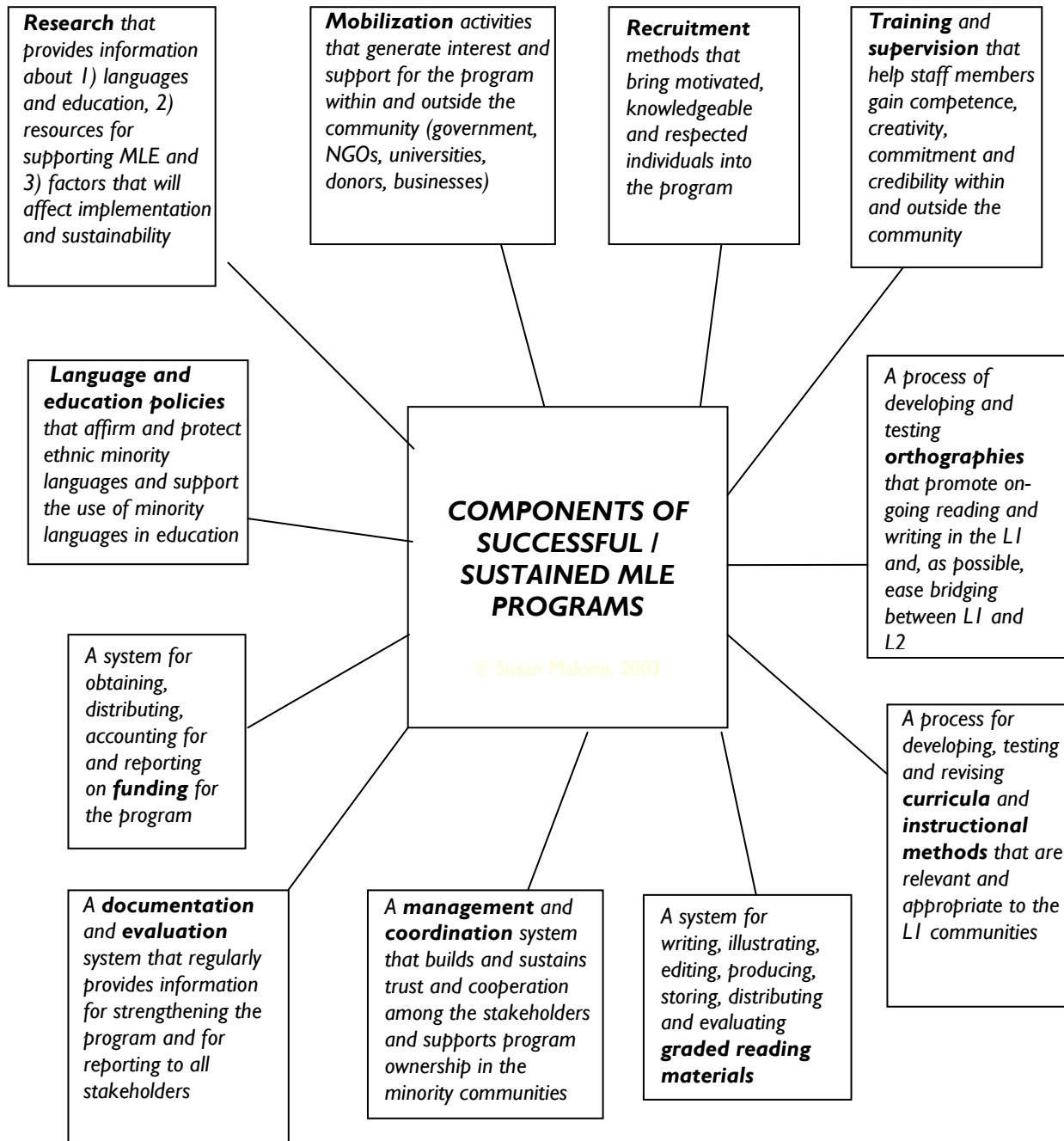
We build a “good bridge” when we...

