Teachers' Perceptions of Bilingualism: Toward a More Equitable Approach

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Abstract

This study reviews orientations toward educating multilingual students with a focus on recent policies and initiatives in California. It includes data and findings from a study investigating the linguistic and cultural resources that English learners bring to school as funds of identity. The research site was a public elementary school in an urban community in Southern California. Data from surveys, interviews, and artwork created by Spanish-speaking focus students in fourth and fifth grade and interviews with their teachers were collected and analyzed. In this article, teachers' perspectives are examined in light of student survey results. Findings indicate that although the teachers in the study stated that students' abilities to speak more than one language represents a strength, depictions of everyday experiences in the classroom contradicted the language as resource orientation and recast language as a problem. Additionally, participants relegated the benefits of bilingualism to ambiguous advantages for the future rather than a resource for learning and daily academic tasks. Finally, directions for future research that can further the notion of multilingualism in educational settings are recommended.

Keywords: *English Learners, bilingualism, multilingual students, translanguaging*

In fall 2018, five million public school students were identified as English learners, or students who speak a language other than English at home (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). California leads the nation in terms of the number of English learners or multilingual students in K-12 schools with over one million identified English learners and 2.5 million students who speak a language other than English at home. These students from over seventy-five language groups represented 41.5 percent of the state's public school enrollment in 2020 (California Department of Education (CDE), 2021, April 29). In the context of this paper, the terms *English learners* and *multilingual students* may be used interchangeably and refer to the same group of students. The richness and diversity of California's population places the state at the forefront of educational policy and programs aimed at serving English learners and their communities. Events in California often have significant repercussions for education in other states when educational policies are replicated. This article discusses findings from a recent study conducted at an urban elementary school in Southern California to highlight three teachers' perspectives on multilingualism based on interviews with teachers and survey data from Spanish-speaking focus students in their classes. After discussing three orientations toward educating multilingual students and providing a brief historical context of the education of English learners in California, I will review recent policy changes in California aimed at providing more equitable educational experiences for multilingual students. Then, using findings from my study, I will challenge perspectives that minimize students'

linguistic skills and cultural experiences as resources for learning and suggest directions for future research that can further the notion of multilingualism in educational settings.

Orientations Toward Language

In a seminal work on the subject, Ruíz (1984) proposed three orientations toward language and its role in society: *language as problem, language as right,* and *language as resource.* Language as problem implies a causal relationship with options for solutions. Ruíz suggested the societal linking of language minority groups with social problems, with the result that a "sociolinguistic Darwinism will force on us the notion that subordinate languages are problems to be resolved" (p. 19). Based on my own personal observations and experiences teaching English learners, I apply a medical analogy to describe this approach such that it views linguistic diversity as a condition to be diagnosed and treated through programmatic prescription regardless of the risk of side effects, such as loss of "subordinate" languages.

Language policies and programs initiated in the 1960s and 1970s in association with the War on Poverty assumed English language deficiencies because "non-English language groups have a handicap to be overcome" (p. 19). Prescriptive measures meant to address language deficiencies often included bilingual programming. Although supported by language proponents, initiatives such as the Chacon-Moscone Bilingual-Bicultural Education Act of 1976 framed the language challenge facing English learners in California as primarily a language problem with the solution as bilingual education (Gándara, 2002; Olsen, 2021). Additionally, Ruíz noted that the language as problem orientation is representative of a more general perspective on diversity that confuses uniformity with unity, thereby necessitating a monolingual society, a perspective that led some activists to advocate for *language as right* (1984).

While Ruíz (1984) acknowledged the connection between the civil rights movement and the *language as right* orientation, Ruíz unveiled the complex nature of fitting language into a more general conception of rights by virtue of its ability to impact many aspects of social life. For example, civil affairs such as voting rights, protection against discrimination, and judicial proceedings involve communication through both written and spoken language. Additionally, in the U.S. legal system, language often serves as a proxy for protection for language minority groups (*Meyer v. Nebraska*, 1932; *U.S. v. Texas*, 1971; *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). These protections represent vital supports for economic and community structures, especially in light of the transnational nature of many iterative migratory circuits to the U.S. for Latinxs from Central America and the Caribbean (Suárez-Orozco & Páez, 2002). Yet, the legal discourse itself can be general and problematic, engendering backlash from the public and resistance from organizations that need to comply. For these reasons, Ruíz offers language as resource as a more promising and palatable orientation to language planning and policy (Ibid).

