A CASE STUDY OF FIVE SPANISH-SPEAKING
ENGLISH LEARNERS IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

by

Jillian T. Raymond

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Jillian T. Raymond

Approved by the Master’s Thesis/Project Committee:

Patty Yancey, Major Professor          Date

Gayle Olson-Raymer, Committee Member   Date

Keri Gelenian, Graduate Coordinator    Date

Chris Hopper, Interim Dean for Research and Graduate Studies  Date
ABSTRACT

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JILLIAN T. RAYMOND

This case study illustrates the educational experience of five Latina English Learners in California. Using a qualitative research approach, guided by the classroom ecology paradigm, I used an open-ended questionnaire conducting interpretative inquiry through a semi-structured interview format, which allows for each participant’s unique story to be told. Each participant monitored how much or little they shared regarding their own experience in school. The results are presented as personal narratives for each case study participant, and ultimately, through the analysis, all experiences are woven together. Major areas of inquiry include background, language learning, and school experience. The analysis is organized by three major codes: Subtractive Bilingualism, Differential Treatment, and Cultural Value Patterns. Within the conclusions are implications for further research as well as a focus on the lessons the case study data provides for educators.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study would not have been possible without the commitment, trust, and participation of my case study students. I extend a sincere thank you to them for entrusting me with their stories and experiences in school. I believe I have given them a voice and highlighted the injustices they face within the public education system. I was only able to arrive at this point because of Humboldt State University and its School of Education. On day one of my credential interview, Sheila and Ann gave me the inspiration and support that has helped me to become the teacher and educational professional I am toady. Within the School of Education many gifted and amazing professors exist. It was from within that pool I was certain that two women would be able to deal with me, and support me, on this ridiculous journey. Patty and Gayle, my mentors, my thesis committee and two of the most influential women in the field, THANK YOU. In addition to the School of Education, the faculty at Humboldt State University has open my knowledge base beyond where I once believed it could go; thank you Dan Faulk, Christina Acamondo, and Manolo Callahan. Last but not least, the unconditional love from my amazing husband Brennan, and our snuggly dogs, has been what made those weeks when I was “scary to be around” fade into distant memory.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Educational institutions, in conjunction with classroom practices, never exist in isolation from exterior factors in the larger society, including political areas, economic status, and cultural patterns (Pennycook, 2000; Phelan & Davidson & Yu, 1998). All situations that exist within a classroom are informed by the larger social context in which we all live, thus impacting students’ experiences. Viewing the classroom environment as separate and isolated from the larger society has been critiqued by researchers and educators, and this study echoes these findings (Pennycook, 2000; Erickson, 1986; Hamilton, 1983; Phelan et al., 1998).

In researching and exploring students’ experiences in school, I must ground their experiences within the greater society (Pennycook, 2000; Hamilton, 1983). In school and in life, various factors affect all adolescent learners (Phelan et al., 1998), some factors, however, affect some adolescent learners differently. When investigating Latina adolescent English Learners, certain circumstances make their experiences unique from that of their non-Latina peers.

Examination of Latina English Learners’ school experiences demands a framework that investigates the influence that exterior socio-political and socio-cultural factors have: immigration, language, family employment, access to local resources, and education. An investigation and critical perspective of politics and
culture are necessary to appropriately deconstruct their experiences within the classroom.

An extensive and on-going study of the concept of “culture” exists in the fields of education, anthropology, and sociology. In brief, culture refers to the thoughts, acts, and behaviors of society. According to Phelan et.al, (1998):

While culture encompasses those visible aspects and artifacts of a particular group it also refers to people’s values and beliefs, expectations, actions and interactions, as well as the meaning people construct about what is appropriate, inappropriate, normative and aberrant (p.7).

It is the relationship that culture has with politics, and vice versa, that can explain the way in which education’s evolution influences and guides society. The Classroom Ecology Paradigm on research in teaching requires utilizing political and cultural factors in the analysis of students’ experiences in school. It is therefore the most fitting paradigm for interpretative research and inquiry (Hamilton, 1983).

My study has three major goals. First, is to paint a holistic and critical picture of the experiences of Latina English Learners in a rural northern California middle school. I will honor the socio-cultural and sociopolitical influences by investigating these particular student experiences in school in conjunction with the larger context in which they live. Second, is to highlight the injustices and inequalities these students experience because of the way society views their primary language and
their role as English Learners. Sonia Nieto’s (2002) work highlights potential barriers for non-white student populations:

There are a number of interrelated policies and practices that may influence student achievement and should be examined by teacher educators in order to help determine how their own curriculum and pedagogy can be transformed. These include institutional racism and other forms of discrimination; expectations of student achievement; curriculum; pedagogy; tracking and ability grouping; testing; and student, teacher, and parent involvement in education (p.187).

And lastly, is to inform the readers of the influences impacting the classroom and school environment for Latina English Learners by taking into consideration the larger societal influences. This case study is born from the motivation to uncover and reveal student experiences and to give the participants’ stories a voice among the field of education and educational research.

Participants

All five participants are designated English Learners. For the purposes of this study, English Learners are defined as, students who speak a language other then English as their primary language, are designated by their school as English Learners, take the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) annually to determine English proficiency, and are placed in an elective English Language Development (ELD).
The “English Learner Designation” is not dependent on citizenship status, as some English Learners are native United States citizens while others are immigrants. Two of the participants in this study are native citizens whose parents are immigrants, and three of the participants are immigrants. This distinction alone demonstrates that cultural and political factors such as immigration and cultural identity influence the students’ experiences.

Language and language learning is pivotal in understanding the students’ experience for this particular case study. Larsen-Freeman (2003) defines language in ten distinct statements. For the purposes of this study, I will use three of these definitions most relevant to the participants: language is a means of cultural transmission; language is an instrument of power (those who know a language are empowered in a way that those who do not are not); and language is a medium through which one can learn other things (p. 1-2).

Based on Larsen-Freeman’s (2003) language definitions, I will argue that through the public school system, English Learners are learning a new set of cultural values, patterns, and beliefs associated with the English language at the expense of those cultural attributes that accompany their primary language. Alongside this cultural attrition, the participants receive differential treatment from the school system that potentially creates a school experience inferior and unequal to their peers.

This case study illustrates the educational experience of Latina middle school students whose primary language is Spanish. The following literature review aims to
frame a context with which to pursue a better understanding of language learning, English Learners in California, and the historic, social, and cultural factors that influence them. Using a Qualitative Research Approach, guided by the Classroom Ecology Paradigm, I used an open-ended questionnaire to conduct the interviews. The semi-structured interview format allowed each participant’s unique story to be told, while allowing each participant to monitor how much or little they shared regarding their own experiences.

The results are presented as personal narratives for each case study participant, with all experiences ultimately woven together to paint a picture of their similar experiences. Major areas of inquiry include background, language learning, and school experience. The analysis is organized by three major codes: Subtractive Bilingualism, Differential Treatment, and Cultural Value Patterns. Within the conclusions are implications for further research as well as a discussion of what the case study data provides for educators.

Chapter One introduces the motivation for this study and included my goals, research methods, and definitions. Chapter Two is comprised of the literature review which will provide the reader with an understanding of how politics and culture influence students’ school experiences. Chapter Three introduces classroom ecology as the paradigm for research on teaching; explains the process by which participants were selected; provides individual information about the participants’ role in the study; and includes the rational for conducting qualitative interviews to collect data, information about the interviews, methods of reporting results, and procedures for
data analysis. Chapter Four organizes the data into individual narratives to report the results. Chapter Five provides an analysis of the results followed by conclusions and implications for further research in Chapter Six.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Children spend a vast majority of their time in school and are influenced by both the implicit and explicit messages conveyed through the public school experience (Walker, 2003). This literature review includes a brief history of education policies related to language instruction in public schools, selective discussion of bilingual education, and a review of English-only instruction in California. This discussion will provide the reader with an understanding of how politics and culture influence students’ school experiences.

This literature review seeks a better understanding of English Learners in California, their experiences with learning English, and relevant historic, social, and cultural influences. Many of the nation’s English Learners are immigrant children, who are enrolled in the compulsory education system of the United States, most often as speakers of a language other than English. Their label, “English Learner”, was created through the education system that houses thousands of speakers of non-English languages each year.

Even though the United States does not boast an official language, the language used by public schools for instruction is predominantly English. This fact drastically impacts English Learners’ ability to maintain equal academic acquisition afforded to their native English speaking peers. In the state of California, however,
English is legally the official language and so exclusive English language instruction in public schools is upheld. The language of instruction directly impacts the understanding, learning, and school experience of English Learners. Per the California education law, daily primary language instruction or bilingual education is illegal (California Education Code). Language policy is just one of the factors that will be explored to ground the context for the experiences of English Learners in California.

*Politics Relating to the Language of Instruction in California Public Education*

Political decisions influence public education and ultimately the school experience of all children (Gay, 2004). Some politicians have focused on California’s public schools and its changing demographics. Since the 1980’s, California laws and regulations have passed that promote the exclusive use of English, which according to Koyama (2004) and Ovando (2003), limit the rights of non-English speaking immigrant groups. Students experience a violation of rights through such limits as unequal access to academic content, language programs that inadequately aid the acquisition of English as a second language, and barriers for parents of immigrant students to access public school information. In addition to California state law, the Federal government has initiated educational reforms that affect the experience of immigrant students and English Learners. One specific example is with English language acquisition. Table 2.1 provides federal and state legislation related to language education (www.sitepp.nysed.gov).
### Table 2.1 Federal and State Legislation Relating to Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Policy, Legislation, or Acts Adopted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Bilingual Education is established in Dade County Florida to better serve the Cuban immigrant community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>California Proposition 63 declares English as the official language of use among Californians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Coleman Report (Equality of Educational Opportunity) finds that academic achievement is more related to students’ family background than to the quality of school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (Title VII of Elementary and Secondary Education Acts 1965). The Act’s purpose was to provide school districts with federal funds to create educational programs for Limited English Proficient students. The Act left open whether its purposes was to maintain the language and culture of non-English speaking children or to provide a transition to English-speaking classes. The 1978 amendment to the act emphasized the latter intent. This Act was also amended also in 1974, 1984, 1988, 1994, and 2001 as part of No Child Left Behind (NCLB).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>U.S. Supreme Court rules on Limited English Proficient education. In <em>Lau v. Nichols</em>, the court rules that school districts must provide remedies for non-English speaking children so that they can have access to meaningful education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Equal Education Opportunities Act of 1974 provides that no state shall deny equal educational opportunity on the basis of race, color, sex, or national origin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>ASPIRA Consent Decree in New York City requires that limited-English-proficient (LEP) students be taught at least partly in their native language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>California Proposition 187 strips public social services, including education, from undocumented immigrants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>English Language Acquisition Act (Part of No Child Left Behind) replaces The Bilingual Education Act, and requires that LEP students be tested in English after three years in the United States.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although federal and state education legislation aims to provide equal educational opportunities to language minority students, no official language policy advocating bilingual education to instruct English Learners has ever been enacted (Garcia, 1998; Ovando 2003). According to Garcia (1998), the BEA aimed to address equal opportunity for language minority students, yet this never evolved as a legal language policy. In fact, the BEA was eliminated when No Child Left Behind was enacted in 2002. BEA’s replacement, The English Language Acquisition Act (ELA), does provide a federally mandated English-only school policy. The ELA Act is influencing states like Massachusetts, Arizona, and California to pass education legislation directing English-only classroom instruction. In sum, no federal or state policy has directly intended for a language other than English to be used for classroom instruction.

