

The Absence of Language Policy and its Effects on the Education of Mexican Migrant Children

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Abstract

Language is a change agent that can contribute to, or limit a migrant student's acculturation into a different sociocultural context. In schools, language policies for second language learners prescribe the types of education minority children receive and their levels of achievement; they are informative of the students' self perceptions, they can either impede or promote children's social acceptance within, and acculturation to the educational community; and they can organize opportunities for students to acculturate to the cultural constructs and the social norms of their adopted community. The major question asked was, how does a school's language policy function to separate and how does it work to integrate majority and minority cultural groups? Semi-structured interviews (N = 54) included 33 teachers and six administrators. In part, the data revealed that the school's language policy was not a useful resource the students could employ to access the sociocultural constructs of the school, to achieve recognition in the classrooms and hallways, and to acculturate to the norms of their new school. The goal of the policy making was to avoid marginalizing the new students, but the processes of acculturation were effectively disempowered through the inability of the policy to address the social and academic needs of the migrant students.

Introduction

The languages spoken in the communities we are born into are central to our identities, and are a fundamental part of our enculturation and socialization processes. Language policies, among other things, can regulate and otherwise control the languages we speak, where we may speak those languages and the status given or ascribed to such languages. Moreover, the political and social status of languages can either support and affirm our self concept as valuable members of our communities, or they can marginalize us from participation within the greater social milieu. Within educational paradigms, language policies may prescribe at least a portion of the education minority children receive. By extension, policies that direct languages of instruction and their use for English language learners (ELLs), can: (a) affect their levels of achievement; (b) either impede or promote these children's social acceptance within, and acculturation or enculturation to the educational community; and

(c) organize opportunities for ELL students to acculturate to the cultural constructs and the social norms of their adopted communities.

Within a Vygotskian paradigm, it is the adults working in the schools who determine and direct the learning and the achievement of their students. In terms of policies that direct and govern the education of language minority students, the teachers and administrators carry the responsibility for organizing the linguistic and the social contexts necessary for their students' success in school. This is especially so when considering the inclusion of immigrant¹ students in the socio-educative processes.

In the fall of 1996, the Clayton Community Unit School District (CUSD)² had nine Hispanic students out of the approximately 1,000 students in the district. This number grew to over 120 by the fall of 1997 and has neared 200 at the close of the 1999-2000 school year, or almost 20% of the student enrollment. The purpose of this study was to investigate the dynamic processes the teachers and administrators utilized while engaged in policy-making activities, such as they were, and to look at the programs resulting from those policies (or from the absence of policy) that would support the learning and the socialization of the recently arrived Hispanic students. The goal of the policy making and program development activities was to avoid marginalizing the new students by facilitating their acculturation³ to the Clayton schools, and by organizing and structuring contexts where they could achieve success both socially and academically.

The major questions guiding this portion of the research were: How did the absence of a language policy function to separate and how did it work to integrate the two cultural groups? How did the conflict over the use of Spanish for ELL students' instruction exert influence on the acculturation and the socialization processes of the Mexican migrant children as a fundamental part of their schooling? I will discuss how the belief systems of the district personnel and the characteristics of the planned instruction functioned (a) to divide the two groups in certain instances and (b) to bring them together in ways that facilitated their socialization processes in becoming members of their new community. A critical and compounding factor added to the acculturation of the migrant students was the frequency in which they moved into and out of the community and schools throughout the year.

The way in which I use "policy" here is derived from the work of Shore and Wright (1997) and of Sutton and Levinson (in press). The first authors frame policies as directive forces that contribute to an individual's self-perception and characterization as the *subject* of policy. They employ ethnographic methodology to underpin the research, grounding the work in a sociocultural approach. Levinson and Sutton reconceptualize "the notion of policy itself as a complex social practice, an ongoing process of normative cultural production constituted by diverse actors across diverse social and institutional contexts" (in press, p. 1).

Theoretical Framework

The number of limited English proficient (LEP)⁴ students attending schools in this country at the end of the 20th century reached 2.8 million (Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs, 1999). Within this context of increasing linguistic and cultural diversity, literate and oral fluency in English remains a major focus in our schools and in our society (Au, 1995). With greater expectations for learning in content knowledge as students progress through the grade levels, all students must construct meanings in increasingly cognitively demanding and context-reduced domains (Cummins, 1994). For ELL students, more often than not the learning and instruction is not in their home languages. Therefore, they must necessarily rely on their individual reading comprehension abilities as a primary strategy to understand content area materials in textbooks (Anderson & Roit, 1996). When second language acquisition policies are ineffective or nonexistent, they can become barriers to achievement for most of the ELL students, putting them at risk of failure. Moreover, in addition to differences in background knowledge, cultural understandings, and (in this case) Spanish Language proficiency (Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1996), the ability of monolingual English-speaking teachers to handle diversity of language and cultures is a contributing factor to these students' achievements (McKay & Hornberger, 1996; Portes & MacLeod, 1996). Central to the idea that a language policy can either bring together or separate two diverse cultural groups are three interrelated concepts that frame the processes of acculturation: the contexts for learning the place of language in the processes of socialization and the choice of languages for instruction in schooling.

Learning Contexts

It is well accepted that scaffolding new ideas and information with established and understood knowledge is the basis for learning (Bruner, 1996; Dewey, 1902/1999). Throughout children's educational experiences and social development, teachers and parents facilitate the connection of new experiences with learned knowledge in both the school and home contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). This requires teachers and parents to understand the individual child's experiences and to respond in meaningful ways to what the child is attempting to do and learn (Richardson, 1997). In the process of enculturation and socialization to the norms of school, teachers are becoming increasingly aware that their students' home languages and cultures are important assets that need to be recognized and respected in the classrooms. When there is a significant difference between the language and culture of the children's homes and the school, children may have difficulty meeting the expectations at school and, in some cases, the expectations at home (Moll, 1992). However, it has been shown that particular strategies, such as changes in the pedagogical processes brought about through a heightened awareness of sociolinguistic

differences, can lead to greater achievement for ELL students (Moll & Diaz, 1987).