The *language as resource* orientation focuses on the benefits of speaking more than one language. Common arguments for multiple languages include better overall communication skills, more opportunities in commerce, improved conceptual skills in science and mathematics, increased reading ability and cognitive flexibility, more empathy, a global mindset, linguistic creativity, and slower decline in executive function for the aged (Bialystok, 2007; Crivello, et al., 2016; Ruíz, 1984; Woll & Wei, 2019). These arguments can be used in support of bilingual programs and foreign language requirements for high school. However, at the same time, policies and programs for English learners have often resulted in the loss of languages other than English (Valdés, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). Few efforts at preservation, development, and use of students' existing

language skills for content learning have appeared in schools, particularly where English remains the language of instruction. While the discussion of the benefits of knowing more than one language may help to fuel public support for multilingualism, research is needed regarding the actual impact on praxis to incorporate students' linguistic resources into the learning process. My study aimed to do this through an investigation of the linguistic and cultural resources that multilingual learners bring to school and how are they used in school settings. Before introducing the participants and data collected in the study, a brief description of significant events in the education of English learners in California will provide context for the study.

Historical Context for the Education of English Learners in California

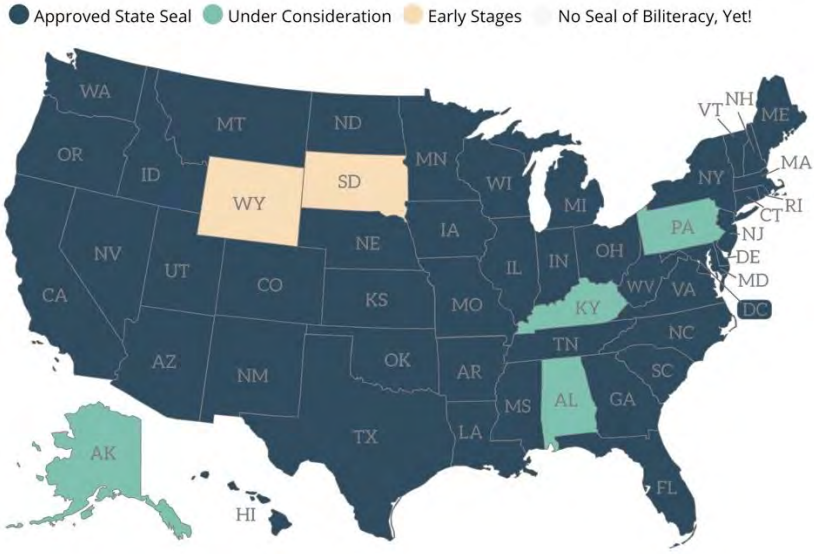
The State of California often leads the nation in terms of educating its English language learners. The 1974 landmark U.S. Supreme Court case, *Lau v. Nichols* originated when English learners of Chinese ancestry in San Francisco Unified School District did not receive supplemental classes in English language skills. The court mandated that local schools must provide students identified as English learners with an instructional program leading to equal access to an education. Four years later, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit ruled on *Castañeda v. Pickard.* This decision declared that the local Texas school district's practice of segregating bilingual students based on race and ethnicity failed to provide an effective program for students to learn English (Wright, 2010; Zacarian, 2011). The prevailing deficit ideologies led to solutions that conceptualized languages other than English in school as a problem to be fixed (Gorski, 2010; Ruiz, 1984; Valencia, 2010). In an effort to improve education for English learners in California, California legislators passed the Chacon-Moscone Bilingual-Bicultural Education Act in 1976. Supported by language proponents, this legislation declared bilingual education to be a right and required public school students to receive instruction in a language that they understand (Olsen, 2021). Schools with twenty or more speakers of a language in a grade level were required to provide a bilingual program using certified teachers. However, many of these bilingual classrooms used a transitional model in which academic instruction in the home language was limited; programs were not designed to focus on academic achievement, but to transition students quickly to English as the sole language of instruction (Gándara, 2002).

