



**TEXAS ASSOCIATION FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION**  
Affiliate of the National Association for Bilingual Education

## **The TABE Journal**

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# The TABE Journal



## TEXAS ASSOCIATION FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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Winter 2008 • The TABE Journal • Volume 10, No. 1

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## INTRODUCTION

In this issue of the TABE Journal, readers are invited to in-depth examination of research topics that frame our work as bilingual educators. The first section presents several articles on accountability issues in public schools, highlighting some of the inequities that are reinforced through institutionalized practices (such as high stakes testing) and providing analysis of the impacts on ELL students. Eslami and Plett focus on reading research as a lens for closer examination of the standardized test required in Texas (TAKS), providing illustrations of the complex issues that arise when ELL students are subjected to assessments using tests that were designed for monolingual, English L1 speakers. Alanís presents findings from a research project conducted in South Texas, pointing out some of the injustices perpetrated in school systems that persist in the application of retention policies resulting in a sorting and tracking system with discriminatory implications. This study of teachers' attitudes towards retention policies provides further insight into the nature of this practice and its insidious long- and short-term consequences.

The second section of this issue examines pedagogical practices that have proven to be effective for ELL learners, in the bilingual classroom and beyond. Arreguín-Anderson and Ruíz-Escalante describe key impacts of project-based learning in bilingual classrooms, discussing the outcomes for all learners who tend to benefit from this teaching/learning strategy as they enrich their understanding and knowledge. They provide an example in their discussion of a case study from a science classroom in a public school on the US-Mexico border. Díaz describes the benefits of using games in the mathematics classroom as a tool for enhancing bilingual student learning outcomes. Her article also provides examples of well-designed lessons using mathematical games, and discusses the implications for engaging parents and families as well. Garza and Lira present results from a study that examined the literacy development of bilingual students over a three-year period of time. Their research concludes that effective instruction for these students takes into account children's development levels, language differences, and literacy knowledge.

The final section of this TABE Journal issue presents examples of what works in bilingual education – dual language programs – and ends with a reflective article analyzing issues of power in a dual language context. Research conducted by Franco-Fuenmayor, Kandel-Cisco, and Padrón examines the cognitive reading strategies of students enrolled in a dual language programs, and these authors found that students from both language groups were in fact, using successful cognitive reading strategies to comprehend text. Their article provides a questionnaire and ideas for teachers who may want to replicate elements of this study by diagnosing the types of cognitive reading strategies used by students in their own classrooms. Hill, Gomez and Gomez describe the significance of an urban school district's transformation from a remedial paradigm to an enrichment dual language program. Rodríguez and Shefelbine's article offers insights into the transformative thinking of a superintendent from a high

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performing, high poverty school district, who led the entire district's transition to dual language education. Their article provides examples of the superintendent as advocate. Finally, Pimentel's article poses a series of questions to help educators critically analyze aspects of dual language programs, focusing specifically on two areas of concern: placement strategies and parental involvement.

Another TABE Journal issue on bilingual education research and practice will appear again in Spring 2009. We encourage readers to join the growing number of scholars and practitioners from around Texas and the nation who are conducting research on the effectiveness of innovative approaches to teaching and learning for English learners in a wide variety of contexts, documenting the processes and impacts and disseminating their findings with others in this public forum.

Josefina V. Tinajero and Judith H. Munter, Co-Editors  
The University of Texas at El Paso

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## Acknowledgements

Thanks to members of the Editorial Board for their assistance in reviewing all manuscripts submitted. Special thanks to Joe Follman and Blanca Magalí Henric, for their thorough editing of each selected published article. Thank you to the UTEP College of Education Technology Implementation Manager, Gerardo Urquiza and staff for their assistance in technical preparation of the web page and all associated documents.

Thanks to all authors for their contributions in advancing the research agenda in bilingual education.

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TABE JOURNAL**

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*Introduction*

Josefina Tinajero & Judith Munter, Co-Editors..... i

*High-Stakes testing and ELLs: L2 Reading Research Applied to Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills*

Zohreh R. Eslami & Bethany Plett, ..... 1

*Pre-emptive retention: Addressing the impact of accountability on English Language Learners in Texas*

Iliana Alanis..... 30

*Aprendiendo RICCO: El aprendizaje por medio de proyectos como instrumento de igualdad educativa en el aula bilingüe*

María Guadalupe Arreguín-Anderson y José Agustín Ruiz-Escalante ..... 63

*Utilizando juegos matemáticos en el salón bilingüe*

Zulmaris Díaz ..... 87

*Literacy development for kindergarten bilingual students: Going beyond the basal*

Emma Alicia Garza & Juan R. Lira ..... 107

*Improving Reading Comprehension in Dual Language Programs*

Susana E. Franco-Fuenmayor, Brooke E. Kandel-Cisco, Dr. Yolanda N. Padrón..... 142

*What a Difference a Year Makes: A Large Urban School District's Transformation from Remedial to an Enrichment Dual Language Education*

Stacie Hill, Richard Gómez, & Leo Gómez ..... 168

*Superintendent as Advocate: Leading a District-Wide Dual Language Program*

Mariela A. Rodríguez & Janet R. Shefelbine ..... 193

*The Dual Language Dualism: ¿Quiénes Ganan?*

Charise Pimentel ..... 217

Call for Papers, TABE Journal v. 11 #1, Spring 2009 ..... 240

# **High-Stakes Testing and ELLs: L2 Reading Research Applied to the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills**

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## **Abstract**

At the same time that the demographic landscape in U.S. schools has radically changed, accountability issues have taken a major place in research, educational policy, and education in general. Testing has become the keystone of the current accountability movement in the U.S. Research shows that English language learners score well below those of any of the other groups tested (Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001; Menken, 2008; Palmer & Lynch, 2008). Many researchers believe that a singular focus on testing for purposes of accountability is inappropriate and that more attention should be given to the social and political dimensions of accountability and to equity issues at the societal level. Based on this premise, the aim of this paper is to illustrate the challenges faced by English language learners (ELLs) when they are included in high-stakes testing. To this end, reading research is applied to the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Text and task analysis are utilized to examine the 10<sup>th</sup> grade reading comprehension section of the TAKS test. Analyzing the TAKS test example illustrates the multiple and complex issues of assessing reading comprehension of ELLs by tests that are basically designed for monolingual, English-speaking students.

## **Introduction**

Over the past three decades, the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of U.S. students has increased substantially, due in part to changing migration patterns and to varied birth rates. Many researchers and educators are concerned about the challenges that diversity poses for equity and excellence. In particular, they are concerned about the persistent achievement gap between students who are poor and from racial, ethnic, and linguistic minority groups and their peers as well as continued disparities in the distribution of educational resources (Abedi, 2004; Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001; Menken, 2008). In addition, there are many concerns about the extent to which responses to student diversity take into account cultural, linguistic, social, and economic factors in teaching, learning, and assessment.

While most educational researchers and practitioners agree on the need for accountability, there is considerable disagreement about what students and educators ought to be held accountable for and how best to assess results. The No Child Left Behind Act maintains that an emphasis on testing, the keystone of the current accountability movement, is essential to ensuring that all students are educated to high standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). However, as Menken (2008) submits, the sole reliance on student test scores as the measure of school success or failure, reflected in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability system, is fundamentally punitive of ELLs and the schools serving them. This opinion is echoed by several other researchers in the field of ESL and Bilingual Education (Abedi, 2004; Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001; Palmer & Lynch, 2008; Wright & Li, 2008).

With NCLB, high-stakes tests are being used more extensively than before. “Testing is the lynchpin of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, created to bring every child to grade level in reading

and math by 2014” (U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Education Secretary, 2006). Nonetheless, ELLs have not benefited from the educational reforms that followed the implementation of high-stakes assessments, because the vast majority of these tests are written for monolingual English speakers, often leaving ELLs at a disadvantage and raising questions as to how the test results should be interpreted (August & Hakuta, 1997; Menken, 2008; Palmer & Lynch, 2008; Wright & Li, 2008). ELL students traditionally do not do well on standardized exams, yet they are the students whom testing proponents target under assumptions that high stakes tests will improve educational quality and academic achievement in their schools (Amrein, Berliner, & Biddle, 2002; Haney, 2000; McNeil, 2000). With issues such as school funding, grade-level promotion, and graduation at stake, using standardized test scores as a basis for major decisions is potentially detrimental to ELLs and to the schools that serve them (Carey, 2006; Kim & Sunderman, 2005; Mathis, 2005).

In Texas, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) began to be administered to Texas schoolchildren in 2002. According to data from the spring 2003 administration of the TAKS, students who were LEP (Limited English Proficient) scored well below of any of the other groups tested. In comparing the LEP to the white students tested in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, only 14% of the LEP passed. This figure was 77% for the white students. In the first year of administering the test, the standards were lowered, and those who scored within two standard deviations were shown as passed (Texas Education Agency, TAKS 2003).

Increasing diversity among students within the context of disparities in achievement and resources; increasing tension regarding the role of education in a democracy; and increasing

accountability through testing—these shifts require clear and purposeful examination of educational practices and assessment procedures. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate multiple levels of challenges that ELLs face through such high-stakes standardized testing and to advocate for quality education and fair assessment for all students.

To illustrate the challenges faced by English language learners in being included in high-stakes testing, reading research is applied to the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Text and task analysis are utilized to examine the 10<sup>th</sup> grade reading comprehension section of the TAKS test. Analyzing the TAKS test example illustrates the multiple and complex issues in assessing reading comprehension of ELLs with tests that are basically designed for monolingual, English-speaking students.

A short literature review of second language (L2) reading and specific issues related to L2 reading comprehension assessment is provided first. Then reading research is used to analyze the 10<sup>th</sup> grade reading TAKS and show the challenges ELLs may face. At the end, some suggestions for action and advocacy are provided.

### **Reading in L2**

While the first language (L1) and L2 reading processes have similarities, it is also important to recognize that many factors come into play in distinguishing them which in turn make second language reading a different activity than first language reading. L2 reading has become distinguished from L1 reading for several reasons. One difference emerged from the body of research applying schema theory to reading, where researchers found that readers comprehend

texts according to their familiar culture (Anderson et al., 1977; Carrell, 1992; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). Readers typically make use of background knowledge, vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, experience with text, and other strategies to help them understand a written text (Pang et al., 2003). Additionally, in the reading process, readers use their background knowledge about the text's topic and structure along with their linguistic knowledge and reading strategies to achieve their purpose for reading (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001). The notion that culture interacts with comprehension of text is very important to both L2 readers—who often read texts from their nonnative culture—as well as to English teachers, who often teach texts from students' non-native culture.

Reading researchers (Brantmeier, 2004; Wolf, 1993; Young, 2000), agree that comprehension is obviously a critical part of the multifarious interplay of mechanisms involved in L2 reading. To achieve reading comprehension, readers compensate for a deficiency in one area of reading, e.g., word recognition, by relying on other knowledge sources such as comprehension strategies or sensitivity to intraword structure (Stanovich, 1980). Thus, even if they encounter difficult or ambiguous terms, readers predict the general meaning according to assumptions derived from their schema. However, if readers activate an inappropriate schema, they may miss the meaning of the text (Oded & Stavans, 1994).

Learners of a second language not only faces the reading challenges experienced by poor readers in the native language (Anderson & Pearson, 1984), they also usually have two additional challenges: lower language proficiency and different cultural backgrounds from those assumed in the text (Bensoussan, 1998).

The assessment of second language reading is a complex task due to intertwining issues of culture, language, and test construction. Aspects of culture and language interfere even when assessments are specifically constructed for second language learners, as they are on international standardized tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) (Parry, 1994). Matters are even more complicated when L2 students take reading comprehension assessments created for L1 students. While assessment issues are complex regardless of the test takers, requiring ELLs to take assessments created for native speakers creates a complex and not easily solved assessment problem.

### **Background Knowledge**

Assessing the reading comprehension skills of second language learners is a complex task due to the persistent influence of cultural background knowledge on students' understanding of text. Almost all reading researchers agree that background knowledge plays an important role in reading comprehension (Grabe 2004). That is, readers' own experiences and expectations, or background knowledge, interact with text in order to create comprehension. Background knowledge, previous experience, and various assumptions about texts influence how readers comprehend texts (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001). In relation to L2 reading assessment, cultural background knowledge emerges as an important issue considering the fact that it is often native speakers of one culture who write tests to assess non-native speakers from various other cultures (Alderson, 2000; Bernhardt, 1991). As Coltrane (2002) maintains, one of the problems associated with the inclusion of ELLs in high-stakes tests concerns the cultural familiarity and knowledge assumed in some test items. Test items may contain references to ideas or events that

are unfamiliar to ELLs because they have not been exposed to similar concepts in their native culture and/or have not lived in the United States for a long period of time.

