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Running Head: EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

Teacher Perspectives on the Educational Experience of English Learners:
A Case Study of Three Monterey Country Schools
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Social and Behavioral Sciences
Cultural Anthropology Concentration
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EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

Abstract

The educational experience of English learners has been largely debated, especially after the passage of Proposition 227 in California in 1998. This proposition essentially banned bilingual education within public schools in the state. With English learners unable to use their native language in a scholastic setting in order to help them acquire English language skills, the educational experience of these students is of particular interest. Monterey County is an idea location as it has the second highest population of English Learners in the state after Imperial County, a county located on the national border with Mexico. Three Monterey County elementary school teachers were interviewed regarding their perspectives and understandings of how English learners navigate through the school system, the resources available to these students, impact of parental involvement and suggestions for improving the educational system for English learners and all students. Each teacher implements their own style in their classroom and based on that style, their approaches to improve the experience of their students differs. A common theme addressed in all interviews included better guidelines for bilingual education, if implemented, due to concern that students are not benefitting from the current bilingual education methods and guidelines.

Introduction

A student's education helps mold them and prepare them to enter society once they are finished. Some students have an easier time transitioning into higher education than others. English Learners (ELs) comprise 22% of California's total enrollment, about 1.4 million students. Seventy three percent of California's English learners are currently enrolled in primary grades (K-6). A vast majority (84.2%) of ELs in California have reported they speak Spanish at home (www.cde.ca.gov). When California passed Proposition 227 in 1998, "this proposition significantly change[d] the way that [Limited English Proficient (LEP)] students are taught in California. Specifically it requires California public schools to teach LEP students in special classes that are taught nearly all in English. This would eliminate "bilingual" classes in most cases" (primary98.sos.ca.gov). These students lack access to education in their native language and are expected to be

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

“taught English by being taught in English” (primary98.sos.ca.gov). Learning English without a formal education in the structure of their native language leaves ELs with unique struggles and roadblocks while on a journey to acquire English language skills.

Because ELs do not experience the classroom in their native language their educational experience is of particular interest. Currently there are two main types of programs designed around this issue. Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms provide “nearly all instruction in English... with a curriculum and presentation designed for children who are learning the language” (cde.ca.gov). Dual Immersion programs work to combine both native English speakers and ELs into the same classroom and expose them to both languages equally over time while they build academic language skills in both languages. Throughout this paper, bilingual education will be used to refer to any educational programs that are conducted in two languages.

In California, most bilingual classes have been eliminated in public schools and SEI programs are very prevalent. This research presents the perspectives of teachers currently in SEI classrooms on the educational experience of the ELs in their classes and how they feel the educational system could be improved in order to improve the experience of these students. Of pertinent interest is how teachers perceive and interpret the factors that affect the education of ELs.

The experience of ELs in school can be better understood if ELs are viewed from a cultural perspective. ELs are in a unique position because a dichotomy exists between the culture practiced at home, which utilizes the native language, and the culture emphasized at school and conducted in English. The culture (including language) that ELs come from makes them a unique population of learners that have unique assets or cultural capital, such

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

as their language. Teachers must understand cultural capital in order to for it to be properly utilized in the educational environment. When properly recognized, this capital can not only make the transition between the school and home dichotomy easier for ELs, but it can also add to the communities cultural wealth and positively affirm the culture within the greater American society, and provide cognitive benefits as well.

Three teachers who currently teach in SEI classrooms in Salinas, a city in Monterey County, were interviewed regarding their perspectives on this topic. They were asked questions about many different aspects of the educational experience such as standardized testing, Common Core standards, parental involvement, and resources that are available to ELs that might affect how this group of students experiences education separated from their native language.

The previous literature has presented evidence that students feel more comfortable in an academic setting when they are able to be understood by their teachers (Rubio and Attinasi 2000), bilingual programs afford students with the most long-term advances in language acquisition (Reardon and Umansky 2014), and helps affirm the identity of culturally diverse ELs(Morales and Aldana:2010).

The experience of ELs in California is impacted by these restrictive language policies and is of importance to Anthropologists because these students are operating in an environment where their culture is not being recognized. Specifically, since Monterey County has the second highest percentage of ELs in the state, the study of this area can be used in comparison to the studies of teachers' perspectives in other counties across the state. Personally I am interested in this topic because I am bilingual and began learning Spanish in kindergarten for an hour a day. I have personally experienced the benefits of learning a

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

second language at a young age alongside my native language. I also experience the benefits of being bilingual in California every day. I believe in supporting a diverse and multicultural society and honoring the diverse backgrounds and cultures of all those living in California. The social implications of this topic include providing equally accessible content within education that works to provide futures in the professional world for students from all backgrounds.

This paper captures the unique experience of ELs in SEI classrooms in Salinas and how their teachers work to ensure they get the best education possible. It also exposes the attitudes of teachers regarding the Dual Immersion classes that are available at some school sites and how these programs affect ELs.

Literature Review

Bilingual education is a highly debated and politically polarized topic, especially in California. Proposition 227 affects English learners in many ways. Students can lose touch with their culture and heritage and their parents can feel isolated from their children's school life. Classes might become more difficult in High School for English Learners, because the intensive one year English immersion program does not best prepare students with a foundation that can serve them linguistically in High School, causing many to drop out.

Shortly after California passed Proposition 227, the ban on bilingual education, in 1998, Olga Rubio and John Attinassi interviewed teachers whose lives and classrooms were turned upside down because of this new law in their article *Teachers in Post-Proposition-227 Southern California: Implications for Teacher Education*. Because of unclear instructions from the government, teachers were unsure when they were officially supposed to stop teaching in Spanish. Many teachers continued to explain things in Spanish to their students for clarification

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

purposes. Teachers found that students felt much more comfortable and confident in themselves when they were able to ask questions in Spanish and conduct themselves in their native language (2000:10). By being able to communicate with their teacher in Spanish, students can feel more confident taking the risks that are associated with learning and understanding new concepts.

