Two-way Bilingual Education and Latino Students

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Two-way bilingual immersion (TWBI) programs have demonstrated great success in improving Latino English learners' educational outcomes. Nevertheless, TWBI classrooms are not immune to the greater power dynamics and influences of United States society. This Participatory Action Research study brought together eight two-way bilingual immersion teachers from two school districts. The participants explored awareness of power imbalance and validation of cultural capital. They then collaborated to develop practices that promote cross-cultural competency in their TWBI classrooms. This study highlights changes that generate higher educational benefits for Latino English learners, thus fostering stronger, more socially just two-way bilingual immersion programs.

The Issues

Presently, the educational outcomes for Latinos in the United States are discouraging. According to data from the National Center of Education Statistics (2010) the achievement gap between White and Latino students has remained measurably unchanged for the past 20 years. Latino elementary and secondary students continue to score over 20 points lower than their White peers in both reading and math. When compared to White and African American students, Latinos have the highest high school drop out rate. Of the almost three million students in the U.S. who are English learners, the majority, 73 percent, speak Spanish (NCES, 2010). Given the large number of students identified as Spanish-speaking English learners, national and state education agencies cannot ignore the impact of Latino English learners on schools. Gándara (2010) noted that most current educational programs and teacher practices are not adequately meeting the needs of Latino English learners; Latino English learners continue to lag behind academically.

Ameliorating the dire state of Latino education will require a comprehensive net of political, social, and economic support. Fervent anti-immigration sentiment and debates regarding the political and civil rights of immigrants and their children have led to legislation and policies that control the language, curriculum, and resources in the classroom. Gándara (1995), Gay (2010), Pizarro (2005) and Valenzuela (1999) assert that Latinos are often trapped in alienating classrooms where they are expected to achieve in spite of curriculum, environment, and teacher practices that are linguistically incomprehensible, culturally irrelevant, and socially demeaning. As Horwitz et al (2009) uncovered, the education of our Latino English learners is often based on politics rather than on sound educational practices.

Gándara (2010) argues that addressing the serious concerns in the educational outcomes of Latino students requires a multifaceted continuum of support systems that follow the child from birth to bachelor's degree. Berliner (2009) further affirms that out-of-school factors associated with poverty, prejudice, and instructional policies and programs

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affect the educational achievement of this population. Yet, effective educational programming *can* improve these students' achievement and, as Lindholm-Leary and Genesee (2010) discovered, effective programming can help close the achievement gap. Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson (2001) noted that "schooling plays an important compensatory role" and that "schools do matter, and they matter the most when support for academic learning outside school is weak" (p. 184).

Culturally and linguistically appropriate education impacts students' school success and life chances. As Delpit (1995), Gándara (1995) (2010), Gay (2010), Irizarry & Raible (2011), Ladson-Billings (1995) and Sleeter (2012) have shown, improving the effectiveness of programs and teacher practices is a crucial step toward remedying the grave state of Latino educational outcomes. Teacher practice needs to be responsive to the linguistic, cultural, and social realities of Latino English learners.

Researchers such as Genesse, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders & Christian (2006) have demonstrated that Latino English learners in two-way immersion programs— that simultaneously provide native Spanish-speakers primary language instruction while teaching native English-speakers Spanish— have made great gains in closing the White-Latino achievement gap. TWBI programs provide academic content instruction to native English-speaking students and native speakers of the target language in the same classroom. Instruction is in both languages, one of which is the primary language of each group. Howard & Lindholm-Leary (2007) have established that high academic achievement in two languages, raising the status of the minority language and culture, and promoting integration and cross-cultural competence play a central role in TWBI programs. TWBI programs place a high value on the language and culture of Spanish speakers and challenge the notion of English and Eurocentric superiority. TWBI recognizes the value of the linguistic and cultural assets of Latino English learners.