Parry (1994) finds that even though the content of British-created university entrance exams administered in Nigeria have cultural content aligning with Nigerian culture, they nevertheless assume a European stance concerning the purpose of literacy. Even though the cultural content matches Nigerian expectations, the expressed point of view does not match Nigerian expectations, and therefore causes comprehension difficulties for the students. Thus, Parry finds that the cultures of both students and texts indeed play a significant role in comprehension of assessment texts. Consequently, it appears that culture can never be disregarded as an influence on reading comprehension.

The role of background knowledge in reading comprehension has been studied mainly in relation to schema theory, which describes readers as coming to text prepared to understand it in specific ways due to their personal schemata (Carrell, 1987; Grabe, 2004). Schemata are defined as “generic concepts underlying objects, events, and actions” (Anderson et al., 1977, p. 369).

Studies based on schema theory have found that readers will interpret texts to have meanings with which they are familiar. In a comparison of language and schema, Freebody and Anderson (1983) found that familiar text content aided comprehension more than familiar vocabulary. Carrell (1987) distinguished between content and formal schema. Content schema refers to the information in the text, while formal schema refers to the structure of the text. Carrell found that content schema seems to play a more important role in comprehension than formal schema. Of

particular importance for L2 readers, Floyd and Carrell (1987) found that teaching background knowledge to a treatment group of L2 readers improved their comprehension over that of the control group. Keshavarz and Atai (2007) found that content schema has a greater effect than linguistic simplification on both reading comprehension and recall. This suggests that in second language reading, content is of the utmost importance.

Background knowledge accounts for a difference between L1 and L2 readers because it affects the internal information that readers can access. First, L2 readers might choose inappropriate background knowledge from their first language while reading in the second language. Second, L2 readers might simply lack the background knowledge to fully comprehend a text in the second language. Consequently, while they may understand the language of the text, they might not understand its implications. The fact that background knowledge has such a large influence on performance signifies that language teachers must be vigilant to be aware that reading instruction entails not only reading strategies and linguistic knowledge, but also cultural knowledge insofar as can be predicted.

### **Short-Circuit Hypothesis**

Another reading comprehension assessment issue centers on students' linguistic knowledge and its relationship to comprehension. As Grabe (2004) maintains, text comprehension requires both language knowledge and recognition of key ideas and their relationship. Although reading assessments are usually intended to measure reading comprehension, it is difficult to distill linguistic knowledge from comprehension skills. Wolf (1993) describes comprehension skills as "including the ability to recognize morphosyntactic cues, word recognition, the perception of

textual relationship, the ability to infer meaning and to understand the gist of a passage” (p. 323). Language skills, however, “include these comprehension abilities as well as the recognition of, and the ability to produce, semantically and syntactically appropriate, as well as cohesive, responses” (p. 323). Because language skills are integral to reading comprehension, the two cannot be separated.

Clarke (1979) suggests that the role of language proficiency may be greater than has previously been assumed. He proposed that there is a “language competence ceiling” that hampers the good L1 reader’s attempts to use effective reading behaviors in the target language; the limited control over the language “short-circuits” the good reader’s system, causing that reader to revert to “poor reader strategies” when confronted with a difficult or confusing task in the second language. That is, not having sufficient L2 knowledge, the skilled L1 reader becomes a poor L2 reader, which shows a reading behavior similar to that of poor L1 readers. The implication of the study results is that a certain amount of L2 language control is needed before transfer of reading strategies can occur, and the ‘certain amount’ is what ‘language ceiling’ implies. This is what Clarke’s ‘short-circuit hypothesis,’ now more commonly referred to as the Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (LTH), entails (Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995).

Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis looks at academic skills such as second language reading from the perspective of the L2 language development. The hypothesis assumes that those aspects of bilingualism which might positively influence cognitive growth are unlikely to come into effect until the child has attained a certain minimum or threshold level of competence in a second language.

While the idea of the short-circuit hypothesis is rather simple, it has raised several research questions concerning the degree to which second language and L1 reading skills influence the ability to read the L2. A seminal study on the short-circuit hypothesis by Clarke (1979) indicated that, in fact, good L1 readers do not automatically transfer their good reading strategies to L2 reading.

Bossers (1991) investigated specific questions raised by the short-circuit hypothesis. From his research with Dutch and Turkish schoolchildren, Bossers formed three conclusions that were consistent with the short-circuit hypothesis. He asserts, “L2 knowledge is a more powerful predictor than L1 reading. Second, differences between the least skilled L2 readers are predicted only by differences in L2 knowledge. Third, L1 reading comes into play as a significant predictor variable only at a relatively high level of L2 reading” (p. 56). Bossers’ research points to the idea that L1 reading strategies only influence L2 reading after students have reached a rather high level of language proficiency. Additionally, Taillefer (1996) concludes that when the reading task is difficult, L2 knowledge increases in importance.

As indicated in research, low-level L2 students do not automatically transfer good reading strategies from the first language to the second language. What is demonstrated by research on the short circuit hypothesis is that bottom-level language issues such as vocabulary and grammar interfere with the use of comprehension strategies when students are not highly proficient users of their second language.

## **Task Type**

Another significant factor in reading assessment is question task type. In general, two kinds of tasks are used to demonstrate comprehension. In the first task, students must identify a correct answer, as in multiple choice, true/false, and matching questions. The second type of task requires students to produce their own answer, as in short answer or essay questions. According to Wolf (1993), the first type of task is appropriate for L2 assessment because it does not require spontaneous language production. On the other hand, simple identification tends to assess low-level information (Garcia & Pearson, 1994). The second type of task is significantly more difficult for L2 students, because even though it assesses higher order information, students must not only comprehend the text passage and the test questions, they must also produce an original answer to the test question. Having to produce their own response heightens the possibility of being misunderstood. Even if the student fully comprehends both the assessment text and the test question, the student might not produce an answer comprehensible to the test raters (Garcia & Pearson, 1994).

For example, students who are asked to choose correct answers in multiple choice tests often do better than students asked to compose a short answer in response to questions. Even if students comprehend texts well, they may not construct appropriate answers in tasks that require spontaneous writing. Thus, the test becomes an assessment of producible linguistic knowledge apart from reading comprehension.

Wolf (1993) describes one of the solutions to the task type dilemma as providing assessments in which the questions and responses are in the students' native language. Administering the

questions and answers in the native language ensures that the assessment focuses on comprehension rather than L2 language skills. However, for younger students who may not be fully literate in their L1, native language assessment may not be as effective. While in Texas students are allowed to take the TAKS in Spanish or English up to grade 6, by 10<sup>th</sup> grade they are required to take the TAKS only in English. Thus, when the test counts the most—toward graduation—students are compelled to take it in English.

### **The Study**

To analyze linguistic and cultural issues involved with ELLs taking reading comprehension tests in their second language, this paper incorporates a text analysis of a 10<sup>th</sup> grade TAKS reading test example. The test example used in this paper is available to the public on the Texas Education Agency website: <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/resources/release/taks/2003/gr10taksela.pdf>. The specific issues related to reading comprehension (readers' background knowledge, text, and task) will be used as the basis of data analysis structure. Analyzing the TAKS test example will illustrate the multiple and complex issues of assessing reading comprehension in the case of ELLs.

The TAKS began to be administered to Texas schoolchildren in 2002. If students do not pass the 10<sup>th</sup> grade test, they may retake it in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. The 10<sup>th</sup> grade exit test must be passed in English in order for students to qualify for graduation from high school (Texas Education Agency, 2003). This policy clearly implies supremacy of English over other

languages, because students will not be eligible to graduate from high school without passing in the English TAKS.

### **The TAKS: Background Knowledge**

The TAKS test includes two excerpts, one called “Brian’s Return,” and the other called “On Willow Creek.” “Brian’s Return” narrates the adventures of Brian, a teenager who is the only survivor of a small plane crash. Until his rescue, Brian has to use his wits and stay alive in the Canadian wilderness. In the test excerpts, Brian willingly decides to return to the wild. “On Willow Creek” is a collection of an author’s memories of his encounters and experiences with nature, and rich descriptions of the natural environment are provided. In both texts, the most obvious cultural issue centers on the fact that the setting and events of the stories have to do with natural settings.

As in the TOEFL text selection process, it is possible that texts about nature are viewed as “safe” texts because they are void of politics, religion, and sex. Moreover, it is probably assumed that the settings would not be extremely problematic for students to comprehend; however, *Brian’s Return* has not only a natural setting but also a story focused specifically on camping.

Consequently, students would need a specialized lexicon of camping words such as *canoe*, *tent*, and (animal) *tracks* in order to comprehend the passage. In particular, *canoe* and *tent* are used repeatedly throughout the passage. To be fair, though, it must be noted that with each occurrence in the text, these specialized words are accompanied by various context clues. Thus, it might be possible for students to eventually piece together the context clues to get an idea of canoes and tents.

Having background knowledge of camping seems even more important in relation to several phrases used to establish the setting and mood of the narrator. First, in the following excerpt taken from the passage, the narrator says, “he had slept so soundly his first night back in the woods, the bear could have been tipping garbage cans.” Although the vocabulary in this description is rather common, no transparent relationship exists between sleeping soundly and bears making loud noises by tipping garbage cans at night:

Brian awakened just after dawn, when the sun began to warm the tent. The sky was cloudless. He flipped the canoe, and when he went to lower his packs he saw the bear tracks. One bear, medium size. It had come in the night so quietly that Brian hadn’t heard it—though he had slept so soundly his first night back in the woods, the bear could have been tipping garbage cans.

Readers would need knowledge of the habits of bears around campgrounds to fully understand the metaphor. Similarly, the following lines describe the way that Brian protected his food from bears by hanging it in trees: “Brian could see that it had tried to stand and reach them. There were claw marks on the tree but the bear had never figured out the rope holding the packs and had gone off without doing anything destructive.” While this passage describes the rope and the tree, it never explicitly describes the fact that campers often hang food from trees in order to keep it away from animals. Without background knowledge of camping, students might have difficulty comprehending the relationship between the rope, tree, and bear.

Another more subtle cultural issue contained in the text centers on cultural beliefs about human relationships to nature and aging. In “*Brian’s Return*,” in the last paragraph, the narrator’s position toward nature is stated as, “. . . nature would do what it wanted to do. He had to be part

of it,..." when Brian is injured in a violent rainstorm. In "On Willow Creek," the narrator ruminates about his lost youth while seeing himself as part of nature—perhaps having become too wild for civilized environments. Although it is difficult to make generalizations about cultural relationships with nature and aging, it seems that depending on their histories, cultures indeed develop differing cultural attitudes about both nature and aging (Bennett, 2003). Accordingly, the relationships to nature and youth described in the passages may be unimaginable or undesirable to students. As a result, their comprehension might suffer. Admittedly, these conclusions need to be validated by actual data from the students' performance on these tests; however, it is important to consider the possibility of underlying cultural assumptions in both texts and students. Even though these excerpts about nature do not include offensive subjects, the possibility must be considered that cultural assumptions either hinder or promote comprehension.

### **The TAKS: Short Circuit Hypothesis**

The idea that bottom-level language issues cause significant difficulties in L2 reading is important in assessing the fairness and validity of state standardized tests such as the TAKS test (Texas Education Agency Released Tests, 2003). That language issues might not be compensated for by comprehension strategies may be detrimental to low-level language students' scores on reading assessments. Moreover, because public school students immigrate and start school in the U.S. at various times, the language levels of students taking the 10<sup>th</sup> grade exit TAKS reading comprehension test vary greatly. Although the passages on the reading test are supposed to constitute basic reading for 10<sup>th</sup> grade students, they are full of infrequent vocabulary, difficult grammar, and confusing cohesive devices.

“Brian’s Return” has several camping-related words that are repeated throughout the reading. Words such as *canoe*, *packs*, *fend off*, *paddle*, *diorama*, *canopy*, and *deluge* are infrequent and possibly unknown to high school L2 students. While conventional wisdom instructs students to find meaning through context, the short-circuit research indicates that low-language proficiency students may be mostly unable to use contextual clues effectively to compensate for other linguistic difficulties.

The vocabulary in “On Willow Creek” does not seem to be as background-specific as that in “Brian’s Return;” however, in general, the language is more poetic. In “On Willow Creek,” language is used to produce rich descriptions of the natural environment. While the language effectively evokes strong imagery, it may also distract students from comprehending the events of the story. Moreover, “On Willow Creek” is not a conventional chronological story. It is more like a collection of the author’s memories. Consequently, students may not understand what “happens” in the story if they understand stories as a chronological series of events. In this story, the marking of time may be difficult to comprehend. The narrator begins by describing a childhood scene in line 1, but in line 6, skips to a scene from his teenage years. The passage of time is marked by additional space between paragraphs. Marking the passage of time by leaving space between paragraphs would not be a transparent cohesive device for low proficiency L2 readers who spend much energy concentrating on word meanings.