Most students can benefit from schools where the teachers and the parents contribute to the educational process, and where the collaboration and cooperation is facilitated through networks and task groups who share the responsibilities for the outcomes (Graham, 1996; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Trujillo, 1997). Schools that make a difference in students' achievements, then, consider three interactive variables: the children's home environments and L1, the types of schools they attend, and the paradigms of instruction they receive (Genesee, 1994; Nieto, 1992). Many immigrant and migrant children in American schools are challenged by obstacles such as the discontinuities between the child's experiences and knowledge in the home and at school (Dehyle & LeCompte, 1994), the language and communication barriers to learning content and engaging processes in classrooms (Delpit, 1988), and the language and cultural barriers and boundaries between parents and teachers (Montavon & Kinser, 1996; Philips, 1983). Within these situations, children can experience a heightened sense of anxiety and confusion that can effectively derail their learning processes (DeMulder, Rigsby, & Wilson-Quayle, 1999; Garcia, 1997). In the classrooms of the Clayton CUSD, many of the teachers attempted to modify their pedagogies in attempts to adjust to the cultural and sociolinguistic differences among their students. This theme will become quite evident to the reader in the discussion and examples that follow.

The Centrality of Language

Theories have been developed about the relationship of language to cognition, social processes, transmission of culture, and the shaping of reality and behavior (Ochs, 1990; Schieffelin, 1990; Spindler, 1974). That is, talk conveys messages about a person by the way it is used, the things that are talked about, the organization of the talk, the experiences of, and within the talk, and the domains where particular types of talk are used and by whom. The interactive nature of language conveys and depicts a way of being that informs children experientially about the expectations of their ecology (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986).

Experiences with language in and out of school may include power relationships, status differentiation, institutionalization, coping strategies, imposition and discrimination, control, exclusion, solidarity, boundaries of in-groups and out-groups, a sense of belonging, familial organization, official designation, autonomy, and opportunities to participate in the affairs of the society (Schieffelin, 1987). Language differences among school children constrict their ability to engage each other on an equal basis, thereby illuminating the disparities. The linguistic status differential in dual language contexts can often contribute to an "us and them" relationship. In the majority of schools across the nation, the language of instruction is that

of the dominant group, and is the usual standard for access to knowledge and the social milieu.

In some geographic communities, as in the case of Clayton, small enclaves of ethnic groups such as migrant workers can coexist with the dominant society and yet can enculturate and socialize their children to different ethnic identities by differential language use (Heath, 1983). There are particular family patterns of interaction that are indexed through the use of heritage languages. The cultural models of the world view of a family's ways of being are invoked through the cultural and ethnic identity of an individual (Holland & Quinn, 1987). Conversely, one's ethnic identity and cultural ways of being are organized by, and indicative of the patterns of behavior and language use within one's family. The heterogeneity of an ethnic group necessarily contributes to varying degrees of family cohesion, forms of discipline, and the nature of communication. In the case of Clayton, the combined effect of these sociocultural and linguistic characteristics contributed to the function and characteristics of the age-graded peer groups, and was central to social and academic inclusion/exclusion within schools. The following discussion illustrates how the social use of language seemed both to separate and integrate children in school, and discusses the range of family attitudes concerning the place of English in homes.

Language in Schools

In most schools, because English is the language of instruction and is thereby necessary for access to academic knowledge, it may function as a barrier to information for ELL students. Reform efforts in schools can provide broad frameworks for the processes of inclusion and achievement by language minority students; however, they typically lack the necessary kinds of decisions, programs, and curricula that contribute to the development of programs and policies beneficial to linguistic minorities (Crawford, 1998; Gandara, 1994; Valdez, 1989). Most often the decisions regarding language policies and programs for second language learners is left to the "expertise" of special program people who interact with the ELL students, most typically in classrooms segregated from the mainstream classes. The unaffected teachers who lack information about ESL programs and content area requirements most typically see the needs of the minority students as peripheral to the total school agenda.

Missing from the policy and instructional paradigm discussions are three critical parts: (a) the informed perspectives of, and participation by the composite teaching faculty; (b) the established research base that delineates best practices and policies for ESL learners, including processes of enculturation and socialization (Zehler, Hopstock, Fleischman, & Greniuk, 1994); and, (c) the involvement of the Hispanic students and/or parents in the policy/decision-making activities. No matter how promising the innovations, the policies and the programs can fail if the grounded research and

accumulated knowledge of best practices are ignored and if the faculty body is secondary to the formative processes (Freeman, 1998).

Total school involvement is key to designing effective policy and programs for language minority students and is facilitated through a process of inquiry, shared decision making, and innovative ideas developed and applied to the unique setting of the individual school or district (Miramontes, Nadeau, & Commins, 1997). Furthermore, there is evidence that, when disadvantaged students receive excellent instruction informed by theoretically grounded practices, over time these students' home background differences are no longer a significant factor in detracting from their academic achievements and social inclusion (Snow, Barnes, Chanden, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991). In school reform, and especially in reform that encompasses second language learning, the challenge for many schools is how to connect with students who are typically marginalized because of language differences, who may not understand or have knowledge about the functioning of schools in this country, and who may not know what is expected of them (Burnaby, 1996; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Edwards, 1995).

Researchers and practitioners have worked to understand how they can reorganize their instructional practices so disadvantaged students may participate and achieve their potential in school (Crawford, 1990; Ernest & Gonzalez, 1996). The focus is on the paradox inherent in transforming a standardized education into a diversified one, and constructing ethnopedagogies and language policies that are multilingual and multidimensional (Hornberger, 1997). Language policies can limit or expand language programs and instructional paradigms in that policies based on best practices can and do give efficacy to marginalized groups, especially when such groups are considered significant participants in second language paradigms through the facilitation of learning communities (Trujillo, 1997; Moll, 1992). The Hispanic students in the Clayton CUSD precipitated a need for school reform, especially as it regarded informed decision-making processes. The discussion below will illuminate the educator's critical need for transforming their practices to delimit students' access to academic knowledge, and to facilitate their social inclusion.