As the population of the United States, and more specifically California, becomes increasingly linguistically and ethnically diverse, the move towards English-only instruction could prove detrimental to the premise that public schools prepare all students for active and meaningful participation in society.

Immigration Policy and Public Schooling

From the earliest years of the U.S. government, attempts have been made to constrain the rights of immigrants in the United States1. Current attempts to curb

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1 The Nation’s first immigration Acts, The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, included multiple acts: 1) increased the waiting period to become a citizen from 5 to 14 years; (2) required all naturalized citizens to be white; (3) gave the President the power to arrest disloyal aliens or order them out of the country during wartime; and (4) outlawed sedition. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was a
immigration at the U.S.-Mexico border do not represent a new direction for immigration policy. Since 1965, shortly after the *bracero* guest worker program ended, the Border Industrialization Project was created to provide jobs along the border in an attempt to keep Mexicans employed in Mexico, thus lessening the motivation to cross the border into the U.S. in search for work (Rivera-Batiz, 1986).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the majority of immigrants in the U.S. were Eastern European. Currently, however, the majority of immigrants come from Asia and Latin America, many of whom are school-aged children (Fix & Passel, 2003; Lessow-Hurley, 2005; Rumbaut, 1996). This influx of immigrants is evident in the current population of California public schools.

U. S. federal policy has played a significant role in determining the influx of new immigrant populations and, more specifically, influencing the ways in which those populations are educated (Banks, 2004; Crawford, 1995; Lessow-Hurley, 2005) see Table 2.1. According to Rumbaut (1996), the growing immigrant population of the U. S. had the greatest impact on the state of California. As the student population in California grows increasingly diverse, both ethnically and linguistically, California has responded with legislation that focuses on immigrant populations and public schooling as demonstrated in Table 2.1. One highly contested area affecting immigrants, especially school age children, is bilingualism and English-only instruction (Banks, 2004; Crawford, 1995; Lessow-Hurley, 2005).

response from native-born Americans who feared immigrants would take away jobs; Chinese immigration was banned for 10 years.
The immigrant population in the U.S. often experiences obstacles when it comes to public education. The traditional role of schools has been to assimilate immigrants to the American culture and English language. According to Arce (2004), Crawford (1995), and Lessow-Hurley (2005), immigrant students experience xenophobia in schools, a phenomenon that is not new to contemporary immigration issues.

Between 1993 and 2000, the English Learner population whose native language is Spanish grew by 395,000 (California Department of Education, 2007). According to the Educational Data Partnership, the current population is 1,341,468. With such a linguistically and culturally diverse student population, it is important to understand and affirm home languages and cultures for the educational success of all students (Banks & Banks, 2004; Nieto, 2002; Sook Lee & Oxelson, 2006).

**Culture, Assimilation, and Latino Populations**

Historically, public schools have promoted immigrant assimilation to U.S. culture. Schools were expected to educate a future work force and provide upward mobility (Crawford, 1995; Rothstein, 1998). During the span of the two World Wars, many large urban schools created Americanization classes to prepare immigrants for integration into mainstream society (Ovando, 2003).

According to Rothstein (1998), some politicians advocate for English–only instruction to preserve the monolingual English population and the mythical “melting pot” of the United States. Martinez (1998) defines the melting pot as “the assimilationist’s desire for all ethnic groups to melt into one conglomerate mixture
where the original ingredients are undecipherable” (p. 3). Brodkey (1996) goes further by claiming that “The melting pot theory turns out to be only a more or less violent attempt to deny the culture of the people in question” (p.10).

Assimilation involves changes in cultural values, patterns, and practices. The Latino culture embodies a collective value pattern in contrast to the individualistic cultural value pattern exercised by the United States (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). McLaren (2000) writes about this value pattern:

In a society that canonizes individualism, [Latino] immigrants are seen as fundamentally “cliquish”; their supposed “wolf-pack mentality” renders them hopelessly unable to socialize with groups in the mainstream. They are perceived as worthwhile to the extent that they can be made over to serve the interests of the Euro-American majority population. (pp. 2-3)

The public school system in the U.S. affirms students’ cultures that share similar European American, middle-class cultural norms (Bull, Fruehling, & Chattergy, 1992; Sleeter & Stillman, 1995). For example, the High-Stakes Testing and Accountability movement of the 1980s contributes to a system-wide school culture of competitiveness and individualism, both of which are associated with United States cultural value patterns and norms. Yet the nation’s Latino student population represents cultural patterns from a traditionally collectivist culture, further disenfranchising them from a culturally appropriate school environment.
Bilingual Education and Its On-Going Debate

Within the history of U.S. federal and state education legislation, a movement arose to counter the assimilation process and provide schooling to immigrants in their native language (Nieto, 2002; Rothstein, 1998). One prominent aspect of this movement is the promotion of bilingual education which creates resistance to the social order and could potentially disrupt the existing status quo (Arce, 2004; Pohan, 2000; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005; Walker, 2003). Martinez (pg. 5) states that “Criticism of bilingual education has focused on Spanish and language politics. Many proponents of bilingual education see this as a colonizing mentality rooted in history, especially since much of the southwestern United States was once Mexico”.

Today, the largest southwestern state, California, serves students of various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. California school districts represent over fifty different languages (California Department of Education).

The validity of bilingual education as a language acquisition method is an on-going debate in the United States (Crawford 1995; Stritikus & García, 2005). The debate focuses of the question whether non-native English speaking students receive more educational opportunity through bilingual instruction or through English-only instruction. In order to examine this debate, it is important to review significant historical court cases pertaining to language in schools and bilingual education, as well as subtractive vs. additive bilingualism.
Historic Court Cases Impacting Bilingual Education

In the U. S. Supreme Court Case *Lau v. Nichols (1974)*, the court ruled that school districts must provide remedies for non-English speaking children so that they can have access to meaningful education. This decision influenced educators and civil rights activists to provide appropriate program guidelines to address the equal educational opportunities and needs of a linguistically diverse student population (Nieto, 2002). In the mid 1980s, the National Association for Bilingual Education reintroduced native language instruction maintenance, which allowed students to learn English and maintain native language skills (Crawford, 1995). According to Krashen (1996), this promoted equal access to the curriculum through language acquisition and literacy development. Drese (2001) argues that with so many English Learners in California, schools need to find the most successful ways of educating and integrating them into the English-speaking world. She adds, “Not only must they survive in an academic setting with their second language, but they must also become successful learners” (Drese, 2001, p.10).

California acknowledges that it does not in fact serve English Learners well, and therefore has embraced English-only as the remedy to advance English Learners (California Education Code). This decision currently stands due to the ambiguity surrounding major court cases involving language minority students (*Lau v Nichols*, 1974; *Castaneda v Pickard*, 1983). In *Castaneda v Pickard* the court found in favor of the school district and ruled that no violation of constitutional rights had taken
place. Yet the language used in court, “appropriate action,” in regards to language minority students, is vague and open to loose interpretation.

Kerper-Mora (2000) reported that not only does bilingual education provide linguistically diverse students access to academic content and language skills without segregating them from their peers or demanding that they struggle in an English-only setting, but it also counters students’ negative self-perceptions of their primary language (Lessow-Hurley, 2005). Primary language maintenance supports students’ academic and cognitive development as well as increases student self-esteem and self-worth (Banks & Banks, 2004; Nieto, 2002; Sook Lee & Oxelson, 2006).

Children who are learning a second language at school or already speak more than one language will succeed academically, provided that both languages are nurtured and developed to the fullest extent (Lessow-Hurley, 2005). Bilingualism for the enrichment of primarily English speakers is embraced, yet the double standard exists when bilingualism for aiding in the educational success of English learners is not promoted. A number of Bilingual Immersion programs exist in California designed to provide educational enrichment and prepare students to compete in a global economy. Native English speakers who learn and become proficient in Spanish are often praised, thus celebrating bilingualism, yet providing bilingual programs to native Spanish language speakers with the goal of English language proficiency is not given the same value or praise (Martinez, 1998; Nieto, 2002).

Students faced with linguistic and cultural conformity from schools, teachers, and peers further receive the message that there is one language and one culture that
is more socially accepted (Sook Lee & Oxelson, 2006). Bilingual programs are seen as desirable for students of elevated status but unacceptable for ethnic minority students (Lessow-Hurley, 2005).

The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (BEA) was a triumph of the Civil Rights Movement. It aimed to equalize educational opportunities by providing schooling in immigrants’ primary language (Crawford, 1995). When the BEA was replaced with the English Language Acquisition Act (ELA), however, the public school system’s assimilation agenda of monolingualism was reinstated (see Table 2.1).

Prior to the ELA Act of 2001, California adopted mandated English-only instruction in public schools through the passage of Proposition 227 in 1998 (California Education Code). In 1963 when Californians passed Proposition 63 declaring English the official language (Proposition 63 see Table 2.1), the state constitution began defending English as the common language of use among citizens. In fact, citizens have the right to sue the state if it does not uphold the preservation of English as the official language of use. This removes the potential to equalize education with bilingual programs for English Learners (California Constitution, Article 3, Section 6). In sum, the state of California advocates bilingualism for student enrichment, but not as an equalizing force for English Learners.
The Debate over Bilingual Instruction

In California, 24.7 percent of the state’s student enrollment consists of language minority students, 21 percent of whom speak Spanish as their first language (Education Data Partnership, 2008). Through Proposition 227, however, the state has a legal barrier against providing native language instruction to 24.7 percent of its student population. Bilingual education programs, weakened by mandated English-only instruction, can positively affect the school and life experiences of immigrant students by significantly aiding in teaching English while at the same time maintaining native language and culture (Banks & Banks, 2004; Nieto, 2002; Sook Lee & Oxelson, 2006). In support of this, the findings of a longitudinal study concluded that providing English Learners with instruction in their native language does not impede or delay their acquisition of English skills (Ramirez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991). Research supports the notion that bilingual instruction can aid in cultural and linguistic development and ultimately academic success for language minority students (Cummins, 2006).