The relationship between L2 linguistic knowledge, and L1 and L2 reading strategies as described by the short-circuit hypothesis is not entirely clear. However, most researchers (Bossers, 1991;

Wijnendaele, 1998) believe that although both L1 reading and L2 proficiency contribute significantly to L2 reading, L2 knowledge is a more powerful predictor than L1 reading for less skilled L2 readers. This confirms the short-circuit hypothesis. Initially, the L2 readers rely on L2 knowledge. After a threshold level has been gained, the readers are able to transfer reading skills.

Additionally, the ways in which individual students might react to certain texts because of their L2 language ability is unpredictable. However, research indicates that low-proficiency L2 students may not sufficiently comprehend the text passages on reading comprehension tests. Consequently, the test might become a test of language rather than reading comprehension.

### **The TAKS and the Task Type**

The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test, the predecessor to the contemporary TAKS test, employed only multiple-choice questions. Perhaps to address concerns that only low-level information is assessed through multiple-choice questions, the TAKS test combines multiple-choice questions with short answer questions. One concern of reading comprehension assessment is that with multiple-choice questions, it is sometimes easy to answer the questions without having read the passage. Thus, the test assesses students' common sense knowledge rather than their comprehension of the specific passage. Indeed, in "Brian's Return" it would be possible for students, including L2 students, to skim in order to answer several of the questions. For example, question 1 asks what visits Brian's camp the first night. Since the answer is in the first line of the second paragraph, it would be easy for everyone to find it without reading.

Questions 2 and 4 below are similar, in that students who already know the words *deluge* and *diorama* would not have to read the passage to answer the question.

2. The word *deluge* in paragraph 19 means a —

F drought

G mistake

H\* flood

J trickle

4. Which word from paragraph 8 helps the reader understand the meaning of the word *diorama*?

F\* *painting*

G *private*

H *sheltered*

J *canopy*

Another type of multiple-choice question on the TAKS reading comprehension assessment requires students to have knowledge of literary terms in order to answer the question. For example, questions 6 and 9 test students' knowledge of repetition and simile as literary devices. Likewise, question 23 in "On Willow Creek" asks about the thesis of the story. While it does not seem inappropriate to require 10<sup>th</sup> graders to know and recognize literary devices, putting them on the reading comprehension assessment seems to muddy the purpose of the test. Students would not necessarily need to recognize and identify *simile* and *repetition* in order to comprehend the passage. Incorporating questions about literary devices into the comprehension test might prove to be a distraction to L2 students. If lower-level L2 students have read and worked to comprehend the passage, then asking about literary devices, which are peripheral to comprehension, might cause some task overload. On the other hand, L2 students who do not comprehend the passage but can recognize simile and repetition might be able to answer such questions independently of their comprehension abilities.

Another problem with multiple choice questions is forcing students to choose one answer among the only four options provided by the test maker. It is possible that students have comprehended the text, but choosing the correct option is problematic because of different likely appropriate interpretations. Two of the options (B and D) to question 13 (below) in “Brian’s Return” for example, can logically be equally correct, depending on student’s interpretation. This question asks about the reason why Brian decided to crawl under the canoe:

- In paragraph 38, why does Brian decide to crawl under the canoe?
- A. The strong wind might blow away the canoe.
  - B. The canoe will protect Brian from lightning strikes.
  - C. He likes the way the rain sounds when it hits the canoe.
  - D\* The canoe acts as shelter during the storm.

The text in paragraph 38, as seen below, does not give a clue as to which one of the options could be the correct one, either:

But he had done one thing right: He had tied the canoe to a tree. He dragged the tent to the canoe, crawled underneath and lay on the tent the rest of the night, listening to the rain, wincing with the pain in his leg and feeling stupid.

Since the reason is not explicitly mentioned in the text, the reader has to make an inference, and both of these inferences are equally probable and correct, depending on what the reader believes to be the most important reason for sheltering.

The final two types of questions on the assessment are ones that ask students to identify the purpose of events in the plot or to describe the feelings of characters. In order to answer these, students would need to read and comprehend some parts of the story. The questions that require the most comprehension as well as the most language skills are the short answer questions that follow the multiple-choice section. For these questions, students are asked to write original

answers in which they must use evidence from the story. For these questions, students must comprehend the story as well as produce appropriate language to answer the questions.

However, two of the three short answer questions focus on literary devices rather than reading comprehension. The first question asks students to describe the conflict Brian faces, while question 3 asks students to compare the themes of the two stories. As with the multiple-choice questions, students might be able to comprehend and write about the story without necessarily knowing conflict and theme as literary devices.

It appears that the essay questions progress from easy to more difficult. The first question (#29) basically asks students to describe Brian's conflict. The second question (#30) asks students to discuss why memories of Willow Creek are important to Rick Bass. The information needed to answer this question is less explicitly stated in the story than information needed to simply describe Brian's conflict. Finally, question #31 asks students to compare the themes of the two passages. This question requires both a high degree of comprehension as well as a high degree of rhetorical knowledge and organization in writing.

Question #31 in particular illustrates the problem of asking L2 students to write essay answers on reading comprehension assessments. Although an L2 student might comprehend the themes of the two passages well enough to talk about their similarities, producing a well-organized and lucid essay about it would certainly be more difficult and perhaps impossible in some cases. The trouble is that even if students comprehend the passages, understand them, and can compare the themes of the two passages, if they cannot write it out, it will appear that they do not comprehend

the text. Consequently, the assessment will not have fulfilled its intention to assess whether students comprehend what they read.

TAKS is basically designed for monolingual English speakers (Texas Education Agency Released Tests, 2003) while many of the students who take it are not native speakers of English. Data from Spring 2003 of the TAKS show that, compared to 77% of native speakers of English, only 14 percent of ELLs passed the test (Texas Education Agency Released Tests, 2003).

Analyzing the TAKS test relative to L2 reading research demonstrates the immense complexity of administering standardized tests to L2 students. Although language proficiency clearly plays a large role in determining students' ability to comprehend reading, background knowledge, task type and task purpose may also influence and interfere with students' comprehension. An ELL who might otherwise be able to comprehend the text would be at a disadvantage due to the cultural, linguistic, or task-related issues inherent in the reading section of standardized tests like the TAKS.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we tried to illustrate the potential challenges that ELLs have in being included in high-stakes testing. To this end, reading research was applied to the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (Texas Education Agency Released Tests, 2003). The 10<sup>th</sup> grade reading comprehension section of the TAKS test was analyzed, and the multiple and complex issues of assessing reading comprehension of ELLs by tests—which are basically designed for monolingual English-speaking students—was illustrated. As the above analyses of the linguistic and non-linguistic demands of the TAKS test reveal, NCLB's mandated expectations for ELLs to

take a test that is designed for monolingual English speakers in order to graduate high school is unreasonable. As Wright & Li (2008, p. 262) submit, the real failure is on the part of U.S. education policy (as promulgated in No Child Left Behind) which has become a language policy.

There has been some research on the potential of creating linguistically simplified tests for ELLs (Abedi & Lord 2001; Keshavarz & Attai, 2007; Garcia & Pearson, 1994) which attempt remove difficult lexical and syntactic features such as those discussed in this paper. However, such research does not clearly show how multiple challenges these students face can be eliminated by one remedy alone. A reasonable policy must take into consideration students' prior knowledge and learning, the quality of education in their home country, their opportunity to learn content, and how language barriers may prevent equal access to core curriculum instruction once ELLs arrive in the U.S. (Wright & Li, 2008). It is claimed that standardized tests cannot accurately measure the knowledge and skills of second language learners because the tests are insensitive to issues of diversity and differing background knowledge of ELLs and are therefore biased. As Chamberlain and Medeiros-Landurand (1991) explain, "Another effect of cultural insensitivity is assessment bias. This problem results when the educational personnel involved in the assessment process do not take the potential cultural differences into account when assessing culturally diverse students" (p. 115).

There are actions to be taken to prevent the negative impact of high-stakes standardized tests on ELLs, who may be retained in grade or denied high school graduation because of poor test performance on these tests. We can do research and provide critical analysis of the effects of high-stakes assessments on stakeholders from a variety of perspectives. Additionally, we can

present other alternatives to ensure educational accountability that are based on sound principles of assessment without the high-stakes pressure of TAKS (Neil, 1999). Organizations such as Institute for Language and Education Policy (<http://www.elladvocates.org>) and Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (<http://www.tesol.org>) have suggested needed modifications to make the U.S. federal education policy more reasonable for ELLS. The suggested changes include the use of multiple authentic assessments as an alternative means of tracking the students' progress over time.

Furthermore, we should advocate for reasonable assessment of students in schools and voice our concerns collectively and individually. Teachers should act as advocates of linguistically and culturally diverse students and promote the awareness that important decisions about ELLs should not be based on a single test score. It is critical to use a balanced approach to interpret and use test data in order to make informed decisions about ELLs, especially when these tests have a gate-keeping function.

State-mandated testing has grown at an exponential rate over the past two decades (Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001). Accountability through testing, for students, teachers, and administrators, is the key leverage point for policymakers seeking to promote educational reform. While no one is opposed to accountability in education and inclusion of all the learners in this accountability movement, it is important to recognize that the goals of accountability can be achieved through alternative assessment.

As advocates for ELLs, we have an important role and responsibility to use appropriate and fair measures for assessment of our language minority students, especially when the stakes are high. The demographics of this country are changing, and the minority will become the majority in the near future. The future of these students is in our hands, and we must do our best to ensure their success and the best realization of their potential.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors like to thank the anonymous reviewers for valuable comments provided for the revision of the manuscript.

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**Pre-emptive Retention: Addressing the impact of accountability on English Language Learners in Texas**

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ABSTRACT

There is no educational intervention that is been shown to be less effective than retention. Nonetheless, many teachers and school administrators use it, not in the best interest of the child and/or the child's family, but to serve their own needs in the accountability system. This article presents a border research study on South Texas elementary teachers' attitudes toward retention and social promotion, with discussion of retention policies and their effects on English language learners (ELLs) in the early grades. Results suggest that retention is not only being applied arbitrarily across campuses within one district but may have possible discriminatory implications for ELLs as teachers use retention to sort and track students and determine grade-level promotion. If retention is an effective policy, as some would suggest, then it should be applied uniformly across schools and not as an arbitrary consequence of living in a particular neighborhood.

Data suggest that by the year 2040, two out of every three Texans will be Latino in all areas of the state (State Data Center, 2005). Educators are searching for effective practices and

programs for this burgeoning population. Culturally relevant pedagogy (Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Gay, 2000), dual language programs (Thomas & Collier, 2004) and use of highly qualified bilingual teachers (Garcia, 2005) have all been cited as effective means of instruction for language minority students. Too many educators however, are also looking for a “quick fix” that often serves the school system but undermines children’s educational opportunities. Social promotion policies and high retention rates are examples of this quick fix solution. Little research, however, has been conducted to determine the factors that influence teacher retention decisions and their impacts on specific populations.

In this study, we examine the political, administrative, and collegial pressures that may contribute to teachers’ decision-making in student retention. We first briefly summarize the literature on the academic retention debate. We then follow with a description of the data and statistical strategy used for analyses. After presenting the findings, we discuss their implications for Latino students and English learners.

### Social Promotion and Retention

The increasing emphasis on educational standards and accountability brought on by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has rekindled public debate regarding the use of grade retention as an intervention to remedy academic deficits. Grade retention has been defined as “the practice of requiring a child to repeat a particular grade” (Raforth, Dawson, & Carey, 1988). Thus, grade-level retention is an important issue in the era of accountability. Much research has revealed the potential benefits or consequences of retention (Alexander et al., 2003; Jacob & Lefgren, 2002; Nagaoka & Roderick, 2004). Empirical studies of retention indicate that children

who are retained generally do worse than comparable peers who are not retained and are at a much higher risk for dropping out of school (Alexander et al., 2003; Holmes, 1989, 2000; House, 1998; Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2005). Nichols et al. (2005) and Alexander et al. (2003) also found that states with the highest proportion of minority and high poverty students implemented accountability systems that exerted the greatest pressure to retain students. This mirrors Valenzuela's research (2004) that indicates the accountability movement is reducing the quality and quantity of education offered to children in Texas. Additionally, studies have shown that poverty, parents' educational levels, and race often correlate with retention rates (Hauser, 2001; Kaufman, Bradby, & Owings, 1992). Thus, the negative impacts of high-stakes testing and retention disproportionately affect low-income, minority students.