Method

Participants

Participants (N = 54) in the 4-year research project included 33 teachers (41% of the pre K-12 staff), two counselors, one administrative assistant, two librarians, four bilingual staff, and all six of the top administrators (four principals, the bilingual coordinator, one superintendent). Except for one of the principals, all of the other participants were originally from the Clayton community. They were born and raised there, received their teaching degrees from the nearby university, and returned to Clayton to teach in the school

system. In 1999–2000, there were approximately 1,200 students in the five schools of the pre K-12 system. The initial research design begun in the fall of 1996 included multiple interviews with the bilingual coordinator, herself a newcomer to the community, but excluded the Hispanic voices except in classroom observations. In the summer of 1999, the research project incorporated the language policy-making component, which necessarily included three Hispanic parents and three Hispanic students. Their participation spanned the many months of the policy discussions during which time they were interviewed more than once each.

Site

Clayton is situated in a rural and historically agrarian community in the west central portion of Illinois. It is adjacent to the Illinois River, which has affected its growth and commercial activity since its founding. A major national agribusiness employed unskilled and semi-skilled laborers from the community, both migrant and resident, in the meat packing plant. The plant was located on the fringe of the community and had been in existence for more than 20 years at the time of this study. In 1996, the plant instituted a major recruitment campaign to expand its workforce with inexpensive immigrant labor from Mexico. The sudden and unannounced arrival of these minority workers initiated a period of escalating civil strife as the workers grew in numbers, and such strife has just recently begun to subside.

The kindergarten and preschool were managed by one principal, but were in separate buildings from each other in the town and were some distance from the 1-12 grade complex. The elementary and the junior/senior high schools each had their own principal. The fifth school was located nine miles out of town and did not have any Hispanic students. None of the five schools had assistant principals. The superintendent's office was located across the street from the 1-12 complex. Hispanic students counted as 20% of the students in both the preschool and in the elementary school, 10% of the junior/senior high students; and 36% of the kindergartners.

Data and Collection

Semi-structured interviews, as defined by Bernard (1988), were conducted for each of the 54 participants in a conversational framework. The teachers, administrators, parents, and students were met individually to insure confidentiality and to derive the most forthright responses. The interviews with the elementary teachers were usually held after school, and most often during prep times with the high school teachers. The administrators and the parents were interviewed throughout the day as their schedules permitted. The students were interviewed outside of school hours.

The order of the questions asked was not significant, although there was some linear sense of starting from their first encounters or interactions, then progressing to the present. Eventually all of the questions on the protocol

were asked, allowing the conversation to take its course by linking their ideas. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, then coded using a qualitative data software program. An interview protocol of 25 questions served to guide the interviews for each of the teachers, and a similar protocol of eight questions was used for each of the administrators. Classroom observations were conducted to note the teachers' pedagogies and instructional paradigms. On occasion, follow-up interviews were necessary to clarify and amplify certain points in the conversations.

Approach to Analysis

An inductive analysis was conducted to discover the themes and the patterns of interaction as well as the themes mentioned across participants regarding the issues of language use in the schools. Based on the interview protocols and the initial reading of the transcripts, I identified a number of primary categories that reflected the themes and topics discussed by most or all of the participants. Foremost among the categorical concerns of the informants were the changes, past and present, in their schools. The demographic changes underpinned their thoughts about the current and future needs of students, both Euro-American and Hispanic, and of schools. Concerns about changes also underpinned the efficacy of an official language policy that would delineate primary and secondary language use in academic contexts, and in social interactions and contexts secondarily. Other issues of concern were faculty responses to the major changes in their school district and how those changes affected their interactions with the Hispanic parents and students. Further categories centered on how the district would fund the current and proposed new programs, both academic and social, that would address the need for inclusion of the Hispanic students. The last category centered on comments about the informants' understandings and knowledge about the socio-cultural backgrounds and educational experiences of the Hispanic students.

As I reread the transcripts, certain constructs emerged as common factors to the primary categories. Subcategories were assigned to the primary categories to define the cross-linked themes of the participants, which were embedded in the transcripts and in the interview protocols: language issues; program issues, culture, socialization, cognition, and family. The primary categories, along with the subcategories, combined to underpin the central issue of language use in and out of the classrooms throughout the school district. The goal of the language policy discussions and activities (i.e., a formal language policy) reflected Clayton CUSD's efforts to manage the pedagogical, social, cultural, and demographic changes. There is still more work to be completed for a comprehensive description to emerge from the data further reveal Clayton's responses to the demographic changes within their schools.

The focus for this paper will be on the elementary grades,⁵ specifically the first through sixth, because there were more Hispanic students in these grades than in the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten or in the junior/senior high school. Further, I specifically chose one school, George Elementary, for this discussion because the teachers in these grades did not have a principal who held strong beliefs about second language acquisition, pro or con, nor did she exhibit the strong leadership necessary to guide the development of programs and procedures during this time of swiftly changing demographics. As the years passed by, the elementary grades continued to absorb the bulk of the Hispanic students and to experience the majority of the conflict over language issues.

The Data

Before the Hispanic students and their families arrived in Clayton, there was no need to have speakers of languages other than English in the schools or in the community for that matter. Therefore, when the students of the migrant workers began to matriculate in the fall of 1996, the school was simply not prepared for these disparate newcomers. The ensuing steady rise in the number of ELL and monolingual Spanish-speaking students challenged those in the educational community, pulling at the very roots of their philosophies, their world views, and their pedagogies.

What the interviews and the analyses demonstrated was that the teachers were clearly divided about how to teach these new students, and what language should be applied to which students in what context. For the Clayton CUSD, the crux of their tensions, disagreements, and consensus agreements centered on the issues of language. Who would use which language (Spanish or English) in which context to accomplish what task effectively became the crux for revealing much about education and the educators in that community. Moreover, classrooms became the “ground zero” of the separation or integration of the two cultural groups, depending on the pedagogies of each individual teacher.