The sudden implementation of new bilingual programs created a shortage of qualified bilingual teachers across the state. When the number of qualified teachers could not meet the demand, bilingual instructional aides with little to no training were hired to help alleviate the teacher shortage (Olsen, 2021). Public criticism of these new measures grew, inciting a movement toward English as the sole language of instruction. In 1998 after an intense media battle featuring a "discourse of threat" that framed multilingualism as a threat to the English language (Katznelson & Bernstein, 2017), California voters overwhelmingly approved Proposition 227 *English Language in Public Schools*, a measure backed by prominent Silicon Valley businessman Ron Unz. Proposition 227 virtually eliminated bilingual education across California, and therefore, the need for certified bilingual educators. Prior to the passage of Proposition 227, approximately thirty percent of English learners in California were enrolled in bilingual programs; after the implementation of the restrictions outlined in Proposition 227, this number decreased to between five and eight percent of English learners (Olsen, 2021). English became the mandated language of instruction rendering any preparation students may have had in their native languages essentially inconsequential (Gándara, 2002; Olsen, 2010).

Shifting Discourse in California Policy and Planning

In the aftermath of Proposition 227, activists and supporters of bilingual education labored to transform public opinion regarding bilingualism toward *language as resource* perspectives. In fall of 1998, bilingual advocates began to reorganize and formed a new coalition called Californians Together. Language experts, researchers, and community activists collaborated in their efforts to "change the public view of bilingualism from being a problem to an asset, to move away from the paradigm of bilingual education as a deficit model of compensatory education" (Olsen, 2021, p. 141). The group's central strategy involved working with local school districts and state legislators to recognize the accomplishments of bilingual students with a Seal of Biliteracy. In 2012, California became the first state to adopt the Seal of Biliteracy, marked by a gold seal on the high school diploma or transcript, for "graduates who have attained a high level of proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing one or more languages in addition to English" (California Department of Education, 2021, April 20). The Seal of Biliteracy program spread rapidly to other states. Currently, forty-four states and the District of Columbia have approved a statewide Seal of Biliteracy for high school graduates who demonstrate proficiency in two or more languages (Californians Together, 2021).

Figure 1: ***State Laws Regarding the Seal of Biliteracy***



Note. From sealofbiliteracy.org. Copyright 2021. (https://sealofbiliteracy.org/index.php)

State adoption and popularity of the Seal of Biliteracy signaled a significant shift in public opinion regarding multilingualism. Almost two decades of additional advocacy efforts by organized proponents of equitable programs for multilingual students culminated in the passage of Proposition 58, the California Education for a Global Economy (Ed.G.E.) Initiative. The legislation took effect on July 1, 2017 and repealed many of the restrictions of Proposition 227, including the English-only instruction mandate. It also provided schools with significant flexibility in terms of the design of programs to serve multilingual students, including a provision supporting dual

language immersion programs. Dual language programs, one form of bilingual education, deliver instruction in English and another language beginning in kindergarten and continuing through elementary school. Researchers have found positive outcomes for students in dual language programs such as the development of proficiency in English more quickly, academically outperforming peers in English only programs, and deeper cross-cultural understanding (Collier & Thomas, 2017; Steele, et al., 2017; Umansky & Reardon, 2014).

Educators and activists in California took advantage of the momentum in the movement toward language as a resource. Several important publications that framed language as a resource followed the implementation of Proposition 58. First, in late 2017, the California State Board of Education unanimously approved the *California English Learner Roadmap*. This document provides guidance to local education agencies by articulating a common vision and mission for educating English learner students in the state. Its mission is to "prepare graduates with the linguistic, academic and social skills and competencies they require for college, career, and civic participation in a global, diverse, and multilingual world, thus ensuring a thriving future for California" (CDE, 2021, February 1). The *Roadmap* established culture and language as resources as explained in the following description:

> The languages and cultures English learners bring to their education are assets for their own learning and are important contributions to learning communities. These assets are valued and built upon in culturally responsive curriculum and instruction and in programs that support, wherever possible, the development of proficiency in multiple languages. (CDE, 2020 November 3).

Soon after in 2018, the Communications and English Learner Support divisions of the CDE published State Superintendent of Education Tom Torlakson's call to action in *Global California 2030*. In this initiative, the "California way" of "aiming high and dreaming big" fueled several ambitious goals aimed at vastly expanding the number of students who know at least two languages in California schools by the year 2030:

- triple the number of students who earn the Seal of Biliteracy;
- enroll half of all K-12 students in programs that lead to proficiency in two or more languages;
- quadruple the number of dual language immersion programs offered in various languages from 407 in 2017 to 1,600;
- grow the number of state-approved programs for training bilingual teachers from 30 in 2016 to 100 in 2030 and double the number of teachers authorized to teach two languages (CDE, 2018).