Proposition 227 put classrooms that were being conducted in Spanish at a disadvantage as well. Proposition 227 was passed three years before No Child Left Behind, a federal program that emphasizes standardized testing as a way to benchmark success. Teachers who were in Spanish classrooms were confused as to how to prepare their students for the test. Their test preparation lessons were void of language development skills, and focused on known answer questions in Spanish to prepare students for the English written examination. The biggest benefit of a program conducted in Spanish for English learners is to develop their native language along with English so they can be experienced academically in both. This will never happen if more time is spent preparing for standardized tests than developing language skills.

The benefits of bilingual education are explained further in a study conducted by Ilana Umansky and Sean Reardon described in their article *Reclassification Patterns among Latino English Learner Students in Bilingual, Dual Immersion, and English Immersion Classrooms*. Umansky and Reardon studied Traditional English Immersion Programs, Spanish Traditional Bilingual Programs, Spanish Maintenance Bilingual Programs and Spanish Dual Immersion Programs. They found that while it took students longer to reclassify out of English learner status and into English proficient, it was the dual language programs (defined as any program conducted in two languages) that provided students with the most benefits in terms of long-term gains (2014: 902-905). In *Learning in Two Languages: Programs with Political Promise*, authors P. Zitali Morales and Ursula S. Aldana explain other benefits of learning in two

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

languages such as: the promotion of positive intergroup relations through ethnic and linguistic diversity, increased cross-cultural awareness and friendships, and reduced prejudice (2010: 165). This study shows that long lasting English acquisition comes from programs that incorporate the students' native language. Although these programs generally require more time until a student can be classified English proficient, students exit with higher levels of English proficiency and are also better prepared to enter American society promoting multiculturalism.

In *Native Language Loss and Its Implications for Revitalization of Spanish in Chicano Communities*, a chapter in the book *Language and Culture in Learning: Teaching Spanish to Native Speakers of Spanish*, Eduardo Hernandez-Chavez iterates that “goals for Spanish revitalization cannot be separated from those for cultural pluralism... For the individual, we must add a strong sense of self, grounded in the native culture, and the full development of cognitive capabilities” (1993:67). Hernandez-Chavez explains how the native language is paramount to a strong sense of self because how much language comprises the identity of someone from a different culture.

Although it would seem that two language programs would slowly fade with the implementation of English-only and Structured English Immersion, the exact opposite happened. April Linton and Rebecca C. Franklin explain in *Bilingualism for the Children: Dual-Language Programs Under Restrictive Language Policies* that some public schools became charter schools “in order to maintain their dual-language curriculum... and children in the dual-language program were doing better than those in English-only classrooms and performing at or above the district average” (2010:177). The authors state that the increase in dual-language programs was due to the renewed district support (2010:181). Even though the political climate is very

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

negatively charged towards immigrants and English learners, some schools are still able to find ways in order to ensure their students' needs are being met to the best of their ability.

Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom explain some of the drawbacks in bilingual programs that further impact the EL community. In their book *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning* they state, "Although bilingual education is theoretically open to all language-minority children, in practice it is a program serving Latinos almost exclusively... [Latino ELs] alone sat in classes in which instruction in English was regarded as a supplement taught for as little as an hour a day" (2003:115). They also explain that 'bilingual education' is a term that has been applied loosely since Proposition 227 was passed and more often than not refers to programs where English instruction is lacking and students have a difficult time transitioning out of these programs and into classrooms conducted in English.

Jeanmarie Boone writes about how we can improve the schooling experience for English learners in her article *¡Ya Me Fui! When English Learners Consider Leaving School*. This article explores the experiences of High School students. What Boone finds is that if students had a different experience as English learners in Elementary school, they wouldn't be so likely to drop out once they reach high school. Boone quotes Jorge Amselle who states that the "lack of bilingual education in grade school is what delays English proficiency and hinders the ability for students to have the advanced and developed command of the English language that is required in high school" (2014:418). The lack of advanced language skills that ELs are equip with upon entering High School leave them feeling discouraged to continue schooling. This is an extremely important issue as Morales and Aldana have noted that "in our current system, English learners are twice as likely to drop out of high school as all other students" (2010:171). Boone suggests providing cultural diversity training to teachers and school faculty which she defines as a training

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

that facilitates their understanding of the complex needs of certain student populations including English learners which assists in avoiding the creation of mentalities that depreciate these students' cultural capital in helping them obtain academic success.

These two suggestions presented by Boone seem to mirror suggestions made by George Spindler in his book *Fifty Years of Anthropology in Education* in the chapter entitled *Schooling in the American Cultural Dialogue*. Spindler mentions his observations that schools are oriented towards the culture of the larger society and the larger society will determine which groups succeed and which groups fail in schooling. He offered an example of a school counselor who was very discriminatory when suggesting high school classes for the graduating eighth graders. Spindler claims these experiences deter students from believing they will do well in a challenging academic environment and suggests diversity training in order to be aware of our subconscious biases (2000). Judie Hanes also recommends training in diverse cultures in her book *Getting Started with English Learners: How Educators Can Meet the Challenge*. Hanes proposes that “all certified staff... need training in second language acquisition, diverse cultures and culture shock” (2007:45). By providing this training, ELs can feel more welcome in their school, less anxious, and more confident they can build good relationships with their teachers because their teachers have an understanding of the difficult transition they are making.