Within George Elementary, there were three identifiable groups of teachers, based on their interviews and on classroom observations the teachers varied greatly in their practices. In simplified categories, the distinctions between the teachers can be characterized as “English only” on one end of a continuum, “language and social bridge builders” in the middle ground, and “bilingual is best” on the other end of the continuum.

The “English Only” Teachers

What the data revealed was that the “English only” group of seven teachers believed that the newcomer students needed to immediately begin to learn the content, skills, and strategies of American education, and that the teachers’ job was to begin that as soon as the students entered their classrooms. Anything that detracted from time spent learning and meeting

these objectives, such as time spent in the ESL room, was thought to be less time spent on achieving grade level competencies. This group of teachers, albeit not the majority, believed that the children should just be taught English. These few teachers were very vocal and had an especially forceful leader, Mrs. Maller, a second grade teacher. This particular teacher flatly and unequivocally stated, "They are in my room and my job is to teach them as much English as possible." She was often frustrated because the Hispanic students could not understand her and because she could not understand them. At one particular time she had five Hispanic children in her room whom she seated all together. She reasoned that they would "feel more comfortable" in their own little group. She thought that they could rely on each other and thereby be able to "understand something." According to her, it turned out to be a big mistake to do that. She noted that the Hispanic students who were really unsure of themselves grew overly reliant on the other Hispanic students for help and assistance, especially in translating, and then became "a pain in the neck." Her solution was to separate them, seating them throughout the room, in effect forcing them to use English and to be on their own. In Clayton, the bilingual teacher for the elementary grades, Mr. Barrera, observed that,

The kids, mainly in first and second grades, didn't know how to write or read in Spanish, and a few third and fourth graders, not that many. . . . We could have a kid that knows no English, but her Spanish is excellent, and compared to this [measure], she would be at a seventh grade level. I mean, the literacy skills in Spanish are good [for the older students], but in English they are nonexistent. . . . I think the only ones that are not up to where they should be are the kids that are in first or second grade. Because, they have been here for two or three years, so they never got out to get instruction, and their mother taught them, and there is that big gap. They cannot work in a Spanish environment, or in an English environment, so they are out on a limb. . . . The top kids in second grade, they can probably say beginning sounds and ending sounds of a word. (Interview 003V1)

Mrs. Maller framed many of the difficulties she saw in the Hispanic children in a deficit model. For example, her perspective of one student was that she personally thought of her as "very low functioning," but later when this teacher received another Hispanic child in her classroom, she stated that "he was far lower than she was, and I thought, she doesn't have a problem, but this one does." Students who were difficult to work with (i.e., teach English) were quite often referred out to the special education program. Such an approach from a teacher raises questions about the actual roots of the difficulties; are they truly learning difficulties, are they sociocultural differences, or are they language differences? These queries were not a part of the repertoire used by this group of teachers to problem-solve their classrooms.

This particular group of teachers was perceived by other teachers in the building as the instigators of several problems within the school and, most

notedly, as being prejudiced against the Hispanic students and their families. In regards to these two thoughts, Mr. Barrera, responsible for overseeing the bilingual education program in George Elementary, said,

I think overall that 80% of the teachers here, they encourage their kids. They really honestly have their best interests at heart. The rest of them, they just, they hate 'em. They wash their hands of 'em, and say "It's not my job." And those are the ones that make other people not sure of how they feel. (Interview 003V1)

Because of the aggressiveness of this vocal, boisterous group of teachers, Mr. Barrera noted that the prejudices and the jealousies spread throughout the elementary grades and concerned who was teaching well, whose students were achieving, which teachers received the new materials and the equipment, and who was receiving recognition for their students' accomplishments. Educated and certified in bilingual education, Mr. Barrera was new to the district and had recently graduated from a teacher college. He felt that these factors made him an available target for many of the complaints by these teachers. He gave examples of this, drawn from his experiences his first year at the school:

I'm only one of the two teachers that has a computer in their classroom. Let me see. I got that teacher of the month award—I work just as hard as you. I guess somebody saw me doing one right thing, one right moment. I don't know. I didn't ask for this; come on! You want it that bad? Here, take it! It's nice to receive praise from the administration, but I'm not here for that. It's stupid! Over new approaches, like I sit up there in the mornings and I praise the kids. I say, "You look nice. Give it all you got, today," and high fives. And teachers, like, they might look at me like, "How immature. How unprofessional, blah, blah, blah. And all I'm trying to do is hype them up so that when they get to the classroom, they are good to go. I mean, I have built some strong relationships with half of the staff. I can call them and say, "I need this." "Yeah, go ahead. Here it is." And [this group of teachers] say, "I don't think you are being professional because these people are married." And I say, "Just because we go out to dinner, and we go out in groups, doesn't mean anything." It's just one thing over another. They are always going to find something. (Interview 003V1)

One part of the difficulties was the perception that the Hispanic students were receiving more services, better materials, and new equipment, and that the Anglo students were being deprived. That is, there was an attitude among this group of teachers that the newcomers were the "haves" and the Anglo students were the "have nots." These thoughts about the disparities stemmed from the grants written by the bilingual coordinator for the district to support the bilingual staff, and for the materials and the equipment that would facilitate their work. They needed funds for these things because the district did not

have the monies to operate the bilingual programs and activities. The arrival of the supplies and the hiring of new personnel gave rise to Mrs. Maller's thought that the main problem in the school was the attitude of the school, in general, about the two different cultural groups. She believed that "too much money was being spent on the Hispanics" for many things that the Anglo students did not have, "in getting [the Hispanics] to stay. And I have a problem dealing with that." She did acknowledge later that the grant money was not coming out of the District's funds. However, she believed that the grants should include all of the students, regardless of ethnicity. She summed it up with these comments:

My biggest gripe is that there are too many white kids that need those kinds of things, and those kinds of services, and those extra personnel, and those extra materials so that they can have a decent education. But, they don't get it. Nobody is working their butts off to go out and get it for them. That's just the way it is. . . . Something is really wrong with that picture. We work harder for them than we do for our own. (Interview005M4)