Bilingual programs still exist in California through the parental waiver process which is outlined in the California Education Code, Article 3, Section 310. The waiver states that a parent can personally visit a school to specialize their child’s education. If twenty pupils in the same grade obtain parental waivers, the school could create a bilingual classroom (California Education Code, Article 3, Section 310), but variations among program criteria, power struggles, and the absence of a
consistent U.S. language policy, continues to complicate the debate between bilingual education and English-only (Ovando, 2003).

Aside from issues of power, much of the opposition to bilingual education arises from the fact that its rationale seems to run counter to widely held popular beliefs about how humans acquire languages. Intuitively, one would think that a person learns another language by using it frequently and by avoiding use of one’s native language. While using a new language is crucial to developing communicative and academic competence in that language, the quality of the instructional process is equally important. More time spent immersed in the new language is not necessarily associated with greater gains in that language, if the student is not understanding the content of the lesson. Related to this, the climate for full cognitive development is absolutely crucial to the full development of the second language. One of the most common misconceptions is that children learn second languages with native-like pronunciation effortlessly and without pain—child’s play, so to speak. (Ovando, 2003, p.15)

The flip-side of advocacy for bilingualism is the advocacy for English-only as the method of educating non-native English speaking students. Advocates for English-only instruction continue to prevail in states such as Arizona, California, and Massachusetts. Support in California was strongly driven by businessman Ron Unz
as he campaigned using the slogan “English for the Children” (www.onenation.org). In reaction, an active movement of educators, students, activists, parents, and school districts are working to build, define, and defend bilingual programs. Their efforts combat decision-making that limits academic freedom and contradicts the promises set forth by the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (Arce, 2004; Crawford, 1995; Nieto, 2002).

Traditionalists view education as a neutral place affording everyone access to equal opportunities, and they fail to see language as a means of power and a tool used to disenfranchise marginalized groups (Giroux, 1992; Nieto, 2002). According to Mitchell (2005), bilingual education is necessary to maintain grade-level achievement in subject area classes. Evidence supports the fact that English language learners need between five and seven years to reach the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency Skills (CALPS) required to effectively learn in a classroom environment. In contrast, Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) required for social interaction can be developed in as short as six months (Crawford, 1989; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt 1986; Snow, 1987). Clearly students can struggle academically even if they have proficient social language capabilities.

Additive bilingual programs maintain a child’s first language while introducing a second language, which provides the learner with cognitive and social advantages (Crawford, 1995; Lessow-Hurley, 2005; Martinez, 1998). All language minority students need such advantages in order to develop more complex language skills in both their primary and secondary languages (Banks & Banks, 2004;
Baetens-Beardsmore, 1986; Ramos, 2005). In contrast, subtractive bilingual education occurs when students lose their primary language as it is replaced by a new language (Lessow-Hurley, 2005). According to Baetens Beardsmore (1986):

This situation is prevalent in societies where the socio-cultural attributes of one of the languages are denigrated at the expense of those of the other, which has a more prestigious socio-economically determined status. (p. 23)

In sum, an additive bilingual program honors students’ home languages by building on their language and adding to it, while subtractive bilingualism disrespects the home language and only emphasizes the new language being imposed.

Language Politics in California Education

According to the California Education Code (2009), public schools in California currently do a poor job of educating immigrant children and have wasted financial resources on costly experimental language programs. The state measures the failure by the current high drop-out rates and low English literacy levels of many immigrant children.

California’s language policy designates English as the language of economic advancement (California Education Code). Thus the use of a language other than English in school and society is seen as not economically viable, and therefore, not as relevant.
In school, teachers can have a positive influence on primary language maintenance by simply expressing respect and interest in students’ primary languages (Sook Lee & Oxelson, 2006). However, if teachers dismiss or disrespect the primary languages of students, they can inadvertently devalue the students and negatively affect their overall school experience (Banks & Banks, 2004; Nieto, 2002; Sook Lee & Oxelson, 2006).

Teacher preparation programs and school district professional development programs can aid in increasing teachers’ knowledge, understanding, and ability to better serve linguistically and culturally diverse students. California mandates that all teachers, veteran and new, earn a Cross-Cultural Language and Academic development (CLAD) certification (California Department of Education). Under the California law, SB 2042, the CLAD certification is now embedded into the basic teaching credential (California SB 2042, 1997-1998), but this alone does not mean that students will be taught by someone who has the pedagogical knowledge to teach linguistically diverse students (Rumberger & Gándara, 2000). For instance, during teacher shortages, lesser prepared teachers teach in schools with high percentages of English language learners (Rumberger & Gándara, 2000). In fact, educators in California who are Bilingual, Cross cultural, Language and Academic Development (BCLAD) certified are likely to favor and support primary language maintenance and instruction as opposed to teachers’ without bilingual training (Sook Lee & Oxelson, 2006).
**English-Only Instruction in California**

“The English Language Law mandates that all children in public schools shall learn English by being taught in English” (California Education Code, Chapter 3, Article 2, Section 300, 305). Non-native English speakers, often immigrants, enter school along a broad continuum of language status (e.g., monolingual in their native language, bilingual in their native language and English, or English speaking with little or no facility in their native language) (Banks & Banks, 2004). California refers to these students as having Limited English Proficiency (LEP) or English Language Learners (ELL) (California Education Code, Chapter 3). The argument can be made that students are learning not only the actual language when they learn English, but also a whole set of values, practices, and acceptable cultural norms that define the status quo.

“Children who are English Learners shall be educated through sheltered English immersion during a temporary transition period not normally intended to exceed one year” (California Education Code, Chapter 3, Article 2, Section 305). To provide all the children of California with economic opportunity and access to the “American Dream of economic and social advancement,” (California Education Code, Chapter 3, Article 2, Section 300, 305), public schools attempt to provide English literacy skills for all its students (California Education Code, Chapter 3, Article 2, Section 300, 305). Yet less than 10 percent of English Learners tested by California CST English Language Art test are proficient in grades 2-11 (http://star.cde.ca.gov/star2008/Viewreport.asp).
According to Martinez (1998), English Learners experience segregation from their native English speaking peers under the facade of English acquisition for academic achievement. When students are transitioned from sheltered English immersion settings, they are not given neutral status, but rather are labeled FEP, Fluent English Proficient (Rumbaut, 1996). Labels given to immigrant students and English Language Learners further give the impression that English is the most useful language to learn, and one’s home language is not as important. Labeling students so that they are represented by their label rather than who they are can be toxic (Ayers, 2001). Once a label is given, the child can become trapped in the label’s essence and their identity can become fabricated by stereotypes and generalizations.

Even though it can take five to seven years to gain the English language proficiency required to understand academic content (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000), by law, students are given roughly one year to transition from a sheltered English immersion setting into mainstream classes (California Education Code). This system transitions learners into mainstream classes prematurely and makes learning English and other academic content problematic (Hakuta, et al. 2000). The success of immersion educational settings is based on available resources and a high-level of commitment backed by policies, teachers, and schools (Cummins, 2006), all of which are hard to find and implement.

After English-only legislation passed in California, teachers experienced a shortage of resources and qualified staff to meet the needs of linguistically diverse
students who are learning English language skills (Gándara et al., 2000). In school districts with strong support and resources to utilize bilingualism, bilingual programs exist, but English-only instruction is the politically supported and federally backed approach to educating immigrant and non-native speaking students (California Education Code; No Child Left Behind Act of 2002). Sheltered English immersion programs do not support primary language instruction and often transition students out of sheltered English classes to mainstream academic content classes before they have gained academic proficiency in English (Bull et al., 1992). According to Garza and Crawford (2005), immersion has an underlying assimilation agenda that devalues linguistically diverse students’ primary language and culture. The passage of Proposition 227, ended bilingual education and promoted English-only instruction in public schools, and further reduced educational opportunities for English Learners (Gándara et al., 2000; Ramos, 2005; Stritikus & García, 2000).

Proposition 227 politicizes language instruction in California public schools for students, teachers, and parents (Gándara et al., 2000; Stritikus & Garcia, 2000). Due to Proposition 227, decisions regarding use of classroom instructional time and various teaching techniques for linguistically diverse students have been reduced to English acquisition so students can perform well on standardized tests (Menken, 2006; Sook Lee & Oxelson, 2006). Menken (2006) argues that this further taints bilingualism and the holistic approach to teaching as English Learners become a liability to schools that are pressured to meet federally mandated performance criteria (Menken, 2006; No Child Left Behind Act of 2002). Additionally, teachers
feel little to no pressure to maintain bilingual students’ primary language skills as they place the responsibility of native language maintenance and English language use on the parents (Sook Lee & Oxelson, 2006). For example, according to Ovando (2003), “When many of these students did not prosper academically, their home cultures and languages were frequently singled out as the culprit. Blaming language-minority students for their academic failure became fashionable among social scientists” (p. 6). Teachers bring to the classroom their personal histories, experiences, value judgments about bilingualism, and, in some cases, covert support of English-only instruction which can’t help but influence their teaching (Martinez, 1998; Sook Lee & Oxelson; Stritikus, 2001).

Proposition 227 tried to end bilingual education for the state’s 1.4 million English Language Learners (Stritikus, 2003), but in schools where support was strong enough and bilingual education existed prior to Proposition 227, bilingual programs survived (Gándara et al., 2000). Unfortunately, many of these schools lost the resources, teachers, and programs that provided primary language instruction for their English Learners (Rumberger & Gándara, 2000).

Conclusion

The majority of the studies reviewed herein dealt directly with English-only instruction and California’s passage of Proposition 227 on districts, schools, and teachers (Arce, 2004; Rumberger & Gándara, 2000; Stritikus, 2001; Stritikus & Garcia, 2003). Based on the studies reviewed and the overwhelming strong preference to highlight schools, teachers, and districts, the effects that English-only
instruction and language acquisition policy has had on the students’ school experience needs further investigation. More than 47,000 English Learners in California are placed in classrooms in which they are not receiving adequate English-language instruction (Ramos, 2006). When students are unable to understand the language of instruction, they are more likely to become bored, restless, or disruptive, as well as suffer diminished self-esteem (Kerper-Mora, 2000; Ramos, 2006). In addition, not acquiring language proficiency in either one’s primary or secondary language is detrimental to academic achievement. The English-only movement and the divergence from bilingual education leave English language learners without adequate resources, thus depriving them of educational equity (Ramos, 2006).

