



## **Are They All Language Learners?: Educational Labeling and Raciolinguistic Identifying in a California Middle School Dual Language Program**

This manuscript draws from a 2-year multiple-case ethnography on the educational experiences of Mexican immigrant families with California middle schools. The article explores the influence of the political landscape and raciolinguistic ideologies surrounding the nature and implementation of a middle school dual language bilingual program, and it shares ethnographic snapshots from both a school- and home-based perspective of (in)equity issues related to the program. Data sources include home and school observations, and interviews with students, parents, administrators, and teachers. Findings suggest that though all students are considered *language learners*, educational-reform policies and practices may be undermining the school's effort to implement an equitable bilingual program. Implications for practice include the interrogation of educational policies and practices that can further marginalize students across race and class in the process of becoming bilingual in the US.

### **Introduction**

**T**hough speaking and navigating society in two or more languages is quite common around the globe (Grosjean, 2010), bilingualism is a highly contentious issue in the US (Baker, 2010), even with decades of research demonstrating the multitude of benefits afforded to bilingual and multilingual individuals and communities, including cognitive, social, and economic advantages (Calahan & Gándara, 2014). The state of California has historically been a hotbed for political debates surrounding issues of bilingualism and

language education. These debates are tightly linked to immigration politics, in which the strong research base in favor of bilingual education is often overlooked (Crawford, 2008). At stake is the education of more than 1.3 million English learners (ELs) in California public schools,<sup>1</sup> 84% of whom speak Spanish in the home (CDE, 2016).

Almost two decades have passed since Proposition 227, the English for the Children Initiative, dismantled many of the state's bilingual programs. This past November, more than 73% of California voters approved opening up avenues for multilingual education for all of California's students with the passing of Proposition 58, thus amending some of Proposition 227's provisions. Also known as the LEARN (Language Education, Acquisition and Readiness Now) Initiative, Proposition 58 was strongly supported by many educational stakeholders, including middle- and upper-class parents who seek out bilingual programs that would provide their children with the opportunity to grow up bilingual and biliterate. This popularity of bilingual education is largely due to the longitudinal research on dual language immersion programs that demonstrates their effectiveness for both English learners and non-ELs (Collier & Thomas, 2004), though the bilingualism of immigrant children is still an underdeveloped resource for both families and the larger US society.

While the field has continued to collect volumes of sound research pointing to the benefits of bilingual education, the knowledge base is limited on equity issues surrounding the features and implementation of bilingual program models. This article adds to the research (Palmer 2009, 2010; Valdés, 1997) that examines issues of race, class, and immigration status in program implementation of equity-based bilingual programs such as dual language (DL) models. The article documents and compares the views of two groups of stakeholders concerned with the equity issues surrounding a DL program in a California middle school—providing both a school- and a home-based perspective. The manuscript begins with a review of dual language bilingual models within the context of schooling for Latino students, followed by a description of the study's methods and an unpacking of critical ethnographic snapshots revealing (in)equity issues surrounding the DL program. The article ends with a critical analysis of the labeling and testing of language learners, followed by a discussion of the tensions surrounding bilingualism and biliteracy in the California context and implications for research and practice.

### ***Latino Students, Segregation, and the Hope of Dual Language Education***

Today Latino students are more likely to attend segregated

schools than are African American students (Gándara, 2010; Orfield & Lee, 2006), as many attend impoverished schools concentrated with other linguistically and culturally diverse students. Though the US has experienced an influx of Latino populations in recent decades, the trend is not a recent phenomenon, as Latino students have been some of the nation's most segregated students in the country throughout the last century, both in their neighborhoods and schools (both pre- and post-*Brown v. Board*). Currently, California leads the nation in its segregation of Latinos in schools, with 90% attending *majority minority* schools, and with almost half of the population of Latinos attending *intensely segregated* minority schools (90-100% minority) in California (Orfield & Lee, 2006). Gándara (2010) also notes the common phenomenon of *triple segregation* in US schools, in which students are segregated by race, socioeconomic status, and language *across* schools and often by language *within* schools as documented by Valdés (2001). That is, Spanish-speaking Latino students are often separated from their English-speaking peers within schools during a large part of the school day in various language-development classes that are often disconnected from the core school curriculum. Moreover, Latino students are still more likely to attend schools with dilapidated facilities, insufficient materials, fewer honor and college-preparatory courses, and less-qualified teachers than their counterparts in affluent neighborhoods (Gándara, 2010).

The dual language (DL) model is distinct when compared to other bilingual programs for numerous reasons. In the popular two-way DL model, dominant English speakers and dominant speakers of another language,<sup>2</sup> often Spanish, are integrated in a classroom that uses both languages at strategic times of the day, ultimately integrating students across language, race/ethnicity, and in some cases, socioeconomic status. In the 90/10 version of the DL model, 90% of the instruction in kindergarten is in the minority language (usually Spanish) and 10% of the instruction is in English. English instruction is then increased each year until each language is used 50% of the time. In the 50/50 version of the model, the two target languages are used 50% of the time each starting in kindergarten and maintained throughout the program (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003). The dual language model is also distinctive from other weak forms of bilingual programs that use the home language only as a vehicle to transition students into English as soon as possible, not to promote bilingualism and biliteracy (Baker, 2010). Dual language, an additive program model (Ruiz, 1984), views bilingualism as a cognitive asset rather than as an intellectual handicap (Hakuta & Gould, 1987).

