

# Children's Cultural Identity Formation: Experiences in a Dual Language Program<sup>1</sup>

Formación de la Identidad Cultural de los Niños: Experiencias en un Programa de Lenguaje Dual

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## Abstract

The role of cultural identity in bilingual programs has barely been discussed in regard to second language acquisition (SLA). This research study focuses on providing relevant information that would help in providing more information about the experiences that an elementary student has during the second language learning process in a bilingual program within a multicultural context. This qualitative study took place in a Dual Language Program in a public elementary school in Northern Virginia, USA. A total of 17 students were immersed in a 50:50 program, that is, 50% of the classes were in English and the other 50% in Spanish. The information was collected using in person interviews, focus group sessions, participants' artifacts, and field observations. The experiences that emerged as contributors to children's cultural identity formation include receiving others' influence, living situations as determiners of languages switch, and using two languages as a key aspect in self-esteem improvement.

*Keywords:* identity; acculturation; bilingual education; dual language program; second language; elemental education; childhood

## Resumen

El papel de la identidad cultural en programas bilingües ha sido escasamente discutido, en relación con la adquisición de una segunda lengua. Esta investigación se enfoca en dar información relevante que ayuda a tener un mejor conocimiento sobre las experiencias que un estudiante de educación elemental tiene durante el proceso de aprendizaje de una segunda lengua en un programa bilingüe, dentro de un contexto multicultural. Este

<sup>1</sup> Received: April 30th 2018/ Accepted: May 8th 2019

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estudio cualitativo tuvo lugar en colegio elemental público en Virginia del Norte, USA., en el que 17 estudiantes estaban inmersos en un programa 50:50, es decir, 50% de las clases eran en inglés y el otro 50%, en español. La información fue recolectada a través de entrevistas personales, sesiones de grupo focal y observaciones de participantes y de campo. El recibo de la influencia de otros, la vivencia de situaciones como determinantes del cambio de lengua y el uso de dos lenguas, como factor importante en el mejoramiento de la autoestima, fueron las experiencias que surgieron como contribuciones a la formación de la identidad cultural de los niños.

*Palabras clave:* identidad; aculturación; educación bilingüe; programa de lenguaje dual; segunda lengua; educación elemental; infancia

### Resumo

O papel da identidade cultural em programas bilíngues tem sido escassamente discutido, em relação com a aquisição de uma segunda língua. Esta pesquisa se enfoca em dar informação relevante que ajuda a ter um melhor conhecimento sobre as experiências que um estudante de educação elementar tem durante o processo de aprendizagem de uma segunda língua em um programa bilíngue, dentro de um contexto multicultural. Este estudo qualitativo teve lugar em colégio fundamental público em Virgínia do Norte, USA., no qual 17 estudantes estavam imersos em um programa 50:50, melhor dito, 50% das aulas eram em inglês e o outro 50%, em espanhol. A informação foi coletada através de entrevistas pessoais, sessões de grupo focal e observações de participantes e de campo. O recebimento da influência de outros, a vivência de situações como determinantes da mudança de língua e o uso de duas línguas, como fator importante no melhoramento da autoestima, foram as experiências que surgiram como contribuições à formação da identidade cultural das crianças.

*Palavras chave:* identidade; aculturação; educação bilíngue; programa de linguagem dual; segunda língua; educação elementar; infância

## Introduction

**L**earning one or more languages, other than one's native language, is an important issue in the globalized world we live in today. The U.S.A., though a global power, is not the exception, especially if we take into account that this country is composed of a variety of people who belong to a diversity of cultures (Silbernagel, 2015). In this country, it is a well established fact that people are likely to have more cultural, social, and economic opportunities when they acquire a second language. According to Welsh Language Board (1999), the acquisition of a second language enhances children's communication, as well as promotes bilingualism and bi-literacy. In addition, it helps learners recognize the diversity of other cultures, and it is economically beneficial for learners.