Insert Figure 1 Here

Despite empirical research demonstrating the harmful effects of retention, the state of Texas has ended 'social promotion' by requiring students to pass state exams to be promoted to the next grade. If repeating a grade resulted in higher achievement, educators would perhaps be justified in retaining so many students. Research on grade retention however, reveals that this is not the case. Students who repeat a grade typically do worse or no better academically than those in carefully matched control groups (Cortez & Cortez, 2005; Hong & Raudenbush, 2005, Smith & Shepard, 1989). Often, students who are retained do not go on to higher achievement levels in subsequent grades. When compared to on-grade classmates, over-age students are twice as likely to be retained (Texas Education Agency, 1996). In addition, they often end up tracked into low-ability groups, where they experience diluted curricula and diminished opportunities to learn (Oakes, 1985). In one study, educators—as part of the Chicago Schools

policy to end social promotion—reported that the threat of retention increased student motivation, increased parent involvement, and made schools more responsive to student needs. On the other hand, teachers also reported that they spent less time on non-tested subjects like science and social studies in order to focus on the tested subjects (Jacob, Stone, & Roderick, 2004). Even more alarming, teachers reported that students retained in third and sixth grade started out very far behind and, very quickly, fell even further behind.

Conversely, social promotion seems adverse to the education process in that students are promoted when they have not met particular standards (Parker, 2001). Proponents argue that while retention may be painful in the short-term, over time students will work harder, be able to master learning requirements, and eventually graduate with a diploma that ‘means something.’ Politicians and parents frequently believe that retention is an effective educational practice, as it is seen as a way to motivate students to succeed (Bracey, 1999). The accountability movement has linked testing to retention and promotion decisions. Requiring students to pass a test is seen as a more objective way of determining whether a student should be retained than a teacher’s more subjective decision (Jacobs & Lefgren, 2002). Although high stakes tests are not considered appropriate to make promotional decisions in and of themselves (National Research Council, 1999), high stakes tests like the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) have replaced the teacher decision-making process in promotion and retention decisions.

### Retention Rules and Rates in Texas

In 2002-2003, Texas students in third grade were required to pass the reading portion of the TAKS to advance to fourth grade. In 2004-2005, students in the fifth grade were required to

pass the reading and math portions of the TAKS to advance to sixth grade (Texas Education Agency, 2004). Beginning in 2007-08, students in the eighth grade were required to pass the reading and mathematics tests before advancing to the ninth grade.

Texas allows students three opportunities to pass the tests. A parent or guardian may appeal the retention decision to their school district's grade placement committee (GPC). School districts maintain discretion in overseeing retention decisions, providing student intervention, and ensuring accelerated instruction (Texas Administrative Code 19). Often, the result is a child who is forced to repeat a full year's curriculum with few changes in instruction to meet his/her academic needs. Reynolds, Temple, and McCoy (1997) state, "Once students are retained . . . they usually get no special help with their schooling and are often placed in low academic tracks . . . and ultimately disengage from school" (p. 36). If students do not receive additional or accelerated instruction to help them learn grade-level material, there should be little expectation that repeating the curriculum will improve student learning outcomes.

Retention rates have been calculated by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) based on year-to-year progress of individual students since 1994-95. The Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) data reveal patterns in retention rates that coincide with Texas' social promotion policies. State data also reveal that particular racial and ethnic groups are more likely to be retained. For example, in 2005, although only 58% of students enrolled in Texas public schools were African American or Hispanic, 75.6% of students retained in the public schools were from one of these two ethnic groups (TEA, 2006). The K-12 rate of retention in 2004-2005 for Hispanic students was almost twice the retention rate for white students, and the total number of

retained Hispanic students (115,941) was more than double the number for white students (46,203) (Texas Education Agency, 2006). AEIS data from 1994-2005 indicate a steady rise in retention rates in all elementary grade levels, through the 2004-2005 school year.

Insert Table I Here

Retention rates in grades K-5 have been rising since 1994, with some of the greatest increases in kindergarten (146.7%) and fifth grade (250%) (TEA Report, 2004, 2006). Retention rates for African American and Hispanic students have persistently been more than double those for white students. Additionally, students who were economically disadvantaged have had higher retention rates than students who were not economically disadvantaged. Across grades K-5, the retention rates have been much higher in first grade than in any other grade. Most striking was the 2.5% increase in retention rates at the fifth grade in 2005—the same year Texas' social promotion policy went into effect at the fifth grade level. Interestingly, this increase in retention was felt primarily by African American and Hispanic students. African American fifth grade retention jumped from 1.5% to 5.3%, and Hispanic fifth grade retention increased from 1.2% to 4.8%. The increase for white students was from 0.7% to 1.5%. These retention rates can be attributed to Texas' end of social promotion policy, and are affecting young minority children at alarming rates with little regard for the adverse emotional affects for children.

### Correlations between Accountability and Retention

When key stakeholders and politicians call for students and teachers to be held accountable, they frequently call for a quick-fix such as grade retention as the immediate response to low achievement rather than seeking systemic improvements to schooling and

teaching practices. Furthermore, many districts use retention as a way to raise test scores and increase a school's rating (Allington, 2000). For instance, retaining 20% of the third graders (those least likely to achieve test scores sufficient to meet state criteria) would provide "a nice boost to passing rates in the year after the retentions occurred" (p. 120). Consequently, in Texas, where third and fifth graders must now pass a reading test for promotion, teachers and administrators may be tempted to retain students so as to bolster their third and fifth grade testing results.

AEIS data from TEA reveal the number of children who have been retained due to low passing rates on state exams. In the 2004-05 school year, 14,589 students in the third grade did not pass their initial attempt at the reading TAKS or reading State Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA II). Nearly 43,000 fifth graders failed to pass the first administration of the TAKS or SDAA II reading and mathematics tests. Just over 43% of the third graders (6,332) who failed were retained, and about 22% of fifth graders (9,320) who did not pass the reading and mathematics tests were retained for the 2004-05 school year. The lingering effect of the accountability system in Texas can be most clearly seen at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level, where in 2005 the 9<sup>th</sup> grade retention rate for students who speak a language other than English was an astounding 30.9% (TEA, 2006).

According to Haney et al. (2004), high stakes tests implemented over the last two decades have lead to the encouragement of dropouts and retention prior to the tenth grade. They link the 'bulge' of students at the ninth grade level to successive changes in testing. Such is the case in Texas, where the high stakes testing environment has led to cases where schools have

intentionally manipulated dropout rates in efforts to maintain top accountability ratings (IDRA, 1999).

### Retention of English Language Learners

With the dismantling of bilingual education programs in many states, Texas leads the country in meeting the needs of its language minority population. ELLs however, have consistently had higher rates of retention than their English-speaking counterparts in all grades except Kindergarten. In 2004-2005, state data reflect Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in the fifth grade were retained at a rate of 8%, compared with 2.8% of non-LEP students (Texas Education Agency, 2006). This is a dramatic increase from the previous year, where retention rates for fifth grade ELL students and non-ELL students were 1.9% and 0.9%, respectively. Data also indicate that between 1995 and 2005, retention rates increased most for students in the third and fifth grades who were economically disadvantaged (2.8% and 3.8%, respectively) (TEA, 2006).

Insert Figure 2 Here

As educators, we must continue to question the validity of these standardized tests for minority students and speakers of languages other than English. The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing note that every assessment is an assessment of language (2004). Therefore, if a student is not proficient in the language of the test, that student's assessment scores will likely underestimate his/her knowledge of the subjects being tested. Furthermore, assessing the full extent of the knowledge of a bilingual child may necessitate some procedures for assessing knowledge across two languages. While it is not contested that the information

provided by standardized tests should be used to inform teachers, students, and parents on the needs and strengths of student performance, the authors of this study also believe that such tests are most often used to sort, track, and determine promotion and graduation. This practice, while not valid for any student, is particularly discriminatory for ELLs. Ironically the previous practice of excluding ELLs in state accountability measures resulted in a lack of accountability for these students. The current practices, on the other hand, are not necessarily more effective for the needs of this population.

### Background of Study

This study investigates how retention is conceptualized and practiced in U.S. schools located along the Texas-Mexico border. These schools have had high commendations from the state accountability system, indicate high numbers of ELLs, and are located in the regional service center area with one of the highest retention rates in Texas (6.1%). Currently the state collects data on student retention. However, little to no research has been conducted on the implementation of specific retention policies by Texas teachers. The following quote suggests the accountability system may be corrupted by means of grade retention, “In Texas, where third graders must now pass a reading test for promotion, administrators may be tempted to retain second graders so those students’ scores won’t show up in third-grade testing” (Ezarik, 2003, p. 36). This paper is an attempt to investigate the above claim by asking the following questions:

1. How was retention applied by elementary teachers?
  - a. Does a students’ native language impact retention decisions?
2. Are children being retained to keep them out of the accountability system?
3. Is retention being applied systematically across schools within one school district?

Given that the sample is one of convenience taken from only one school district, the results are not meant to be generalized. Rather, the findings are meant to be illustrative of the range of retention practices and the negative impact of high-stakes testing on ELLs in this context. A description of the data set and general study design follows.

## Methodology

### Participants

Informants included elementary teachers from schools located in South Texas, along the U.S./Mexico border. The initial survey was given to 18 teachers from 8 public and 1 private school. The follow-up survey was only given to 46 second and third grade teachers; these are the grades with high numbers of ELLs who are most impacted by the accountability system at the elementary level. The teachers selected were from schools from the same district that had similar demographics but had different levels of retention based on AEIS data. Schools were selected that had the highest and the lowest levels of retention in order to get a better idea of what was happening on the extremes.

### Instruments

A descriptive analysis was conducted of the survey data. The open-ended information in these surveys was coded for themes. As delineated by Huberman and Miles (1983), the data analysis proceeded from noting patterns and themes to arriving at comparisons and contrasts to determining conceptual explanations. Multiple data sources (e.g., district, educational service centers and state-level documents) were built into data collection and analysis for the purpose of achieving trustworthiness. An important theme that emerged from the original data was the role

of school climate in making retention decisions. In order to investigate this theme, a second survey was prepared and distributed to 46 second and third grade teachers from high- and low-retention schools (see Appendix). The second survey was targeted at evaluating differences in the ways schools were implementing and rationalizing retention, depending on school climate.

In order to evaluate the differences in school climate between high- and low-retention schools, the authors created a matrix to categorize schools as either high- or low-retention schools. The AEIS data on retention were reviewed for the elementary schools in the district, and schools were classified as either high- or low-retention. The categories of high- and low-retention were based on AEIS data for the previous four years. The authors created a system for estimating the level of retention at a particular school.

Schools were given a point for each time they were above the state retention average for a particular grade level. When schools showed retention of at least 10% in a particular grade level, they were given an additional point for each year. For example, the following school exceeded the state average eight times (asterisks) between 2000 and 2003 and had double-digit retention once in first grade in 2003, for a total score of nine. (Note the very low retention rates in grades 4 and 5; this was a common result for all schools in the sample).

Insert Table 3 Here

The results are based on percentages of students at a particular grade level, for example, the retention rate of 1.3% in the fifth grade represents the retention of a single student. According to district policy, the retention of students in Kindergarten is avoided. Newly built

schools (less than five years old) were discarded from the initial analysis. All 19 schools came from the campus group, with a high percentage of low-income students and a high percentage of ELLs. Seven schools were rated as having high retention (above the average), nine schools were rated as low retention (below the average), and three schools had exactly the average of nine points. In addition, looking at retention below third grade shows that 77.6% of the over-state-average retention occurred before third grade, prior to the students entering the accountability system. The following two tables show the difference in retention rates at a high- and a low-retention school.

Insert Table 4 Here

Insert Table 5 Here

Of the original 46 surveys, 25 were returned and used for final analysis, 7 from low-retention schools and 18 from high-retention schools. All schools were found in one school district. The school district used in this study reflected an average retention rate of 10.2% in the first grade and 28.2% in the ninth grade.

### Findings and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how retention was being conceptualized and practiced at a school district with high numbers of economically disadvantaged students and ELLs. The research was an attempt to examine how retention was applied by elementary teachers and whether a students' native language impacted that retention decision. We also questioned whether children were being retained to keep them out of the accountability system.

Finally, we questioned whether or not retention was being applied systematically across schools within the district and if there were noticeable differences between high-retention and low-retention schools. These research questions were collapsed into the following themes that emerged from the survey data: (1) the differences between high- and low-retention schools, (2) teachers' rationales for student retention, (3) academic support for students who are in danger of failing, (4) the relationship of students' language to retention, and (5) the relationship between retention and the accountability system.

### Differences between High- and Low-Retention Schools

Based on earlier research, school districts that are located in low-income communities and serve high percentages of minority students and English learners may have higher retention rates (Hauser, 2001). Our study, conversely, revealed that differences between the high- and low-retention rates were found within the same district in schools with similar demographics, where administrators and teachers were inconsistently applying district policy. Some schools had retention rates as high as 22% for some grade levels, while other schools in the district went several years without any grade-level retentions.

School climate toward retention appeared to be the most important factor in whether students were retained, revealing arbitrary and subjective decision-making. For example, teachers from high-retention schools saw retention as an important part of their intervention for struggling students. They were concerned about students 'falling behind,' particularly in reading. Teachers from low-retention schools, on the other hand, saw retention as more of a 'last resort,' something to be done only if there were no other option. As a teacher from a low-

retention school explained, “It’s only used when everything else [has] failed, and intends to be in the best interest of the student or simply, avoid [retention] at all costs.”