With all this emphasis on how teachers and students are affected by Proposition 227 it is important not to forget the perspectives of the parents of English learners. In his article *Immigrant Parents' Views of Bilingual Education as a Vehicle for Heritage Preservation*, Pete Farruggio explains that Latino immigrants are locked into low wage jobs in segregated communities and because of this, preserving the Spanish language heritage is of value. There is a marked difference between the cultural emphasis on interdependence that is present in Hispanic

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

communities and the strong emphasis on independence that is pushed by the Public School System (2010: 6-8). Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom present that one of the reasons that Asian minorities frequently perform highly has to do with the importance of school, education, and professional preparation emphasized by their home culture and facilitated through their education. "Asian-American families have successfully transmitted to their children a culture conducive to high academic achievement" (2003:99). Different cultures transmit different messages to their offspring and while the messages transmitted by Asian families work to propel their children to academic success, the objectives of the messages sent to children in Hispanic families from their Hispanic communities do not share the same objectives as the schools. (2003:99).

Parents who requested and had their child placed in bilingual programs often did so in order to ensure the preservation of their Spanish heritage. Some parents have their children placed in English programs believing they could continue the Spanish language education at home outside of school. There is another group of parents who feel they have been put at a disadvantage because while they wanted their children placed in a bilingual education program, that option was not available. Those parents felt involuntarily excluded from the education of their children because they were unable to get involved or even help and support their children with their homework because they could not understand English well enough (2010:14). Patricia Gandara and Gary Orfield also note in their article *Moving from Failure for a New Vision of Language Policy* that English learners are a "product of a social system that provides no safety net for them or their families" (2010: 223). They also explain that dual-language instruction shows promise "for bringing low- and middle-income, Black, Latino, Asian and White students together in equal status contact, where they not only learn in two languages, but also learn to like and respect each

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

other's cultures" (2010: 224). While Structured English Immersion might leave parents feeling excluded from the schooling process, Dual-language programs work to include parents. Linton and Franklin note in one school, English and Spanish speaking parents are paired up to help each other with language issues in the homework (2010: 185).

Parental involvement is very important to the success of their children in school. Alex Ian Gershber, Anne Danenberg and Patricia Sanchez explain in their article *Recent Immigrant Challenges and Public School Responses* that "parent involvement in a child's education can help improve a wide range of outcomes" (2004: 79). There are many obstacles that recent immigrant parents face when trying to become more involved with their child's school. Reasons for such obstacles include "1. Schools and the school system are *inaccessible* to recent immigrant parents. 2. The "culture" of parental involvement is different for many immigrants. 3. Fear associated with undocumented status impedes parental involvement" (2004: 80). "They may view school staff as official authorities potentially connected to the INS. Such fear of deportation creates a particular obstacle for schools trying to foster parent involvement" (2004: 85). Fostering parent involvement might be easier if teachers were able to bridge the gap between schools and families. According to Gandara and Orfield, in order to do this, schools "need... teachers from the same language communities as the students – teachers who know the students' challenges and assets, understand their communities and can communicate directly with them and their parents" (2010: 225). Gandara and Orfield state that "Any policy that erodes the supply of well-trained bilingual teachers or discourages new teachers from preparing themselves in this way should be reconsidered" (2010: 225).

In schools where bilingual teachers are available, they are more likely to step in and inform parents of what options are available to them because they share a language background.

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

Gershber, Danenberg, and Sanchez found that while parents might select English-only, they often have little understanding of how long and how difficult learning a new language can be. In these circumstances, one teacher recommended the parent opt for bilingual education in order to be able to help their child with their schoolwork and also to be able to learn English along with their child (2004: 108). Parents obviously want their children to learn English, but it is important for them to know what options they have, and how these options will affect their children as academic learners in the future.

The importance of having bilingual teachers is also mentioned in an article entitled *Winning the Battle, Losing the War: Bilingual Teachers and Post-Proposition 227*, by Elsa Valdez. In this article Valdez explores bilingual classrooms in California and explains the unequal ratio of Latino students to teachers. Latinos comprise 33% of California's public school students and Latino teachers only make up 7% of California's public school teacher population (2001:241). The bilingual education teachers Valdez interviewed emphasized the benefits of having command of two languages, and also explained that by providing bilingual education they are not trying to strip their students of their identity. By being taught in their native language, students have the opportunity to feel pride and validation in their home culture. Valdez interviewed a teacher who explained that by offering bilingual education, teachers can affirm who students are "We come from the same background so they feel at home. They are very comfortable around me. In my classroom they know who they are" (2001: 244) Programs facilitated in more than one language have the ability to present students with diverse settings in which to navigate academically and socially which can not only affirm their own identity, but can affirm the diversity that exists in the world outside the classroom.

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

It is also important to keep in mind the attitudes of students who are being strongly encouraged to learn English rapidly without much attention paid to their native language. A Finnish study on bilingual education conducted by Tuula Merisuo-Storm found that negative attitudes about learning a foreign language can reduce progress and harm motivation (2007:228). P. Zitali Morales and Urusla S. Aldana also discovered, “When maintenance of the primary language is not emphasized at the same level as English language acquisition, students and communities may receive the message that their language is a problem that needs remediation rather than a resource that will aid them in their academic and career paths” (2010:168). The unequal emphasis on the acquisition of English in comparison to ELs’ native languages breeds ideas that the EL’s native language is a problem which leads them to have negative attitudes about learning English. Also, by discouraging the acquisition of ELs native language, the educational system is perpetuating the idea that there is no room in America for those who do not speak English.

James Crawford expands on this idea in his book *War with Diversity: U.S. Language Policy in an Age of Anxiety* where he explains the political paradox of bilingual education. Crawford states, “Immigrant children’s’ progress in acquiring English is now regarded as a matter of urgency... hence the growing popularity of nostrums like ‘structured immersion’ whose enthusiasts promise shortcuts to English proficiency” (2000:85). The urgency to learn English puts unneeded pressure on ELs and lacks to validate their native language causing a negative experience in learning English. Also, as Umansky and Reardon have already stated, there are no shortcuts to English proficiency and it is bilingual programs that provide students with the most beneficial linguistic foundation.