- Introduce oral L2 through meaningful, enjoyable activities

² Jim Cummins, citing Baker and Skutnabb-Kangas, in “Bilingual children's mother tongue: Why is it important for education?” <http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins>

- Introduce L2 literacy gradually
- Build competence, confidence and creativity in using oral and written L2
- Use L2 for instruction, with support from the learners' L1

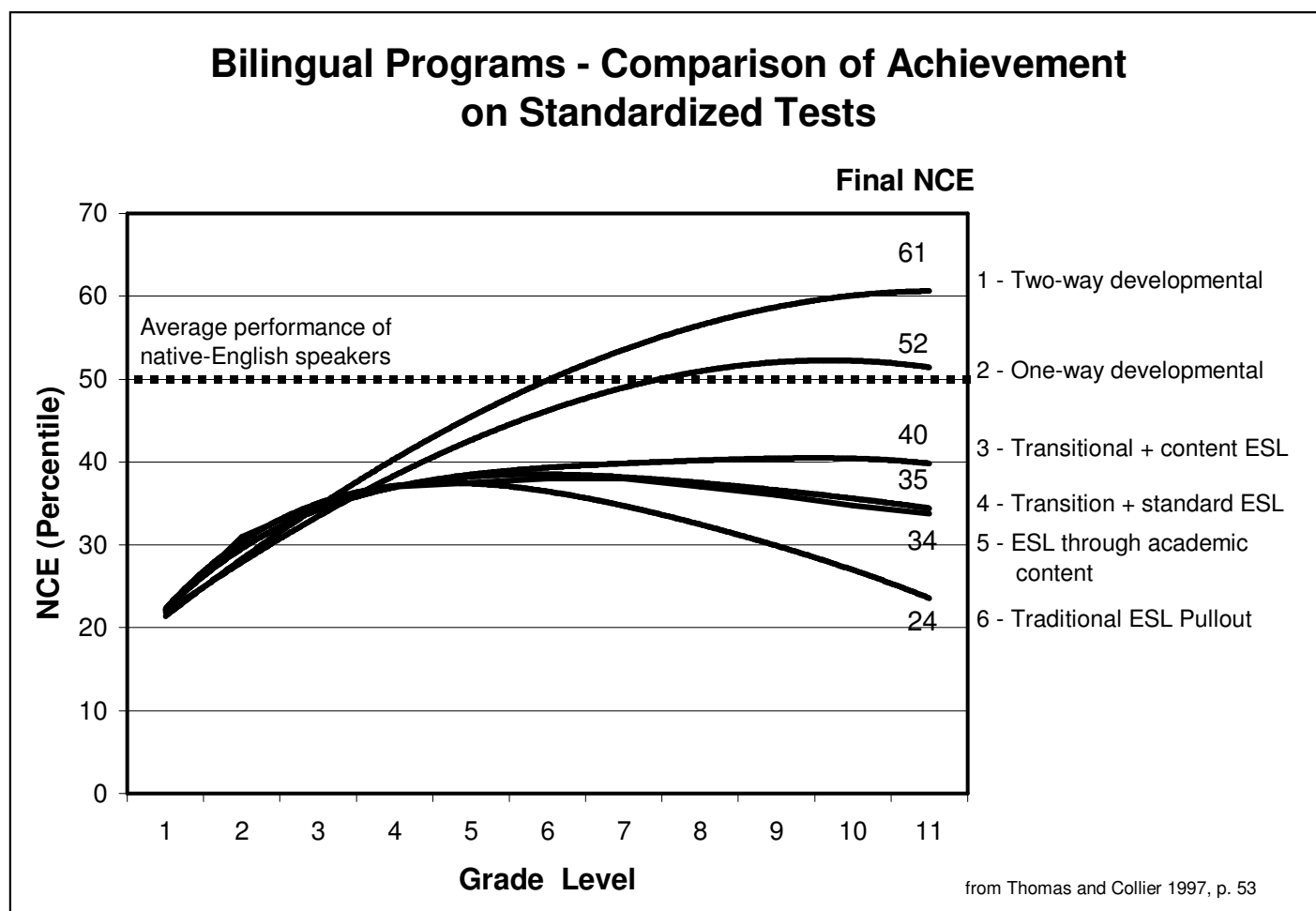
MLE in practice...what is required?