Teachers at low-retention schools indicated that students should not be retained and that the school should follow other alternatives as reflected in the following statement: “Once you retain a child, you set them up for failure. Interventions should begin early in the school year. Parent and teacher collaboration can be the key to lead the child to succeed.” Teachers at low-retention schools also reported that teachers’ efforts to avoid retention were an important element in ensuring that it did not occur. Extra tutorials, early interventions, and strategies like extra lessons during physical education class were seen as ways to avoid retention unless it was absolutely necessary.

Teachers in high-retention schools relied less on tutorials and more on retention as a way to ensure student success on the TAKS test. In campuses that employed grade retention in the name of “standards,” many students ended up losing more than they gained from retention. For retained children, bored with their schooling and frustrated with inappropriate instruction, the threat of withholding a diploma rarely stimulates them to excel academically. Many of these students ultimately develop the belief that ‘school is not for me’ and drop out (Alexander, Entwistle, & Dauber, 2003; Wheelock & Dorman, 1988).

#### Teacher’s Rationale for Student Retention

Teachers had many reasons for retaining a student at the elementary level. Of the first grade teachers surveyed, one reason for retaining students was low reading levels. Teachers in

first grade classrooms felt it was extremely important for children to be at grade-level reading when they entered the second grade. Their bilingual coordinator explained, “Teachers do not want to pass first-grade students if they are not reading because of the fear that they will get further and further behind” (M. Flores, personal communication, April 18, 2003). Another rationale was concern for a lack of paraprofessional support in second grade for slow readers, reiterating the desire to give students more time to be successful. Finally, teacher comments revealed the possibility that students were also being retained due to incorrect assessment for special assistance or bilingual services.

Initial reports from teachers explain patterns in fifth grade retention rates across the state. Prior to the 2004-2005 requirements of retaining students who did not pass the reading and math portions of the TAKS, retention at the fifth grade was rare. One teacher described how the view of retention changes as students move up in grade, “If it’s in 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, its ok. In the 5<sup>th</sup> grade—forget it.” This statement reflected state data, as less than one percent of students were retained in the fifth grade in the 2003-2004 academic year. One teacher explained,

I’ve been in both 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade and if we retain a student we are “punished” by having the same student the next year. Also administration wants the student to exit the school as soon as possible.

However, state data now reflect a huge increase in the number of fifth grade retentions with the termination of the social promotion policy in 2004-05; a pattern that reflects an alarming trend in Texas’ educational system.

Academic Support for Retained Students

The literature reflects a concern for retained students regarding the support or lack of support such students receive prior to a retention decision. As per state guidelines, students are offered extra tutorials, access to small-group learning, and summer school as a means to avoid retention. In some cases, however, teachers reported that their schools actually reduced support for students in danger of retention. As reflected in the following statement by one teacher,

Our school offers after-school tutorial, tutors from the high school two days a week, and summer school. Unfortunately, we were told that the after-school tutorial classes were for the slow readers only, not for students that had been referred for special education testing or students in danger of failing.

Another teacher elaborated,

We have been in situations where summer school has been offered for whomever we recommend; however, we have been told that it is better to sign up students who are struggling, yet passing, rather than students who are being retained. I don't know that all my administrators would agree to this statement, but this has been said to me in the past. I guess the rationale is that students who are retained will repeat the year anyway . . . so it is figured that they need summer school less . . . ?

In addition, some students were not given access to intervention and/or remedial services if their special education status resulted in exemption from the TAKS test.

### The Relationship between Students' Language and Retention

An important goal in this study was to determine the impact a student's native language had on retention decisions. The ELLs most likely to be retained were reported to be students

who had been waived from bilingual education due to parental denials. These students were placed in all-English classrooms without native language support and with teachers who had little to no background in bilingual education. As stated by one bilingual specialist,

This is the group that worries me the most. Because what happens is they are retained in 1<sup>st</sup> grade and then the chances are very high that they will be retained in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade if not 5<sup>th</sup> grade. By that time they are much older than the other students and they will probably drop out. (E. Rios, personal communication, May 27, 2003).

This statement reflects a growing concern that elementary teachers are using a child's native language as a factor in retention decisions.

It is plausible that early exit transitioning also has a detrimental effect on students and may lead to retention in the upper grades. Despite the availability of the Spanish TAKS test up to the sixth-grade, first grade teachers reported an attempt to transition ELLs early so that students received more English instruction prior to taking the English TAKS in the third grade. As reflected in the following statement by one first-grade teacher, "Students at times are transitioned in the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of the 1<sup>st</sup> grade to push them along the system."

Students who are transitioned early are not provided with the opportunity to develop cognitive skills in their native language. Consequently, they have difficulty mastering content in English (Cummins, 1981). Districts that follow a policy of transitioning students early are also violating the state's guidelines regarding bilingual instruction (19 TAC Chapter 89; Subchapter BB). This inappropriate practice leads teachers to retain the student under the assumption that the student needs extra time to learn English and master content. As one teacher reported in

reference to her own child, “From what I saw with my son, he was transitioned early when he still has not mastered the English language. They wanted to retain him in second because he was not passing his benchmark.”

School policy also asks teachers to ‘put back’ newly arriving immigrant students by one grade level. One kinder teacher explained, “At our campus, one kinder student was sent to pre-k because he was a new arrival. He really should’ve been in kinder.” Although not counted as a retention, the practice of placing students at one grade-level below their designated age-grade does lead to students being ‘over age’ in relation to their classmates and may cause both physical and emotional distress.

#### The Relationships between Retention and Accountability

Teacher testimonials and state retention rates indicated retention was being used as a possible remedy to delay students from taking the TAKS tests in the third and fifth grade, thus keeping students out of the accountability system. This was often done to help teachers who were held responsible for students failing the TAKS test. As one second-grade teacher explained, “Even though some students could advance with extra help they are kept behind for the teachers’ benefit—o they will not have to take the TAKS test.” The teachers themselves may be placing pressure on colleagues in their efforts to avoid being held responsible for failing students. This pressure most apparent at the second grade level, as reflected in the following comment: “The third grade teacher might inquire about a student and influence the teacher in retaining a student that they think might not pass the test.” Second-grade teachers did report retaining students to increase the likelihood of passing third grade test scores. For example, one

second-grade teacher stated, “They’re retained to become better prepared to pass the TAKS in third- grade.” Teachers from low-retention campuses, however, did not report the practice of grade-level retention as a means to provide students with more time to learn content or English.

Finally, administrator attitude toward retention was also a critical component. If administrators viewed retention as an important remediation tool, then the school’s grade-level retention practices reflected that belief. Likewise, if administrators discouraged retention, that attitude was reflected in school climate and teacher response as indicated by the following comment: “The administration is against retention, so we try not to. But if the student needs to be retained then they are retained.” (Second-grade teacher, personal communication April 3, 2003). Consequently, while there is a standard guideline at the district level, it is being interpreted in very different ways at the campus level by different campus administrators.

### Implications

Texas grade-level retention rates are increasing at a disproportionate pace among the racial and ethnic minority students of the state (TEA, 2006), despite a lack of evidence showing retention improves student outcomes. Nearly all of the research indicates that retention fails to help the retained student academically and can have significant negative impact on that student’s opportunity to complete school. Evidence shows elementary retention rates are now linked to the accountability movement. Data from the TEA and this study demonstrate that the accountability movement is linked to the retention rates at elementary and occurring as early as the first grade in one school district.

The impact of the accountability system on student retention is very clear. Racial and ethnic minorities including English learners are particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of the accountability movement. Accountability for students is related to accountability for educators, schools, and school districts. The pressure is high for teachers and school administrators to obtain high test scores. This pressure is expressed by one private school teacher:

Our administrator is actually against retention. But then again, I am at a private school. I think public schools are different. My school has a low retention rate because it's a private school. We as teachers do not have the "pressure" that public school teachers have . . . That's why even though I am certified, I think twice about working at a public school.

This statement reveals the impression by this private school teacher that reflects the differences in attitude and practice between private and public schools. This pressure leads many administrators and teachers to encourage retention in an effort to give students an extra year to learn English before they are tested, while concomitantly encouraging the pushing along of some students to remove them from the elementary school books as soon as possible.

Retention at the elementary level may have hidden long-term impacts as the retained students reach middle and high school at ages that are sometimes significantly older than their peers. Although the causal connections are unclear, much of the existing research shows that the use of high-stakes tests is associated with higher dropout rates (Haney et al., 2004; National Research Council, 1999). The authors' our own work with schools and the results from this

study support the assertion that increases in the retention rate, even in the early grades, may lead to increases in the dropout rate.

This research reveals retention is particularly impacting language minority students. This impact can be seen in at least three areas. Students who entered the school system speaking a language other than English are (1) more likely to be retained, (2) being pushed to early transition, and (3) often placed in a lower grade if they are recent immigrants or newcomers to a school. All three scenarios have negative implications for this population.

Finally, the research indicates that retention is being applied arbitrarily. Although there is a standard guideline at the district level, it is being interpreted in very different ways at the campus level. Retention rates varied by administrator attitudes toward retention, support services available to students, and in individual teacher decisions. If retention is an effective policy, as proponents and politicians would argue, it should then be applied uniformly across schools and within districts and not as an arbitrary consequence of living in a particular neighborhood and attending a particular school.

### Recommendations

Neither repeating a grade nor merely moving on to the next grade provides students with the support they need to improve academic and social skills. The results of this research indicate a need to focus attention on systemic issues that affect language minority student outcomes in multiple ways. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) encourages schools to seek alternatives to retention that more effectively address the specific instructional needs of

language minority children. Holding schools accountable for students' progress requires effective intervention strategies that provide educational opportunities and assistance to promote the cognitive development of all students (2004).

The NASP provide several recommendations, including emphasizing the importance of early developmental programs and preschool programs to enhance language and social skills and providing effective early reading programs. Darling Hammond (1998) stresses the importance of enhancing professional development for teachers to ensure they have the knowledge and skills necessary to teach a wider range of students to meet the standards and include the use of classroom assessments that better inform teaching.

Many argue for strong dual language programs at the elementary level to develop students' academic language in Spanish and English (Collier & Thomas, 2004; Gómez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005). Others argue for a more comprehensive system of accountability that ensures ELLs are evaluated with appropriate and valid assessments (Valenzuela, 2004). Although Texas offers a Spanish version of the TAKS up to the sixth grade, efforts should be made to improve the validity of large-scale standardized tests and to make appropriate accommodations in the administration of tests (Basterra, 1999). Some critics even suggest a moratorium in public education on the use of high-stakes testing.

### Conclusion

It is clear the debate of grade-level retention versus social promotion is complex and challenging, and is complicated even further by educators' desire to do 'what's best for children.'

Regardless of the complexity of the assessment process, school districts must develop systems of accountability that fully incorporate linguistically and culturally diverse students. One short-term remedy may be to include retention results at the elementary level in the accountability system. Educators should be held responsible not just for passing rates on high stakes tests, but for the rates of grade-level retention as well. As the system moves to a cohort completer model of dropping out, it should become increasingly difficult to mask the high dropout rates for poor and minority youth. High stakes testing should only be used after changes in teaching and learning ensure that students have a genuine opportunity to participate in the curriculum. If tests are used to make high-stakes decisions about individual children, it is educators' responsibility to carefully monitor such practices and evaluate their potential impact on all students.

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## Appendix

### Retention survey

#### Demographic information

Campus: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade level: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of teaching: \_\_\_\_\_

Level of education:

Bachelor's \_\_\_\_\_ Bachelor's plus graduate hours \_\_\_\_\_ Master's \_\_\_\_\_

Route to certification:

Traditional \_\_\_\_\_ Alternative Certification \_\_\_\_\_ Emergency \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Type of instructional program:

Transitional Bilingual \_\_\_\_\_ Dual Language Bilingual \_\_\_\_\_ ESL \_\_\_\_\_ All \_\_\_\_\_

English \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

About how many students have you retained in the last five years? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Questions:

1. What factor is most critical in making a retention decision?
2. What is done at your school to avoid retaining a student?
3. What remedial services are available to students who are in danger of being retained?
4. Who makes the final decision on when a child should be retained?
5. What is the general school attitude toward retention?
6. What is the general school district attitude toward retention?

7. Describe the effect that language for LEP students has on retention decisions.
8. Are LEP students transitioned into English instruction early to get them to take the TAKS test in English rather than Spanish?
9. What is the school's preferred language for testing for TAKS?
10. Are students retained in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade in order to keep them from taking the TAKS in third?  
If so, why?
11. What grade is most likely to have a higher retention rate? Please explain.
12. Are new arrivals from Mexico usually placed on or below grade level?
13. What is the parent's role in retention decisions?
14. What is the school policy if parents do not support a retention decision?