Milambiling (2011) referred to the fact that, nowadays, there is greater opportunity to be in contact with different languages, groups, and cultures. Nonetheless, speaking two or more languages can make the difference on where a person lives, as well as define their educational and career choices. Additionally, Rhodes and Pufahl (2009) reinforced Milambiling's position in saying that "Providing second language experiences and knowledge about other cultures is key to any country's ability to remain competitive and increasingly recognized as critical to economic success, national security, and international relations" (as cited by Soderman, 2010, p. 55). Consequently, different school districts around the country have developed Two-Way Immersion (TWI) programs in response to an increase in diversity among their population. The idea behind these programs is to develop bilingual proficiency for both language minority and majority students in the same setting. Furthermore, these programs promote a positive attitude toward languages and diverse cultures. This particular form of TWI is a Dual Language Program (DLP), in which both native English speakers and native speakers of a partner language are integrated to develop bilingualism and bi-literacy in English and another language. Both the L1 and L2 are taught together in an effort to develop full bilingualism and bi-literacy for both groups. According to Potowski (2007), Dual Immersion Programs look to promote not just the development of two languages, but also positive cross-cultural attitudes. In addition to the previous aspects, Potowski (2004) added that another goal of these kinds of programs is to develop students' self-esteem.

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For the following study, the focus is less on the cognitive process of second language acquisition in children who attend a DLP, but more about the connection between culture and identity formation among younger learners. Moreover, I seek to reflect on young learners' cultural experiences and their attitudes toward the complex world in which they live in. The objective of this study will be to describe these experiences, which contribute to the children's cultural identity formation, while participating in a Dual Language Program.

Krashen (2004, as cited in Mercuri, 2008) indicated that studies about DLP were limited, but because of their design and methodology they can be considered useful. The current study may be added to this field since its goal is to help support the benefits that bilingual, cross-cultural programs can provide. Mercuri, who talks about “Capital Social”, explained how cultural heritage can be transformed into social resources, and it can be included in the educative system (Mercuri, 2008, p. 92).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Bilingual Education**

According to Cohen (1975), bilingual education is the use and instruction of two languages in part or all of the school curriculum. It is also acknowledged that bilingual education includes the concept of bicultural education because language cannot be separated from culture. As Hammers and Blanc (1995) stated, language interacts with culture in defined ways, such as being the transmitter and tool used for internalization of culture by the individual.

According to the National Association for Bilingual Education, NABE, an American advocacy group, bilingual education has different goals, such as English instruction, promoting academic achievement, acculturation of immigrants, support for heritage language and culture, and the opportunity for English speakers to acquire a second language. In conformity with this, the U.S. Congress defined the term “bilingual education program” as an instructional program in P.L. 95-561, which is also known as the Bilingual Act. These types of programs are designed for children who have limited English proficiency, in which the instruction, study of, and extent of that language depend on the number of years the program is applicable. The objective is for the child to progressively acquire the desired competence in English through the educational system (Malarz, 2015).

According to Mercuri (2008) English Immersion, English as a Second Language, Transitional Bilingual, Late Exit Programs, and Dual Language Programs or Two-Way Bilingual Programs are models of programs that can be considered as bilingual education programs. She explained that each one of the programs establishes a different approach to the concept of bilingualism. In addition, these models share common goals like to achieve challenging academic skills and adequate knowledge depending on the child’s age, as well to understand and value cross cultural differences (Mercuri, 2008, p. 89).

## Dual Language Programs, DLP

DLP, also known as TWI programs, instruct native English speakers and native speakers of another language to develop academic proficiency in both languages beginning in kindergarten for a minimum of six years. According to Genesee (1999), TWI Programs aim at bilingual proficiency, high academic achievement, and cross-cultural understanding among participating students. Two-way implies that each native speaker can be a model for the native speaker of the other language. In other words, learners become peer teachers and language models for one another.

Based on Howard and Sugarman (2007), enrichment 90-10 and 50-50 are the two basic models in dual language education. The variation between these programs is the time of instruction for each language, as well as the literacy instruction used for the 90-10 model. The 50-50 model has a balance between L1 and second language (hereinafter L2) in academic content areas, which means that 50% of instruction is taught in the target (partner language) or minority language and the other 50% in the majority language. In the 90-10 model, students are immersed 90% of their school day in the L2.

Moreover, these dual language experiences have helped students become comfortable with speaking the second language and interacting with members from other ethnographic groups. In relation to this, Ruiz (1984) declared that these kinds of programs have helped create cross-cultural school communities and have eased the pressure between diverse language groups. In view of this, TWI Programs have also built cultural fellowship amongst all participants, such as children, parents, teachers, and administrators. Similarly, bilingual programs have recognized that acquiring a language involves learning the culture that is expressed through the language. Generally speaking, a DLP also values children's cultural and diverse characteristics and encourages them to maintain their native language, which reinforces their cultural identity.