### ***Methodological Orientations and Tools***

This manuscript draws from a 2-year ethnography that explored the ways in which four first-generation Mexican immigrant families with a child in a California middle school navigated the US public school system during a time of increased educational reform. By blending multiple-case study (Yin, 2009) and language socialization research (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002; Shieffelin & Ochs, 1986), detailed ethnographic cases were collected through sustained participant observation in both the home and school domains. Data collection included participant and direct observation within homes and schools, video recordings of dinnertime talk, audio recordings of parent narratives, semistructured interviews with focal families and school officials, and text-based artifact analysis. While the microlevel analyses of audio- and video-recorded familial talk and interviews are privileged in the larger study, field notes, documentation, archival records, and educator interview transcripts supported a robust description of documented phenomena. For systematized interpretation of the data I used the features of the atlas.ti software to code field notes, video logs, transcriptions, artifacts, and archival data for repeated topics and themes.

The case explored in this article focuses on the experience of one of the focal families with a daughter enrolled in a dual language bilingual program. The Garcia family included parents Justa and Mariano and daughter Guadalupe.<sup>3</sup> Ethnographic snapshots of the focal participants' perspectives of the DL program unfold in the highlighting of transcribed audio-recorded interview and narrative data taken within the Garcia family home and Guadalupe's middle school. The following research questions are addressed: How are educational-equity issues understood in the context of a middle-school dual language program? What are the similarities and differences in perspectives among school educators and families?

### **Findings**

#### ***Dual Language as an Equitable Bilingual Program: School Perspective***

The link between segregation and language-program models for English learners is of concern to educational researchers and practitioners. Cooper Academy, situated in a northern California school district, is structured to address these contentious issues through two major efforts—one at the district and one at the school level. First, the district has a decades-old desegregation approach to schooling that ensures that students are integrated by race, class, and parent educational level. Second, the middle school houses the successful two-way

dual language immersion program in which culturally and linguistically diverse students are integrated at the classroom level. That is, ELs in this program do not face the linguistic isolation and segregation that many Spanish-speaking students face in traditional language programs such as English Language Development (ELD) and sheltered English immersion (SEI). Even other bilingual models such as transitional bilingual also segregate students so that they are in classes with only dominant Spanish speakers throughout the day (Ovando, 2003). Many of the middle- and upper-class families of the Cooper Academy community were aware of the research on DL models and preferred a dual language education for their English-dominant children as an alternative to the traditional foreign language high school model,<sup>4</sup> recognizing the importance of multilingualism in a global society.

At the middle school level, DL programs are rare (Palmer, 2009), and if they do exist, the program model typically includes one or two classes taught in the nondominant language, usually language arts and one content area, all depending on the availability of a qualified bilingual teacher and classroom materials in the nondominant language (Montone & Loeb, 2000). Cooper Academy is the only school in the district that houses a dual language bilingual program at the middle school level, supporting students in their bilingual and biliterate educational trajectory until they transition into high school. If students attend one of the three elementary schools that offer a DL education within the district, they transition to Cooper once they graduate from fifth grade. At the time of the study, Guadalupe Garcia attended the seventh grade at Cooper Academy.

It appears that the educators at Cooper Academy regard the dual language strand as the bilingual-education model par excellence. When I asked about the DL program in an interview with the bilingual Latino vice principal (VP), he suggested that because all students in the program are *language learners*, the Latino students fare better. VP Sánchez began with,

It's working because I think two things. One it's creating a safe space for Latino students to learn. And I say safe more in the kind of them feeling a part of the classroom where they could one, speak the language that they speak better than, for example, their white peers, in the dual immersion program.

VP Sánchez addresses the classroom dynamics in the program model as a safe space for learning for the emergent bilingual students because they were fluent in Spanish, one of the program's target languages. He uses race and ethnicity to juxtapose the students' experiences—La-

tino (primarily Mexican) and white. He continued speaking about the students' classroom experiences in terms of fairness and equal opportunity,

So they [Latino students] feel a little bit more comfortable engaging in the material given that they know the Spanish so they use it, and it puts them at I would say in one way looking at a level playing field when the white student who doesn't know quite the language but yet has possibly a little bit higher academic background.

Using the metaphor of “leveling the playing field,” VP Sánchez suggested that all students in the program are *language learners*. Specifically, during the times when Spanish is the language of instruction, the Latino emergent bilingual students have a leg up because they are communicatively competent in the target language, an experience similar to that of the white native English-speaking students during instruction in English. This sense of a level playing field suggests that the Latino English learners are placed in a context where they are expected to form a positive sense of educational efficacy and be academically successful, as opposed to an English-only setting where they might not feel as safe. Similarly, research suggests that dual language education may reduce the stigmatization that English learners may experience, as the underlying assumptions of the DL model suggest that minority and majority students share equal social status since both languages and cultures are to be valued equally (Genesee & Gándara, 1999). Gándara and Orfield (2010) posit that the nature of the DL program model promotes ethnic and linguistic integration because students are grouped by their language assets as opposed to by their language deficits, which is common in English-only models. He closed with, “So I think kids are comfortable and that means they participate more, they engage more. And two, their grades are significantly better than the students that aren't in the program.” His statement suggests that there is a link between students' engagement and student learning.