Mrs. Maller's attitude toward Hispanics carried over into her classroom and affected the learning of her newcomer students, not only in their content knowledge but also in their language acquisition. Because she did not speak Spanish beyond the use of a few polite words and phrases, she enlisted those Hispanic students in her room who had some faculty with English to act as translators for the monolingual Spanish speakers. This was a common practice in many of the classrooms throughout the elementary grades. One of the primary differences, though, was that many teachers not in this group not only enlisted help translating, but they were also making efforts to learn as much Spanish as possible within the context of this language brokering, a practice that Mrs. Maller did not embrace. Moreover, Mrs. Maller took the use of student translators to the extreme. She believed that the adult translators/aides that were supplied through the grants were not well enough educated for the work that they needed to do, that they were in her classroom simply by the fact that they spoke two languages, and that it was an imposition for her to take the time to explain what she needed done by them. In one notable instance she had over-relied on one Hispanic student to the point of making him frustrated with this on-going task. Mrs. Maller stated that she "was always calling on him to ask him something, or to tell him something" because she was not able to understand or speak Spanish. Finally the young student rebelled, refusing to do the language brokering any longer. Mrs. Maller remarked to him that he was the only one in the class who could speak two languages, and therefore, from her perspective, it was he who she needed to ask to be her interpreter since she was not able to do that herself.

While Mrs. Maller seemed to be the extreme example in this school, she was not atypical of the seven teachers in the "English only" group. These teachers firmly believed that in order for the newcomers to assimilate into

America, they needed to learn English, and that continuing to acquire Spanish literacy detracted from their progress in English literacy. In these classrooms, the Hispanic students were not only separated linguistically from the Anglo students, they were separated academically and socially. The pedagogies of the teachers did not allow for Vygotskian paradigms wherein more able and less able students could work together to make meaning of the instruction and content, a paradigm that has long since been proven appropriate for this and other educational contexts. Likewise, such classrooms as this imposed a context-reduced domain (Cummins, 1994), leaving the Hispanic students awash in a linguistic sea of unknown language. As Moll and Diaz (1987) remind us, while the ultimate goal of American education is the learning of content and the acquisition of English, the use of one's heritage language to support the acquisition of another language is necessary in similar contexts if students are to maximize their efforts and time. However, they further note that it takes a shift in the pedagogy of the teacher to accomplish this, something that this group of teachers did not understand or were willing to do.

The "Language and Social Bridge Builder" Teachers

These were by far the clear majority group of teachers in Clayton CUSD, although they were the most silent about their beliefs and practices when they were in large gatherings, or when they were speaking with one of the seven "English only" teachers. The interviews with these teachers in George Elementary demonstrated that they were active learners in their profession, that they questioned their practices as one way to continue to develop their pedagogies, sought out research and expertise that would help inform them about best practices for ELL students, and talked with others in their group and with the "Bilingual is best" teachers to try to make sense of what they observed and heard in their classrooms. When interviewed about how she was chosen to have several newcomer students in her fourth-grade classroom (placement was primarily the responsibility of the bilingual director for the district in conjunction with the few bilingual staff), Mrs. Reichardt responded that it must surely be based on her personality, and on her willingness to accept new ideas and paradigms of education:

I think they chose my class . . . which is interesting, because with no Spanish background and all, I was sort of surprised. But, I think it was my temperament. Because, I don't get too upset about stuff, and I really . . . I'm a firm believer that you are here for your kids, and you do whatever it takes to make your kids so that they are doing the best that they can do. If things don't always go my way, I'm not a screamer and yeller, and there are some people that are like that. I [never knew] until they came to my door that they were coming. . . . What they basically do is they knock on your door and say, "You have a new student." And it's just like, "Okay, bring 'em in. Come on in." (Interview 012M1)

Mrs. Reichardt saw that having the Hispanic children in the school was an opportunity to expand and develop her pedagogy, and was an opportunity for her Anglo students to learn something about different students while at the same time learning social skills and tolerance for interacting with others. She thought that learning another's language would be a first step in providing a means to move beyond language boundaries in order to bring the newcomers into her classroom community. In one interview she stated her wish:

I would like Spanish to be taught to my kids in class. I mentioned it to [the Superintendent]; but, you know . . . I'd like to actually have a teacher come in and start with the basic words, and then have them do sentences and do it just like you do an English class. . . . If I had this group of kids that I have, and I had a Hispanic child come into my classroom, I would like them to be able to say basic words to the kids so that the child that comes into my room did not feel that they were completely ostracized out of the classroom, and that they were the only one that was learning a new language. And that, I think it's scary enough when a kid comes to a new school, and a new place. It's scary for them. But, boy, when you can't understand what they are talking about, I can't imagine how frustrating that must be, and frightening for them. (Interview 012M1)

Mrs. Reichardt received her first Hispanic student two weeks before Christmas—a student who spoke no English. She noted that he came to the door of her classroom, then left for a short time. When he returned, he was reluctant to enter the room, but her students took over, welcoming him into their room. As she recalled, "It worked out really well that way." This young student quickly found his comfort place within this community of learners. Her approach to all of her students was that,

I never put kids on the spot in front of other kids if I feel that they are uncomfortable with it. And I think that's why my kids are fairly comfortable here. And I actually can say, I think most of the kids feel successful. But, I'm real careful about self-esteem. (Interview 012M1)

Mrs. Reichardt worked with the two other fourth-grade teachers, exchanging ideas about materials, strategies, and processes to best utilize their classroom resources. One of their biggest challenges, as for many teachers, was the assessment of students' knowledge, skills, and abilities. Together they wrote a checklist of what they thought was important for the children to know, and what was not. Included in the list were criteria such as, could the child say and use basic words, put basic words together to form sentences, pay attention in class, participate with other students, and speak Spanish and/or English in the classroom. Once they completed the checklist, they gave a copy to the principal who distributed it to other teachers as one example of what could be useful. Another means she used for assessment was through one of the Hispanic student's parents, who was a teacher in Mexico. Although