## Identity and Cultural Identity

To link the terms of identity and cultural identity, it may be relevant to consider Monzo and Rueda (2009) and Nieto (2010), presented by Mercuri (2014), because they explain that culture goes beyond external aspects of a person's life, rather it moves toward those intangible aspects, such as religious beliefs, the nature of language, and the values that shape the way a person thinks, behaves, and views the world.

Nieto presented seven key characteristics for culture. One of them is that culture is learned through families and communities. Nieto highlighted the fact that bilingual/bicultural education is an example of the intent of communities and individuals to maintain their language and traditions alive. This is done

by means of a curriculum that permeates students' culture and language and fosters intercultural tolerance (as cited in Mercuri, 2014).

There is a relationship between individual identity and language use. Certainly, the daily use of the language represents a particular identity. The role that language plays in the formation and expression of identity is without a doubt an influential one. Language allows for flexibility between race and ethnicity in every society, where individuals are able to consciously or unconsciously express different identities by the linguistic choices they make.

Moreover, when individuals become aware of their own culture, learning about other people's cultures may seem less difficult. Recognizing that everyone has unique traditions, values, and beliefs that are important to them (ethnic identity, language, religion and formal/informal community, neighborhood, and family connections) helps us see how we are connected, build trust, and foster stronger relationships. Certainly, ethnic heritage instruction is something that teachers should promote. By doing so, educators support their students during the acquisition of a second language; it provides learners with a transcendental support for their learning process, their academic development, and their social skills.

### **Acculturation**

Based on Redfield, Lenton, and Herskovits (1936), acculturation is viewed as a process that happens when two autonomous groups are in direct contact with one another, which results in changes within the original culture of either or both cultures. Miranda and Umhoefer (1998, p. 159) conceptualized biculturalism as being in the "intermediate level of acculturation". Being at the intermediate level may be considered as processing a balance between one's cultural values and those of the host culture.

Generally, acculturation is a cultural learning process where individuals are exposed to new cultures. Usually this occurs when one culture comes into contact with another culture, and these groups interact or "acculturate" to each other mainly in the context of immigration. However, the true meaning of acculturation is more complex than just the adoption of norms from the majority group. With this in mind, this research study considers acculturation as a process of adaptation, which is dynamic and multidimensional, that occurs when different cultures converge in contact. That process involves different degrees and instances of culture learning and maintenance that depend on factors like the individual, group, or environment (Balls, Marín and Chun, 2010).

So, essentially this is a continuous and dynamic process. It is affected by the personal and social experiences of the individual. However, when someone

has been exposed to two or more cultures, changes take place. Generally, there are changes in behavior, which include changes in speech, food preferences, clothing styles, and identity.

Furthermore, according to Berry (2003), there are also emotional reactions, such as anxiety, depression, or happiness. In addition, there are individual attitudes and orientations toward the culture of origin and the other group pertaining to the new culture. As a result, individuals create either a positive or negative response to their home culture, or their heritage culture. Additionally, the individual could also have a positive or negative response to the new culture.

Bearing in mind the focus of this study, it is important to highlight that Mercuri (2008) said that students in a DLP may learn languages, as well as cultures, according to each one of the linguistic groups they have the chance to share with. This is because apart from sharing the language, students are also sharing life experiences. Therefore, the goal is that each student takes advantage of the cultural capital that each person brings to the classroom.

### **Methodology**

This study took place in a Spanish/English Dual Language Elementary school in Northern Virginia. The DLP was 50-50, which means that 50% of classes were in English and the other 50% in Spanish. The participants, who were the focus of this study, were randomly selected under the following criteria. First, the sample size needed to be small enough to carry out the study with the available resources and time. Second, the linguistically and culturally diverse population should be representative of the sample. Finally, the prospective participants could be approachable during the research. After identifying the characteristics of the target population, a random sample process was organized, which resulted in a sample of 17 students. Their ages ranged from 5 to 11 years old. The participants' names were changed bearing in mind ethical considerations. This study was developed during a year starting in March 2013, when permission from the school's principal was given.