In addition to the social benefits of integration, DL programs are also lauded for their positive impact on academic achievement. Researchers Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier (2012) have conducted program-evaluation research in districts across the US and have determined that DL programs provide a “win-win advantage” for all students in the program. They reported earlier that:

English learners have an opportunity to make faster-than-average

progress on grade-level instruction that is not watered down. Native English speakers who are already on grade level can exceed the achievement of their monolingually educated peers. And through the cognitive stimulus of schooling in two languages, which leads to enhanced creativity and analytical thinking, native English speakers who are lagging behind academically receive the accelerated instruction necessary to close the achievement gap. (Thomas & Collier, 2003, p. 61)

That is, ELs in such programs perform just as well and often exceed their peers in English-only settings on academic achievement tests by the time they reach middle school, while native English-speaking students tend to thrive in this program model as well (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006). This is aligned with VP Sánchez's comparison of the grades of the ELs in the DL program with the ELs in the English-only strand offered at the school, suggesting that the DL model is a better fit for Spanish-speaking Latino students.

This distinction between student groups across racial and ethnic identities (i.e., comparison of Latino and white students in the program) continued with interview data with the Caucasian sixth-grade dual language teacher. After sharing that most of the Spanish-speaking students in the program are first-generation US citizens and that the English-speaking students are from highly educated families who are choosing to immerse their children in a Spanish bilingual program, Maestra Stevenson stated,

There's like an anti-racism to just the nature of this program and the results because you're the—the dominant, the people from the dominant race are valuing and choosing to learn the nondominant language. And there's just inherently right there, an equality in the classroom.

Maestra Stevenson covertly addresses race when describing the DL program, suggesting that the equality reached in the classroom stems from the fact that the white students in the program value and choose to learn Spanish. This comment illustrates how Spanish is the non-dominant target language of the program, reflective of its low status in society, while English holds an elevated status, demonstrating how schools function as microcosms of the larger sociopolitical context. Delving deeper, one sees that the use of “dominant race” as a proxy for white masks an explicit mention of race and privilege (Tran & Patterson, 2015) but demonstrates an understanding of English as the

dominant language in society that belongs to the dominant people—white Americans—who are able to exercise their privilege to value and choose to learn the nondominant language of Spanish. These notions of equality and a level playing field evoke an understanding of these programs as functioning as a socially reconstructive or welfare program, providing Latino ELs with advantages (that may have the capacity to level the playing field) that they might not have received in traditional English-only classrooms.

### ***Dual Language as Contradictory in Philosophy and Practice: The Garcia Family's Perspective***

Guadalupe Garcia has participated in the district's DL program since kindergarten. Her parents, Justa and Mariano, were born in a small village outside of Jalisco, Mexico, and they came to the US on work visas. Guadalupe was born in the US after Mariano and Justa had been married for 10 years. Mariano works in construction and gardening and Justa works as an after-school aide at the elementary school her daughter previously attended. Much of my time spent in the Garcia home was sitting in the living room on one of the couches, at the dinner table with them, and occasionally in Guadalupe's room observing her do homework or talking with her about school.

On several occasions during the two-year period visiting the family home, conversation focused on experiences surrounding Guadalupe's status as an *English learner*. The district has reported that English learners in the dual language programs are twice as likely to be reclassified as fluent English proficient (FEP) than ELs in the English-only program (Parent Group Meeting Minutes 12/12). This is not the case for Guadalupe, however, as she had not scored at the required levels on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT),<sup>5</sup> the annual assessment administered to students designated as English learners. According to the *language learner* classification process, Guadalupe is not ready to be deemed "fluent" in English because her reading and writing scores have not yet reached the Intermediate level on the CELDT, though she has done well enough on the California Standards Tests (CST). Because her classification as an English learner has continued into middle school, Guadalupe is now considered a *long-term English learner* (LTEL), a category describing students who after seven or more years in American public schools have not met the criteria described above to be reclassified as fluent in English (Olsen, 2010). Previous research has demonstrated that when students carry that label into high school, they are more likely to have limited access to college preparatory classes, such as higher-level math and science classes (Callahan, Wilkinson, & Muller, 2010), and are of-



ten tracked into ESL or sheltered classes that would not count toward college preparation (Dabach, 2014).

Because the CELDT plays a large role in determining whether Guadalupe can relinquish the *English learner* label that threatens to follow her into high school, the whole family is concerned, including Guadalupe. In an audio-recorded conversation with me and her mother before dinner, Guadalupe explained how she thought the testing practices at her school were inequitable: “I think it’s unfair because we have to take three [tests] while the other kids just take one.” Guadalupe’s use of *we* indexes the Latino ELs, and *the other kids* indexes the white English-dominant students. The three tests she is referring to are the CELDT, the California Standards Test (CST), and the Standards-based Test in Spanish (STS). The “others” are required to take only the CST. As a seventh grader, Guadalupe personally experienced, named, and interrogated the overtesting of ELs, noting the unequal treatment of students in her DL strand.