Torlakson's initiative also formalized California's perspective in the shift to viewing language as resource:

> At one point in our recent past, English learners were viewed only as a challenge to the educational system because these students needed extra support. Today, we recognize that these young people are assets to our state and their local communities. Like all students, they bring a rich cultural and linguistic heritage to our classrooms, making our schools more vibrant and diverse. (CDE, 2018)

As a complement to the *Roadmap, California Ed.G.E* and *Global California 2030* initiatives, the CDE published *Improving Education for English Learners and Multilingual Students: Theory to Practice* (CDE, 2020). This tome of over five hundred pages opens with a sense of urgency created by a

> unique opportunity to promote both individual potential and the realization of a multicultural and multilingual society. At no other time in history has this dual goal been more urgent. Right now, California needs its students to become globally competent citizens with the knowledge, values, skills, and attitudes to improve their communities, state, and world (Improving CDE, 2020, p. 30).

The volume contains examples of evidence-based pedagogy and best practices for developing multilingualism with a focus on asset-based environments and systemic structures. It encourages educators to design learning experiences in which students use their home languages as "a powerful support for their learning" regardless of the language of instruction, and recommends that "all school staff assert frequent messages about the benefits of bilingualism" (CDE, 2020, p. 54).

These asset-based approaches have emerged as a potent strategy directed at dismantling dominant deficit perspectives toward educating students identified by schools as English learners (Brooks & Karathanos, 2009; CDE, 2020; Celedón-Pattichis, et al., 2018; García, & Ozturk, 2017; Hakuta, 2018; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). An asset can be defined as an "advantage or resource; a valuable person or thing" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). According to these approaches, the ability to communicate in a language other than English represents just one of the many advantages or resources that multilingual students bring to school as part of their lived experiences; others include cultural heritage, values, and accumulated bodies of knowledge existing in households and communities called Funds of Knowledge (CDE, 2020; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). In other words, children's language skills and experiences outside of school matter, and therefore are important to consider in order for students to fully engage in learning. My study to investigate the linguistic and cultural resources that children bring to school and how they are or are not used for learning took place during this whirlwind transition in discourse to language as a resource.

Methodology

The data presented here originated from a larger case study investigation into the kinds of linguistic and cultural resources that students bring to school and how those resources are used in the classroom setting (Canillas, 2018). The goal of my study was to counter deficit-informed research by highlighting the abundant linguistic and cultural resources that multilingual learners bring to school that can be valuable to learning activities. My research questions were:

- What funds of identity (linguistic and cultural resources) do students at risk of becoming Long Term English Learner bring to the school? To what extend do students use them to construct or perform identities in school?
- In what ways do school policies and discourse shape the identities of students at risk of becoming Long Term English Learners?

- How does peer school culture shape identities of students at risk of becoming Long Term English Learner?

A case study format enabled me to embed myself at the school and collect rich data on the lived experiences of students and teachers as they navigated everyday schooling events. My research took place in 2017 at a public charter school with approximately 300 students in grades kindergarten through sixth grade in an urban area of Southern California. Sixty-seven percent of students at the school were considered socioeconomically disadvantaged and twenty-three percent were identified as English language learners. The school offered an asset-based curriculum with daily offerings of activities such as art, music, robotics, hockey, theatre, and journalism. Data collection included semester-long observations in classrooms and at school events, semi-structured interviews with three teachers and the school administrator, an initial survey taken by focal students, information from official school records for each student, group interviews with focal students, and two pieces of artwork created by each focal student with accompanying interviews of explanations of their pieces.

Student Participants

The focal group consisted of all identified English learners at the school who met or were close to meeting the state criteria to be considered "at risk of becoming a Long Term English Learner" (Assem. Bill CA 2193, 2011-12). These are students who are in grades five to eleven, have been in U.S. schools for four or more years, scored at the intermediate level or below on the state English language proficiency test, and received a score of *Does Not Meet* on the annual standardized test for English language arts. Five students in fourth grade and five students in fifth grade met the criteria and participated in the study. There was one classroom per grade level at the school for grades four through six. All five focal students in fourth grade were in the same classroom with the fourth grade teacher, and all five fifth grade focal students were in the same classroom with the fifth grade teacher. One additional student in sixth grade met these criteria, but did not return a consent form, and so was not included in the study, although the sixth grade teacher was a participant in the teacher interview. All of the focal students were orally bilingual in Spanish and English; none claimed to be able to write in Spanish. The study would have included students who spoke languages other than Spanish if they had been available.