Teaching in the target languages took place for 7.5 hours per day. Students learned crucial subjects entirely in Spanish like Language and Math. Later in the day, they switched and learned only in English. In some cases, they had never even heard Spanish spoken before. However, the students received support from other instructional professionals, volunteers, or even parents, who came a few times a week and helped students during the development of the activities. This last aspect is supported by Lang et al. (2009), who argued that efforts to join immigrant parents in all of the processes carried out in U.S. schools would break down cultural barriers and create opportunities for all.

For this case study, the qualitative paradigm was the key design used to link the research questions to the methodological approaches. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative research involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its matter. That means that qualitative researchers study things as they are and try to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. It is an unfolding of different interpretations that evolves throughout the whole process and helps the researcher to obtain knowledge from the point of view of those who participate. Indeed, utilizing a qualitative method helps researchers become familiar with the way participants interpret their reality. In the same way, for Bogdan and Biklen (2007), a case study is “a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event” (p. 196). This research method helps to conduct a meaningful analysis of a particular place, group, or phenomenon. Therefore, it provides an opportunity to understand why individuals do certain things, what motivates them, and how they explain what they were doing.

The main information for this research was collected using in-person interviews, focus group sessions, participant observations, and field observations. Additionally, surveys, questionnaires, school documents, and students’ work samples were used to gather relevant information. The purpose of collecting data was to obtain different sources in order to understand the participant’s perspectives according to the main focus of the study.

The data collection instruments mentioned above were methodologically applied during different moments of the research implementation. The reason for obtaining data through these instruments was so that the researcher could ask open-ended questions. In doing so, the researcher was able to look at all of the possible ways that the participants used the targeted languages to relate to their own cultural identity.

### **Instructional Design**

The study began with short visits to the classroom where the participants were located in order to develop a sense of familiarity between them and the researcher. This helped the children become more relaxed when having another adult in the classroom different from their main teacher. The 17 students answered questionnaires and surveys related to general information, language use, and language attitudes. These were followed up by individual meetings and group conversations. In addition, the participants’ parents also collaborated by completing two surveys (see Appendix 1) and a questionnaire.

Participant observations were completed in the Spanish and English classrooms. Students were also observed during some classes like Science,



Art, Music, Physical Education. Also, the participants were observed in places other than their classroom, such as the library, cafeteria, and playground. In total, there were two face-to-face interviews with each case participant. One was conducted at the beginning of the study, while the other was conducted at the end of the study. The interview questions were related to family background, language use, likes and dislikes, and other cultural aspects. It was also important to have open-ended questions, which allowed the participants to provide more information. Digital audio files for each of the students' interview were recorded.

### **Data Analysis**

For this study, Grounded Theory was the most accurate approach in analyzing the data. According to Strauss and Corbin (2008), this theory is inductively derived from the study of the phenomena it represents. In fact, Grounded Theory aims at being inductive, which means that the only idea is to generate, or discover theory. Three stages of data analysis are involved in Grounded Theory: open-coding, axial, and selective. Open coding is a procedure used to develop categories of information. Axial coding refers to the interconnections of the categories, and selective coding relates to identifying particular categories or codes that form some kind of core, or essential concept, which can elucidate many aspects of the situation that the researcher is looking at.

Close attention was paid to each transcript in order to develop a better understanding about each participant. Then, the researcher began the stage of open coding, which is the procedure of developing categories of information. It implies studying the data collected with a more analytical point of view, so the researcher highlighted any statement that had a relationship to the broad categories and differences within each code (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

Later on, the researcher started to create other sub-categories using interconnections among the categories that the researcher had already named. This process allowed the researcher to discover relevant information, although there were certain issues that required further consideration. There was a consistent comparison between the data, categories, and theory, in which relevant information related to each other within the same data. It was a process of seeking the instances that represented the categories established by the researcher. Additionally, the researcher continued to look for new information until no further insight was provide for a specific category. Finally, the researcher selected the codes, which were necessary in constructing the explanations.