Guadalupe’s mother, Justa, also acknowledged the social, linguistic, and academic distance between the integrated Latino and white students in the dual immersion program in an audio-recorded interaction in her home regarding the CELDT. Mariano was not home from work yet, and Guadalupe was in the room sitting with us on the living-room couch. The excerpt below from the transcript of this interaction illustrates Justa’s understanding of the racial and class differences between *language learners* within the context of high-stakes testing, as the white students are not subjected to the same rigid language-classification procedures that the Latino English learners must endure. Justa explained,

*¿Por qué a los niños que están en inmersión y hablan inglés—los Americanos—no le hacen el test en español? Nada más se los hacen a los Latinos? ¿Por qué si están en el mismo programa todos, y están luchando para aprender ese idioma, por qué a todos no les hacen el mismo examen? ¡Y ellos pobrecitos ahí en la librería todos!<sup>6</sup> Y los demás que estaban en el mismo grupo ... jugando. Entonces pues es así. (Why are the children that are in immersion and speak English—the Americans—don’t take the test in Spanish? They only make the Latinos. Because if everyone is in the same program, and they are fighting to learn this language, why doesn’t everyone take the same exam? And those poor kids there in the library all of them! And the rest of them from the same group ... playing. Well, that’s the way it is.)*

Justa’s explanation illustrates her understanding of the multiple

layers of race and class politics in the US through the sharing of this unfair testing practice in her daughter's school (a practice occurring in every public school in the state with ELs but heightened here in the context of an integrated classroom with *language learners*). Justa uses the strategy of racial color blindness (Tran & Paterson, 2015) when using "American" as a proxy for white. Specifically, she distinguishes between the Latinos like her daughter, who make up half of the student population in the DL program, and the Americans—the white, middle-class students who make up the other half. Guadalupe was born in the US and is an American, but in this raciolinguistic context, she is less American than her white classmates. Though her parents are from Mexico, Guadalupe does not have Mexican citizenship. Yet when she (and her Latino classmates who are also still classified as ELs) is juxtaposed with her native English-speaking peers, she becomes less American. Though Guadalupe is a proficient English speaker and has the communicative competence (Hymes, 2001) needed to successfully navigate multiple contexts in her world, she is not recognized as a fluent English speaker in this unstable identification and reclassification process (Hakuta, 2011), and her mother regards the white students in the program as the "English speakers."

Justa is very up-to-date on the language policies in place during the current educational reform movement as she served as the president of the English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC) for her daughter's elementary school three years before. The ELAC is a group of parents, staff, and community members specifically designated to advise school officials on English learner program services as mandated by the U.S. Department of Education. Through her district- and school-level training, she was made aware of the government mandates in place that affect her daughter as a *language learner* and her educational trajectory. Justa's comment above "they only *make* the Latinos" indicates her understanding that this testing practice is required for ELs. That is, the language-classification process Guadalupe faced does not programmatically or politically apply to students learning Spanish as a second language, and as evidenced here, the Latino students (and their parents) simply do not have the option to not take the CELDT. The mostly white *Spanish learners* in the program will never start the language-testing and classification process that has become such a large part of *English learner* education because it is only if a language other than English is spoken in the home (as determined by a language survey administered to parents and guardians) will the process be initiated.<sup>7</sup>

Yet the racial/national segregation through this testing practice is transparent in Justa's narrative—the American students are playing

while the Latino students are working. Though they are in the same group, the program expectations are different. There were other instances in the data that demonstrated how stressful the time of year was for the family when Guadalupe took the CELDT. The stress related to *language learner* status that the Garcia family experienced is nonexistent for the white families in the program, as their English-dominant children will never undergo the political process of becoming and being *language learners* in the everyday business of public school education in the US. There are no comparable high-stakes repercussions for the English-dominant students if they fail to become fluent in the speaking, listening, reading, and writing of the Spanish language. The high stakes of exiting *language learner* status is something the Latino students will be faced with and, as exhibited with the case of the Garcia family, can be emotionally, physically, and psychologically draining on both students and parents alike.

### ***Academic Identities Within Educational Labeling and Testing***

In the business of doing school, students are socialized to particular academic identities (Wortham, 2006) that influence their daily academic lives. For decades, schools have been preoccupied with identifying children in terms of categories (Varenne & McDermott, 1998), an institutionalized practice that pathologizes students and reduces them to diagnostic labels that foreground a particular educational or linguistic need (e.g., *language learner*). These categorical labels are intertwined with the practice of testing, and thus the business of psychometrics plays a key role in a student's academic trajectory. These labels get taken up and negotiated by educators and linguistically diverse students. Guadalupe did not fit the exact description of a long-term English learner (LTEL), especially as she had strong literacy in her home language. Nevertheless, because she has not been able to pass the CELDT, her English-learning label became more defined, and potentially rigid, with the LTEL designation.

In addition to the above labels, Cooper Academy refers to LTELs as *entrenched English learners*. In her interview, Guadalupe's teacher Maestra Stevenson used the label when explaining how students are more often redesignated as *fluent English proficient* when in the DL program as compared to students in district mainstream programs.

I don't know if I remember the numbers, but it was something like 85 sort of what we're calling like the entrenched English learners or the long-term English learners who just never seem to redesignate, there were—I only knew six. Like I'd only ever taught six of them.