Mrs. Gonzalez spoke no English, she volunteered to assist in Mrs. Reichardt's room, providing teaching assistance to the Spanish-speaking students. Mrs. Reichardt recalls that,

She had a background with working in the schools, and she took my kids, and actually I got our text in Spanish because all of them could read in Spanish. I was worried. Basically, I did not want them to lose the content. She went over the information with them in Spanish, and then, they were actually in my class then, and we talked in English. It was great. She made up, she did the test in Spanish, and would come back and tell me . . . It was such a good situation. I felt like once we got that going, that was the right direction to go. (Interview 012M1)

Playing with language was encouraged in many of the teachers' classrooms. Teachers not only instigated discussions about language meanings and usage, and how some concept words were similar yet different, but organized and promoted situations wherein students could "language," as in Heath's (1983) sense of the term regarding the children in Trackton. For example, in Mrs. Reichardt's class she noted that,

I do a lot of oral reading, and they did some of that, where they had to say parts and do it in Spanish. . . . One of the things that I did, and they really, really liked it. When we did social studies and science, a lot of times we would do reading with the kids. And when they read aloud they always read in Spanish, and it was a trick because then my kids had to try to follow along. Juan was so funny because he'd read a paragraph, and he'd say "okay," and then he'd say what paragraph he was on, and he'd say one word in English, and then he'd start reading in Spanish so that the kids could find where he was so he could take off. (Interview 012M1)

Some students came with good faculties in Spanish and English, such as one student in Mrs. Mason's fourth-grade class. The student's parents were well educated;⁶ thus, they were literate in Spanish. Carlos had been in George Elementary since first grade, so his English skills were on grade level with native English speakers in his class. His parents continued to speak Spanish in the home, maintaining Carlos's native language development. However, this teacher had two girls who went to the bilingual teacher for a pull-out program in language arts. Neither one spoke any English upon their arrival in Clayton. The bilingual teacher worked with them five days a week, for 90 minutes each session. They received language assistance only in language arts because of the guidelines of the federal grants that supported the programs. The girls were in the classroom for the other content area activities where a translator/aide assisted the teacher and facilitated the girls' learning. Mrs. Mason occasionally separated the two girls so that they could continue to make the transition from Spanish to English. This teacher saw that practice as an appropriate ELL method but was not sure if it was an accepted strategy for

more than occasional use. She did note that they made steady progress with their English language abilities, but did not comment on the fact of their Spanish language loss. She was not a speaker of Spanish but she was very interested and made continuing efforts to learn Spanish, and to better understand her students. For example, she walked with the two girls around the track each day, conversing and exchanging words. This helped to bridge the boundaries between teacher and students, but more importantly it provided a way to bring the two cultures together using language as one of the major vehicles.

Language in classrooms of the “language and social bridge builder” teachers was one means to bring all of the students together. They sat in mixed groups, participated in activities, shared responsibilities in the classrooms, and, with support and encouragement from the teacher, proactively worked to understand each other. This approach to learning and achievement also prevailed outside of the classrooms. For example, two of the fourth-grade Hispanic children teamed up to teach the game of soccer to the Anglo students on the playground at recess. It was an opportunity for the two boys to teach game skills and strategies in a cognitively undemanding and context-embedded environment (Cummins, 1994). That is, the social characteristics of play afforded the participants to make mistakes, to try new things (i.e., language and rules), and to learn new ways to work in teams. Moreover, it gave both language groups an opportunity to learn these constructs in situations where the process of trial and error would yield immediate feedback about the developing knowledge and skills of the game.

Further, the teachers worked to assure that their students, newcomers and residents alike, achieved at the highest levels. They did this through efforts to understand their students’ backgrounds and by responding to what the children were attempting to do with language. In this way, too, they brought the students together, lowering the barriers of language as best they could, at every opportunity, through awareness of differences and the facilitation of shared understandings. The interactive use of each other’s language served to guide much of the information building that each language group achieved.

The “Bilingual is Best” Teachers

Primarily, the bilingual education staff at George Elementary constituted this cohort of teachers, although there were two regular education teachers among this group who had some Spanish language faculties. When the newcomers began to arrive, both teachers began to actively learn about ELL students and methods and theories of second language acquisition and teaching (SLAT). They also participated in professional development programs and attended conferences to talk with other teachers about their experiences with ELL students and programs. As a group their understanding of, and approach to second language acquisition was grounded in the writings and theories of leaders in the field of bilingual education (i.e., Cummins, 1999;

Krashen, 2000). Moreover, because they understood that these newcomers had a very wide range of experiences with schooling and literacy in Spanish and English, they believed that an ethnopedagogical model (Schieffelin & Gilmore, 1986) would best serve the classrooms where these students were placed.

One teacher in particular, Ms. Theodorsen, especially requested to have Spanish-speaking children placed in her first-grade classroom. Her request was based to some extent on what she had heard in conversation among the other primary grade teachers about their approaches to teaching the Hispanic students, but mainly on her desire to assist the children to make their transition into American education and their new community, as positive and successful as possible. She knew that the best practices included a balance of social and academic paradigms for content learning, and a sharing of language and cultural constructs. As the Hispanic students matriculated in first grade, they were sent to her classroom. In some ways, she did not know what to expect from the new students regarding their language abilities because almost all of the new students did not arrive with school records. Moreover, she was unsure about what she would do exactly once they came to her:

I have three kids that speak no English in my room right now. I had one at the beginning of the year. And boy, that's what really has made me look at things. She spoke no English when she came in. The first two days she cried because she was just so scared, and now she's my translator. She has just picked up the language unbelievable. Very bright girl. She's my teacher. (Interview 008L1)

Ms. Theodorsen's attitude that she and her students had much to learn from each other set the tone for the classroom. Her Anglo students were just as eager to learn about and from the Hispanic students, and visa versa. She noted that her English-speaking students wanted to learn Spanish, "so we've been working on all kinds of things. They know all their colors and numbers. . . . We've been trying to integrate a lot of Spanish into the program, too." She instituted her language exchange activities, knowing theoretically that it was an appropriate practice but was unsure as to the outcome since she had no experiences with such a program. However, she continued with her plan and eventually saw that "the other kids [were] really starting to benefit from it." Reflecting back to when the two languages became actively used in her classroom, she recalled that at first the Hispanic students were uncomfortable speaking Spanish:

At the beginning of the year, I only had about half of these kids, and some of my kids that spoke Spanish refused to speak it in front of the other kids when they were in the class, or whatever. And so, I had one that was losing her Spanish. In fact, they dropped her from the ESL program because she just refused to speak Spanish any more. . . . When I got all of them, and they all came in, and I really started stressing the

importance [of Spanish]. . . . Then, all of a sudden now, she speaks Spanish all the time. Then, I asked to have her put back into the ESL program because she's kind of the one that had no foundation left of the language. (Interview 008L2)

This refusal to use Spanish by one particular student was indicative of the parental influences and thoughts about the place of English and Spanish in school. On the one hand, parents wanted their children to learn as much English as possible because they saw that as one key to success in America. However, when English replaces Spanish, then the children can be set adrift from their families, both nuclear and extended. This was a fact that was not lost on Ms. Theodorsen. She would have preferred that Spanish be taught in her classroom along with the English that she was required to teach. Her beliefs were not only centered on the maintenance of Spanish to bind the families, but also on the thought that when teaching and using both languages it portended that both languages were important. "We emphasize so much English that these kids lose their languages. If they lose their language, they can't communicate with parents because a lot, especially mothers, speak no English at all." To illustrate this point, she shared an experience she had with one of the Hispanic mothers who expressed her frustration with her son, regarding the use and loss of Spanish:

I have one mother right now that's so frustrated she can't even . . . the one little boy refuses to . . . he understands Spanish. He won't speak it. He answers her in English. She can't understand him, but dad wants him to speak English. He does not want him to speak Spanish. So it's kind of . . . I can see how it would be frustrating for her. (Interview 008L2)

Many children were caught in the conflicting goals their parents had for them at school. A few parents wanted their children to learn English and Spanish, and some wanted English to be the primary focus. When asked further about her students' parental attitudes concerning maintenance of Spanish and transition to English, Ms. Theodorsen responded that she had discussed this with the parent of her most able English speaking student.

[Dad] has really stressed the importance of English. That he's really wanted [the student] to learn English. But I don't think that when he's with her, he speaks Spanish, and I can see why she's the way she is. . . . She has the same way about herself. . . . He would be the type of person that would want their child to be very successful in both languages, and I'm sure he really wants her to learn more English. I mean, most of the parents that come here do. (Interview 008L2)

When this teacher reflected on the overall language use of this particular student, she noted that the girl used Spanish in the classroom 75% of the time and that it was her "preferred language." It was stressed in this classroom

that students should converse with each other for both social and academic purposes, and that they could use whichever language they chose. It was definitely not an English only environment. The teacher reported that, often times, when a student was talking with another s/he tended to use the language of the receiving partner. This practice demonstrated one way that language was used by the children to bring them together in the context of the classroom and the school.

Within this group of teachers, one of the important pedagogical constructs was that the children were in school to learn as much as they could, and the teachers needed to do all that they could to support those objectives. Testing was one measure of how well the teachers were meeting the objectives, and how well the students were progressing toward those goals. Assessment and evaluation in the continuing learning processes in the classrooms were viewed as formative and on-going instead of summative and formal. The summative and formal assessments were typically given at the start and at the end of the school year by Mr. Barrera and several of the bilingual aides. However, it was the day-to-day examining of learning that occupied these teachers' attention and time. Ms. Theodorsen noted that for the in-class testing of content material, neither Mr. Barrera nor the bilingual aides were present or necessary. The students knew that they could help each other with the directions and with the questions whenever the occasion arose and that they "can lean over and say whatever needs to be said." This demonstrated another way in which the students made use of each other's language expertise to make sense of the print in order to achieve their objectives of learning (Moll & Diaz, 1987).

The "bilingual is best" teachers believed that the use of Spanish to support many of the Hispanic children's learning in the classrooms was paramount for their success in learning content and English. This group of teachers provided theoretical and practical information to many of the teachers in the middle of the continuum who solicited their assistance with their practices. Perhaps more than most of the teachers in George Elementary, this group understood, on theoretical and applied levels, the struggles and the dilemmas the Hispanic students experienced in their efforts to learn the languages and the content of the school. This group did not assume that English was the only and best language for many of the classrooms. Moreover, they believed that through the use of the two languages many of the barriers that separated the children in this school could be breached.

Conclusion

Classroom teachers, among others, are the power brokers of access to knowledge for a community of learners, and most especially in dual language contexts. In terms of the work of Ruiz (1981), they can either acknowledge language as a difference and as a problem, thereby erecting barriers to the language minority students, or they can delimit the obstacles through their own efforts to bridge the boundaries of language differences, recognizing

language as a resource. The Clayton CUSD did not have a policy regarding language use in the classrooms (English or otherwise) either before or during the course of the Hispanic children's arrival. Throughout the school it was quite clear that the role of language was an important influence in the experiences of teachers and students. Without the guidance and direction that a language policy could provide, most of the teachers were without foundations in second language acquisition for their practices, and students were left with few opportunities to integrate into their new learning communities. It was understandable that one simple policy regarding the use of Spanish and English in the classrooms of the schools would not fit all circumstances; it was also apparent that some direction was needed that would more assuredly promote the academic achievement of the Hispanic students and the social integration of the two disparate cultural groups of students.

The issues extant in language use in instruction were complex, yet subsumed in the greater paradox for the children and for the teachers. That is, all three groups of teachers wanted the newcomers to enjoin the culture and the social milieu of the school, albeit each in their own particular way. The selection of a "language program" that would integrate the two linguistic groups was very important to their children's academic and social success. How the three groups approached their common goals was quite varied.