## Findings and Discussion

Since the main concern of this study was to discover which of the participants' experiences contributed to cultural identity formation while participating in a DLP, and after having developed the process of analysis explained formerly, the researcher concluded that those experiences can be clarified in the following categories:

### Receiving others' influence

Each participant shared very similar points of view about his/her dual language experience, as well as similar childhood patterns. However, each participant's contribution has a unique print that reveals their particular personalities. The information that they shared portrayed fundamental aspects of their lives, such as family structure, preferences, and culture like ethnicity, language (s), beliefs, values, and family traditions. Focus group sessions provided contexts for observing the participants' active engagement with their experiences as dual language learners, and the interviews were very helpful in constructing the descriptions of their cultural lives within and beyond the school. This was complemented by the questionnaires (see Appendix 2). Each one of the participants performed both cultural and social roles throughout their participation in a DLP. As they engaged with all of the different activities throughout the day, each child showed their individual preferences and life through their own cultural world.

Within this first category, a subcategory emerged that showed how the participants were aware of who they are as people, as well as how others have influenced them.

**Me, my family, and my community.** Bearing in mind the main concern of this study, it is important to review the way cultural identity is defined within the literature review. Through this definition and after the collection of data for this study, the researcher determined that the cultural identity formation of children is connected to the different choices children make in regard to their behaviors, preferences, and social and cultural roles. Cultural identity, according to Deng (2005), "answer the questions of 'Who am I?', 'Where are we going?' and 'What do we Have?'" (pp 39-41). Likewise, Norton and Toohey (2002) suggested that cultural identity answers questions that are linked to who the person is, how the person relates to the social world, and under what conditions the person speaks. On the contrary, Meca, Sabet, Farrelly, Benitez, Schwartz, Gonzales-Backen, Lorenzo-Blanco, Unger, Zamboanga, Baezconde-Garbanati, Picariello, Des Rosiers, Soto, Pattarroyo, Villamar, and Lizzi, (2017), based on different authors, such as Syed and Juang (2014) and

Waterman (1999), clearly differentiated between personal identity and cultural identity. They explained that personal identity was related to the person by himself or herself, while cultural identity referred to the way individuals defined themselves in relation to the cultural groups they belonged to (p. 349).

The focus group sessions offered an opportunity to learn about the children's perceptions regarding their experience with dual language participation (see Appendix 3). It also allowed the researcher to see some of the different roles and behaviors that participants adopted when they worked on concepts related to culture. The participants expressed their cultural preferences through interviews and the creation of artifacts. They described themselves in terms of their general attributes, family structure, and experiences as dual language learners. The learners' daily context influenced their perceptions about language and culture. Children care about those who are very important to them, primarily their parents, close relatives, and even friends. They see the people who are part of their world as family and community members. Based on the concept of "Capital Social", provided by Mercuri (2008), there are different positive relationships that students share with other people at school, but at the same time, there are support relationships at home. That is why both contexts, school and home, may influence the perception of language and culture.

Every participant within the DLP is an active contributor to the system itself. From that perspective, the term "social role" was considered as a type of influence that other people may have on a participant's behavior. Indeed, human beings live each experience in a particular way and behave differently depending on the social role s/he plays at that moment. Social roles involve being a daughter, son, student, friend, relative, or teacher. In fact, each role has an important connection with the different settings where the participants live. Each person takes on different roles during the day, and s/he shift between them daily. According to Chen (2015), as bilinguals acquire a language in different contexts, the use of a specific language evokes its associated attitudes and behaviors (2015, p. 7). The child cannot be influenced just by the role s/he plays in a specific moment, but also by the language s/he uses at a specific time.

Thanks to the time the researcher spent with the students during the collection of data, she was able to become more aware of the influence family background has on the way children experience their participation in the DLP. This notion is represented in the following situation, where Lauren, who speaks Spanish fluently, emphasized the following:

*Lauren: I am very comfortable speaking in Spanish. My dad always says to me "Honey, you are doing great with your Spanish".*

In the previous example, it was very interesting to see the parents' interest in their children learning and reinforcing another language other than English. This aspect was opposite to the one found by Mercuri (2014), in which she explained how parents understood the value of English in the American society. Because of this, they pushed their children to learn that language and forget the native one. This was based on the notion that doing so would provide their children with better possibilities and less discrimination.

Based on Adelman and Lynn (2007), there is ample evidence that parents' satisfaction does not only come from their children's academic environment, it also comes from the way their children are challenged by this kind of education. However, an important issue to bear in mind is how those challenges expand into children's identity formation.