Moreover, according to Howard, Sugarman and Christian (2003), students in well-implemented two-way immersion bilingual programs have reduced drop out rates, most students reported more positive attitudes to bilingualism and biculturalism, and by secondary school, native Spanish speakers achieved at or above grade level in reading and math. In an earlier longitude study, analyzing the achievement data of 210,054 English learners in several school districts and program models throughout the United States, Thomas and Collier (2002) concluded that students in dual language, bilingual immersion outperformed language minority students in all other program models. The authors further concluded that well implemented dual language programs could "reverse the negative effects" (p.5) of socioeconomic status when compared to other program models for English learners. In addition to improved performance on English standardized tests, Kohne (2006) found that Latinos in TWBI programs were also more likely than their peers in mainstream English-only programs to enroll in advanced coursework.

Theoretical Framework

Despite its effectiveness, TWBI faces a cultural bias that favors English, as well as an inequitable power balance among students. Teachers struggle with implementing cross-cultural competency because of the overarching societal forces that influence the classroom

social dynamics. Bourdieu's (1977, 1984, 1991) theories on cultural capital, offer a theoretical foundation for understanding said power relations.

The authors compared the general cultural background, knowledge, skills, and education of an individual to economic goods. They termed the value of this background cultural capital. Individuals use their "capital" to negotiate and position themselves within social structures. This "socially inherited 'linguistic and cultural competence'" as Swartz (1977) explains, "facilitates achievement in school" (p. 547). Thus, an imbalance in the cultural capital between native English-speakers and native Spanish-speakers in a TWBI classroom will likely lead to inequitable educational outcomes. In order to achieve the goal of equitable linguistic and cultural balance, TWBI teachers should facilitate the distribution of cultural capital in their classrooms. Without this, TWBI programs will continue to "favor those who are culturally privileged" (p.550) and reproduce inequitable social class structures and power relationships. Thus, establishing organizational routines that promote the cultural capital of Latino English learners may strengthen cross-cultural competency, which in turn would lead to the creation of stronger, more equitable TWBI programs.

Purpose of the Study

Certainly, an abundance of research has shown that TWBI is a sound model for English learners. The research of Block (2007), Christian, Genesse & Lindholm-Leary (2004), Howard et al. (2003), Kohne (2006), Lindholm-Leary (2005), Lindholm-Leary & Genesse (2010) and Thomas & Collier (1997) (2002) bear out the success of the TWBI model for English learners. Therefore, the effectiveness of TWBI in comparison to other programs is well established. The aim of this study is to explore concerns within the TWBI program and fortify an already strong program model.

Methodology

Design of the Study

This study examined teacher awareness of cultural capital between native English-speakers and native Spanish-speakers in the TWBI classroom. The study operationalized this inquiry by analyzing teacher descriptions of the social dynamics in their classrooms, specifically noting teacher awareness of power imbalance regarding the validation of cultural capital between native English-speakers and native Spanish-speakers.

This was a qualitative study that involved Participatory Action Research (PAR). The author, the principal investigator, chose to use PAR because this research method is a well-suited approach to analyze the concern of power dynamics within the TWBI classroom. The principal investigator sought a research approach that is democratic and equitable in nature among all participants: a cadre of eight two-way bilingual immersion teachers from two school districts and the principal investigator. The participants are stakeholders embedded in the area of concern and have a mutual interest to bring about change. Berg & Lune (2004) and Walter (2009) note that PAR is a commonly used approach in educational research because it focuses on improving teaching and learning practices.

The study adhered to the five action research goals and the associated validity criteria addressed by Herr and Anderson (2005): democratic, dialogic, process, catalytic, and outcome validity. The principal investigator honored the democratic nature of the action

research framework by being collaborative and sensitive to the needs and recommendations of the co-participants.