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

Merisuo-Storm also mentions that students in bilingual classes had more advanced reading comprehension skills, which prepared them for high school and higher learning (2007:233). Hitting on the same points Boone was making when discussing why Latino students drop out of school is in part due to the lack of advanced language manipulation that is required that could be fostered through bilingual education.

Zulmara Cline and Juan Necochea, along with Francisco Rios, elaborate on other reasons Proposition 227 was passed in their article *The Tyranny of Democracy: Deconstructing the Passage of Racist Propositions*. They explain that fear in the form of racist sentiments, capitalism in the form of huge investment from Ron Unz, a Silicon Valley millionaire, a deceiving name *English for the Children*, which neglects to mention any of the harm it will do to English learners, and Media collusion such as the Latino supporter for Proposition 227 that created false support by the Latino community, all worked together to get California to pass Proposition 227 into law (2004:70-73). Patricia Gandara and Gary Orfield highlight that with Proposition 227 alive in California, misinformation is still being spread in order to promote these restrictive language policies. “While the great majority of studies reported in the academic literature found bilingual programs to be successful, the majority of op-eds and other newspaper articles described them, as failures. This kind of reporting creates erroneous beliefs among the public that convert into votes at the ballot box” (2010: 217). What is unfortunate about this campaign of misinformation is that news articles in newspapers and op-ed pieces are much more likely to circulate through homes than are scholarly studies.

James Crawford explores in his book *Hold Your Tongue: Bilingualism and the Politics of English-Only* that “there is no reason other than prejudice to give up on language while learning another” (1992:248). In every other educational instance, learners are encouraged to learn

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

another language, as long as they are already fluent in English. This expression of prejudice is obvious as ELs are the only population encouraged to give up their native language while trying to acquire English under Proposition 227.

The true evaluation of Proposition 227 should include a long-term study of English learner gains coupled with benchmarks to identify if progress is being made. In his article, *Challenging Limitations: The Growing Potential for Overturning Restrictive Language Policies and Ensuring Equal Education Opportunity*, Daniel Losen explains court mandated benchmarks intended to evaluate whether programs should continue or cease to exist. In 1981, the *Castaneda vs. Pickard* case came into the spotlight, claiming a Texas school was not providing equal educational opportunities to its students. The *Castaneda* case provided 3 prongs for determining if a program is fair in the treatment of its students. The first prong looks at if the program is supported by professionals in the field, the second prong looks at the steps taken to implement the program effectively and the third prong is to determine if the program is successful in showing that students can overcome the language barriers confronting them so they may become Fluent English Proficient (2010:197). A long-term appraisal of the effects of Proposition 227 was analyzed by Laura Wentworth, Nathan Pellegrin, Karen Thompson and Kenji Hakuta, in their article *Proposition 227 in California: A Long-Term Appraisal of Its Impact on English Learner Student Achievement*. The authors found that “Proposition 227 did not increase the rate of English learners’ reclassification as Fluent English Proficient” (2010: 38). Losen also states “There has been no study at either the state or national level that has shown significant or sustained closing of the achievement gap between English learners and English speakers in the states that have enacted English-only policies... the data all point in the direction of either increases in the gaps or not change” (2010, 204-5). Because there has been no concrete evidence

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

of a decrease in the achievement gap between English learners and native English speakers under Proposition 227, the third prong of Castaneda has not been met and English-only education should not be seen as a viable method of instruction.

With the ability to lift the ban on bilingual education during the election in 2016, it is important to become informed of how Proposition 227 acts to put English learners at a disadvantage. In an article entitled *Educating Language Minority Students and Affirming their Equal Rights: Research and Practical Perspectives* Kenji Hakuta explains how the perception of bilingual students as those suffering a linguistic handicap is what is being perpetuated by the media and by politics even though there is plenty of scholarly evidence that shows being bilingual provides many cognitive advances (2011:164). Hakuta argued with Unz and urged him to pull his support for Proposition 227 making an argument based on the cultural capital of English Learners. Hakuta likened English learners to a man who wanted a forest of trees and stumbled upon a lot of saplings. Should he either begin to nurture the saplings into tall trees, or bulldoze the lot in order to plant seedlings from scratch (2011:172). Proposition 227 attempts to deny all assets brought by English learners in forms of cultural capital in order to provide an English only education.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital can help explain why bilingual education makes the most sense for empowering California's English learners by validating their culture and recognizing the valuable contribution their heritage and experiences make in our society. It also helps explain why an English-only, one-size-fit all approach is not keeping the students' best interests in mind when working with students that have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

Theory

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital can be applied to better understand the experience of English Learners and their specific needs. This theory explains how one acquires skills, mannerisms, ways of being, styles, and credentials by being part of a distinguished social class (1986). Along with Cultural Capital, Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of Habitus, which is the set of skills one learns within their culture that guides their movements through society. The movement between cultures within a society could show someone's skills and Habitus they learned from one culture could be detrimental to the Habitus required in another culture.

Farruggio reflects the concept of Habitus when he explains how the core value of interdependence among Hispanic cultures, especially those living in segregated communities, clashes with the core value of independence emphasized by the California Public Schools.

Expanding on these ideas of Cultural Capital, Tara Yosso, a professor in the Department of Chicano and Chicana Studies and the University California, Santa Barbara, applies Critical Race Theory in her article *Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion Of Community Cultural Wealth* (2006). Yosso explains how Critical Race Theory (CRT) can be used to support Cultural Capital within all cultures. She explains CRT as an analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourse. Yosso states, the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism exhibit themselves in US schools in the form of deficit thinking. She writes, "Schools most often work from this assumption in structuring ways to help 'disadvantaged' students whose race and class background has left them lacking necessary knowledge, social skills, abilities and cultural capital" (2006:70). Yosso claims that this is the reason schools rely on the banking method of education,

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

a term coined by Paulo Freire which is an explanation of the traditional education system that views students as empty containers waiting for educators to deposit knowledge into them (1993).