Teacher Participants

Three teachers participated in the study through interviews and classroom observations: the teacher of five fourth grade focal students, whom we will call Teacher 1; the teacher of five fifth grade focal students, whom we will call Teacher 2; and the teacher of a fifth and sixth grade combination class, whom we will refer to as Teacher 3. The student who did not return the consent form was enrolled in Teacher 3's classroom. Asking for participation from only teachers at the school who had focus students in their classes allowed me to compare data gathered from the students with data from teacher interviews. Although the student in sixth grade was not an official focal student, I was able to conduct general observations in the sixth grade classroom and interview Teacher 3. Teacher 1, the most experienced teacher in the study, was a veteran educator with seventeen years of experience in the classroom and thirteen years as a school principal. Teacher 1 self-identified as an English language learner who came from a multilingual home. In contrast,

Teacher 2 represented the least experienced educator in the study. As a newly credentialed teacher, Teacher 2 had recently been hired as a long-term substitute after completing student teaching at the school during the previous semester. Teacher 3 had only one student in the class who was identified as an English learner, yet had significant past experience working with English learners. Teacher 3 reported several non-consecutive years of teaching in various settings including juvenile hall after a prior career at an accounting agency.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection included field notes, semi-structured interviews with teachers and focal students, school records, surveys from focal students, and art work from focal students. Teachers were interviewed individually in the classroom as each had time during a lunch break or prep period. Interviews with each teacher included questions about their views on languages other than English in school and their observations of how home languages were used by students in their classrooms. All teacher and student interviews were transcribed by me. Transcriptions of interviews and digital images of student artwork were analyzed and coded for patterns using an iterative approach (Lichtman, 2013; Yin, 2013). Nine of ten focal students completed the initial survey I created on Google forms (Table 1), constructed of scaled questions and open-ended questions in student friendly, first-person language about their experiences in school, favorite subjects, and preferences for first and second language use at home as well as at school. One focal student was unable to complete the survey. The student survey utilized a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Survey data were analyzed after conversion to a spreadsheet and used to hone interview topics. According to the results of the student survey, students agreed or strongly agreed that speaking Spanish was one of their strengths; in addition, students agreed that speaking Spanish helps them at school. The highest rating occurred when students responded to whether they like speaking Spanish. It is clear that the students in the study highly valued their family traditions, including the ability to speak their home language. Speaking Spanish is important to them and to their families. Students indicated that they learn things from their families that help them at school. Their lowest mean rating occurred when asked whether their teachers think that speaking more than one language is important.

Table 1: ***Selected Questions from the Student Survey***

Question	Mean
I learn things from my family that help me at school.	4.6
Family traditions are important to me.	4.7
I like to speak a language other than English	4.9
Speaking Spanish is important to me.	4.4
Speaking Spanish is important to my family.	4.6
Speaking more than one language helps me in school.	4.2
Speaking more than one language is one of my strengths.	4.1

My teachers think speaking more than one language is important.	3.9

Findings and Discussion

Findings: Teacher Perspectives on Language

Data indicate that although the teachers in the study stated that students' abilities to speak more than one language represents a strength, depictions of everyday experiences in the classroom contradicted the language as resource orientation and recast language as a problem. All three teachers expressed the idea that speaking a language other than English can be a strength. For example, Teacher 1, a veteran educator of over thirty years, explained, "If they have another language, it is a strength. It leads to open doors that otherwise wouldn't" (Teacher 1, personal communication, May 3, 2017). Teacher 1 stated that having another language is a "gift" that leads to "open doors," but did not specify what those doors could be. Teacher 2, a newly credentialed teacher, provided this description of students' use of their home language:

> I hear a lot of Spanish words just being thrown out like casually in our class, so I feel like it's a good bonding thing for them as a whole…like they have that, connection, I guess I could call it. Like I can see that it's something that they really all pretty much value, and it's comforting to them, I think. (Teacher 2, personal communication, May 11, 2017).