While being receptive to collaboration, the researcher executed the study with process validity and rigor. The study followed a qualitative research format using Creswall's (2011) six steps in analyzing and interpreting qualitative data: (a) prepare and organize the data for analysis; (b) explore and code the data; (c) use codes to develop general themes; (d) represent and report findings; (e) interpret findings; and (f) validate the accuracy of the findings. The data included over 30 hours of individual interviews and focus group conversations. This discourse was recorded and transcribed. Later, the transcriptions were analyzed using the HyperResearch qualitative analysis software. The process of analysis involved multiple readings of the transcriptions, applying codes to the participants' responses, and examining these codes for themes. To reinforce the trustworthiness of the data and findings, the researcher followed Cresswell's (1994) recommendation of triangulating the data through classroom observation, member checking, and external audit. Participants checked the accuracy of the transcripts and findings and non-participant two-way immersion teachers reviewed the process and findings.

The goals and outcomes of this study were also aligned with the catalytic and outcome validity criteria of action research. The participants in the study stated that becoming involved with the focus groups helped raise their awareness of power and cultural capital imbalance and influenced their teaching. Classroom observation revealed the accuracy of the teachers self-reporting. Furthermore, the participants expressed a desire to continue to network with other teachers.

This study included eight fourth through sixth grade teachers at two dual immersion programs from two different school districts and the principal investigator. In the first phase of the study the researcher interviewed the teacher participants. They discussed their background, understanding of cross cultural competency, the social dynamics between native English-speaking students and native Spanish-speaking students and the organizational routines they use to promote cultural capital in their classrooms.

After the first phase of individual interviews, the eight participants met, in phase two of the study, as a community of inquiry, action and reflection. The community reviewed the research results and looked at the pedagogy implemented in the classroom. The community then reflected on and discussed practices which promoted equitable linguistic and social interactions among students. The teachers planned how they could incorporate these strategies into their classroom practice. Throughout the week, this community of eight teachers kept journals. They reflected on the successes and challenges they encountered in their efforts to incorporate culturally responsive teaching strategies and encourage equitable distribution of centrality and status in their classroom. The community met frequently to review the initial study results, studied the literature, shared insights from their struggles and successes and reflected on how, as a collective, they could incorporate the learning into an action plan in their classrooms.

At the end of the study, phase three, the eight teachers participated in a final individual, structured interview series. As a triangulation tactic, the principal investigator also observed each teacher during classroom instruction.

Setting

Four of the teacher participants and this writer, the principal investigator, taught in the Ridgeline Unified School District (RUSD). These four teacher participants were teachers at Creekside Elementary School. With 730 students, Creekside is one of RUSD's three Title I schools. The school population is predominately White (59%), followed by Latino/Hispanic (27%), Asian (7%) and African American (2%) (Ed-Data Website, 2012). Because of the high housing costs in the area, most of the students come from affluent families. However, 19% of the student population is on free or reduced lunch. Spanish is the primary language of the majority of the school's limited English proficient students. About 15% of the Creekside students are limited English proficient. 13% of the school's students are Spanish-speaking English learners (Ed-Data Website, 2012). The school's dual immersion program began in the fall of 1998 as a 90:10 model with one kindergarten and one first grade class. By 2012, about half of the school's classes were dual immersion classes, including a long, mostly native English-speakers waiting list.

The other four teacher participants were from Main Street K-8 School in the Vineyard Valley Unified School District (VVJUSD). Main Street has a total enrollment of 770 students. It is designated as a Title I school. At Main Street, the majority of the school population—61%—is Latino/Hispanic, followed by 24% White and 4% African American (Ed-Data Website, 2012). Main Street has 38% of the student body identified as English learners. Most of the school's limited English proficient students' primary language is Spanish. A majority of the student body (61%) receive free or reduced lunch (Ed-Data Website, 2012).

The Main Street dual immersion program is a strand in a small elementary program. This dual immersion program follows the 50:50 model. It was formerly a transitional bilingual program. Initially, the program had difficulty attracting and keeping native English-speakers; as a result, the first few cohorts are predominately Latino Spanish-speakers. The sixth and fifth grade classes became almost entirely native Spanish-speakers. As word about the program spread, more native English-speaking parents enrolled their children. The kindergarten through second grade classes now have close to a 50 percent mix of each student group.