Table 1

*Texas Retention Rates by Grade, Grades K-5, 1994-2005*

Grade	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Kinder	1.5	1.7	1.9	2.2	2.5	2.8	3.2	3.4	3.6	3.7	3.7
1	5.8	5.9	5.6	6.0	6.5	6.3	6.3	6.4	6.3	6.4	6.4
2	2.2	2.6	2.5	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.7	3.6
3	1.3	1.5	1.6	1.9	2.4	2.3	2.5	2.4	2.8	2.6	3.2
4	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.3	1.5	1.6	1.8
5	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.8	1.0	1.0	3.5

Note: Texas Retention Rates by Grades K-5, 1994-2005. TEA, 2006

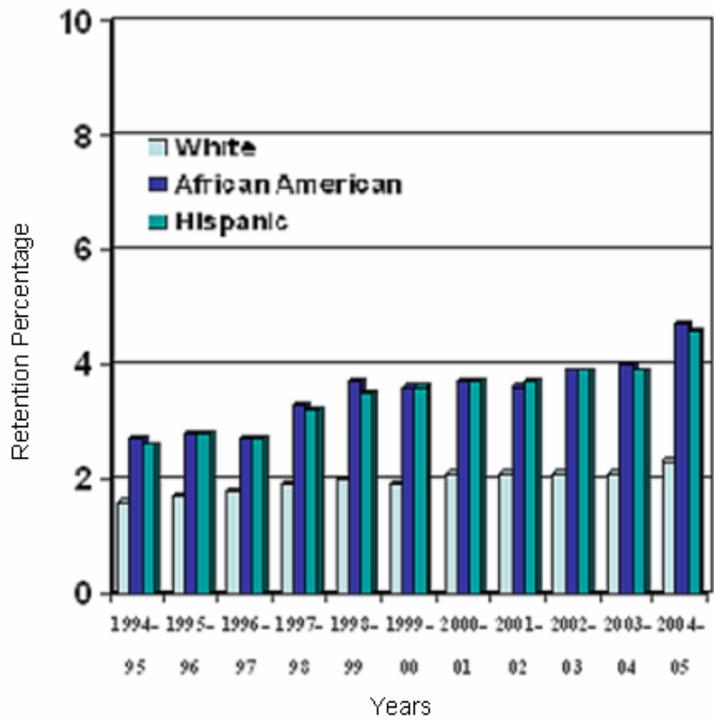


Figure 1. Texas Retention Percentages by Ethnicity 1994-2005

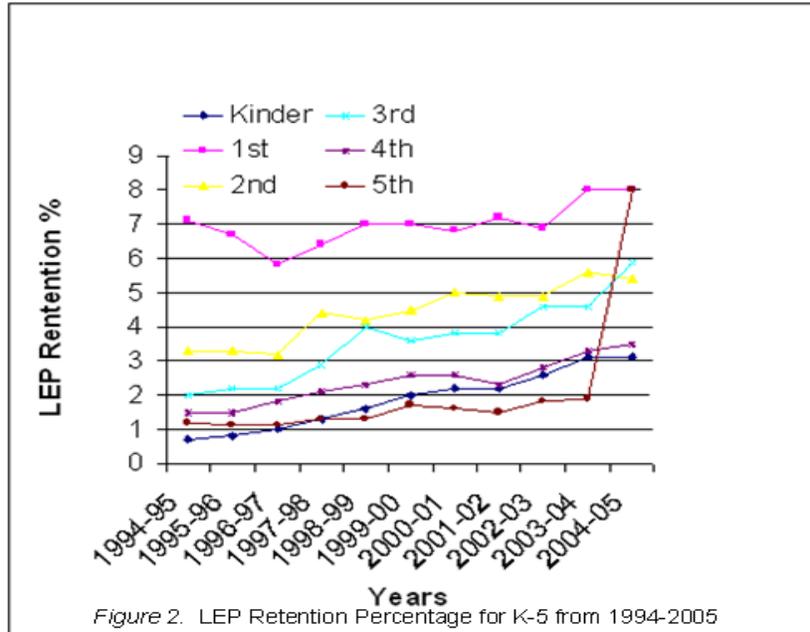


Table 3

*Average Retention Rate School Retention by Grade*

Grade	2002-2003	2001-2002	2000-2001	1999-2000
K	0	0	0	0
1	11.4*	6.9*	1.1	6*
2	6.5*	2.6	0	1.3
3	4.6*	7.9*	2.7*	0
4	0	0	0	0
5	0	1.3*	0	0

\* Rates with asterisk indicate higher than state average

Table 4

*High Retention Rate School Retention by Grade*

	2002-	2001-	2000-	1999-
Grade	2003	2002	2001	2000
K	3.1*	0.8	0	3.1*
Grade 1	10.1*	11.3*	12.4*	8.5*
Grade 2	4.7*	6.2*	1.5	1.8
Grade 3	11.7*	3.4*	2.7*	0.8
Grade 4	1.8*	3.5*	1.4*	0
Grade 5	0	1.4*	0	0

\* Rates with asterisk indicate higher than state average

Table 5

*Low Retention Rate School Retention by Grade*

	2002-	2001-	2000-	1999-
Grade	2003	2002	2001	2000
K	0	0	0	0
1	8.1*	4.8	2.3	2.8
2	0	1.7	0.8	2.7
3	1.9	0.9	0	0
4	0	0	0	0
5	0	0.8	0	0.8*

\* Rates with asterisk indicate higher than state average

## **Aprendiendo RICCO: El aprendizaje por medio de proyectos como instrumento de igualdad educativa en el aula bilingüe**

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### Resumen

El aprendizaje por medio de proyectos representa un enfoque pedagógico capaz de enriquecer la experiencia educativa tanto de estudiantes como de maestros, especialmente en un ambiente cultural y lingüísticamente diverso (Boss & Krauss, 2007; Diffily & Sassman, 2002; Katz & Chard, 2000). Por medio de proyectos, el estudiante bilingüe tiene la oportunidad de desarrollar su potencial intelectual y humano avanzando tanto lingüística como académicamente. Este artículo incluye un ejemplo de un proyecto pensado, planeado y desarrollado por estudiantes bilingües del sur de Texas, quienes decidieron estudiar la larva del escarabajo haciendo conexiones con la vida *real* de manera *interdisciplinaria*, realizaron investigaciones de *campo cooperativas* y tuvieron *opciones* respecto al método y producto a desarrollar, en otras palabras, enriquecieron su aprendizaje.

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Aprendiendo RICCO: El aprendizaje por medio de proyectos como instrumento de igualdad  
educativa

“Lo único valioso en la sociedad humana reside en la oportunidad que se le otorga al individuo para desarrollarse”

Alberto Einstein

En *Freedom to Learn* Rogers y Freiberg (1994), establecen una distinción clara entre el aprendizaje que ocurre “del cuello para arriba” y el aprendizaje impregnado de sentimiento y pasión. El primero se caracteriza por el excesivo énfasis en la memorización de información y el segundo implica que el ser humano experimenta una atracción intrínseca hacia el descubrimiento y el reto intelectual. Por naturaleza, todo individuo está llamado a la realización interna y en esa trayectoria el aprendizaje generalmente se concretiza por medio de proyectos ricos en significado a nivel personal (Freire, 2003).

En el contexto escolar los proyectos académicos han sido definidos como un estudio a fondo de un tema específico (Katz & Chard, 2000); tal definición encierra una serie de implicaciones pedagógicas cuando los creadores, protagonistas y evaluadores de tales proyectos son estudiantes procedentes de culturas y lenguas diferentes. Primero, la enseñanza por medio de proyectos coloca al estudiante minoritario en un esquema de igualdad educativa y social respecto a su contraparte angloparlante; segundo, el aprendizaje por medio de proyectos humaniza al educando minoritario transformando su papel y reconociéndolo como ser pensante en continua transformación de su realidad inmediata (Freire, 2003); y tercero, el aprendizaje por medio de proyectos, dentro de un marco de descubrimiento e indagación inquisitiva, facilita y promueve tanto el desarrollo del lenguaje como el avance académico.

## Los Proyectos y la Equidad Educativa

Históricamente, el aprendizaje y la enseñanza por medio de proyectos han estado ausentes dentro de los planes de estudio y del currículo diseñados para el estudiante méxico-americano. El educador e intelectual George I. Sánchez denunció desde la década de los 50's el estado vergonzoso del panorama educativo para el estudiante méxico-americano a quien se le ha tratado como un ser cultural y lingüísticamente inferior (Carter, 1970; Sanchez, 1974). En Texas, por ejemplo, la ley del uso exclusivo del idioma inglés de 1918 propagó una pedagogía racista y segregacionista cuya finalidad era el aprendizaje de un segundo idioma durante sesiones diarias basadas en ejercicios gramaticales y la repetición continua de patrones lingüísticos (Blanton, 2004). Bajo este esquema, la estricta aplicación de la ley y la eventual adquisición de un segundo idioma ocurrían “dejando de lado todo aprendizaje adicional y bajo la noción de que a final de cuentas el dominio del idioma inglés representaba la meta final en la experiencia educativa de los estudiantes hispano-parlantes” (Blanton, 2004, p. 86).

Durante el periodo de 1918 a 1969, la educación del estudiante méxico-americano se caracterizó por la escasez de conexiones con la vida real (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1971). En otras palabras, representó la antítesis de los principios bajo los cuales se sustenta el aprendizaje basado en proyectos, es decir; careció de conexiones interdisciplinarias, trabajo y participación activa, actividades cooperativas y la infusión de opciones dentro del plan de estudios.

### El Aprendizaje por medio de Proyectos: Humanizando al Estudiante

La participación activa del estudiante méxico-americano en el contexto de su propia educación representa un cambio de paradigma tanto para el educador como para el educando mismo. La realización de proyectos dentro del aula de clases sólo es posible dentro de un

esquema igualitario en el que “el maestro deja de ser ‘el que enseña’ para convertirse en alguien que también aprende en diálogo con sus estudiantes, quienes a su vez asumen el papel de co-investigadores en diálogo con el maestro” (Freire, 2003, p. 81).

Debido a su naturaleza interactiva y a la demanda intelectual implícita en los proyectos, la implementación de los mismos en el aula de clases transforma de manera inmediata el comportamiento de los estudiantes. En su transición de receptáculo a ser pensante el estudiante minoritario toma posesión de una conciencia crítica, de un deseo de “ser” y “hacer” más. Freire (2003) afirma que: “no es posible percibir a un individuo como auténticamente humano cuando se le idealiza al margen de la búsqueda constante, al margen de la praxis” (p. 72). Al humanizarse, el estudiante ingresa al campo de lo que Leistyna (1999) ha llamado “presencia mental”; dicho proceso es poco probable si el educador no entra él mismo en una concientización en la que reflexione, cuestione y reforme las relaciones de subordinación y poder presentes en su salón de clases (Macedo, 1994).

#### Aprendiendo RICCO: Ventajas Académicas, Lingüísticas y Culturales

Enseñando RICCO es una magnífica herramienta para usar en programas de doble inmersión lingüística porque tiene ventajas académicas y lingüísticas. RICCO contiene cinco elementos que benefician a los estudiantes que aprenden en dos idiomas, estos elementos son: conexiones con la vida real, aprendizaje interdisciplinario, trabajo de campo, actividades cooperativas y opciones para los estudiantes.

Los elementos fundamentales en un proyecto RICCO son: **R** = Relevante, **I**= Interdisciplinario, **C**=Campo (trabajo de), **C** = Cooperación, **O** = Opciones.

El primer elemento de RICCO es la relevancia y conexiones con la vida real. Al escoger los proyectos para los estudiantes, el educador tiene que asegurarse que las actividades

relacionadas al proyecto tengan conexión a la vida diaria de los estudiantes. Este tipo de aprendizaje incorpora asuntos y situaciones auténticas que estén basados en los conocimientos y experiencias de los estudiantes; en otras palabras, los proyectos deben tener relevancia cultural y académica.

El segundo elemento de RICCO es la naturaleza interdisciplinaria de los proyectos, los cuales deben incorporar las diferentes áreas académicas que se imparten en las escuelas primarias. Para que sea un proyecto interdisciplinario es recomendable incluir aspectos relacionados con la lectura, la escritura, las ciencias, los estudios sociales, las matemáticas y la tecnología. El educador también puede utilizar el arte, la música, la educación física y otras disciplinas para complementar el tema tratado en el proyecto. Es así como los estudiantes bilingües aprenden a hacer conexiones entre las diferentes materias y no verlas como información aislada.

El tercer elemento de RICCO es la investigación de campo; esto significa que el proyecto se presta para que los educandos investiguen directamente ya sea dentro o fuera del aula de clases teniendo al educador como guía. Son los estudiantes, trabajando en equipo, los que investigan para encontrar la información necesaria para completar las actividades. El trabajo de campo permite a los estudiantes convertirse en alumnos independientes capaces de encontrar soluciones a sus propios problemas.