According to this novice teacher, Spanish speaking students in the class "all pretty much value" the ability to speak Spanish; they find the connections they make to be "comforting to them," indicating probable positive social-emotional outcomes for multilingual students. Teacher 3 in the 5th/6th grade combination class, also a veteran teacher, conveyed a similar sentiment toward multilingualism:

> I would consider it to be a strength long term. I think in the beginning, it could cause struggles because they want to be like the other kids and they want to get doing everything. So long term it becomes a strength, but I think when they're starting off in school it's definitely a struggle...I find really working with the vocabulary and before we start any kind of project or any activity really frontloading strategies to them and the vocabulary and getting them ready and building the background knowledge because so many times I find they don't know what we're talking about on something that we as Americans just know. (Teacher 3, personal communication, May 17, 2017).

Although Teacher 3 considered speaking a language other than English as a strength, some undertones of the *language as problem* orientation were evident. The benefits of bilingualism were only apparent in the long term it becomes a strength somehow; in the present classroom environment it can cause struggles for the teacher and for the student. The teacher needs to pre-teach vocabulary and build background knowledge because multilingual students "don't know what we're talking about on something that we as Americans just know." Ironically, every focal student in the study was born in the U.S. as an American citizen. The phrase "we as Americans" signals an othering of multilingual students as outsiders who lack the privileged mainstream knowledge of the American classroom. Although having a language other than English may be a strength in the long term, it

presented a problem that led to struggles for this teacher. Teacher 3 also commented on multilingual students' lives outside of school: "Kids coming from our neighborhoods, the English language learners, they're never going to get to explore their strengths because they're just sitting home eating Cheetos and playing X-box or watching whatever with grandma" (Teacher 3, personal communication, May 17, 2017). In this statement, students' strengths do not include language or culture, but are only accessible outside of the home. This perspective falls short of identifying the rich linguistic and cultural resources as described in California's newest push in support of multilingualism and makes stereotypical assumptions about students' lives outside of school.

Teacher 1 listed slightly more specific benefits of speaking more than one language, but also described language as a barrier that made it difficult for English learners to understand concepts in school. The teacher reported that "kids with dual languages will learn another language easier, quicker…a third language, fourth language, fifth language. So, it's a gift if you speak more than one language, then you quickly learn these other languages" (Teacher 1, personal communication, May 3, 2017). Students with "dual languages" learn new languages easier and faster, but for most students, the opportunity to learn a third, fourth, or fifth language is not part of the curriculum, especially for students who are not meeting grade level standards in English. Teacher 1 described working with one of the focal students in this way:

> Her ability to understand concepts is definitely related to her EL status because she is the one that doesn't hear anything but Spanish at home, so when she reads at school, she's not hearing English. So with her I like to write things down, that works for her.
>
> Also, you take part of the word, the root word or the word, the part that's in Latin in an English word that helps the kids understand also. And also, to have someone, either myself or someone else give the Spanish word if they're Spanish-speaking. (Teacher 1, personal communication, May 3, 2017)

In this instance, Teacher 1 connected the student's difficulty understanding concepts to her "status" as an English learner because she "doesn't hear anything but Spanish at home" as if there is an expectation that families will use languages other than Spanish for communication and literacy practices. Speaking Spanish was framed as a problem that causes the student to "not hear English" when she reads at school. However, Teacher 1 does recognize the usefulness of identifying Latin root words that may be similar to Spanish to help the student learn vocabulary. Later in the interview, Teacher 1 shared this anecdote:

> I was working in another district that was predominantly Hispanic with a lot of EL kids. They'd go out on the playground and always speak Spanish, and if you tried to help them with the English, they didn't want to speak it. I don't know how you overcome that. I mean, without saying, Nah, let's speak English...[in the classroom] sometimes they didn't want to [speak English] because they didn't want to miss anything or get anything wrong, and then other times, it was the attitude, especially if they got older, say in junior high. I was doing junior high for a while. It became an attitude. I don't know how you break that. (Teacher 1, personal communication, May 3, 2017)

In this interview excerpt, Teacher 1 framed speaking Spanish as a problem to be overcome even

on the playground, a space removed from the formal academic structures and requirements of the classroom. In Teachers 1's experience with junior high students, reluctance to speak English was an "attitude" that needs to be broken. This veteran educator named other languages as a strength, but in everyday educational settings, having Spanish as a home language became a barrier to learning and language was as problem when students chose to speak Spanish.