Thomas, Wayne P. & Virginia Collier (1997). School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students. NCBE Resource Collection Series

<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/ncbepubs/resource/effectiveness/>

National Clearinghouse on Bilingual Education
The George Washington University
Center for the Study of Language and Education
Washington, DC



6.3 The six program models being compared

The descriptive literature on bilingual education identifies many different models of bilingual education. Some of these are simply different names for a given model. Others are really minor variants of one of the major models. In our research, it proved conceptually and analytically useful to identify and compare six different models of bilingual education. These are briefly described below. The interested reader is referred to Appendix B for a more detailed discussion of program types and the terminology that has been proposed to describe these types.

Program 1 – Two-way developmental bilingual education. Language minority children and native-English-speaking children are put together in mixed classrooms from the beginning of their education. Both English and Spanish (or other MT language) are used as languages of instruction for the entire classroom in some structured way (e.g., different teachers, alternating days, by subject, etc.). Language instruction and literacy are provided and supported in both languages. The objective is full academic proficiency in both languages by the end of the 6th grade. Beyond 6th grade, all students are mainstreamed into regular English-based classes with some effort being made to include the minority language as a subject through secondary school.

Program 2 – One-way developmental bilingual education. Language minority children receive 6 or 7 years of education in their first language from teachers who speak their language and who use their language as a medium of instruction. Initial literacy is provided in L1. In some versions, English (the L2) is introduced first orally with subsequent instruction in basic English literacy. In other versions, instructional time is split in some structured manner (morning/afternoon, alternating days, different teachers) between L1 and L2. The objective is full academic proficiency in both languages by the end of the 6th grade. Beyond 6th grade, all students are mainstreamed into regular English-based classes.

Program 3 – Transitional bilingual education with content-based ESL. Language minority children receive 2-3 years of education in their first language from teachers who speak their language and who use their language as a medium of instruction. Initial literacy is provided in L1. In some versions, English (the L2) is first introduced orally with subsequent instruction in basic English literacy. In other versions, instructional time is split in some structured manner (morning/afternoon, alternating days, different teachers) between L1 and L2. ESL instruction is provided via academic content. ESL teachers receive special training to teach in this way. The objectives are basic literacy in both languages, sufficient proficiency in English to enter the mainstream by the end of the 3rd grade, and enough academic content to avoid being behind native English students at the time of mainstreaming.

Program 4 – Transitional bilingual education with language-based ESL. Language minority children receive 2-3 years of education in their first language from teachers who speak their language and who use their language as a medium of instruction. Initial literacy is provided in L1. In some versions, English (the L2) is first introduced orally with subsequent instruction in basic English literacy. In other versions, instructional time is split in some structured manner (morning/afternoon, alternating days, different teachers) between L1 and L2. ESL instruction is provided via traditional language-based instruction. The objectives are basic literacy in both languages and sufficient proficiency in English to enter the mainstream by the end of the 3rd grade.

Program 5 – Content-based ESL. Language minority children receive ESL training in the context of academic instruction, typically for 2-3 years. This is usually, but not always done by means of pullout classes. Teachers must have special training to deliver ESL via content instruction. The objective is sufficient mastery of English to function in the English mainstream without having gotten too far behind in the content areas.

Program 6 – Language-based (traditional) ESL. Language minority children receive basic or traditional ESL instruction usually in pullout classes. The objective is sufficient mastery of English to function in the English mainstream.

PLANNING MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS: WHAT IS REQUIRED FOR SUCCESS AND SUSTAINABILITY?

© Susan Malone, SIL International

Cooperation among stakeholders: government agencies, NGOs, universities, donors, businesses, ethnic minority communities

- Conducting linguistic research
- Developing writing systems/alphabets
- Developing MLE curricula and instructional materials
- Developing graded reading materials
- Training and supervising teachers
- Monitoring and evaluating programs