Findings and Discussion

Teacher Awareness of Distribution of Cultural Capital

The participants' descriptions revealed that socioeconomic background has a stronger influence on social dynamics and cultural capital disparity than linguistic and ethnic factors. Isabel, a teacher participant, emphasized, "[I]t's all tied into socioeconomics. . . .I see that the dominant English group, for the most part—there are exceptions—but for the most part are just at a higher socioeconomic range" (I. Cruz, personal communication, November 1, 2012). Certainly, throughout the study's findings, participants stressed that the imbalance of power and participation in the classroom was more closely associated with class than with linguistic or ethnic background. Lola, another teacher participant, described her classroom academic and power dynamics as divided by class status. She stated, "I don't see an actual language division, but I see more of a socioeconomic division in my class" (L. Peña, personal communication, November 7, 2012).

The participants expressed that the chief influence on socially valued linguistic and cultural competencies was the socioeconomic background of the students. Data showed that a student's social class had a greater impact on the students' classroom social interactions and academic outcomes. In the classrooms studied, the majority of the native English-speakers shared a middle class background, whereas, most of the native Spanish-speakers came from a lower social class. Language and ethnicity were often linked with socioeconomic status. Students from a higher social class, usually the native English-speakers, displayed more confidence and, if left unmanaged, dominated classroom participation. Teacher participant, Ana Lucia, described her native English-speaking students. "My English-speakers are aggressive, dominating, outspoken, control classroom discussions. My Spanish speakers are passive, pretty much as a whole, passive, aren't outspoken. . . . .They don't see themselves as equals in some ways" (A. Reyes, personal communication, February 6, 2013).

Although the participants emphasized that socioeconomic status had the greatest impact on social dynamics and cultural capital, they also pointed out the effect of societal attitudes towards racialized groups and English dominance. In fact, the participants repeatedly mentioned their efforts to combat depreciating societal attitudes towards Latino culture and Spanish language. They felt that Euro-centrism and English preeminence were prevalent forces with which to contend. All of the teacher participants spoke of a society that placed a greater esteem on English and American norms. The surrounding culture in the community and the school favored English and American culture. Assemblies, support classes, visitors, announcements and tests that assess many of the "important" aspects of school life are in English. Students receive messages of which language and culture is valued. Susan, a participant from Main Street, stated that it is difficult to fight against the society and culture that surrounds us. "So one of the dynamics is that just English is the language of interaction in the school, on the playground. It's really hard to fight that tide. In some ways it's what the culture is around us, the society." (S. Parker, personal communication, November 11, 2012) The participants indicated that the Latinos' passivity was not due to ethnic factors but to class distinctions. Native Spanish-speaking students from educated, middle class families also dominated and took on central roles in classroom interactions. As one of the teacher participants from Creekside, Veronica, stated, "I do have Latino kids that are participating… It's not so much Anglo/Latino" (V. Bell, personal communication November 5, 2012).

Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) theory of habitus—internalized self-perceptions and demeanor, influenced by an individual's social relations, class status and cultural capital—explained these social dynamics. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) posited that schools perpetuate the culture and preeminence of the dominant class. The dominant social classes possess the linguistic and cultural competence that is considered legitimate and valued in the educational system. Through social interactions, a student internalizes her subordinate status; she develops an identity, behavior patterns, and aspirations in response to her social class and expected role in society. Thus, the Spanish-speakers' submissive demeanor fit Bourdieu and Passeron's theories of social class dynamics.

TWBI educators often use a native English-speaker/native Spanish-speaker lens to monitor and make instructional decisions. This two-way lens may not reveal the predominant distinctions between the student groups. As a result, TWBI educators may not be sufficiently cognizant of the impact of socioeconomic differences on equity concerns. Awareness of

socioeconomic influences will provide TWBI teachers with greater clarity to fine-tune their instructional decision-making.