An alternative to this model would be the problem-posing model which requires the students to solve problems for themselves by using their cultural capital. This model views the student as a participant with prior knowledge that can be utilized in learning new concepts. The problem-posing model provides ELs with an opportunity to use their Habitus in order to succeed in school.

Yosso explains that CRT shifts this focus from ideas of White, middle class culture, to the cultures of Communities of Color. Yosso lists six forms of Cultural Capital:

1. Aspirational Capital: maintaining hopes and dreams for a successful future
2. Linguistic Capital: includes skills attained through communication
3. Familial Capital: centered around kinship and a sense of community
4. Social Capital: described as networks of people and community resources
5. Navigational Capital: skills necessary to maneuver through social institutions, especially those that breed racism,
6. Resistant Capital: knowledge created through opposition that challenges inequality.

Yosso's application of CRT and forms of Capital can be used to understand how the school could provide a better experience for English Learners. By making connections between the culture the student experiences at home and the culture the student experiences at school, students can navigate between the two worlds more seamlessly. As Valdez's interviews expressed, students identities feel respected and encouraged when they feel comfortable expressing who they are, and a large part of expressing who someone is can be reflected in the use of their native language. Students that feel confident in themselves and the resources they

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

bring to the table have cultural capital that is being affirmed. If society can view that cultural capital and habitus that English learners have developed at home as an asset, something that can be enhanced and built upon, affirmed, instead of rejected and torn down, Latino students could feel much more confident.

By affirming linguistic capital of English learners, they are shown that their language matters. By implementing well executed and organized Dual Immersion programs that work to reduce prejudice and promote multicultural diversity by bringing many students from diverse backgrounds into the same classroom, students can begin to see the importance of diversity and the value found in every culture's forms of capital. Long-term language gains could be made for both English learners in the English language and Native English Speakers in the Spanish language which more accurately represents the language background of Monterey County and California. In order for teachers of English learners or any teacher in a diverse classroom to be able to use their students' diverse cultural capital, they must be aware of the ways this capital manifests itself, and how the culture of American society might make them biased as to whether they view this Cultural Capital as an asset or not. By participating in a critical analysis of their classroom conduct through the form of Professional Development or cultural diversity trainings teachers can be made aware of how their conduct in the classroom affects their learners and how to show each student how they can use their unique cultural capital to their advantage in order to be more successful in school.

In the application of Yosso's CRT, it can be understood that cultural capital, such as the native language spoken by English learners, can be used by schools to enhance their educational experience and grant validity to their culture. When minority students feel there is a place for them in academia and that they belong in school, they will be less likely to drop out.

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

Methodology

This research is based in qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Data was collected through open ended or semi standardized interviews with three teachers at different schools in Monterey County. Bruce Berg explains interviews and how they can be used in his book *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. The semi standardized interview “involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions and/or special topics... the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress... [or] probe far beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions” (1995:33). Interviews were conducted in order to provide research into this topic because “the interview is an especially effective method of collecting information for certain types of research questions... particularly when investigators are interested in understanding perceptions of participants” (1995: 35). Since this project aims to collect teacher perceptions of the experience of English Learners, interviewing teachers is an ideal method. Cultural Anthropologists often rely on information relayed through interviews with or observations of key informants, who are keenly familiar with the culture being studied, in this case, English Learners.

Participants included three teachers who currently teach at elementary schools in Salinas. Carmen has been a teacher in Monterey County for 10 years. She currently teaches 2nd grade at Los Padres Elementary School which in 2013-2014 had 75.1% of its student population classify as English Learners. Pilar has been teaching in Monterey County for 22 years and she currently teaches 1st grade at Steinbeck Elementary School which had 41% of its enrolled students classify as English Learners in the 2013-2014 school year. Iris has taught in Monterey County for 13 years and currently teachers 2nd grade at Monterey Park Elementary School. English Learners at

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

Monterey Park comprise 44.5% of the enrolled student population.

Interviews were held on the phone or conducted in person. Teachers were asked about the experience of English learners at their current school site through questions that focus on resources, parental involvement, standardized testing, determining the proper appropriation of programs, and suggestions for improvements at any level be it school, district, county, or state. All these topics presented themselves as prominent themes within the scholarly literature that have an effect on the scholastic experience of English Learners.

The study of English learners is especially important in Monterey County because Monterey County had the highest percentage of English Learners in Public schools in 2013 at 38.6%, second only to Imperial County, California with 42.2%, located on the California Mexico border. (kidsdata.org). Because Monterey County has such a high percentage of English Learners in public schools, it is an ideal population to study as participants (teachers) will be able to discuss their perceptions of experience of English learners at length.

The questions focused on in the interviews were common themes prevalent in the literature I have reviewed in regards to English learners and their scholastic experience. The data collected from each teacher was compared with the responses received by other teachers, as well as the literature. Critical Race Theory was used to analyze the data collected where applicable.

Each school has a unique community with unique needs and resources used to meet those needs. Although this research only focuses on three teachers working at three different schools, the participants have worked at numerous schools in the county and are aware of the resources available at their school site.

Limitations for this study include that participants only represent a sample from 2 districts in the Salinas area. Ideally, teachers from every district in Monterey County could be interviewed.

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

Also, while these participants had experience teaching in dual language classrooms, they all currently taught in Structured English Immersion classrooms.

After the interviews were conducted, responses were organized by question and then responses to each question were coded by themes which include resources available to English Learners, teachers' impressions of standardized testing, impressions of parental involvement, teachers' critiques of the Common Core, critiques and impressions of bilingual/dual-immersion programs in Monterey County, pressures felt by teachers, and suggestions for improvement.