The political climate surrounding English-only instruction is rooted in historical anti-immigration and assimilation sentiments. These sociopolitical factors affect the students who sit at the center of this political debate (Martinez, 1998; Nieto, 2002). The controversy over bilingual education has focused on language politics, cultural values, and identity issues (Martinez, 1998). Students’ cultural values and identities are further shaped by the political climate surrounding their education (Nieto, 2002). Given the positive effects that primary language maintenance has on student achievement and self-esteem, the implementation of bilingual programs that focus on native language support will benefit students and their school experience.
The purpose of this research is to gather evidence about the educational experiences of English Learners. The focus of this thesis is the personal narratives of students who have been directly impacted by English-only instruction in an effort to answer the question: What are the educational experiences of five Latina English learners in a rural community middle school? The following chapter will explain the methodology used to address this question.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As the writer of a qualitative research study, I assume the role of translator/interpreter by telling the story of what it is like to be an English Learner in a California middle school. This process includes drawing on my own experience, knowledge, and theoretical grounding (Glesne, 1999). For data collection, interviews were conducted with five Spanish-speaking Latina students. The interview questions focused on family, friends, language, school, community, and future goals. Interviewees represented a diversity of opinions, experiences, and goals, all of which contribute to this study’s purpose. The case-study approach allowed for an in-depth investigation. In addition to revealing various injustices to which the participants are exposed, their voices provide clues for educators as to how to best understand and educate English Learners with similar characteristics.

Qualitative Research

According to Glesne (1999, p. 24), “Qualitative studies are best at contributing to a greater understanding of perceptions, attitudes, and processes”. In this study, the investigation began with an open-ended guide for the first round of interviews. Subsequent questions organically emerged from the first round to inform each individual’s second round. This echoes the common qualitative research approach.
Following each initial interview, I read through the transcription and extracted common salient themes. This data informed and guided the next round of interviews. After all interviews were conducted, transcribed, and coded, I read and re-read them to extract similar patterns. It was this process that led me to the final series of codes for analysis.

- **Subtractive Bilingualism** occurs when the primary language is lost at the expense of the new learned language.

- **Differential Treatment** based on culture and language that is aimed towards students of non-white, non-English speaking backgrounds.

- **Cultural Patterns**, which refer to the dramatic split between different cultures’ value patterns exhibited by both mainstream U.S. and Latino populations.

Guided by political and cultural influences, it is my goal to ground the participants’ experiences in the backdrop of the larger society. This approach is informed by interpretative research methods (Erickson, 1986) and the classroom ecology paradigm (Hamilton, 1983).

*Classroom Ecology Paradigm*

In the Classroom Ecology Paradigm, the thoughts, attitudes, and feelings of the participants are important sources of data which lend integrity to qualitative research. In addition, the Classroom Ecology Paradigm supports the analysis of participants’ school experiences through the examination of political and cultural factors. According to Marcelo and Carola Suarez-Orozco (2000), it is problematic to investigate the lives of immigrant students and reduce the multiplicity of their
experiences to a single phenomenon or construct. If only one phenomenon or construct is examined, the students’ cumulative school experience is ignored. Therefore this investigation draws on a multiplicity of influences, thus further identifying the classroom context as nested within other contexts, like politics, culture, and society.

Interpretative Research Methodology, which incorporates Qualitative Interviewing and the Classroom Ecology Paradigm, will be used to uncover students in the educational system “who are relatively powerless” (Shulman, 1986). Erickson (1986, p. 120) defines one of the central concerns of Interpretive Research as “the nature of classrooms as socially and culturally organized environments for learning.” Since my goal is to situate the students’ experience in the larger political and social contexts, the Interpretive Research Method is the most appropriate.

Interviewer

This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of my Master of Arts in Education Degree. I completed my student-teaching at Willow Middle School and served as a substitute teacher. I knew all the participants except Angelica prior to beginning this study. I was fortunate to be granted school site permission to conduct research and sought recommendations from teachers, administrators, and counselors when recruiting participants. Once school site permission was obtained, I began contacting each potential participant and explained the study. After obtaining student and parent consent, I planned a calendar of meeting times for each student, which was based on the participating teachers’ approved times and student
availability. I was given access to an open classroom and a conference room in the school’s main office to conduct the interviews.

Over the course of three weeks in March 2007, I interviewed five Latina English Learners from this rural middle school to investigate their experiences learning English in the California public school system. Approval for this research was obtained from the Institution Review Board of Human Subjects on February 26th 2007. All interviews were conducted in person and audio taped.

Participants

Participants were selected based on recommendations from the school site administrator and content area teachers. Parent and student consent was obtained prior to the interview process. Initially there were six participants, but one student chose to opt out after the first interview.

A pre-requisite for participation in this study was the student’s status as an English Learner. All the participants are female Mexican-American students enrolled in the eighth grade. Table 3.1 illustrates both individual information for each participant and also the time frame in which each interview took place.
Table 3.1. Participants’ Individual Information and Interview Time Frames in March 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Initial Interview</th>
<th>Second Interview</th>
<th>Third Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tia *^</td>
<td>3/12/07</td>
<td>3/21/07</td>
<td>3/26/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guadalupe *&gt;</td>
<td>3/12/07</td>
<td>3/19/07</td>
<td>4/5/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gigi *^</td>
<td>4/5/07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth *&gt;</td>
<td>3/14/07</td>
<td>3/19/07</td>
<td>3/26/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelica *&gt;</td>
<td>3/22/07</td>
<td>4/5/07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Student and parent consent obtained prior to date of first interview
^ Participant was born in the United States
> Participant was born in Mexico

There were varied schooling backgrounds among the participants:

- Tia was born in the United States and was enrolled in an Oregon public school prior to third grade when she was enrolled in the California public school system.

- Guadalupe was born in Mexico, immigrated to the United States, and enrolled in the California public school system in the fourth grade.

- Gigi was born in the United States and has attended a California public school since kindergarten.

- Elizabeth was born in Mexico, immigrated to United States, and enrolled in the California public school system in the fourth grade.

- Angelica was born in Mexico, immigrated to California, and enrolled in the California public school system when she was in fifth grade.


Interviews

The interviews began on March 12, 2007, and culminated on April 5, 2007. Each student signed a consent form stating that approximately 1-1½ hours of their time would be required. This measure was taken to respect the students’ time missed from classroom instruction. At the beginning of each interview, all participants were reminded that they had the choice to discontinue the study at any time without any negative consequences or hard feelings. After each interview the audio taped interviews were transcribed and coded. The data was used to sharpen the focus and develop questions for the second interview. The same procedure was followed after the second interview if the participant participated in a third interview. If conducted, interviews two and three varied in length and content for each individual participant depending on what data was collected in the initial interview. Table 3.2 organizes the participants, number of interviews, and total time spent.

Table 3.2 Number of interviews and total time spent with each participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Number of Interviews</th>
<th>Total Time spent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 hr. 15 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guadalupe</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 hr. 30 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gigi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 hr. 40 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelica</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 hr.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Illustrates the total number of interviews conducted and total time spent. During the three weeks I conducted a total of twelve interviews for a total of six hours and five minutes.
Obtained Results and Type of Analysis

During the data collection and interpretation, literature in the field and scholarly work on immigration, public schools, language, and culture was revisited. This textual analysis, in conjunction with the reading and re-reading of the transcriptions, informed Chapter Four which includes results in the form of participant narratives.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

The research results are organized by focusing on each individual participant and her English language acquisition. The primary codes that emerged from my research include:

- Subtractive bilingualism is when the primary language is lost at the expense of the new learned language.
- Differential Treatment refers to students of non-white backgrounds and non-English speaking backgrounds receiving inferior treatment.
- Cultural Patterns examines the dramatic split between value patterns and cultures exhibited by the U.S. mainstream population and mainstream Latino populations.

The twelve interviews conducted at Willow Middle school resulted in personal narratives for each case study participant relating to language learning and their school experience. The data is grounded in socio-cultural and socio-political theories and analyzed utilizing the Classroom Ecology Paradigm for research on teaching.

During the interview process the students displayed a sense of pride, maturity, and satisfaction from the experience of being interviewed through their use of direct eye contact when we conversed, asking direct questions for clarification, and sitting
tall and upright in their chairs. In addition, Elizabeth directly told me that meeting with me made her feel “special” and “like [she is] important”.

Personal Narratives

Angelica.

When I asked Angelica to tell me about her background she responded, her brown eyes sparkling and a huge smile on her face, “I am 14 years old. I was born in Mexico and I have three years here in the United States.” Angelica attended school in Mexico which is not a luxury afforded to all she explained:

Kids are in the calle\(^2\). They don’t have families or money to go to school. They like consume drugs, they have to robar,\(^3\) they like when they take away things and they sell to others and take the money to buy drugs. I saw in the streets when I was with my mom to visit my grandmother’s house.

She is able to recall not only events that involved living near her family in Mexico, but also experiences attending school. “I think Mexico school is challenging. It is challenging here because everything is in English. Sometimes the teachers are mean [in Mexico] with the students le pagas le pegan\(^4\).” Her main challenge with school in the United States has not been mean teachers, but has been learning her academic content in English. She is a native Spanish speaker with literacy skills in her primary language. Being bilingual is important to her and her

\(^2\) street
\(^3\) to steal
\(^4\) to hit, to slap
family. Her father is learning a little English at work yet Angelica mostly speaks Spanish with her family. Most of her friends are Spanish speakers and she shared that she wished to have more friends to practice English with, “I have six friends that speak English in PE, it is time to practice.”

When she began attending California public schools, she was instantly thrown into an English-only classroom. “It was hard. I didn’t understand anything. Like when I come to United States and my teacher say, ‘How are you?’ and I didn’t know that word.” When I inquired about teachers speaking Spanish, Angelica’s eyes widened and she shared, “Yeah like in ELD I had a teacher that speaks a lot of Spanish and English. [It was] good! Because she explain me more easy to do work in English with explain me in Spanish.” Bilingual teachers and peers have assisted Angelica throughout her school experience in the United States.

Angelica represents the Instrumental Intrinsic Motivational Dichotomy5 (Brown, 2000). As an English Learner, she wishes to achieve goals that demand she learn her target language, in this case English. This motivation became clear to me when she painted a brief picture of her family’s financial situation and her interest to return to Mexico to work one day as a teacher or flight attendant.

My grandparents want to come here but we are going to go back to Mexico to live because here it is like you can’t do all the things that you can do in Mexico. Like when we don’t have money there [in

---

5 Learner wishes to achieve goals that utilize the second language for a career
Mexico] you go to market in blocks *vender*⁶ [which] helps family earn money. [In the United States] you have to have application to work and speak in English. [How do you feel about moving to Mexico?]

Good. I want to go but I want to learn more English to get a job there.