El cuarto elemento de RICCO es la cooperación o el aprendizaje cooperativo; trabajando cooperativamente los estudiantes desarrollan destrezas sociales y habilidades de trabajo en equipo ya que dependen de sus compañeros para terminar la tarea asociada con el proyecto. De esta manera los estudiantes asumen papeles específicos y aprenden que compartiendo las responsabilidades y obligaciones es más fácil culminar exitosamente una tarea. Otro de los

beneficios de la cooperación es que el estudiante desarrolla y mejora sus destrezas lingüísticas como escuchar, hablar, leer y escribir en forma integral. Esta aplicación en conjunto de las destrezas lingüísticas, sucede dentro de un ambiente relajado en el cual el estudiante encuentra múltiples oportunidades de proporcionar y recibir retroalimentación.

El quinto y último elemento de RICCO son las opciones; desde un inicio los estudiantes tienen acceso a una serie de opciones y preguntas que sirven de guía para el desarrollo de los proyectos. Los estudiantes deben decidir cuales fuentes de información usarán, el calendario a seguir, la rúbrica para la evaluación y la presentación del producto final. Al tener voz y voto en el desarrollo, planeación y presentación del proyecto los estudiantes se motivan incrementando la calidad de los proyectos.

#### Fases dentro del Desarrollo de Proyectos

##### *Inicio de un Proyecto*

La fase inicial en el desarrollo de proyectos está íntimamente ligada con la generación de preguntas y temas a investigar. Los mapas conceptuales, las lluvias de ideas y los organizadores gráficos son ideales para categorizar los posibles temas que surgen durante una discusión de grupo (Katz & Chard, 2000; Boss & Krauss, 2007). Por ejemplo, una lección de estudios sociales en la que se discuten conceptos abstractos como la oferta y la demanda, podría ser el punto de partida ideal para un proyecto en el cual los estudiantes decidan iniciar su propio negocio, tal como se ilustra en la Figura 1. Por medio de un mapa conceptual o red de ideas, una discusión de grupo puede guiarse de tal manera que el proyecto tome forma en cuanto a los posibles productos, el lugar, la hora y el rango de precios que se desea manejar.

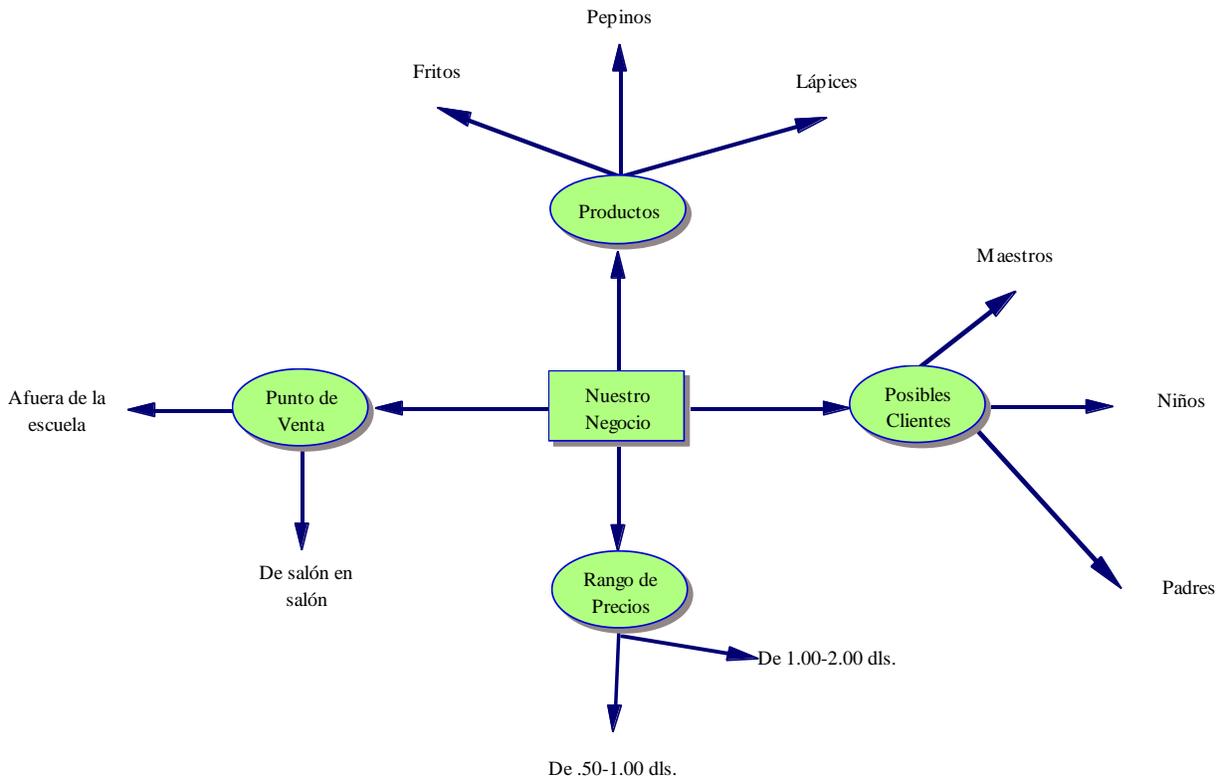


Figura 1. Ejemplo de un mapa conceptual para conceptos de oferta y demanda.

Una vez definido el tema del proyecto es crucial que los estudiantes aprendan a formular lo que Markham, Larner, y Ravitz (2003) llaman: “preguntas guías”, ellos sugieren enfocar dichas preguntas en temas de importancia y de uso en la vida “real” del estudiante basadas en el siguiente criterio:

*La pregunta guía es provocativa.* Dentro de esta categoría, Maker y Nielson (1982) sugieren que las preguntas estimulen al estudiante a descubrir conocimiento que es nuevo para él/ella y proponen tres tipos básicos: ¿Qué crees que pasaría si \_\_\_\_\_? ¿Qué efecto podría \_\_\_\_\_ tener en \_\_\_\_\_? ¿Cómo podría \_\_\_\_\_ haber cambiado si \_\_\_\_\_?

En la lección de oferta y demanda, otros ejemplos de preguntas provocativas podrían incluir: ¿Qué crees que pasaría si empezáramos a vender fruta a la salida de nuestra escuela? ¿Qué efecto tendrá en los padres el hecho de que los niños empiecen a cambiar la comida chatarra por un refrigerio saludable? ¿Cuál sería el mejor punto de venta en nuestra escuela?

Muchos niños tienen dificultades con la formulación de preguntas por lo que la demostración por parte del maestro durante las discusiones de grupo resulta de gran ayuda (Katz & Chard, 2000).

*La pregunta guía es divergente.* Como regla general, las preguntas abiertas no tienen una respuesta pre-determinada y no se pueden contestar con un simple sí o no. Ejemplos de preguntas abiertas incluyen: ¿Qué tipo de campaña publicitaria nos ayudaría a promover mejor nuestro producto? y ¿De qué manera podríamos persuadir a nuestra directora para que nos permitiera operar nuestro propio negocio?

*La pregunta guía está directamente relacionada con la materia en cuestión.* Si el proyecto tiene su inicio durante una lección de estudios sociales y los conceptos curriculares incluyen

mercado, oferta, demanda, etc., entonces una pregunta apropiada sería por ejemplo: ¿Durante qué días existe mayor demanda de lápices? ¿De qué manera podríamos ampliar nuestra oferta?

*La pregunta guía representa un reto cognoscitivo.* La demanda cognoscitiva de las preguntas seleccionadas para una indagación a fondo lleva un mensaje implícito con respecto a las expectativas del maestro. Investigaciones llevadas a cabo en programas bilingües indican que los maestros de estudiantes minoritarios generalmente formulan preguntas de bajo nivel con respuestas pre-determinadas (Ramirez, Pasta, Yuen, Ramey, & Billings, 1991). Preguntas tales como: ¿Cuál sería la mejor hora para vender nuestros productos? ¿Dónde podremos conseguir nuestra mercancía? retan al estudiante a indagar y explorar su entorno. Enfatizando la importancia de asumir el papel de verdaderos investigadores, se sugiere que el maestro oriente a los estudiantes en la elaboración de preguntas; Boss y Krauss (2007) proponen la ilustración explícita del proceso de reformulación de las mismas. La tabla 1 incluye algunas opciones para transformar preguntas elevando su nivel cognoscitivo.

Tabla 1

*Transformación de Preguntas para Estimular la Investigación*

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Preguntas de bajo nivel cognoscitivo	Preguntas reformuladas que requieren una investigación de fondo
¿Dónde nació César Chávez?	¿Qué factores en la vida de César Chávez lo impulsaron a tomar acción cívica?
¿Qué significa la palabra líder?	¿Cuáles son las cualidades que han caracterizado a los líderes de nuestra comunidad?
¿Qué movimiento encabezó César Chávez?	¿De qué manera transformó César Chávez a mi comunidad?
¿Cuántas personas se unieron a César Chávez?	¿Por qué creció la popularidad de César Chávez?

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*La pregunta guía surge del interés inmediato del estudiante y de cuestiones de la “vida real”.* Valenzuela (1999) propone la sensibilidad cultural como elemento fundamental en un plan de estudios y advierte que la opresión y subordinación a la que han sido sometidos los grupos minoritarios, en específico los México-Americanos, requiere que las instituciones educativas abandonen “la noción del currículo ajeno al color, así como la idea del proceso de asimilación neutral” (p. 109). Si los estudiantes están interesados en iniciar un negocio, las conversaciones o discusiones de grupo podrían centrarse en artículos producidos o comercializados localmente o elaborados por miembros de su comunidad, incluyendo padres de familia, por ejemplo: ¿Qué negocios locales podrían ayudarnos si decidiéramos plantar semillas y eventualmente vender macetas?

### *Proyectos en Desarrollo*

Aunado al papel del estudiante, Markham, Lerner, y Ravitz (2003) afirman que el éxito de un proyecto depende en gran parte del papel que el educador asuma durante el proceso. Entre otras funciones, el maestro es responsable del monitoreo constante asegurándose de que los estudiantes mantengan sus acciones enfocadas en la pregunta guía formulada en un inicio. Las conversaciones entre estudiantes y maestro durante esta etapa, frecuentemente giran en torno a las destrezas y habilidades académicas que dieron origen al proyecto. Este diálogo se desarrolla teniendo como base cierta documentación que incluye: un contrato en el que el estudiante delinea claramente su investigación comprometiéndose a trabajar en un producto durante un periodo determinado y un calendario que permita dividir el proyecto en segmentos definidos (ver Apéndices A y B).

El flujo ordenado tanto del trabajo como de la instrucción y de la evaluación es responsabilidad directa del educador. Paralelo con el trabajo de los estudiantes, el educador inicia una labor de apoyo durante el aprendizaje gradual asistido. Hammer (1997) sugiere que la capacidad perceptiva del educador respecto al razonamiento y entendimiento de los estudiantes influye de manera determinante en la culminación exitosa de un proyecto. Esta labor de orientación representa un elemento fundamental en los salones de clases donde se estimula el aprendizaje y la enseñanza inquisitiva (Carin, Bass, & Contant, 2005). La circulación continua de grupo en grupo permite al educador identificar patrones respecto a la comprensión de un concepto, la necesidad de una mini lección, así como de posibles modificaciones al producto inicial, etc.

### *Conclusión de Proyectos*

Katz y Chard (2000) argumentan que la fase final de un proyecto debe caracterizarse por una visión y un sentido compartido de los logros académicos. Dos de sus sugerencias consisten en presentaciones orales de los productos finales ante grupos de estudiantes de otros grados escolares y sesiones abiertas a las cuales se invite a padres de familia, personal administrativo, además de otros visitantes y miembros de la comunidad. Maker y Nielson (1995) advierten acerca de los riesgos de desarrollar productos para los cuales el educador es la única audiencia:

- Los estudiantes no tienen la oportunidad de analizar a una audiencia real durante la planeación, desarrollo y conclusión de sus productos. Por consiguiente el análisis del impacto de su producto en una audiencia potencial es nulo.

- Se crea una dependencia en el educador como evaluador o audiencia exclusiva de los proyectos. Bajo este esquema, los estudiantes encuentran poco aliciente en desarrollar su propio criterio evaluativo y se dedican a “complacer al maestro”.

El aprendizaje por medio de proyectos representa un concepto dinámico en el cual los estudiantes toman como base sus conocimientos previos en conexión con el conocimiento recientemente adquirido para concretizar sus intereses por medio de la investigación. Diffily y Sassman (2002) afirman que más allá de representar una pedagogía centrada en el estudiante, la realización de proyectos coloca al educando como director de su propio aprendizaje, convirtiéndolo en verdadero agente de cambio y facultándolo para emprender su crecimiento intelectual de manera independiente.