Findings

Each teacher interviewed for this project had unique views about the experience of English Learners, but overlap existed among common aspects or themes all teachers found important. Such themes include available resources, impressions of standardized testing, parental involvement, critiques of the Common Core and current Bilingual Education Programs, pressures teachers face, and suggestions for improving the current learning environment.

Resources Available

Resources for English learners vary by district and even school site. Carmen (Los Padres Elementary) and Iris (Monterey Park Elementary) spoke of software called Imagine Learning that is used 30 minutes per day to increase English Proficiency. Carmen's school has an English Language Development Block that consists of time spent in the classroom that is rich in vocabulary exposure, grammatical concepts, and strategies for developing more advanced communication. Carmen expressed that she uses ample amounts of visuals, hand motions, and picture drawing to ensure that the information is presented a variety of ways. She encourages her

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

students to use Cornell notes, a note-taking style that organizes information topically, which allow them to compartmentalize information.

Pilar (Steinbeck Elementary) felt resources were scarce at her school and expressed that there is no bilingual resource teacher or academic coach for English Learners. She explained also a need to use diverse teaching styles in order to reach every student but spoke negatively about trying to teach to one type of student. She explained that “students are not going to remember a worksheet they did, but they will remember something that was exciting” (Iris 2015). In hopes of getting her students excited about learning, she tries to develop hands-on activities that reinforce the topics they are learning about in their books. She also views Science class as a way to introduce more academic language, and by using a language based approach to Science she finds more time to incorporate the hours.

Iris, along with mentioning Imagine Learning also spoke of a time during her school day called Universal Access, where students split up and spend time working in small groups so Iris can see where each group needs assistance. She also stated that at her school there is intensive 3rd grade instruction which includes a two hour time block of Language Arts. Like Carmen, she also explained how she uses different techniques such as pointing out pictures in books, splitting the class into pairs so they can explain their writing or activity and also provides her students with sentence framing structures so they can express themselves clearly through writing. Iris referred to the constant implementation of new programs and stated “programs are always coming and going because there are always new programs available that might be better” (Iris 2015).

These teachers expressed that verbally conveying information to students is not enough, especially for English Learners, and there needs to be more context offered to students in the

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

form of gestures or photos in order to ensure students grasp the information the best they can. Although Pilar spoke negatively about teaching towards ELLs, she still sees the benefit in using multiple teaching styles and employs many teaching strategies in her classroom. The teachers identified providing their own tools and strategies such as the implementation of small groups, hands on learning activities, or Cornell notes in order to ensure students have command over the information. It is important to be aware of possible places in the curriculum where there can be an application of different cultural understandings. Schools can improve their resources by allowing students to access their cultural capital. It is unfortunate to hear that programs are always coming and going in hopes that a newer and better program is available. There will always be new programs coming out, but all these programs will have drawbacks of some form or another. Existing programs could be improved by finding places where culture can be applied in order to be better understood in the classroom.

Impressions of Standardized Testing

Carmen expressed that standardized testing was one of the main reasons she moved from teaching in a Bilingual Program to teaching in a Structured English Immersion Program. She also mentioned that standardized testing does not begin being administered until the 3rd grade. Carmen does not believe that standardized testing reflects anything that ELs learn. Pilar also explained that her students do not take standardized tests because she only teaches 1st grade.

Iris, although she is also a 2nd grade teacher and does not have students taking standardized tests, believes that standardized testing is harmful to all students, not just English Learners. Iris stated that “academic language used in Standardized tests is difficult for any

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

student to acquire” (Iris 2015) unless they are exposed to such academic language at home by their parents. She encourages parents to utilize academic language in the home, in either language because it will benefit their children.

The teachers expressed that standardized testing impacts ELs negatively. The tests use academic language that is difficult for students to attain if they are not exposed to it at home. Also the standardized tests do not measure the progress an EL has made throughout the year accurately. Rubio and Attinasi commented in their article that teachers who were teaching in classrooms conducted in Spanish were confused on how to prepare their students for the test (2010). Carmen expressed similar concerns that poorly conducted bilingual programs with instruction in Spanish lacked the English preparation necessary for students to do well on standardized tests.

Impressions of Parental Involvement

Carmen stated that “parental involvement is huge and it does not matter if parents speak English or not (Carmen 2015). Iris also stated that when it comes to parental involvement, literacy in the target language does not matter. Carmen said she has “no time for parents who don’t have time to support their children with their schoolwork because they are too busy with work themselves” (Carmen 2015). She explained that parental involvement and engagement in their child’s learning can make the difference of a student who was once low performing to one that is now performing on level. She expressed that parents who are involved in their child’s education can help keep their children accountable about completing their schoolwork. When children see their parents involved with their school it holds them accountable in school.

Pilar mirrored this idea by explaining that “teachers only have their students for 183 days

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

out of the year, the rest of the days it is up to the parents to encourage their children to build healthy habits” (Pilar 2015). Pilar said that the best way parents can be involved is to give their children support and encouragement with their homework at home. She noted that learning should be a family experience.

Iris, similar to Carmen and Pilar, noted that parents do not readily come in to help in the classroom. Iris stated that parents often want to be involved only when there is a party or social event. She said it is clear to her which of her students have parents involved in their schooling and with their homework and which do not. Iris, like all the teachers interviewed, encourages all parents to spend time with their children while they are working on homework.

All teachers agreed on the importance of parental involvement and acknowledged that the literacy of the parent does not matter when it comes to being supportive. Simply sitting with their child while they complete their homework can help make a child feel more encouraged to go to school and more empowered to learn and take school seriously.

Gershber, Danenberg, and Sanchez all touch upon the importance of parental involvement and explain that parents might not seem interested in getting involved in the school because they might see the school staff as connected to Immigration officials (2004:85). The authors also mention that the culture of parental involvement may vary greatly between the country the student is from and the United States (2004:80). By having each school hold events such as math and reading nights, movie nights, and other events that get parents involved at the school site, they may be interested in taking a more active role in their child’s learning.