As this first category refers to others' influence, the next sample shows a different type of influence. Based on one of the observations, the researcher noticed that Joseph always used formal Spanish and English. He also had a well-developed ability to switch from English to Spanish, or vice versa. In one interview, he said:

*Joseph: Sometimes my dad says that he is gonna give me 10 bucks if I help him with Spanish. So, one day my dad forgot what "table" was in Spanish and he is like "Table for two please." The waitress did not hear, so then he said, "Joseph, I give you a ten-dollar bill and you just tell me How do I say 'table' please?" And I am like "Money first please."*

*Teacher: Did he give you the money? Did he?*

*Joseph: Oh, yeah.*

Bearing in mind the construct of investment provided by Norton (2000), who is referenced by Potowski (2004), learners invest in a language when they feel they will receive symbolic and material resources. Joseph received double profits. First, he gained the feeling of high self-esteem because of his ability to speak an additional language, and the second was the monetary gain.

The following category emerged after having analyzed how children switch the language they speak depending on the situation s/he was facing.

### **Living situations as determiners of language switch**

During the one-on-one interviews, different topics were addressed. Some of the conversations were related to the use of Spanish or English, the things children found good about speaking two languages, and mixing or switching languages. Based on Barón Ávila (2010), code switching happens when a

person alternates between two languages during a discourse. According to Potowski (2004), language selection in the classroom is part of the students' identity performances. Nevertheless, these performances cannot be limited to the school environment. In addition, Trechter and Bucholtz (as cited in Mercuri, 2014) argued that the use of a specific language in a determined context influences the development of cultural identity.

A sample for this case is the following:

*Teacher: Has it ever happened to you that you mix the languages?*

*Sean: Ahh. One time I was playing piano because I am learning piano lessons, and I asked something to my grandpa, and then I talked to him in English "this is my favorite piano piece..." or something like that I said, and he gave me this look like "what are you saying???" because he doesn't know English, and I said "Oh, I am sorry. I am sorry. I meant to say 'Este es mi favorito'", and I immediately played the piano. Later on, I asked my Dad how to say "Piano Piece" in Spanish and he told me "pieza de piano". Then, I learned a new word. (big smile)*

Based on the previous episode between Sean and his father, it is noticeable that the child had the opportunity to learn new words, in this case *pieza de piano*. According to Soderman (2010), vocabulary building in each one of the languages that the child is learning is extremely important. Nevertheless, this author referred to how teachers receive additional training in effective strategies to teach vocabulary. In this case of Sean, the teaching came from Sean's father, who also played an important role in the language learning process.

In addition, the last sample is also supported by Barón Ávila (2010), who indicated that language switching occurs because of the social and cultural contexts where students are immersed in. In some cases, the context does not allow children to practice or interact frequently in English. Sean's context of immersion at that moment did not involve English as the way of communication. Therefore, language switching was not an option, it was a process that Sean needed to undergo if he wanted his grandfather to understand him.

After stating the previous examples, it is important to highlight that mixing languages, for some children, is related to the child's ability to infer if the person speaks two languages or not. Also, once the child has been able to recognize which language to speak and with whom, s/he will do two things: challenge him/her to speak more of that language or avoid communication with people who speak that language. Therefore, it is very important to recognize that students may have family members who speak other languages and who may motivate the child to speak their native language more. It is very important that children can communicate in their parents' native language

because if they don't, they may not value their parent's heritage. Consequently, they may not grow up identifying themselves with their parents' heritage. If the language is not part of their lives, the children will forget a piece of who they are. The former idea is based on the definition on language provided by Hillard (1983), "...since language is always used within a cultural context, it cannot be separated from cultural identity" (as cited in Silbernagel, 2015).

Dual language learners also create a comfort zone through their choice of language. They use their creativity in terms of communication. As soon as they build better language skills, they start to use the language in certain situations. For example, they might use a particular language if they think the receptor would like to hear them using that language. When children have the confidence to switch languages, they are simultaneously learning from themselves. Dual language learners also switch languages with different intentions. The following example was recognized during this study due to their relation to cultural identity formation among dual language learners.

*Amy: My little brother estaba en la guatita de mami (guata: Chilean word for 'belly') (My little brother was in my mom's belly).*

What is represented in the previous example is clearly supported by Chen (2015), who explained that the integration of one language into another presupposes the use of "loanwords". In this concrete case, Amy not only switched from English to Spanish, but she also used a specific Chilean word in the conversation. This example showed how bilinguals alternate emotions, behaviors, and cognition, which are components of personality traits (Chen, 2015).