*Entrenched* is a problematic choice of words to describe learners involved in acquiring a second language, especially as research suggests it can take anywhere from 4 to 10 years to fully learn another language, especially the academic language needed in school, and more important, it is dependent on a number of factors (Collier, 1989). *Entrenched* is defined by the *Oxford Dictionaries* as “to establish (an attitude, habit, or belief) so firmly that change is very difficult or unlikely.” Linguistic and academic ideologies are embedded in institutional labels such as this one, in which students are reduced to a label that often conjures monolithic understandings of diverse students (Talmy, 2008) and influences the ways educators interact and perceive ELs—and in this case, educators may have already given up on students who are “very difficult or unlikely” to change.

During this interview, the teacher failed to mention that Guadalupe was considered an *entrenched English learner*, one of the few still retaking the CELDT each year despite being born in the US and having been in the system for seven years (at the time of the interview), so that she could be considered *fluent*. Even when she was eventually reclassified with the label *Redesignated as Fluent English Proficient* (RFEP) one year after the study, the label did not recognize her fluency in Spanish, the extent of her vast linguistic repertoire (Orellana, Martínez, Lee, & Montaño, 2012), and the arduous work of linguistic and cultural identity work sustained while simultaneously learning English and taking tests. The RFEP label serves to designate a status that deems ELs the same as (though not equal to) their native English-speaking counterparts—fluent in English. The label carries traces of the political and social dynamics of the language-classification process for students—a subtractive process that has implications for status access. Since there are no labels to serve as policy-sanctioned counterparts on the additive side for ELs (e.g., *balanced bilingual*, *fluent Spanish proficient*) that would recognize the extra burdens and challenges faced in the process of learning and being/becoming bilingual,<sup>8</sup> the result is simply the recognition of students’ passing an exam—demonstrating the immutable interdependence between testing and labeling, and undoubtedly affecting Latino immigrant students’ sense of academic identity and educational possibility.

## Discussion and Conclusion

### ***Raciolinguistic Ideologies: Are They All Language Learners?***

The English learners in the DL program at Cooper Academy are experiencing something distinct from the experiences of ELs within the nation, state, district, and even their own schools if they are not enrolled in a bilingual program with native English speakers. Though

the Spanish-dominant Latino students in the DL strand at Cooper Academy are integrated with English-dominant white students, they still experience the de facto segregation or “social apartness” described by Menchaca (1995) through the practice of overtesting that Guadalupe and Justa named and interrogated in this study.<sup>9,10</sup>

Within this context, language is used to segregate students into a strict binary (e.g., English-only vs. English learner), where tests operate as mechanisms of control and surveillance and where Latino *language learners* are given the opportunity to prove they can be trusted and branded as true English speakers. There are expectations of limited language with the label *English learner*. Rosa’s (2010) study of raciolinguistic ideologies surrounding Latino students in Chicago demonstrates how school officials inevitably reduce their bilingual linguistic practices and skills to a deficiency in English (rather than proficiency in two languages). He refers to this ideological interpretation as a notion of “languagelessness” that reduces students to “linguistic subhumanness” (pp. 153-154). These race- and language-based understandings play a role in shaping the dispositions educators have toward their students, and where often the label *language learner* is not a language learner as a person in general, but a particular type of person in the context of US education—preserved for students with brown skin and so-called “accented” speech (Flores & Rosa, 2015). This notion of *languagelessness*—that “some people are unable to speak any language properly” (Rosa, 2010, p. 158)—and that those people fit a particular mold, informs the creation and implementation of language policy in schools and ignores important issues around race, class, and immigration status.

The school, as an ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 1971), reproduces the dominant ideologies of a society by legitimating the knowledge that is selected, organized, and made available to students (and in what language that knowledge is acquired). In Bourdieu’s (1982) discussion of the market value of languages, that is how some languages can be deemed linguistically legitimate while others are stigmatized and racialized, and the hegemony of English in the US and globally goes undisputed; it is the official language of 32 US states, and at the very least, the lingua franca of most states. Even in a school context that strives to value two languages, English is still the legitimate language and members of one group enter the school with an automatic *legitimate competence* (Bourdieu, 1982) because of the language they speak. The native Spanish-speaking students are regularly overttested in their second language and designated incompetent when unable to perform at a level the native English-speaking students are not expected to reach in Spanish.

The raciolinguistic ideologies behind Cooper Academy's DL program point to a color-blind stance that all students are *language learners*. This indexes a belief that Latino immigrant and white middle-class students experience equal opportunity because the white families that "choose" for their students to be in the program help level the playing field. The act of choosing to learn the nondominant language is not leveling the playing field but giving dominant folks the power to choose enrichment for their children. These raciolinguistic ideologies fail to acknowledge the deep divide between the process of subtractive schooling involved in learning English (a legitimate language) and the process of "choosing" to learn Spanish (a low-status language in the context of urban America). The processes surrounding language learning in the US are hyperpoliticized as it is not a neutral act to "choose" to learn a language and to be a legitimate *language learner*; one must be deemed one by educational policies and practices, not just in theory. The policy label *English learner* codifies the process by which nondominant students learn the language of power as determined by the de facto English-only educational policies of high-stakes tests (Menken, 2008), subverting the notion that all students working towards bilingualism are language learners.