Angelica expressed that in Mexico, one must speak English in order to have a good job. In addition to improving her English, Angelica also considers being bilingual to be very important. In the one and a half years she has been at Willow Middle School, she feels that she has learned a lot of English. “I learned more in this school because I have two classes of ELD. I learn paragraphs and descriptions about a person and I learn more about how to read.”

Angelica cited a few barriers to learning in the U.S: oral comprehension of English during class instructions and directions, writing in English, filling out registration forms for the school, no access to bilingual materials to support primary language learning, and the lack of a “big” vocabulary in English. Despite these barriers, Angelica has made the school’s ‘A’ Honor Roll. Additionally, she expressed that the school communicates well with her family, and her family believes an education is very important.

*Elizabeth.*

Elizabeth moved to the United States from Mexico with her mother and brother when she was in the fourth grade. The school in Mexico she attended provided instruction in Spanish for all her subjects and she experienced no English
language instruction. She did not begin learning English until her enrollment in the fourth grade in a California public school. The strategies she employed for initial comprehension included asking her Spanish speaking peers to translate (one of whom is also a participant in this study) or seeking out teachers who spoke Spanish.

It was really difficult to learn English because I didn’t understand anything. My fourth grade teacher, she help because she spoke some Spanish, sometimes it helped. [I] learned school stuff first because my teachers talked to me in English and I didn’t speak English outside of school. I speak Spanish with family. Each year [I] learned more and by the end of fourth grade I learned a lot, so by fifth grade I was ready for everything.

When I asked Elizabeth if the school communicates with her family regarding her progress and grades she replied, “Yes, with the help of me.” Elizabeth shared that one of the many barriers that existed for her was the transition from elementary school to middle school, which was difficult because of the “big” words used. However, now in middle school she is enrolled in an English Language Development (ELD) class. She stated, “in ELD [the teacher] will help us with homework, we keep a journal on the sounds of the letters, and how you spelled words.”

One way Elizabeth’s language acquisition is measured, like all English Learners in California, is by the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). “I scored a high score on the CELDT so I don’t have to take it [ELD]
anymore. I feel good about that.” As an eighth grader, she no longer has to take ELD because she scored high enough on the CELDT to be re-designated Fluent English Proficient (RFEP). Normally in place of ELD for English Learners, native-English speakers have elective courses, yet when Elizabeth was re-designated RFEP she had Language Arts Intervention and Math Intervention in her schedule and no chosen elective. She shared that she wishes she could go back to her ELD class.

ELD is more helpful I don’t like Language Arts Intervention. In Language Arts Intervention you just sit and do workbook pages and in ELD she [the teacher] would help us. And in Language Arts Intervention she [the teacher] would just sit there read a book [while we] watch movies. [I had] more support in ELD.

Elizabeth’s ELD class had a higher number of students than her Language Arts Intervention class.

Elizabeth helps her Spanish speaking peers by translating and clarifying teacher instructions and assignments. She commented that though this is helpful for her peers, it can also be a distraction. Elizabeth has Spanish speaking ability, but can no longer fluently read or write in her first language. She expressed that it is important to her to keep her Spanish language skills while also learning English. She had not heard of bilingual education yet, but spoke of the importance of knowing two languages.

She included reading aloud and math word problems as explicit examples of how she felt that a language barrier made her unable to participate in school:
When we were reading aloud in school [could you decline to read aloud?] We had to. [I would] feel bad because I was really bad [at reading English]. My least favorite now is math because the word problems are different from the way I grew up learning [math.] [Did you learn math skills in Mexico?] Yes. [Now there is a barrier] in math because of word problems.

Her favorite class is Physical Education because she gets to play games and be with her friends. Her future goals include going to the “novel” [naval] academy and joining the Coast Guard. “A good education is important to be able to be in the Coast Guard.” She is excited about high school because if she does well on the year’s English/Language Arts portion of the California Standards Test (CST) she can choose an elective. The high school which she will attend has a Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (Jr. ROTC) program which can help her achieve her future goals of being in the Coast Guard. She hopes to be able to move back to Mexico one day.

One barrier that emerged from our interviews had more to do with culture than academics. She cited specific differences between school in Mexico and school in the United States.

In Mexico you [don’t] go until 9am and that would be PE [physical education] and we have uniforms for both [PE and school]. You would stay in one classroom all day and the teachers would change. We wouldn’t have to leave the classroom. At breaks they would be
selling Mexican food and candy. [What do you miss most?] Tostadas. Fried tortillas it is really thick and you put toppings on it. Posole boiled corn, lemon, lettuce. I like and miss uniforms it is really difficult to pick out the clothes. [After school] I would go home and go to sleep and then wake and do my homework. Then my mom would go to work and I would go to sleep. In Mexico [kids had] a morning turn and afternoon turn. [It is] easier to be in school less time. [Then] go home and play and do homework.

Her discussion about living in Mexico verse living in the United States included this:

Since we lived in an apartment the whole entire neighborhood knows each other. We couldn’t do anything without the neighbors finding out. But here [in the neighborhood] everybody is quiet and keeps to themselves. So in Mexico you had many moms, aunts. In Mexico [her mom] was a nurse. [In the United States, she] doesn’t work, [she] wants to learn [English], she is tired of being in the house.

Elizabeth is a B student who likes school and has an ambitious attitude. For community service, Elizabeth went to a neighboring elementary school to help with the after-school program.

For community service I went to Pine Hill. I went and helped the little kids. I played with them for a little while. Then we would go in and then I would help them with their homework. Then they would go
outside and get snack and then they would go to the computer lab and play. Then I would go home and then I would come back and help them sign out. [The homework] was easy for me to help them but they had a lot of trouble. It was really fun to help them. They miss me. Every time I walk home I would go and give hugs. They made me a mask and I hung it in my bathroom. [It was] everyday for a week. I was tired [because] we run like crazy. The last day there was a little girl who was crying because she didn’t want me to leave. [She was a] Mexican girl who spoke only a little English.

Her advice to the little kids she helped was, “Work hard and never get down because of your grades and do the best you can.”

Elizabeth commented on political relations between the United States and Mexico. I asked her about her participation in El Día de Los Inmigrantes uno de Mayo, 2006.

Yes I remember May 1. [Did you or your family march?] My mom, brother in-law, and sister. They just sent me to school. [There were] not a lot of Mexican students here. [It can help] prevent everyone from getting deported. All the jobs that Americans won’t do so you see how we will do them well it is like they everybody protests that the Mexicans immigrants should move back to Mexico but they don’t realize how many jobs we take over.
Gigi.

Gigi is an eighth grade student enrolled in Willow Middle School’s Alternative Program known as ‘WAP’. Gigi is a U.S. native born Mexican-American who has been enrolled in California’s public schools since kindergarten, and speaks Spanish as her first language. Due to Gigi’s placement in an alternative program, our interview was different from the other participants because Gigi was only available for one interview totaling one hour. She began:

When I was younger I never had time to be a little girl. I was always trying to think about how to make things better for my family. That is something I have always wanted. I think about it now [being a kid] and I try to have fun now but I feel I am too old to do that I feel kinda of shut. Sometimes I just don’t like how my beginning was or how it started.

[How old are you?] I’m thirteen. I was nine years old when I started worrying because my sister went through a lot. She was touched by my cousin and I was there with her when it happened. I still go back. I still feel a lot of hate in myself. I don’t know how to handle it and people think I am bad.

I always tried to talk to my mom and not to side with my dad because he was an alcoholic. My dad would come and I would tell my mom not to open the door to him because I didn’t want to see him yell at
her. He would try to hit her sometimes and I didn’t want to go through that. My sister, who’s above me, she would always open the window for him because she loves him a lot. I love him too [but] she was like a daddy’s girl. He’d get in and start doing bad things and I’d always try to tell my sister that he’s making me suffer but [because of] the things she went through I don’t think she cared about anybody in that moment but herself.

Gigi identifies with being a Latina Mexican-American though she was born in the United States. Her mom was born in Mexico and crossed the border when she was pregnant with Gigi’s older sister. “She came to the United States ‘cause she wanted a better life for herself and she wanted a better life for my sister.”

Currently she defends her mom’s wishes to have a partner in her life, yet admits that no one has time for her. Her biological father is no longer part of her life. She has been focused, since she can remember, on making things better for her family. Teenage pregnancy is frequent in her family. “My sisters have babies and their life isn’t going that well and I look at them and I don’t want to turn out like that. I want to go further. I know I have that choice.”

She acknowledges that she has the choice to not be a teen-age mom and do well in school, but she often gets in trouble. “It was going good but I get in trouble a lot [in school]. I wish I could do better and not get in trouble but it has happened. I always get consequences and it makes me madder and I want to do worse. [Do the consequences help you learn?] No I don’t think it helps.”
The school program she is currently enrolled in includes two classes on the school’s main campus. One of which is ELD. Gigi stated, “I don’t like it [ELD]. I feel stupid when I am in there. It is not challenging at all.” When I inquired about being bilingual Gigi shared, “You know right now I don’t feel it is important but I know when I get older I can help a lot of people because I speak two languages and later on it is going to be worth it.”

Currently, she has low proficiency in writing and reading Spanish. She asks, “Do I write in Spanish? I suck at it. I know how to read little and write just a little.” She has never had primary language instruction or support and she says that she even suppresses her use of Spanish. She shared:

Sometimes I forget to speak English. If there are Latinos or friends sitting next to me I might start talking, but in Spanish. The teachers get mad. Oh you can’t speak in Spanish and it makes me feel bad. I got switched out of one of my classes because I was talking in Spanish. [Did you get switched out just because you were talking when no talking was allowed?] No it was projects, talking was okay, but I was talking in Spanish. I speak a little more English [because] I got to the point where I didn’t want to get in any more trouble.
Gigi told me about the summer when she visited Mexico:

It is pretty. I like it there. I have gone to school there just for summertime. My cousins were going to school. I didn’t want to stay home so I went with them. It is kinda sad though. There are only like three books and 25 people and people have classes under trees. And I see here people have books for home and have books for school and we have a lot of classrooms and I just wish it was like that over there.

Though her mom has a fourth grade education, Gigi explained that her mom is smart, just not “book and math smart.” If Gigi graduates from high school she will be the first in her family to do so. She acknowledges that she is trying in school and learning. She wishes she could have the opportunity to ask more questions and get more help. The idea of a tutor intrigued Gigi. She affirmed the challenge teachers must feel because so many students need their help, but she still wishes to be able to ask all the questions she has and have more time for explanation.