Based on Grosjean (2008), as cited by Bakić and Škifić (2017), people who are bilingual can use one language and switch the other language off in special situations. In their article, they discussed the connection between bilingualism and biculturalism and how a person may deactivate one language, but they cannot do the same with culture.

Potowski (2004) argued that the language students select in the classroom must be seen as part of their identity performances. However, those performances cannot be limited to the class because students are people who want to show who they are in different places. This is especially true when they want to share their identities with those who are closer to them, such as their family members at home. Mercuri (2014) also referred to Gee's position (2008) about the two kinds of discourses that a person may acquire, the primary and the secondary one. The secondary discourse is the one acquired by the person at school. The first discourse, which is part of this study, is the primary discourse. It is the cultural base of the language that the person speaks every day and provides him/her a sense of self. According to Gee, the first discourse needs to be valued at school in order to avoid affecting identity development.

Finally, knowing more than one language may influence the way a child is or behaves, such as his or her personal traits. For this study, self-esteem was considered and analyzed as follows.

### Using two languages as a key aspect in self-esteem improvement

One of the advantages that learning a second language offers is an improvement in the person's self-esteem and sense of self. In fact, knowing more than one language supports children by making them more at ease in different environments. In the following excerpts, the participants demonstrated how they felt speaking two languages. The first excerpt was provided by Amy, who felt very proud of herself for speaking two languages. She expressed that her parents only speak one language, "Español".

*Amy: En la escuela yo hablo Inglés y Español. En el parque hablo Español a la Sra. "x" (Spanish speaker) y a mis amigos yo hablo inglés, también Español. Hay niños que no saben Español, así como "x" (classmate) tú sabes. Yo se que tú sabes. [In school I speak English and Spanish. At the park, I speak Spanish with Mrs. "x" (Spanish speaker) and with my friends I speak English, also Spanish. There are kids that don't know Spanish, like "x" (classmate) you know. I know that you know].*

However, there are times when some learners do not feel very confident at all when talking in other language. This was the case in following excerpt where Nina was not confident talking in Spanish.

*Nina: My parents are from Mongolia and all of my grandparents live in Mongolia...and I ...I...was born in America, and I've been in New York and Mongolia. I mostly speak English, I know a little bit of Spanish and some Mongolian...I know how to say "hola" in Mongolian. Ahhh...*

Nina had difficulty expressing her thoughts in Spanish. When the researcher asked her which language she was used to speaking most of the time in the school cafeteria or playground, she replied "English". As a matter of fact, the researcher was able to recognize that Nina does not participate at all in Spanish class. She received extra help to support her Spanish speaking skills.

There are circumstances that make this situation more difficult, such as communication with family members. To be bilingual does not mean that the competence in both languages must be the same. Chen (2015) indicated that some bilinguals who are not fluent in the other language may feel "inhibited" because of the restricted ability to express themselves. As a consequence, this affects the way they express their personalities. This point suggests that the expression of personality traits is highly influenced by the language that is dominated by the bilingual person.

After working with the participants and having the chance to see them construct their own ideas of culture, I noticed how they, little by little, became engaged in the constant process of seeking and refining their first ideas of culture. By the last focus group session, the participants condensed all of the information, which was explored during the study in order to make the first recognition of the aspects they considered relevant to their cultural identity. During this period of the study, the attention was focused on observing them more as individuals, as well as part of a particular group within a multicultural society.

### Conclusions

This research study explored children's lived experiences in a multicultural context while participating in a DLP. Through this study, the researcher was able to confirm that the participation in a DLP, as well as living in a multicultural context, may be an experience that contributes to children's cultural identity formation. Their context and personal expressions as members of a society and as individuals aids in the formation of cultural identity.

The participants shared different experiences in regard to their individuality and as members of a group. The children shaped their cultural identity by finding ways to get to know who they are and identify what makes them different from others in their immense cultural context.

Culture is something relevant and important for every child, and it has an important place in their lives. Culture helps them bond with their families, and it also helps them value their uniqueness and individuality through a sense of pride. This enriching experience brings something special to their lives. The participants of this study switched their cultural language as a means of understanding their world and expressed their feelings and experiences as dual language learners while sharing who they are.