This is not the first critique of dual language program models. Educational researchers have questioned the benefits of including middle-class English-dominant students in bilingual programs in the US. Critiques include interrogating the politics of offering enrichment foreign-language immersion to middle- and upper-class white children (Valdés, 1997), while low-income Spanish-speaking students often do not have the freedom to learn and be proficient in two languages in the US (Moran, 2014), investigating whose needs are served in such programs, and asking whether English-dominant children can "impede the process of creating a safe space for bilingual students to assert themselves and claim academically oriented identities" (Palmer, 2009, p. 180). Exploring the racial positioning and subsequent language practices of minoritized *language learners* (Flores & Rosa, 2015) must occur within models that by their very nature are thought to undo or avoid unequitable educational practices. This case captured the tensions related to the overtesting of English learners that are inherent in all public schools in which ELs attend alongside native English-speaking students, but that are heightened in a DL program in which students are integrated and all are regarded as *language learners*.

### ***Double Bind of Dual Language Education: The California Context***

Advocates of English learners are concerned with ELs' access to quality educational opportunities across their schooling trajectories.

California provides a unique context at the intersection of policy and practice that is working toward leveraging and building upon students' linguistic strengths. The many efforts of state policy makers, researchers, advocates, and educators have coalesced to increase ELs' access to bilingual and biliteracy pathways across their pre-K–postsecondary trajectories. Two key initiatives leading the way are the adoption of the State Seal of Biliteracy (SSB) and the recent passing of the LEARN Initiative (Proposition 58).

Led by research and advocacy group Californians Together, California implemented the State Seal of Biliteracy (SSB) in 2012 as a method of recognizing the bilingual and biliterate proficiencies of California's graduating high school seniors. Specifically, the SSB allows for states, districts, and schools to recognize students' accomplishments in learning content and state-required material in two or more languages, thus promoting the ability to read, write, and speak in multiple languages as a valued asset. Followed by 22 states thus far, the promotion and recognition of bilingualism and biliteracy has proven popular, with significant growth each year in the number of students receiving the seal on their diploma or transcripts in California.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the State Seal of Biliteracy sends the message to families that being bilingual and biliterate is valued in schools and in the larger society, which plays a role in countering the negative anti-immigration and assimilationist focus in the media and larger national discourse that can influence families in (and even accelerate) the loss of their home languages. This message stands in sharp contrast to both covert and overt messages communicated from schools that employ subtractive schooling practices. Moreover, the SSB recognition is not only for English learners as it is meant for all students on the bilingual/biliterate schooling track, and alongside an increase in dual language programs across the state, it provides a mechanism to award students committed to their linguistic growth and development. San Diego State University and other California universities will pilot Biliteracy Badges this year to recognize students graduating from college with high levels of biliteracy to validate their achievements in two or more languages and to assist in postbaccalaureate opportunities.

Of course, access to the pathways and conditions (e.g., curriculum, bilingual programs, educators) needed to facilitate bilingual and biliterate journeys for students is not available everywhere. Moreover, the unequal language status of Spanish (and other minority languages) and English can negatively affect students' long-term desire to continue along the bilingual pathway. This is especially the case in communities in which the target minority language is not used regularly. It is the role of both the monolingual and multilingual educator to create



an environment where the minority language is amplified. It has been evident in both policy and practice that educators who do not share the same language background as their students can promote bilingualism and biliteracy through the ways in which they communicate about bilingualism and languages other than English. While English is the dominant language in the larger US, we know that elevating the status of other languages as bilingualism is promoted can increase the likelihood that students in middle and high school will continue to develop their second/third language.

Undoubtedly, California's recent passing of Proposition 58 will also open more pathways for biliteracy for many of the state's students. While not requiring a multilingual education, it successfully undoes the waiver requirement of Proposition 227, which will potentially allow immigrant families to more easily access bilingual programs. Previously, the parents of English learners needed to fill out a waiver to give their children access to bilingual programs, including dual language models. Non-EL parents were never required to jump through such political hoops. Though bilingual and multilingual programs will be easier to implement across the state, we must move forward cautiously.

Roughly 400 dual language programs exist in the state, and the number is expected to grow over the next several years. While a promising model with the research to back it up, dual language programs are not a silver bullet for educational reform. As with all program models, careful planning and implementation are key for these models to be successful for all students (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003). For schools and communities considering the implementation of dual language or other multilingual program models, Californians Together and the California Association for Bilingual Education offer some guidelines for the process,<sup>12</sup> including a one-year planning period before implementation, seeking out the research and successful models, recruitment of highly qualified teachers, and parent engagement, among others.

Additionally, the role of the sociocultural and educational context in determining what program model will best serve the local community is critical. A parent group representative of the local community's socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic demographics must have a seat at the table when making decisions about program models. The parents of language-minority students have long been marginalized in the conversation about bilingualism and biliteracy. We cannot ignore the rhetorical and strategic changes that were made to help pass Proposition 58—the focus on multilingual rather than bilingual programs distanced the campaign from the failed opposition to Proposition 227.



Moreover, Proposition 227 successfully passed partly because of the false campaign that blamed bilingual education for failing immigrant children and their families. Proposition 58 never made the campaign about immigrant children, a tactic that helped avoid the anti-immigrant sentiment that prevails today. We want language-minority children and their families to be successful but we must be very aware that they are not commodities. They are needed to sustain a two-way dual language program (along with their English-only counterparts), but their academic vulnerability needs to be addressed aggressively. They have more at stake than their dominant English-speaking counterparts, who have access to the language of power before they attend school.