Teacher 2 had just begun teaching as a long term substitute. Nevertheless, this teacher was already aware that students spoke Spanish, and observed them using it in the classroom to build relationships with each other. The teacher shared with me that she had not been able to collect much information thus far regarding the students' home experiences: "I know that they speak Spanish obviously with their parents, but overall I haven't really seen too much about their home culturally" (Teacher 2, personal communication, May 11, 2017).

Discussion

In light of the asset-based approach used by the school, it was not surprising to find that teachers expressed a *language as resource* orientation (Ruíz, 1984) toward their multilingual students' home languages. However, when elaborating on the practical daily events of schooling, language was framed as a *problem* and notions of language as resource were embedded in narratives of ambiguity surrounding the benefits of multilingualism. By ascribing to orientations that devalue students' linguistic and cultural resources, teachers may overlook the powerful ways in which multilingual students can and do use their primary language in the classroom for learning and identity building. In doing so, educators may "perpetuate deficit thinking by ascribing to stereotypical ideas about students' lives outside of school" (Canillas, 2018, p. 176). Ruíz described the three orientations to language programs and policy as "competing but not incompatible" and additionally advocates for "a repertoire of orientations from which to draw" (1984, p. 18). What I am proposing is an addition to our repertoire of orientations- *language as learning tool*, i.e. harnessing the power of linguistic diversity, skills, and culture to increase motivation, engagement, and academic achievement.

Beyond the instrumental nature of language, it is important to remember its deep connection to culture and identity. For this reason, language as a learning tool has two dimensions: first, language as a learning tool for students to comprehend and engage with content. Teacher 1 provided an example of this when explaining the use of Latin root words to assist Spanish speakers with English vocabulary. Translanguaging also offers a promising strategy for language as a learning tool by incorporating multilingual abilities in the learning process. Language researchers refer to translanguaging as the act of accessing and leveraging one's complete set of skills in more than one language for learning (García, Aponte, & Le, 2019; García & Seltzer, 2015). The act of juxtaposing Spanish words with English to enhance the meaning of select words or concepts reflects a bilingual student's unique ability to strategically employ the entire linguistic repertoire for learning and communication, rather than being limited to only a portion of their language skills (English). Translanguaging as a strategy for employing linguistic resources positions students as capable speakers and communicators and linguistic diversity not as something to be tolerated, but as a critical tool for learning and identity building, to be celebrated and prized.

The second dimension involves educators learning about students' linguistic and cultural resources in order to leverage them for learning in the classroom. In other words, the teacher becomes the learner and uses new knowledge of the students as a tool for instruction. Openness to

using data collection methods such as student surveys, artwork, and frequent and friendly communication with students and families will allow teachers to get to know the everyday lives and interests of their students. Educational equity for multilingual students involves identifying and addressing the subtractive structures in the school system that are masked by popular rhetoric such as promoting notions of language as a resource without practical application in the classroom. California's new direction strives to accomplish this, but the success of these new initiatives depends on the ability to realign teacher perspectives with the high level of esteem given to linguistic and cultural resources.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The limitations of this study include the small number of participants and the single location for research. However, because California remains a forerunner of much of the policy for the nation regarding educating multilingual students, this project can shed light on the current orientations toward language. Clearly, more research is needed regarding the nature of multilingualism as a resource and tool for learning and what that may look like in practice. Moving from the orientation of language as problem to language as resource represented a significant shift in public opinion and policy. Adding language as *tool for learning* offers a more equitable approach by reinforcing the value of multilingualism to daily learning tasks, especially when envisioned through practical strategies that acknowledge students' identities and the languages that accompany those identities. Researchers could investigate further methods for educators to identify and incorporate information about students' lives into daily classroom requirements. Encouraging strategies such as translanguaging in the classroom that utilize language as a learning tool to build on students' whole repertoire of language skills promotes a more equitable approach and avoids narratives of ambiguity that devalue the linguistic and cultural resources students bring to school. Teachers must be given the training and resources to align daily practice with new policies. It will take significant work, commitment and collaboration to make the shifts necessary to see California's new vision to reach fruition.

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