She shared her perspective on how the school’s administration views her and her friends:

The truth. I have a big group of Mexican students every time we would be together [the principal] would say “Separate, Separate” and the principal would always say that but the white girls, those girls, the preppy girls there are a lot of them too, I never see them get separated and sometimes I think about it because they are A students [and] they are really good in class so they deserve the best but I feel like I’m
trying, you know, and if they going to treat me like [that] it makes me not want to try. [One time] I was in the bathroom and there were all these white girls and I was only me and I really needed to go. There was a lot of smoke, and the only person they checked to see if they had drugs was me they never checked those white girls. I felt really bad. It was so stupid. I’m not saying its racism, I’m not saying that. They just think of us different because we came from another place, and maybe we were taught differently than the white people here and white people are more decent I guess. I think people are all kinds of decent like maybe there is some Latinos that aren’t decent but I’m pretty sure there are some white people that aren’t decent too.

On May 1, 2006, Gigi and other community members marched in the streets in an effort to help bring about justice for immigrants.

[May 1] The marching thing? Me and my mom struggled a lot for that. A lot of people went, it was not surprising but it made me feel better that there were white, blacks, helping us but there were some white people in cars. They had signs that said go home wetbacks. And you know this place wasn’t theirs first either.

Guadalupe.

Guadalupe attended school in her native country. “I was born in Mexico and I don’t really speak well English.” She received school instruction in Spanish, her first language, and no instruction in English.
I learned English when I came here. It was very cool but very scary because I didn’t know what they were saying. [It was] mostly Mexican students who helped me because there were not a lot of teachers who spoke Spanish but when there were it was very helpful.

Her strategies for overcoming language barriers include “having to just do it” and receiving help from Spanish-speaking students. For the most part, she has not encountered teachers who speak Spanish and would be able to offer primary language support. Primary language support would help because she feels that the language barrier limits her access to core content.

Sometimes the classes are very hard because I don’t understand the work and I don’t know how to do it. I think that is from. I don’t understand. It is very hard to speak it. Better to have teachers who are fluent or bilingual because they will know if we don’t understand.

Spanish is the language spoken at home by Guadalupe’s family. Her extended family lives in Mexico. She is still able to read and write in Spanish and it is important to her to be able to do both. “I practice with my family. We are trying to teach reading and writing in Spanish.” Although she has acquired some English skills at school through immersion, the translation of her primary language into English has offered her the most language acquisition success. “It was reading bilingual books. If I didn’t understand the English I could look at the Spanish and find it out.” She answered “no” when asked if she can practice English at home. At
home, her family will check whether or not she has homework, and if it is completed, but they do not have the English language skills to help her. In addition to only hearing and speaking Spanish at home, she mostly has Spanish speaking friends.

She shared with me the reason that her family moved to the United States. They decided to “move to [have] better jobs when we grow up.” Both her parents work in the United States and they believe that education is very important. Guadalupe expressed that the school doesn’t communicate well with her family, but she thinks it would be good if they did. Even though both her parents work, she stated that they would come to meetings, only if the language barrier didn’t prevent them from understanding. She cited that the one difference between attending school in Mexico and the United States was the ability for her parents to be involved in her education and attend meetings with her teachers.

Like all English Learners, Guadalupe takes an English Language Development class.

ELD is important to me. [In ELD I] learn more English and words. [The teacher] helps you how to say [the words] and when to say [the words]. [She also helps me to know] when it is the appropriate way to say [certain words]. [ELD] helps with writing commas. I have learned a lot in that class.
Although she shared that she has learned a lot in ELD, she added, “I think it would better in Spanish and English.” In her mainstream classes, she shared that “Expectations are the same [for English-only students]. Sometimes expectations are high [and it is] hard to do it because other kids can do it fast. [I am] expected to do the same work. [I feel] frustrated.”

She acknowledged that homework helps her. “Homework helps. I learn more words that I didn’t know. It helps vocabulary. I learn more English. I learn more words.” Guadalupe is on the ‘B’ honor roll yet she worries she won’t be able to pass classes in high school. “Worried I am not going to pass for having trouble to speaking.”

She likes all her classes and finds Social Studies the hardest. “It is difficult to learn all the terms and find all the words to complete the assignments.” Last year in school there was an English Learner aide that worked with Guadalupe in her Social Studies class, but not this year. She misses the ability to ask questions and receive extra explanation when necessary. She is interested in the option and the opportunity to have a tutor at home.

As an English Learner, Guadalupe takes the CELDT test each year to measure her English proficiency. Her experiences with the CELDT are increasingly more positive. Her scores are higher each year and she feels proud of her language acquisition. Her family is very excited about her upcoming eighth grade graduation.
Tia.

Tia began her interview with a series of giggles. “I was born in Washington State.” Her first year in the California public school system was in third grade, and she speaks English and Spanish. As a kid she spoke English at home and learned Spanish from her mom. She identifies herself primarily as an English speaking Mexican. She wishes she could eat Mexican food at school. She says she is “sick” of the school lunches and just eats snacks during the school day and waits to get home to eat.

Tia’s “elective” in her school schedule is an ELD class. At the time of our interview she had just had her schedule changed and was no longer in a Language Arts class taught by Ms. M. “[I have] ELD so I could have one trimester of science to graduate so no more of Ms. M.’s class. But the work was harder [in Mrs. M’s class] and now ELD is review and boring.”

Prior to the schedule change, Tia had had no science classes. Her schedule was changed to accommodate one semester of science, even though English-only students are required to have a full year of science to graduate. This schedule change actually moved her from a more advanced language class to a less advanced class. Her previous class had her working on writing paragraphs and increasing her vocabulary, but now her current ELD class has her practicing English using picture dictionaries and working on pronunciation which is a strategy for low-beginner English Learners. In sum, the more advanced class is providing more rigorous language practice than the less advanced.
Her experience learning English thus far has left her desiring “bigger words and more words that are not used that much”. Though she does not have literacy skills in Spanish, she wishes to be able to read and write in Spanish.

The school communicates well with her family. She and her family acknowledge that staying in school and getting an education is important. She stated, however, “I hate reading. I get tired and lose focus.” She does like mystery books but other topics bore her quickly.

At home she earns an allowance by taking care of her nephew, which she enjoys very much. When she grows up, she wishes to be a dentist or an architect so she can make enough money to have “a nice house, nice car, and all the other things I may need.”

Tia expressed that she thinks she has the friends that she does because, “we act different [from others] and we like to be with our own kind”. She is excited for her upcoming graduation and feels proud that she is getting all her work done and making better grades.

Conclusion

Chapter Four presents the data collected through conducting Qualitative interviews. The personal narratives are the individual experiences of each of the five participants. Chapter Five analyzes the data and Chapter Six presents conclusions and implications for further research.
CHAPTER FIVE
ANALYSIS

Introduction

I was initially concerned that the interviews would be monosyllabic, but was pleasantly surprised at all of the participants’ abilities to share their unique stories. The most salient theme that emerged was that the students experienced many language barriers. The major codes used to organize the barriers include: Subtractive Bilingualism, Differential Treatment, and Cultural Value Patterns. Language theories from prominent linguists in the field of Second Language Acquisition are included in this chapter due to their relevance in understanding the participants’ experiences.

Subtractive Bilingualism

The participants are losing their primary language as it is replaced by English (Lessow-Hurley 2005). According to Baetens-Beardsmore (1986), “This situation is prevalent in societies where the Socio-cultural attributes of one of the languages are denigrated at the expense of those of the other, which has a more prestigious socio-economically determined status” (p.23). The California Education Code, the regulatory body for California public schools, section 300, states its position on the economic status associated with learning English:

(a) Whereas, The English language is the national public language of the United States of America and of the State of California, is spoken by the vast majority of California residents, and is also the
leading world language for science, technology, and international business, thereby being the language of economic opportunity; and

(b) Whereas, Immigrant parents are eager to have their children acquire a good knowledge of English, thereby allowing them to fully participate in the American Dream of economic and social advancement…

The State of California acknowledges and affirms English and English alone as the appropriate language of use. This affirmation is not hidden, but rather is visibly printed in the education code legislation. According to Brown (2000), decisions made by the California Education code “require a judgment on the part of the policy-making body on which language(s) is (are) deemed to be of value for the future generations of wage earners (and voters) in society” (p. 195).

According to all of the respondents, English is the only language used in school instruction. This impacts these students because they learn English as their second language at the sake of maintaining proficiency of their primary language. When not supported academically, the primary language is lost through the method of English-only instruction.

Research shows, however, that primary language support aides in the acquisition of the target language. Linguists, such as Brown (2000), use the term “transfer” to describe the carryover of previous performance or language knowledge to later learning. Rather then being supported in using “transfer,” the participants are instructed to learn English through English-only, thus the ability to use their first
language as a framework, foundation, or reference point is not available to them through the public school system in California. Guadalupe specifically cited that she learned English through the use of her Spanish literacy. “It was reading bilingual books. If I didn’t understand the English I could look at the Spanish and find it out.”

All the participants expressed the need and desire for a more advanced vocabulary, more time during class for questions, and more explanation to help them complete their assignments. In addition, Guadalupe and Gigi specifically expressed interest in working with tutors.

All of the participants are English Learners exposed to an English-only curriculum at school. Their second language acquisition takes place mostly at school through input received in English dominated classrooms. For Elizabeth, Guadalupe, and Angelica, entering a California public school during grades four, five, and six, respectively, was a terrifying experience. The girls all shared the common experiences of the inability to understand, scared feelings, and the fact that most language assistance comes from Spanish speaking friends who act as translators for the “big” words.

The use of “big” and “bigger” was frequently used when describing what the participants liked learning and what they wanted more of – vocabulary. When and if they encountered a teacher or adult who used bilingual teaching techniques or simply used more detailed instruction, their experience was more positive and less scary. Angelica shared a positive experience she had with a bilingual teacher, “Yeah like in
ELD, I had a teacher that speaks a lot of Spanish and English it was good because she explain me more easy to do work in English with explain me in Spanish.”

**Differential Treatment**

The participants receive Differential Treatment based on their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Through the use of English-only education, the participants are denied equal access to the core curriculum afforded to their native English speaking peers. For example, although Guadalupe and Elizabeth are on the “B” honor roll and Angelica is on the “A” honor roll, they shared the challenge of true comprehension of school content, mainly in Social Studies and Science. This opens the door to ask, does Guadalupe’s “B” honor and Angelica’s “A” honor roll equate to a mainstream student “B” or “A” honor roll?