By promoting parental engagement either within the actual school, or by attending an adult school, the culture of schooling in California can be better incorporated into the lives and homes of culturally diverse families who have different definitions of education. Involving parents of

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

ELs in education helps to bridge the dichotomy of cultures.

Critiques of the Common Core

Iris expressed that the Common Core is much more difficult for English Learners. Carmen stated that Common Core puts students from Bilingual programs at a disadvantage because concepts are heavily based in language. Math problems completed in the Common Core curriculum are more commonly word problems that require students to have a good knowledge of the English Language. This is especially reflected in EL's experience with Standardized Testing. Carmen also explained that the way the Common Core presents concepts makes it very difficult for parents to help their children with their homework because oftentimes the parent does not understand what is being asked of the student.

Teachers indicated the Common Core is very difficult for English Learners because they lack the advanced English acquisition that is required to understand the concepts presented. Because all the concepts are presented using language, even mathematics, students have a difficult time deciphering the meaning. Furthermore, the Common Core might deter parents from helping or engaging with their child and their schoolwork because they might not understand how to decipher the meaning either. Common Core could be improved for ELs by providing applications of their culture within the curriculum.

Critiques and Impressions of Bilingual Education Programs

Carmen was offered a position in a Dual Immersion classroom at the school she currently works at (Los Padres). She turned down this offer and accepted her current position in an SEI classroom. She expressed concern that the Dual Immersion program is only phonics based and

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

the students only use English for one hour per day which does not help them develop and improve their grammar. She was also concerned that the limited amount of exposure in the target language does not prepare English learners to take the standardized tests which begin the following year, in 3rd grade, for her students. “The minimal English exposure offered to students in Bilingual Programs does them a disservice when it comes to standardized test preparation” (Carmen 2015). Carmen has taught in more than one school in the County and shared her experience teaching at another school where there are two dual immersion sections until the 4th grade where the dual immersion program is reduced to one section. “This makes 3rd grade a defining moment for English Learners in whether they will continue in a Dual Immersion classroom or switch to an SEI classroom” (Carmen 2015). Minimal exposure to English in bilingual education programs is exactly what Thernstrom and Thernstrom report perpetuating the struggle of ELs (2003:115).

Pilar, who spent time teaching in a Bilingual classroom explained that the minutes spent in each language were not enforced. “English language development minutes were not happening for many classes” (Pilar 2015). This left students without an acquisition of academic English which will only affect them negatively as they get into higher grades. “The success of Bilingual Programs depends on the teacher and if they honor the minutes of the ELD time block and push the students even if they lack motivation because they are feeling discouraged with the language” (Pilar 2015).

Iris also affirmed that Bilingual Programs need to be conducted properly and she had noticed that teachers in Bilingual classrooms lacked the ability to speak both English and Spanish perfectly. “This does not help English Learners progress because they need perfect examples of both languages” (Iris 2015). Thernstrom and Thernstrom also note this problem

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

when they state, “In some of these [bilingual] classes (no one knows how many) the teachers have a weak command of English themselves” (2003:114). Iris affirmed that the current way bilingual programs are facilitated is not as helpful to English learners as it could be. She expressed concern also with the brief amount of years that student have academic exposure to their native language, which, even in bilingual programs, does not last past middle school. “There is no way to be literate in your own language if you stop studying it in 3rd grade... Bilingual programs need to be included all the way through High School” (Iris 2015).

All teachers indicated the need for bilingual programs to improve. English Learners who are in bilingual programs, do not spend enough years learning their native language in order for it to be most helpful to them. Bilingual programs as they are currently run in the county do not provide ELs with the linguistic resources they need in order for them to be successful as they continue to advance through school. Because equal time is not being spend in each language and the English Language Development minutes are not being met, students in 2nd grade bilingual programs are not being prepared for the academic language they will be presented with once they begin taking standardized tests in 3rd grade.

Umansky and Reardon, in their evaluation of different programs designed for second language acquisition state that “transfer theory and underlying proficiency theory both suggest that acquiring a solid foundation in one’s native language supports one’s ability to acquire proficiency in a second language”(2014:905). Their study of intensive programs that aim to reclassify students into English proficient in just one year report that “only about 40% of students are reclassified by the end of fifth grade and 45% have not been reclassified as they enter high school” (2014:903). As Boone states this is a factor that largely contributes to why English learners consider dropping out before they graduate and receive their diploma

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

(2011:432). By providing students with access to education in their native language alongside English applied in long-term programs with exposure to academic vocabulary in both languages, they have a greater chance of not dropping out of school because they are acquiring the appropriate academic language needed to succeed.

Pressure Felt by Teachers

Each teacher interviewed expressed they felt there was a lot of pressure put on teachers to perform. Carmen prints all the notices she sends home in 2 languages. She wants to make sure parents understand the information she is sending home, but she also feels the pressure to get on her students level and help them make connections. She felt it is important that “teachers try to make an effort to be able to communicate with their students... it is up to the teacher to make sure students have access to the information they need” (Carmen 2015). Iris expressed the same sentiment when she said the responsibility is left up to the teacher to provide resources for English Learners.

Pilar felt the same way and expressed difficulties finding time to develop herself professionally by going to conferences when everything is done during her own time, such as developing resources and providing supplementary materials.

All teachers expressed feeling pressure and lack of support. They put a lot of responsibility on themselves in order to ensure that learning is being facilitated in their classroom. This preoccupation and pressure might keep teachers from seeing their own bias or might prevent them from attending professional development workshops that would help them make sure they are attending to the cultural resources of their students.