Advocates for bilingual- and multilingual-education options for all children must consider the unintended consequences of a two-way dual language program within the context of language policy and policing. Despite the Garcia family's overall positive experience with the program, their experiences shared in the private space of their home brought to light critical issues that seem to be ignored by school officials. No matter how progressive or transformative a program model may be, it cannot be extracted from the current high-stakes educational-reform model we continue to function under. Educational scholars and practitioners must not tread lightly on the fact that the sociopolitical context will continue to influence the implementation of the highly popular dual language models. It is irresponsible at best, and dangerous (with material consequences) at worst, to believe that a program model's nature or philosophy, no matter how progressive, can replace the hard work of engaging the raciolinguistic ideologies present at the implementation level. Questions to consider include: Who has the privilege in our society to choose to be bilingual? Can a DL program be antiracist without naming race? Are all students regarded and treated at the policy and practice level as *language learners*? Further research on the raciolinguistic ideologies of DL models must include the perspectives of families and school officials. Otherwise, we continue to risk implementing programs that look antiracist and equitable, but that continue to serve the needs of mostly white middle- and upper-class families that flock to these models.

### **Acknowledgments**

The author would like to thank the families and educators who participated in this study and to acknowledge the funding from UC All Campus Consortium on Research for Diversity (ACCORD) that supported this work.

## Author

Dr. Sera J. Hernandez is assistant professor of Dual Language and English Learner Education at San Diego State University, where she teaches university courses on multilingual education, bilingualism, biliteracy, language policy, and English Language Development. She earned her PhD in Language, Literacy and Culture from the University of California, Berkeley.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The author prefers the more additive term *emergent bilingual* to refer to students learning English as an additional language. However, the label *English learners* is used in this article (a) as the term used in educational policy to refer to students who have been identified as needing additional support with English language acquisition as determined by a political process that involves standardized language testing and tracking of students into specialized English classes, and (b) to unpack the identity of a “language learner.”

<sup>2</sup>It is common for students to be exposed to more than one language within the home and to have experienced a simultaneous bilingual experience before entering the schooling system, which complicates this notion of a “dominant language.”

<sup>3</sup>Pseudonyms are used for all names of people and places in this study.

<sup>4</sup>An estimated 35.5 million people over the age of 5 in the US speak Spanish as a primary language (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). This statistic does not account for individuals who speak Spanish as an additional language, making the categorization of Spanish as a foreign language in government and language departments across the country a misnomer. *World language* is a more recent term used in many high school programs, but this change in terminology has yet to be taken on by many universities.

<sup>5</sup>The CELDT serves three purposes: to identify new students who are English learners in kindergarten through grade 12, to monitor EL students’ progress in learning English, and to help decide when EL students can be reclassified as fluent English proficient (FEP) (Xiong & Zhou, 2006).

<sup>6</sup>*Librería* is the Spanish word for “bookstore,” but Justa and other Latina parents at the school use it to refer to the school library. This linguistic practice is documented in other ethnographic work, in which Latino bilingual students have replaced the Spanish word for library (*biblioteca*) with *librería* in their lexicon (Zentella, 2003).

<sup>7</sup>There is no Spanish-language equivalent assessment to the CELDT.

<sup>8</sup>The term *emergent bilingual* as an additive example has yet to enter

language-policy discourse at either the federal level or at the state level in California.

<sup>9</sup>Menchaca (1995) examines interethnic relations in a California town, documenting the social apartness between Mexican-origin and Anglo Americans during the last century.

<sup>10</sup>The overtesting of emergent bilinguals is a well-known predicament of high-stakes educational reform. See Zacher Pandya (2011) for an in-depth illustration.

<sup>11</sup>See the announcement in 2015 from the state superintendent of Public Instruction at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr15/yr15rel76.asp>

<sup>12</sup>Go to the following website for the full list of recommendations for starting a new multilingual/biliteracy program from CAFE and Californians Together: <http://www.gocafe.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Post-Prop-58-handout-v.10.pdf>

## References

- Althusser, L. (1971). *Lenin and philosophy* (B. Brewster, Trans.). New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.
- Baker, C. (2010). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism* (5th ed.). Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters.
- Bourdieu, P. (1982). *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- California Department of Education. (2016). *Facts about English learners*. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/cefel/facts.asp>
- Callahan, R. M., & Gándara, P. (2014). *The bilingual advantage: Language, literacy and the US labor market*. Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters.
- Callahan, R. M., Wilkinson, L., & Muller, C. (2010). Academic achievement and course taking among language minority youth in U.S. schools: Effects of ESL placement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 32(1), 84-117.
- Collier, V. P. (1989). How long? A synthesis of research on academic achievement in second language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 23, 509-531.
- Collier, V. P., & Thomas, W. P. (2004). The astounding effectiveness of dual language education for all. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice*, 2(1), 1-20.
- Crawford, J. (2008) *Advocating for English learners: Selected essays*. Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters.
- Dabach, D. (2014). "I am not a shelter!": Stigma and social boundaries in teachers' accounts of students' experience in separate "sheltered" English learner classrooms. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 19,(2), 98-124.