Cultural Capital Awareness Influence on Teacher Cross-cultural Competence and Practice

As the participants in this study expanded their awareness of power imbalance in their classrooms they sought to develop practices to build up the native Spanish-speakers' cultural capital. They felt a personal responsibility to reflect and master cultural competency within themselves and then to model and convey that capability to their students. Isabel emphasized the importance of internalizing cultural competency and then transmitting it to her students stating, "We have to be the number one model for them, to be the example for them. Make them feel proud and encourage them. . . .Build that capital. Give that power" (I. Cruz, personal communication, February 1, 2013). The participants sought ways to create "an even playing field" in their classrooms. They believed that they played a role in advocating for and managing equitable social interactions. This commitment and sense of responsibility positively impacted the participants' teaching practice.

Developing awareness of the ramifications of unbalanced distribution of cultural capital influenced the participants' teaching practice. Identifying the need to establish more equity in their classrooms prompted the participants to incorporate organizational routines that promoted the cultural capital of their native Spanish-speaking students. By taking responsibility for their teaching practice, they took steps to counter the societal forces that led to inequitable classroom social dynamics and contributed to unfavorable Latino educational outcomes. These routines focused on teacher accountability, awareness, and advocacy. The participants recognized that if left to chance, inequitable power dynamics would take over. The teachers acknowledged their role in nurturing a culturally competent environment; they needed to be cognizant of unbalanced situations and be willing to intervene. Cross-cultural competency required constant vigilance, monitoring, and implementation.

The participants noted that an important organizational routine to promote cultural capital in the TWBI classroom was to involve parents and students beyond the school day. The Main Street participants pointed out the effectiveness of after school programs. Main Street participants indicated that these programs contributed to student academic success, connectedness with school, sense of cultural pride and confidence. The dual immersion teachers at Main Street took an active role in promoting these activities and involving families. The Creekside participants noted that their economically disadvantaged Latino families did not have the access to expensive classes, extra-curricular activities, and tutoring that advantaged many of their native English-speaking students. The participants identified family and student outreach as an important organizational routine that promoted cross-cultural understanding, built students' cultural capital and minimized the discrepancies between the students with different financial resources. The participants realized that to achieve equity among all of their students, the teachers, school, and district needed to cast out a net that reached beyond their classroom walls.

Promoting Cultural Capital, Confronting Challenges, Taking on Advocacy Roles

Despite this strong commitment to promote the cultural capital of their native Spanish-speaking students, the participants struggled. They were mindful to incorporate effective routines into their practice, yet they saw that they did not always reach their goals: English

ruled as the language of status, native English-speaking students dominated classroom participation, and students often continued to self-segregate socially. The participants felt that they needed more support. Most had received some training. Project GLAD was specifically identified; the participants had implemented the concepts and strategies they had learned, yet they felt they still needed additional instruction. The participants voiced needing more professional development in improving their practice to develop cross-cultural practices. Their voluntary participation in this study indicated their active search for more training.

Most of the participants shared a high degree of motivation to seek training, implement new learning, and modify their practice. The participants were interested in an opportunity to collaborate with other teachers in order to improve their teaching. Several of the participants related how their background and experiences had prompted them to teach in a two-way program. They may have fallen into teaching in a two-way program because they had the language skills, but they continued to teach in the program because of a strong commitment to the goals of TWBI. All eight participants had experienced living in a country where they spoke the non-dominant language. Six were Latinos(as). They possessed similarities in ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds that led them to be sympathetic to the difficulties that Latino, English learners experience. Confronting the difficulties of establishing the balance required by TWBI pushed the participants to take on advocacy roles.