Boone and Spindler both suggest cultural diversity training, which Boone explains is an

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

intensified version of professional development that emphasizes the needs of certain student populations (2014:434). The teachers' perceptions of the inability to attend professional development conferences prevent them from understanding how their students are interacting with the school. Spindler explains that these cultural diversity trainings can help make teachers aware of their subconscious biases (2000) that might alter the way they perceive and interact with certain student populations such as English learners. Critically evaluating teaching methods and classroom interactions can help make the classroom a more welcoming and comfortable place for all students.

Diversity training is important especially in areas with large diverse populations. Somehow, the importance of these programs needs to be stressed and high attendance among teachers needs to be attained. When the importance of the diversity training programs are stressed, so is the importance of understanding the student's background and their experience in the school.

Suggestions for Improvement

Each teacher had very unique ideas for how to improve the educational experience not just for English learners, but for all students. Carmen touched upon the possibility of schools offering Rosetta Stone to teachers at a lesser cost (if possible) for those interested in learning the first language of their students. She also stated that more money could be allocated to the development of software, or to provide funding for professional development trainings. Carmen feels the technology in the library at her school could be updated. Carmen also touched upon having more language support at the Salinas Adult School which would empower both parents and students who are learning English.

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

Iris explained a current issue within the system is that teachers are not allowed to hold a student back from advancing in grade level because their English is not good enough. She sees this as a disadvantage to students because by continuing to advance in grade level they could continue to struggle the whole time with English because they are progressing without a strong foundation of the language. To resolve her own issue of students not being exposed to perfect examples of the native language and the target language, she suggested having two teachers per bilingual classroom: one teacher for Spanish and the other teacher for English. She also stated that if each student took the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) it would help guide the teacher as to what programs would benefit their class by making them aware of what level of English their class has acquired.

Iris supports the continuation of supportive programs such as MiniCorps and Monterey County Reads. She also sees benefit in having smaller class sizes and an aide or second teacher in each classroom.

Pilar noted that the professional population of California is not representative of the general population and that there exist 'stereotypical Hispanic jobs'. This is similar to what Elsa Valdez presents in her article when she explains that while Latinos make up one third of the student population in California, Latino teachers comprise less than one tenth of California's educators (241:2001). By having more Latino teachers and teachers from other diverse backgrounds, minority students can see their place in the educational and professional world instead of perceiving this sphere as something inaccessible to them.

In order to best benefit English Learners, teachers should be trained in English Language Development and how to teach English Learners. All teachers indicated it would be beneficial if teachers could communicate with their students in their student's language, and the importance

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

of understanding the language background of their students. Language support is very important if the educational system is to improve. Language support is needed not just for ELs in elementary schools, but for everyone interested in learning English. More resources need to be made available to the adult English Learner community in order to help create a more empowered and engaged society all while respecting unique and diverse cultural backgrounds.

This idea is also very prevalent within the literature. Gandara and Orfield explain the benefits of having teachers from the same language and cultural backgrounds as students. This is beneficial because the teachers are more familiar with how the student is interacting with their community and how to teach to the student's assets (2010:225). By being familiar with the students' language, the teacher can use that knowledge to help the student make connections between the two languages and hopefully show the student how to use their native language as an asset and part of their cultural capital. In the current environment, students might not feel their language is important as Morales and Aldana explain the unequal and extremely great emphasis of English acquisition when compared to the emphasis of the acquisition of a student's native language can leave students with the impression that their language is a hindrance rather than an asset. (2010:168).

By implementing more dual language programs at both the elementary and adult educational levels, the importance of the native language can be recognized and maintained as an asset that assists in the acquisition of English while also acting as a component to promote a multicultural and diverse society.

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

Results

Teachers interviewed for this study spoke of many factors in the current educational environment that affect student learning, especially that of English Learners. Teachers had a hard time distinguishing the experience of English Learners from that of their other students. The lack of Professional Development and Cultural Diversity Training that these teachers perceive they have limited access to could be a key factor. By participating in Professional Development trainings, teachers can be made aware of many diverse student populations within their classrooms and how to create a learning environment where assets from each cultural group are recognized and utilized. In order for teachers to be able to use language as an asset of cultural capital, they must first understand how this language and culture can be used as an asset in learning which is impossible without Professional Development and Cultural Diversity Training.

Teachers also spoke out very negatively towards the poorly structured bilingual programs available in their school districts. Districts must ensure that these programs are running based on guidelines and that students are being exposed to sufficient amounts of English alongside their native language in order to better prepare them for more advanced grades, which is currently not happening.

All of the teachers interviewed had experience teaching in Bilingual classrooms but chose to continue their teaching in SEI classrooms. Their comments speak loudly to the lack of organization and confidence in those programs, which is unfortunate because if conducted properly, dual language programs would benefit its students the most not just linguistically but culturally as well.

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

Conclusion

This study presented perspectives of teachers on the educational experience of English learners in Monterey County. This study could be benefited from the inclusion of teachers' perspectives that are currently teaching in bilingual classrooms as well as expanded to include many more classrooms outside SEI classrooms in Salinas, which were the only schools presented in this study. Further research should also consider collecting perspectives from teachers in higher grades because as noted by the participants, some higher grades become very important for students in determining which program they will continue in depending on the resources available at their school.

No teachers in this study were able to speak about the effects of standardized testing on English learners in their classes because they were not teaching grades which are given standardized tests. An inclusion of teachers teaching 3rd grade and higher would provide the data needed to better understand teachers' perspectives on how standardized tests affect the English learners in their classes.

This study identifies a dichotomy between the culture that exists within the school, which mirrors the culture American society, and the cultural practices of minority groups, specifically Latinos. More connections must be made in order to bridge the gap between the two cultures and make school a culturally affirming space for linguistically diverse minorities in California schools. By incorporating education into the home and some elements of home culture into the school, academic institutions could be more accessible to ELs and their educational experience could be more culturally affirming.

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

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