The data demonstrated that in order for children to come together in contexts of learning and socialization, they had to find a common, unifying factor. For the Clayton CUSD schools, that medium was language. The absence of a policy that directed the languages of instruction for these Hispanic children severely affected their academic achievement and made their social inclusion tentative at best. In classrooms where English was the only language of instruction and learning, the ELL students with the least understanding of English were failing. When teachers organized their classrooms so that their Hispanic students were isolated linguistically, either individually or in groups, there were scant instances and opportunities for them to make usual strides academically. Moreover, with the linguistic boundaries also came social barriers so that the children, as peers in a classroom, had a difficult time learning about each other. This occurred most usually in the primary grades. The exceptions were those students in the higher grades, or the occasional student in the lower grades, who were well grounded in Spanish literacy. They were better able to cope with the lack of direction and support for second language learners. Their greater understanding of language as a system, in addition to familial support, helped facilitate their transition to English more easily.

On the other hand, in classrooms where Spanish and English were both used for instruction and learning, the "language and social bridge building" teachers constructed academic and social contexts wherein there was an exchange, a give and take of language. The newcomers more readily felt comfortable in their new environments and began to integrate socially in their

classrooms. Moreover, with the support of their heritage language, they were making better progress in acquiring content area knowledge than their peers in the “English only” teachers’ classrooms. They used their abilities in Spanish to help make sense of the new language and the unfamiliar content they studied. The “bilingual is best” teachers were able to carry these processes to even greater heights because of their somewhat different program objectives.

The processes of socialization paralleled many of the same linguistic situations as with the academic paradigms. Those students who achieved the greatest levels of integration were in classrooms with teachers who made concerted efforts to organize social interactions in which Spanish and English were encouraged for communication and learning. For these students the process of enculturation acted to enhance their senses of self and to contribute to their identities. Students who encountered extreme difficulties because of the high level of English language use in classrooms most often experienced discomfort in their situation. Consequently, many of the students in the “English only” teachers’ classrooms were less sure about their ability to achieve.

In sum, one direct consequence of no language policy was that most teachers approached the education of their ELL students without a sound basis of knowledge and understanding of the best practices for their students. The positive processes of acculturation that could have been derived from a language policy were absent—effectively disempowered through the inability of the district to address the social and academic needs of the migrant students. Language was not a useful resource the students could employ to access the sociocultural constructs of the school or to achieve recognition in the classrooms and hallways. In the final analysis, for most of the ELL students their heritage language was being replaced with English, both academically and socially. Furthermore, in order for the students to incorporate the structure, organization, norms, and expectations of the school into their belief systems, the faculty and the administrators needed to be proactive in their efforts and to organize Vygotskian paradigms wherein the migrant students could enjoin the sociocultural constructs of the school in a productive and positive manner.

This case study revealed that the absence of a language policy for this school district exerted powerful influences on the processes of learning, acculturation, and socialization of the Mexican migrant children as a fundamental part of their schooling. The children were caught between their efforts to maintain their heritage and their native language, their need to express their evolving identities, and the belief systems of the teachers. Some of the teachers proactively and avidly worked to develop new socialization contexts that would assist the students to succeed in the school and in the community. However, most teachers were tentatively striving for these goals without the direction and support of any policies. To the credit of the teachers who attempted to ameliorate their situations, theirs was not an easy task, given the complexity of the policy needs and the acculturation issues, and the

fact that the language abilities of the students were widely distributed from monolingual Spanish speakers to proficient English speakers. The levels of literacy were just as broad and varied, non literate to literate in either or both languages, further compounding the formation and implementation of language policies and best practices. While the absence of a language policy divided the two cultural groups in particular instances, in some respects it served to bring them together through the facilitation of their social and cultural integration.

The experiences of this school district were not atypical of other districts that are in, or could soon encounter, a similar situation. Teachers across the nation are finding themselves in increasingly diverse classrooms with multiple languages spoken among their students. How districts take charge of their changing demographics, and what efforts they make to provide leadership and direction through policies grounded in best practices, will continue to affect their diverse students' levels of achievement. Moreover, it will affect to what extent they are integrated into their educational communities, and determine how they acculturate to the culture and to the social norms of their new environments. Finally, as broad sweeping state initiatives continue to erode the abilities of schools and teachers to meet the academic and social needs of increasingly diverse student populations, the necessity for educators to problem-solve their policies and language issues on their building and/or local levels will grow more acute.

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Endnotes

1. Throughout the community and the schools studied, the terms “migrant” and “Mexican” were used interchangeably by almost all of the non-Hispanic population when referring to the Hispanic students and parents. These non-discerning labels were based on a lack of knowledge about the children and the families. In reality, the majority of the families were immigrants from Mexico and the remaining Hispanic students were children of migrant parents, many of whom were U.S. citizens with employment histories in agriculture in the United States. There was a continual arrival and departure of Hispanic students. However, this did not correlate with their being either immigrants or migrants, Mexicans or Americans. The term “migrant” refers to workers in agricultural endeavors or to the specific federal Title I Migrant Education Program for which most of the Hispanic students in Clayton were eligible.
2. The names of the schools and the district, along with the informants, were altered in order to protect their confidentiality and their identities.
3. It should be noted that the acculturation process (i.e., the modification of one culture as a result of contact with a different culture) was more apparent among the Hispanics than the Euro-Americans. The assumption among the majority of the resident population was that the newly arrived Hispanics should assimilate into the larger community by divesting themselves of their old ways, and adopting the ways of the Euro-Americans. This attitude was an important contextual factor in the policymaking activities.
4. Although LEP is a controversial label in some circles and because it defines students in deficit terms of not knowing or being able to do something, it is used here to be consistent with federal and educational uses.
5. This research project was conducted throughout the pre K-12 system in the Clayton CUSD. It spanned four years, over 80 interviewees, several boxes of artifacts from the schools, and hundreds of pages of transcripts. Over time it became clear that the greatest conflict was centered in George Elementary, a 1-6 grade school. That is the most salient context for this particular discussion.
6. Among the immigrant Mexicans who worked in the meat packing plant were teachers, a medical doctor, engineers, and other professional people. This information was not available from the Excel Corporation which operated the plant, but came from the social networks of the Hispanic community and was known by the bilingual staff.

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