Research has found that the Home Language Survey (HLS) labels and tracks students before they are even assessed. According to Gerschberg et. Al, (2004), the process of labeling by an assessment system begins when schools administer an HLS. Their study found that though the information can be useful in providing valuable information, the HLS sets into place tracking, segregation, and marginalization. Foreign language instructor and linguist L. Farhart explains:

…the minute I checked the box [Do you speak a language other then English at home] my son was labeled as an ESL student. Soon after, his teachers were noticing problems with his English that weren’t there before. I received a letter from his teacher asking me to speak only English at home for the sake of my child’s English Language
Development and to practice with him. (as quoted in Sook Lee & Oxelson, 2006, p. 1)

The population of immigrant students and English Learner students creates labels. Label examples include; English as a Second Language (ESL), Second Language Learner (SLL), English Language Learner (ELL), and English Learner (EL). The ESL and SLL labels reflect recognition of Second Language Acquisition. The ELL label shifts the focus from learning a second language to simply being an English Language Learner. And finally, the currently used label EL, reflects a shift from being an English Language Learner to just being an English Learner.

I argue that the use of labels placed on students who speak a primary language other than English reflects the trend of continued acculturation. Public schools are not just teaching English language skills, but rather a whole set of value patterns, expectations, and rules that represent mainstream United States society. The system of educating immigrant students and non-native English speakers is responsible for subtractive bilingualism, cultural attrition, and forced Americanization. According to research conducted by Bowles & Gintis (1976), “The politics of education are better understood in terms of the need for social control in an unequal and rapidly changing social order” (p.27). One such area where this phenomenon occurs is the employment hardship for Mexican-origin women. Findings from a study conducted by De Anda (2005) showed that twice as many Mexican-origin women experience employment hardships than white women. One theory could be that through unequal access to educational opportunity, students
of non-white backgrounds are being tracked to fill less desirable jobs and positions in society.

The case study participants’ experience reflect inappropriate class placement at times, less access to core subjects, and a thirst for bilingual educational materials. For example, Guadalupe and Angelica commented that Social Studies is challenging because they need more vocabulary and more advanced words so they can keep up with peers who are reading content in their native language. The participants’ Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) may be misinterpreted as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Additionally, during a parent/teacher conference I attended, one teacher expressed shock when a Spanish-speaking student mentioned she had difficulty understanding the English directions. The teacher’s facial expression and tone reflected surprise and dismay as she realized that the student was missing valuable instruction due to a language barrier.

The language barrier exists for the participants in many forms. Elizabeth struggles in reading Algebraic word problems. An assessment of her math ability is invalid because she is actually being tested on her reading ability first and her math ability second.

For English Learners, the score on the CELDT combined with their score on the English Language Arts CTS determines their fluency in English and their placement in either an English Language Development, Language Arts Intervention, or mainstream Language Arts class. It appears that the placement determined by the test scores did not always benefit the students’ language acquisition process. For
example, Elizabeth shared how good she felt when she scored high enough on the CELDT so she would be transitioned out of ELD. As a result, however, she was placed in a Language Arts Intervention class due to a low score on the CSTs Language Arts Exam. According to the California Education Code article 2 Section 305, “once English Learners have acquired a good working knowledge of English, they should be transferred to English Language mainstream classrooms.” According to Elizabeth’s experience, she scored high enough on the CELDT to be labeled Fluent English Proficient (FEP) yet did not get mainstreamed into English Language Arts.

Elizabeth explained the transition into, and pedagogical difference from her ELD class to Language Arts Intervention:

The teacher that put me out of the class said I got a high score on the CELDT but I didn’t get enough score on the STAR [CSTS] so they would have to put me in intervention class so I could get out of ELD. If I had the choice I would go back to ELD because in Language Arts intervention you just sit and do workbook pages and in ELD she [the teacher] would help us with homework, we would keep a journal on the sounds of the letter, [and] how you spelled words. In Language Arts invention she [teacher] would just sit there read a book while we watch movies.
Guadalupe revealed that she feels frustrated because she is expected to complete the same work, with the same quality, within the same amount of time as her native English speaking peers.

Expectations are the same. Sometimes expectations are high. [It is] hard to do it [work] because another kids can do it fast. [I am] expected to do the same work. I feel frustrated. English and Spanish work I feel good [about] because I can do the work and turn it in on time. It would be good [for a] little while [to work in Spanish] but then I would like the other work in English only. [I] want the English.

Although frustrated, she still expressed that she values doing work in English but she just wants a balance. She also commented on the use of bilingual materials. “I was reading bilingual books because if I didn’t understand the English I could look at the Spanish and find it out.”

Tia and Gigi are U.S. native born, yet they are classified as English Learners at Willow Middle School. The California Education Codes defines an English Learner in article 2 section 305 as, “a student who does not speak English, whose native language is not English, or is currently not able to perform or do classroom work in English (otherwise known as Limited English Proficient)”.

Tia shared an experience involving her school schedule not serving her needs. At the time of our interview, Tia had just had her schedule changed. When I asked her why she was now in an ELD class she explained, “I was just switched to
ELD so I could have one trimester of Science to graduate.” Tia’s needs are not being met because of how she is tracked. She receives less exposure to Science than her peers do, and has to be enrolled in a low-beginner ELD class because it is more convenient for her schedule, not because it is more efficient for her learning. Her family may not even have the social or cultural capital to even be aware of this disservice. Tia is receiving less Science content, experience, and instruction than her native English speaking peers all at the expense of a less rigorous English Language Arts curriculum.

Differential Treatment does not only exist for immigrant students like Guadalupe, Elizabeth, and Angelica, but also for native born Tia and Gigi. When I asked Gigi about her experience in ELD she responded, “I don’t like it. I feel stupid when I am in there.” Although Tia and Gigi find ELD boring, Tia did acknowledge that she does receive help with homework and is learning new words. The participants are in between languages; not fully acquiring English and not able to use or expand their Spanish language literacy or linguistics.

Gigi shared her need to suppress Spanish at school for fear of being disciplined for it:

Sometimes I forget to speak English if there are Latinos or friends sitting next to me and I might start talking, but in Spanish, and the teachers get mad, “oh you can’t speak in Spanish” and it makes me feel bad. If you are going have a class that speaks Spanish, you’re going [to] get a little bit more and you’re going to want to speak
[Spanish] but you can’t speak it at school…I got switched out of one of my classes because I was talking in Spanish…now I speak a little more English. I got to the point were I didn’t want to get in any more trouble.

I wanted to be able to understand Gigi’s story better so I asked her if she got in trouble because she was talking in Spanish or just talking in general. She explained that she was talking during group work when talking was admissible. She believes that it was because she was talking in Spanish that she got disciplined.

For Gigi, the use of Spanish during class caused her to be transferred because the teacher would not allow Spanish speaking. Her experience and awareness of the administration’s view of her and her friends is profound. This resulted in her, the student, feeling marginalized, thus perpetuating the notion that the English language is superior and that English is the only language worth learning and using.

Willow Middle School has one fluent Spanish-speaking administrator and when possible, translators are available for student-teacher conferences. Requesting special placement or programs for English learner students is included in the California Education Code. It is reasonable to presume that the ability for the participants’ parents to have the access, time, and skills to present the necessary waivers is limited. One might wonder if the state has set it up to be a challenge to limit the amount of special programs, such as bilingual education, because in fact the parameters required are in direct contradiction to the capabilities of many of the parents. Also, according to the research findings of Gerschberg, et. al. (2004), in the
case of immigrant students the waiver process presents a considerable obstacle because of the fear “related to undocumented legal status issues” (p.110).

An example of local anti-immigrant action includes “sweeps” by the National Immigration Services aiming to deport potentially undocumented Mexican-Americans. This can leave school-age children abandoned, scared, and unaware of their family’s whereabouts and safety. This, however, is not a ramification that directly impacts Caucasian students and parents (Binder, 2007). In addition to regional immigration sweeps, the debate over further securing the U.S.-Mexico border against illegal immigration is a political conversation at the local, state, and federal level. This controversy causes legal Mexican-Americans to be at risk for discrimination based on both outward appearance and through the use of Spanish.

In short, the barriers, obstacles, and inequalities the participants face place them at an educational disadvantage compared with their native English speaking peers. Obstacles such as language barriers, limited access to core content due to English-only instruction, lack of consistent parental communication, and inappropriate class placements, impact the participants’ access to educational equality and opportunity. These cultural conflicts further highlight the dramatic difference in school experiences that these young girls face and the dire need for systemic change.

*Cultural Value Patterns*

These Mexican-American Spanish speaking students attend public school with American English-only students. In the event that a classroom teacher did not
speak Spanish, the participants were often helped by classmates who were themselves Spanish speaking English Learners. This practice is coded as Cultural Value Patterns which refers to the dramatic split between different cultures’ value patterns exhibited by both mainstream U.S. and Latino populations.

For Elizabeth, Guadalupe, and Angelica, entering a California public school during grades four, five, and six, respectively, was a terrifying experience. According to Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005), this fear is a common attribute of culture shock. The three immigrant participants experienced this fear associated with culture shock upon attending school with limited or no English skills. The strategies employed to cope with the early and ongoing language learning struggle is classified culturally as Collectivism. For example, Latino culture is categorized by a Collective Value Pattern whereas the United States is categorized by an Individualistic Value Pattern (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). In addition to their fear, all the participants experienced the culture shock associated with Latina Collectivist Value Patterns interacting with Individual Culture Patterns.

One of the top Collectivist Value Patterns is the fulfillment of others’ needs (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). The participants shared that the majority of help which they receive comes from Spanish speaking friends who act as translators for the “big” words⁷. When and if they encountered a teacher or adult who used bilingual teaching techniques, or simply explained more carefully what was to be

⁷ The over-use of “big” and “bigger” in describing what the participants liked learning and what they wanted more of for their vocabulary acts as a indicator of the lack of synonyms for the word ‘big’ they possess in their English vocabulary.
done, their experience was more positive and less scary. Angelica shared a positive experience she had with a bilingual teacher, “In ELD a teacher that speaks a lot of Spanish and English it was good [easier] to do work in English with explain me in Spanish.”

During Elizabeth’s first year in a California public school, Guadalupe was one of her translators. Ever since then, she has supported her in learning English. Elizabeth took on that role later in the year as a translator for a classmate, Maria. Elizabeth explained that helping her classmates may be helpful for them, but it can be distracting for her. Educators must recognize that our English Learners should not be getting practice in their home language simply by acting as translators. However, there are positive benefits to the role of translator. It reflects a Collectivist Cultural Pattern verse the more common Individualist Cultural Pattern embodied by the U.S. mainstream population (Ting-Toomy & Chung, 2005), which shows how a maintained collectivist cultural pattern can exist alongside, yet in opposition to, an individualistic.