- Entrenched. (2017). In *Oxford's online dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/entrenched>
- Flores, N., & Rosa, J. (2015). Undoing appropriateness: Raciolinguistic ideologies and language diversity in education. *Harvard Educational Review, 85*(2), 149-171.
- Gándara, P. (2010). Overcoming triple segregation. *Educational Leadership, 68*(3), 60-64.
- Gándara, P., & Orfield, G. (2010). *A return to the "Mexican room": The segregation of Arizona's English learners. The Civil Rights Project*. Retrieved from [www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/ArizonaEducationalEquityProject](http://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/ArizonaEducationalEquityProject).
- Garrett, P., & Baquedano-López, P. (2002). Language socialization: Reproduction and continuity, transformation and change. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 31*, 339-361.
- Genesee, F., & Gándara, P. (1999). Bilingual education programs: A cross-national perspective. *Journal of Social Issues, 55*(4), 665-685.
- Genesee, F., Lindholm-Leary, K., Saunders, W., & Christian, D. (2006). *Educating English language learners: A synthesis of research evidence*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Grosjean, F. (2010). *Bilingual: Life and reality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hakuta, K. (2011). Educating language minority students and affirming their equal rights: Research and practical perspectives. Seventh annual Brown lecture in education research. *Educational Researcher, 40*(4), 163-174.
- Hakuta, K., & Gould, L. J. (1987). Synthesis of research on bilingual education. *Educational Leadership, 44*(3), 38-44.
- Howard, E. R., Sugarman, J., & Christian, D. (2003). Trends in two-way immersion education: A review of the research (Report No. 63). Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk.
- Hymes, D. (2001). On communicative competence. In A. Duranti (Ed.), *Linguistic anthropology: A reader* (pp. 53-74). Massachusetts: Blackwell. (Reprinted from *Sociolinguistics: Selected readings*, pp. 269-293, by J. Pride & J. Holmes, Eds., 1986, Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books)
- Menchaca, M. (1995). *The Mexican outsiders: A community history of marginalization and discrimination in California*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Menken, K. (2008). *English learners left behind: Standardized testing as language policy*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

- Montone, C. L., & Loeb, M. I. (2000) *Implementing two-way immersion programs in secondary schools* (Educational Practice Report #5). Santa Cruz: Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence, University of California.
- Moran, R. (2014). New twist on “The One Best System”: Structured immersion initiatives, equal opportunity, and freedom to learn. In G. P. McField (Ed.), *The miseducation of English learners: A tale of three states and lessons to be learned* (pp. 229-250), Charlotte, NC: Information Age.
- Olsen, L. (2010). *Repairable harm: Fulfilling the unkept promise of educational opportunity for California’s long term English learners* (Research & Policy Publication). Long Beach, CA: Californians Together.
- Orellana, M. F., Martínez, D. C., Lee, C., & Montaña, E. (2012). Language as a tool in diverse forms of learning. *Linguistics and Education*, 23(4), 373-387.
- Orfield, G., & Lee, C. (2006). Racial transformation and the changing nature of segregation. Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University.
- Ovando, C. J. (2003). Bilingual education in the United States: Historical development and current issues. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 27(1), 1-24.
- Palmer, D. (2009). Middle-class English speakers in a two-way immersion bilingual classroom: “Everybody should be listening to Jonathan right now . . .” *TESOL Quarterly*, 43(2), 177-202.
- Palmer, D. (2010). Race, power, and equity in a multiethnic urban elementary school with a dual-language “strand” program. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 41(1), 94-114.
- Rosa, J. (2010). Looking like a language, sounding like a race: Making Latino panethnicity and managing American anxieties (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago.
- Ruiz, R. (1984). Orientations in language planning. *National Association for Bilingual Education Journal*, 8, 15-34.
- Schieffelin, B., & Ochs, E. (Eds.) (1986). *Language socialization across cultures*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Talmy, S. (2008). The cultural production of the ESL student at Tradewinds High: Contingency, multidirectionality, and identity in L2 socialization. *Applied Linguistics* 17(1), 1-22.
- Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. P. (2003). The multiple benefits of dual language. *Educational Leadership*, 61(2), 61-64.
- Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. P. (2012). *Dual language education for a*

- transformed world*. Albuquerque, NM: Dual Language Education of New Mexico/Fuente Press.
- Tran, N., & Paterson, S. E. (2015). "American" as a proxy for "whiteness": Racial color blindness in everyday life. *Women & Therapy*, 38, 341-355.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2009). *American community survey, B16001, language spoken at home by ability to speak English for the population 5 years and over*. Retrieved from <http://factfinder.census.gov/>
- Valdés, G. (1997). Dual language immersion programs: A cautionary note concerning the education of language-minority students. *Harvard Educational Review*, 67, 391-429.
- Valdés, G. (2001). *Learning and not learning English: Latino students in American schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Varenne, H., & McDermott, R. (1998). *Successful failure: The school America builds*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Wortham, S. (2006). *Learning identity: The joint emergence of social identification and academic learning*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Xiong, Y. S., & Zhou, M. (2006). Structuring inequity: How California selectively tests, classifies, and tracks language-minority students. In D. Mitchell (Ed.), *California policy options* (pp. 145-171). Los Angeles: UCLA Ralph and Goldy Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Zacher Pandya, J. (2011). *Overtested: How high-stakes accountability fails English language learners*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Zentella, A. C. (2003). 'José, can you see?' Latin@ responses to racist discourse. In D. Sommer (Ed.). *Bilingual aesthetics* (pp. 51-66). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.