Cultural identity of children is in constant transformation. It is smooth, flexible, and solidified through their own reflections about their past experiences. It represents opportunities, as well as complex situations and cultural and social roles that relate to different behaviors, which combine with their unique identity. It is a fact that the cultural identity of children is still in progress. Furthermore, children are incredibly active when they feel valued and their ideas are heard. They are constantly exploring and shaping their cultural identity in school settings and beyond.

The acquisition of a second language, no matter the type of bilingual program chosen, is beneficial for individuals. In this case, it is particularly beneficial for children because they not only have the chance to become literate in a different language, but they can also recognize and value the diversity of cultures, especially the native one.



A Dual Language Program gives learners the opportunity to be native language models to others in the same classroom. In addition, DLPs allow native cultures to be shared, which results in the chance of encouraging the native language and culture. This is done while learning a second language and valuing a different culture.

When teaching a second language, it is not valid to think that it just implies the transmission of linguistic knowledge about that second language. The language, as part of the culture and a key aspect in a person's identity, plays an important role in keeping and reinforcing native languages. That is why it is important to have curriculums which embrace the cultural heritage of its students.

With this study, it was evident that the students integrated new languages (English/Spanish) with a positive attitude. They learned and interacted with new cultures, but they also maintained the native culture.

Participation in a DLP is a great opportunity for learners to acquire a second language and interact with different cultures. In addition, experiences like receiving others' influence, living situations as determiners of language switch, and using two languages as a key aspect in self-esteem can be labeled as those which contribute to children's cultural identity formation.

This research study illustrated a way to engage students in exploring and recognizing important features of their and their family's culture. This could serve as an action plan for a general curriculum or classroom setting. Again, this is just a possibility of many to recognize the importance of providing opportunities to explore culture within the classroom and to engage children in their own cultural identity formation. This includes encouraging parents and teachers to support children in this process. Sometimes, in a rush to prepare lesson plans or to accomplish the curriculum for classes, teachers forget that other aspects are valuable for their students. To conclude, this might be a fun and solid foundation where children can build their values, beliefs, and knowledge.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Parent Survey (Some questions were selected to be part of this article)

1. Is a language other than English spoken in your home?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_\_\_ No    What is that language?
2. Is your child's native tongue a language other than English?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_\_\_ No    What is that language?
3. What language do you speak most of the time?
4. What language does your child speak most of the time?
5. Why did you choose to enroll your child in the dual language program?
6. Has the dual language program met your expectations for your child's learning? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_\_\_ No
7. In what ways are you involved in your child's education at school (volunteering in class, joining him/her for lunch, etc.)?
8. Has your knowledge of different cultures increased through your child's participation in this language program?
9. Do you feel like other unique cultures are appreciated and valued at your child's school? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_\_\_ No

If so, in what ways? How is it demonstrated?

**Appendix 2: Students' questionnaire (Some questions were selected to be part of this article)**

What language do you mainly speak at home?

What language do you mainly speak at school?

In what language do you speak most often during recess?

In what language do you speak more fluently?

What language do you speak when spending time with friends outside of school?

When spending time with your Spanish/English bilingual friends outside of school, which language do you typically use?

With whom do you use Spanish? (Bubble in all that apply)

At home, with your parents, brothers, or sisters, how often do you speak in Spanish and English?

How comfortable do you feel speaking Spanish in public?

How comfortable do you feel speaking English in public?

**Appendix 3: Focus Group Session (FGS)**

The purpose of developing these activities within the focus group sessions is to give the participants a space where they can explore different aspects of "culture" (language, traditions, values, and beliefs). Finally, I conclude the sessions with the topic "Cultural Identity". Through these workshops, students reflect upon culture, both individually and as a group. The children think and talk about what the word culture means to each of them. My assistance is very little. For example, I introduce the topics, such as "traditions", give some examples, use visual cards, and work as a facilitator. I ask questions related to the topic and give them the chance to provide their perceptions. These activities were designed to motivate the children to create their own ideas of culture, to recognize it, and relate with it. Students returned their worksheets during the same session or the next day of the session. The topics selected to work on the Focus Group Sessions were: All About Me, how are we alike? My Family Tree, My Winter Holiday Scrapbook, Designing My Own Flag, My Cultural Identity.