Never the less, the time spent helping, translating, and even worrying about a peer who is struggling does take that student away from their own learning experience whether it be English acquisition or academic content. Reading and writing skill promotion in Spanish can support proficiency in reading and writing English. As educators, it is our responsibility to do the helping, translating, and worrying as we embrace the challenge to be advocates for our entire student population regardless of their linguistic background.
Second Language Acquisition

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a field that is extensively researched and which no absolute conclusions on the perfect language acquisition method have been drawn. One theory of SLA includes the Social Constructivist Model (Long, 1985, 1996). This theory describes the language classroom not just as a place where language learners mingle and work together, but where the contexts for interaction are carefully and intentionally designed (Brown, 2000). Long’s interaction hypothesis, which has support from Swain and Lapkin’s (1998) output and input acquisition theories, will be addressed in the next section for its role in language learning research and development.

Long’s theory and work, stemming from Steven Krashen’s theory of comprehensible input (i + 1), focuses on the interplay between learners, peers, teachers, and others with whom they interact, which is clearly significant for the participants of this study. The majority of the participants said they wanted more time for questions, more exposure to advanced vocabulary, more time to practice English, and more explanations in class. Only Angelica reported having English-speaking friends at school and only Tia shared that she speaks English more than Spanish with her friends. The Language Acquisition Theory applied in the classroom would promote a venue where student interaction and English output were intentionally facilitated to advance the participants’ English language acquisition. In addition to recognizing the needs for English Learners to produce language, this practice may help in the language learning process.
All five girls reported that learning English is important to them, but so is maintaining and increasing their Spanish skills. While attending school in California, none of the participants have received instruction in their native language. They feel they have lost their ability to read and write in Spanish, and have little to no opportunities to use their native language in school except socially with their other Spanish speaking friends. I asked the participants how confident they felt with their Spanish reading and writing skills. The answers, all quotes taken from their interviews, varied in degree and reasoning:

Table 5.1 Participant Responses Regarding Language Skills and Bilingualism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Spanish Language Skills</th>
<th>Feelings about Bilingualism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gigi</td>
<td>I know how to speak Spanish but sometimes I choke on the words. Do I write in Spanish? I suck at it. I know how to read little and write just a little.</td>
<td>You know, right now I don’t feel it is important but I know when I get older I can help a lot of people because I speak two languages and later on it is going to be worth it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelica</td>
<td>I read and write in Spanish. It is important to me.</td>
<td>You can’t have a really good job when you don’t learn two languages, and in Mexico you can learn one language and a little bit of English and here you have more opportunity to have good job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>I don’t read or write anymore.</td>
<td>Very important for the job I get.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tia</td>
<td>[Do you know how to read and write in Spanish?] No. [would you like to be able to?] Yes.</td>
<td>[Is it important to you?] Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guadalupe</td>
<td>Kinda of able to read and write in Spanish and it is important to me to do both. I practice with family we are trying to keep reading and writing in Spanish, [but] I am losing how to write in Spanish.</td>
<td>[It is] Helpful to translate for other people or to teach. I would like when I grow up to be a teacher of little kids to help them how to speak it…Yeah it would [be] great to have both to translate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I believe an Additive Bilingual Program, a program in which a student learns, or adds, a new language, while sustaining the primary language, would benefit the educational experience of these young students. According to Gershberg, et al (2004), parents favor bilingual programs for their children so that “they would be able to communicate with the child’s teacher, thus positively influencing the child’s educational development and parent-school relations” (p.109). Each participant’s experience varied regarding school-family communication, though three of them stressed that the language barrier kept their parents away from school. For example, Elizabeth stated that the school communicates well with her family “only with the help of me” through translation.” Guadalupe stressed that her family would like to be more involved in her education, as they were in Mexico, but they don’t attend conferences “because they wouldn’t understand anything.” Gigi’s mom speaks “very little English” but is able to communicate with the school. Tia’s family is able to communicate with the school but her mom speaks only Spanish. Angelica stated that the communication between her family and the school “is okay.”

These testimonies reveal that in addition to Subtractive Bilingualism taking away the students’ primary language, it also widens the distance between the
students’ families and the school. In a qualitative research study conducted by Gerschberg, et al (2004), the authors found that parents favor bilingual programs, as they enable communication with their child’s teacher. Students like Guadalupe, Tia, Gigi, Angelica, and Elizabeth are eligible for specialized language acquisition classes, such as bilingual education, under the California Education Code Section 310. This eligibility is based on parental waivers that require parents to personally visit the school and articulate what they want in regards to the education of their children. Often parents of immigrant students lack the English literacy skills and cultural capital such waivers demand, thus parental waivers are not a viable option.

Conclusion

The main codes used in analysis of the raw data include Subtractive Bilingualism, Differential Treatment, and Cultural Value Patterns. Socio-political and Socio-cultural factors contribute to the experience of the English Learners who participated in this study. In addition, Second Language Acquisition theories are relevant to this study.

Potential specialized programs do exist within the rules set forth by this state’s education code to more specifically address the needs of English Learners. As educators, we have the responsibility to create the best learning environment possible. The process for specialized programs involves steps inaccessible to schools and families, so as educators we can modify, accommodate, and differentiate to best meet the needs of our language learners. For these specific participants,
accommodations might include providing literary resources in Spanish and bringing
the student’s home culture into the classroom.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSIONS

Revealing the experiences of five Spanish-speaking Latina English Learners aids the field of education, classroom teachers, and most importantly, students. Since these students are enrolled in California’s public schools, and are influenced by socio-political and socio-cultural factors, their stories can help inform the progression of equal opportunity for English Learners. Rather than place blame, the goals of this study are to paint a holistic and critical picture of the experiences that Latina English Learners have in a rural northern California middle school, to highlight the injustices and inequalities these students experience because of the way society views their primary language and their role as English Learners, and to inform the readers of the influences impacting the classroom and school environment for Latina English Learners by taking into consideration the larger societal influence.

The initial experiences of attending English speaking schools in California for these young girls were “hard,” “difficult,” or “scary.” The assistance from their Spanish speaking peers and sparse bilingual educators has enabled these young learners to achieve, despite their identified barriers and obstacles. Those who experienced a bilingual teacher shared how good it made them feel and how helpful it was. Providing instructions in a language understood by the students allowed them to work with confidence. The immigrant participants were tutored under a Spanish
speaking peer. When they felt confident themselves, they began to help others embodying a collectivist approach to language learning.

In a nation which has a population rapidly shifting increasingly towards immigrants who speak a language other than English as their primary language, we should work to create a pluralistic multilingual society as opposed to a monolingual segregated society. This does not mean to imply that all teachers have to be bilingual to meet the needs of the students, but it does mean that there could be a shift in attitude from the responsibility of primary language maintenance from students and their families to the schools.

Enabling and encouraging students to read and write in their primary language is an absolute if we are to help these students gain proficiency in reading and writing in English. When a student emigrates from Mexico in the late elementary phase of schooling, they are leaving a more rigorous curriculum behind. The students experienced more challenging and strict schooling in Mexico and research shows that the United State’s eighth grade California education has the equivalency of a fifth grade education in Mexico (Gerschberg, et al, 2004). The reading and writing abilities of these newly arrived adolescent students are still in their development. The interruption of their intellectual development combined with a foreign language is a huge disservice to young immigrant populations.

The shift needs to incorporate additive bilingualism. In addition to helping immigrant populations, additive bilingualism can help second and third generation immigrant students to both preserve their native language, and to maintain ties,
communication, and cultural bonds with their ancestors. Possible methods that were shared by the participants, both wishfully and through their own experience, include tutors, providing bilingual instructions, reading bilingual books, and engaging in community service that involves helping and teaching younger English Learners.

Community service allows the students to practice and learn in an environment that doesn’t present a distraction from their own learning process in the classroom. It benefits them by building confidence, a sense of self-worth, and experiences for their future. It involves them in something greater than just their own individual education. For Mexican Americans, this community engagement fulfills their cultural value pattern of collectivism as opposed to the individualism that embodies United States mainstream culture and public schools. This concept of collectivism is so significant in relating to and best educating our Latina and Mexican American students. Elizabeth shared with me the cultural difference in her community living in the United States verses in Mexico, “We lived in an apartment and the whole entire neighborhood knows each other so we couldn’t do anything with out the neighbors finding out, good or bad but here everybody is quiet and keeps to them selves so in Mexico I had many moms, aunts”.

The socio-cultural and socio-political factors reported in this study do not directly affect the experience of Anglo students, but rather students of color. Treating all student equal, regardless of color, background, language, etc. can be a toxic practice because they do not all enter school with equal resources. Failure to recognize that 1) students come to educational institutions with a varying degree of
cultural and linguistic resources and 2) equal opportunity is not created from equal
treatment, are practices that continue to disenfranchise marginalized populations. If
we as educators can recognize what is it that various students need to be successful,
and how to provide that to them, is how we act as agents of change towards
equalizing education. Specifically designing teaching methods to the various
students groups within the general education classroom takes us closer to such a
vision.

High expectations for all students are different than high expectations for
completing work that is near impossible to understand. Fear is not the only emotion
impacting the climate for the students, frustration also plays a role. This frustration
can turn students off to learning, trying, and succeeding.

All the participants expressed the want and need for “bigger” words. The
more one reads, the greater the chance that one’s vocabulary increases. English
Learners, through subtractive bilingualism, are not afforded the transfer from their
primary to target language because their primary literacy skills are not academically
supported.

Limitations of This Study

The case study method of research does not permit the results to be
generalized to a larger population. Instead, the results inform those teachers and
administrators most intimately related to the participants, and so can provide insight
for all educators who interact with English Learners, and speak to theoretical
constructs. Gaps exist in the research as well; both in the literature reviewed and in
The research conducted. The most prominent areas of research that are in need are further study include: Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE), Content Based Instruction (CBI), and English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum on mainstream students; and the role and purpose of the Language Enhancement and Academic Achievement Act, what it ensures, how it assists all children, what it develops, whether it in fact assists state agencies, what it promotes, and how to streamline barriers to its potential Title III grants, strength, and collaboration.

The conclusions of my study, though not able to be generalized, are powerful in the message to all educators, administrators, and students. The voices of these young learners reveal the effects of subtractive bilingualism and the ramifications are real. Students who are highly motivated are cheated by the institutional practice of their native language being subtracted from their intellect and replaced with the economic promises associated with acquiring English. They are treated differently through covert racism, and educational tracking, and their gap is not only linguistic, but also cultural, as the ability to communicate with their family verbally and in writing in their primary language is not supported. The critical needs for more explanation, more space for questions, tutors are not being met, thus widening the achievement gap for English Learners.

I am committed to education as a force that promotes equality, democratic participation, and advancement of social justice. This study and thesis have been a eye-opening and profound way to connect a passion for education with a passion for
human rights. Currently in my position as a classroom teacher, eighty percent of my students are Latino English Learners. I am grateful for the insight afforded by this study. I carry out practices daily that I gleaned from this study, and I teach with the objective and goal to provide equal access for all students.
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