Witnessing social, cultural, and linguistic imbalance, and struggling to ameliorate this inequity creates a fertile ground for teachers to become advocates. The demands and challenges of implementing TWBI equity goals may lead TWBI teachers to develop greater awareness of inequitable educational outcomes and power balance. As a result, they may be more disposed to assume much needed advocacy roles on behalf of their students. The teacher participants in this study possessed personal backgrounds that primed them to notice injustices in their classrooms. They were receptive to developing greater awareness of the inequitable power distribution. In turn, they applied their expanded consciousness to building the cultural capital of their Latino students.

Recommendations

Address the Effects of the Social Class Gap in the TWBI Programs

I recommend that TWBI educators acknowledge and address the effects of the social class gap in the TWBI programs. Differences in socioeconomic status influence the social dynamics and validation of cultural capital. Educators need to be cognizant of how this may play out in the classroom and address it with professional development and training that focuses on meeting the needs of low-income students. Furthermore, policymakers and educators need to recognize that teacher classroom practices will not make the many consequences of poverty disappear. Federal, state, and district policymakers need to dedicate resources to cast a wider net of support for economically disadvantaged native Spanish-speakers.

When making program decisions, distributing resources, and fine-tuning instructional practices, TWBI educators need to discard the traditional two-way lens that categorizes the student groups by language and heritage background; TWBI educators should consider and address socioeconomic factors as well. Furthermore, policymakers, educators, and social justice advocates need to muster the political courage to develop multi-faceted approaches to

Latino student education that entail social supports that extend beyond the school walls. Although student language/ethnic background and social class usually converged in the classrooms studied, this confluence may not occur in every situation/classroom. Social class distinctions exist within the native Spanish-speaking population as well. In order to clarify the predominant factors impeding equitable power balance and integration, TWBI educators need to reconsider the two-way lens and put on trifocals.

Implement and Strengthen Two-way Bilingual Immersion Programs to Address Latino English Learner Educational Needs

When examining program options for English learners, policymakers and district administrators should adopt a long-term approach to educating Latino English learners. Policymakers, administrators and teacher education programs should be mindful of the research supporting the effectiveness of TWBI programs in combating the inequitable educational outcomes for Latino English learners. They should seek ways to develop TWBI programs, strengthen program components, and support two-way immersion teachers.

Extend Studies to Include the Role of Social Class in TWBI Social Dynamics

Additionally, I recommend researchers continue to explore ways to strengthen the cultural competency component of TWBI. This study can be extended to include larger numbers of participants, school sites, and different demographical combinations. I also suggest that researchers study the effects of the student demographical make up on the social dynamics and educational outcomes of TWBI students. The demographic mix should take into account socioeconomic class in addition to language and ethnic background. Studies analyzing the social dynamics and cultural capital of students when the majority of the Latino native Spanish-speakers are of a higher socioeconomic class than the native English-speakers may shed more light on the role of social class in TWBI social dynamics, cultural capital and cultural competency.

Improving Latino Education through Stronger, More Socially Just TWBI Programs

To summarize, as socially responsible leaders and educators, we must explore ways to better address the educational and sociopolitical issues that confront Latinos in the United States. Extensive research supports that Latino English learners in two-way bilingual immersion programs make greater academic gains and have more favorable attitudes about school and their heritage than Latino English learners in other programs. Through the core TWBI goals of ensuring equity, valuing diversity, encouraging integration, and promoting academic rigor for all students, TWBI program educators have the opportunity to empower the underserved Latino population. To implement TWBI programs properly, it is crucial that the status of the minority language and culture be on par with English and American culture. Both languages and cultures must have equal capital. Despite the TWBI emphasis on equity, teachers and students are impacted by social, cultural, and political influences of the communities to which they belong. This study shed light on the challenges TWBI teachers face implementing culturally competent educational environments. It also explored teacher awareness of cultural capital distribution, and the ways which teachers can improve their practice to promote cross-cultural competency and equitable interactions and engagement in the TWBI classroom. Such changes generate higher educational benefits for Latino English learners, thus fostering stronger, more socially just two-way bilingual immersion programs.

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