#### Un Ejemplo de un Proyecto: Hablando de Escarabajos en un Salón de Clases de 4to Grado

El proyecto basado en la larva del escarabajo harinero (conocido en algunos lugares como gusanos harineros) surgió como una extensión de una lección relacionada con el estudio de animales invertebrados, particularmente insectos. Inicialmente, la maestra estructuró una serie de lecciones enfocadas al estudio del ciclo de vida de diversas especies, incluyendo la mariposa. Posteriormente, durante una discusión de grupo, los estudiantes decidieron, una vez consideradas varias opciones, que la larva del escarabajo de la harina o escarabajo molinero (*tenebrio molitor*) resultaba la opción más viable para aprender acerca del ciclo de la vida de un organismo invertebrado en particular.

#### *Pregunta Guía:*

¿Qué podemos aprender acerca del ciclo de la vida por medio de la observación de gusanos harineros?

### *Proceso*

Una vez que por voto mayoritario los estudiantes decidieron investigar los gusanos harineros como la alternativa más viable para ampliar su conocimiento de los ciclos de la vida, la discusión se centró en el tipo de productos que se desarrollarían al concluir el proyecto. Paralelamente, los estudiantes consideraron la posibilidad de trabajar tanto en grupos como de manera independiente. Luego, como lo indica la Tabla 2, se definieron una serie de productos que representarían mejor las investigaciones.

Tabla 2  
*Productos Desarrollados por Estudiantes de 4to Grado en Base al Ciclo de la Larva del Escarabajo Harinero*

Producto	Contenido
Película	Juego con reglas e instrucciones
Presentación audiovisual	Dramatización de la vida de un gusano
Libro Grande	Álbum de la vida diaria de un gusano
ABC del gusano (libro)	Hechos y opiniones acerca del gusano harinero (libro)

La siguiente etapa consistió en firmar un contrato (ver Apéndice A) en el cuál se especificó la pregunta a investigar y datos con respecto a las acciones a tomar. Haciendo uso de un calendario, los estudiantes definieron las fechas límite para la culminación de diferentes etapas de su proyecto tomando en cuenta: el tiempo requerido para la observación directa de los gusanos, la disponibilidad de materiales tecnológicos y de referencia y los eventos académicos y sociales previamente incluidos dentro del calendario (ver Apéndice B).

### *Proyecto en Progreso*

Los estudiantes tuvieron la oportunidad de monitorear su propio avance por medio de rúbricas o matrices de evaluación diseñadas específicamente para cada producto. En el caso de

productos como el juego y la presentación en audiovisual, la maestra utilizó sitios cibernéticos como: [www.Rubistar.forteachers.org](http://www.Rubistar.forteachers.org) y [www.Pblchecklist.4teacher.org](http://www.Pblchecklist.4teacher.org). Aquí, los estudiantes en colaboración con la maestra localizaron las matrices apropiadas para sus productos.

Durante el transcurso de dos semanas, los estudiantes visitaron la biblioteca, el laboratorio de computadoras y tuvieron acceso a una variedad de materiales dentro del centro de recursos de su aula de clases. Entre otras cosas, los estudiantes consultaron diccionarios, libros acerca del ciclo de la vida y sitios cibernéticos. La maestra por su parte, adquirió recursos materiales incluyendo lápices, marcadores, cartoncillo, etc.

### *Resultados del Proyecto*

El monitoreo constante permitió que los estudiantes concluyeran sus proyectos en la fecha previamente establecida. Los productos fueron compartidos oralmente con estudiantes de primer y segundo grado, quienes, como audiencia principal, hicieron preguntas y fueron testigos del trabajo auténtico llevado a una conclusión exitosa. Se realizaron círculos de lectura integrados por grupos pequeños de cinco a seis estudiantes en sesiones programadas por la maestra.

Las conexiones interdisciplinarias durante las diferentes etapas de un proyecto se llevaron a cabo dentro de un contexto auténtico. De manera casi imperceptible para los estudiantes, las diferentes áreas del contenido se fueron entrelazando hasta integrarse naturalmente en el producto final. La Tabla 3 muestra cómo el aprendizaje por medio de proyectos contextualizó la adquisición de destrezas y conceptos en artes del lenguaje, ciencias biológicas y estudios sociales.

Tabla 3

*Conexiones Interdisciplinarias durante el Estudio de la Larva del Escarabajo Harinero*

*Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills*

Disciplinas	Conexiones
Ciencias Biológicas:	(4.2) Procesos científicos. El estudiante utiliza métodos científicos de indagación, durante las investigaciones de campo y en el laboratorio.
Artes del Lenguaje	(4.5) Escuchar/hablar/públicos. El estudiante habla apropiadamente con diferentes públicos y propósitos, en distintas ocasiones. (4.8) Lectura/variedad de textos. El estudiante lee fuentes variadas con propósitos diferentes. (4.15) Escritura/propósitos. El estudiante escribe para diferentes tipos de público, con distintos propósitos y en una diversidad de formas.
Estudios Sociales	(3.16) Destrezas en estudios sociales. El estudiante aplica destrezas de pensamiento crítico para organizar y utilizar información adquirida de una variedad de fuentes, incluyendo la tecnología electrónica.

El proyecto muestra #1 consistió en la realización de una película acerca de las etapas en la vida de un gusano harinero. Dos estudiantes utilizaron un registro de observación, libros de referencia y fuentes secundarias de información como la red cibernética. Conforme avanzaba la película representada en la Figura 2, mostraba datos específicos respecto a la metamorfosis observada durante un período de aproximadamente dos semanas. Los materiales utilizados incluyeron papel de transparencia, marcadores y un cartapacio color manila.

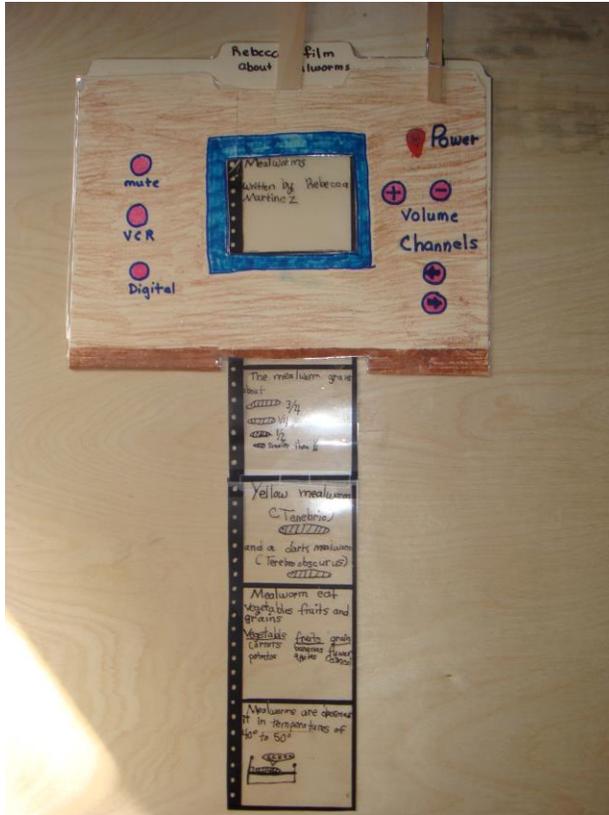


Figura 2. Película acerca de la las etapas en la vida del escarabajo harinero.

Para el proyecto muestra #2 fotografiado en la Figura 3, los estudiantes decidieron demostrar lo que aprendieron acerca del ciclo de la vida de un gusano harinero por medio de la dramatización. Se creó un diálogo y la puesta en escena fue presenciada por estudiantes de primer grado.



*Figura 3.* Escenario que sirvió para dramatizar la vida de un gusano harinero.

El proyecto muestra #3 fue elaborado por una estudiante que decidió documentar el ciclo de vida del gusano harinero por medio de un álbum en el que de manera imaginativa se narraron eventos significativos en la vida de este insecto. La Figura 4, presenta el libro completo que incluyó ocho páginas con una mezcla de hechos y fantasía.



Figura 4. Álbum que incluye escenas y hechos importantes en la vida de un gusano harinero.

### Conclusiones

El aprendizaje por medio de proyectos revoluciona la dinámica del aula de clases tradicional dándole sentido al currículo de estudios, convirtiendo al maestro no sólo en el guía sino en aquél que ‘deja aprender’. Estas ventajas resultan de gran beneficio para el estudiante promedio y en el caso del estudiante minoritario revierten la cadena de fracasos académicos que históricamente ha caracterizado su educación.

El aprendizaje por medio de proyectos permite que los estudiantes de lenguajes minoritarios participen en igualdad de circunstancias con los alumnos angloparlantes en todos los ámbitos, para así cerrar el abismo académico. Otro resultado de este tipo de aprendizaje es que humaniza al educando minoritario restableciendo las altas expectativas sin importar su nivel socio económico, cultural o lingüístico. También, transforma al educador enfatizando su papel como co-investigador y aprendiz. El educador se convierte en una fuente de información y no en receptor de información. Finalmente, el aprendizaje por medio de proyectos, dentro de un marco de descubrimiento e indagación inquisitiva, facilita y promueve el desarrollo del lenguaje social y académico.

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Apéndice A

Contrato del Estudiante  
Contrato del Estudiante: **Mi Proyecto**

**Nombre:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Fecha:** \_\_\_\_\_

Estas son las preguntas que he decidido investigar:

- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_

Investigaré de la siguiente manera:

- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_

Compartiré lo que aprendí por medio de (¿Cuál será tu producto?)

---

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---

Esta investigación concluirá y el producto estará terminado para el día:

---

\_\_\_\_\_ Sí, voy a utilizar una matriz de evaluación o lista de chequeo  
\_\_\_\_\_ Sí, voy a utilizar un calendario o voy a seguir un horario específico

Firma del Estudiante:

---

## Apéndice B

### Agenda del Proyecto

Nombre:

Fecha:	Fecha:	Fecha:
En esta fecha me comprometo a llevar a cabo los siguientes pasos de mi proyecto:	En esta fecha me comprometo a llevar a cabo los siguientes pasos de mi proyecto:	En esta fecha me comprometo a llevar a cabo los siguientes pasos de mi proyecto:
¿Voy al corriente? ¿Qué ajustes tengo que hacerle a mi proyecto?	¿Voy al corriente? ¿Qué ajustes tengo que hacerle a mi proyecto?	¿Voy al corriente? ¿Qué ajustes tengo que hacerle a mi proyecto?

**Utilizando juegos matemáticos en el salón bilingüe**  
Zulmaris Díaz  
The University of Texas Pan-American

Resumen

El presente artículo propone el uso de juegos como método suplementario para la enseñanza, práctica y aplicación de conceptos matemáticos. En este artículo se establecen los beneficios de los juegos matemáticos y cómo hacer uso de éstos no tan solo en el salón de clase, sino también como vínculo didáctico entre el hogar y la escuela. Además, se presentan ejemplos de juegos que pueden ser utilizados para la práctica de números y operaciones, uno de los estándares nacionales establecidos por el Consejo Nacional de Profesores de Matemáticas (NCTM).

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En esta época en la que las escuelas son juzgadas por el rendimiento estudiantil en los exámenes estandarizados, gran parte de la instrucción se ha limitado al material que será evaluado en el examen, o sea a “enseñar el examen” (Gulek, 2003). En muchas escuelas, por lo general aquellas que se encuentran en áreas de bajos recursos y con un gran número de estudiantes bilingües, las hojas de práctica para el examen estatal se han convertido en el currículo a seguir (Berlak, 1999; McNeil, 2000). Los juegos educativos, las actividades manuales, y las estrategias que promueven el descubrimiento y el pensamiento crítico, que son de gran beneficio para todos los estudiantes, en especial para los estudiantes bilingües (Arreguín-Anderson & Ruiz-Escalante, 2007); se han tenido que hacer a un lado para dar lugar a esta nueva tendencia. No es que el uso de hojas de práctica no sea un método eficaz para la enseñanza de matemáticas; pero es importante estar consciente que muchas de estas hojas no tan solo aburren a los estudiantes sino también que requieren de memorización más que de aplicación y de pensamiento crítico.

De acuerdo con Baroody (1989), cuando la información se memoriza, parte de ésta o toda es olvidada rápidamente; aunque se recuerde algo, es difícil aplicar el concepto memorizado ya sea para aprender nueva información o para resolver problemas. Muchas veces los estudiantes contestan bien el problema pero esto no significa que lo entienden o que hacen uso de los niveles más altos del pensamiento, como lo son: el análisis, la síntesis, y la evaluación. Para poder tener amplio dominio de los conceptos matemáticos se requiere de un aprendizaje significativo, en el que los estudiantes construyan activamente su conocimiento; por consiguiente, este artículo propone el uso de juegos como método suplementario para la enseñanza, práctica y aplicación de conceptos matemáticos.

### *¿Cuán favorables son los juegos?*

Por más de cien años se han hecho estudios que demuestran la importancia y beneficios de los juegos en el desarrollo cognoscitivo y la resolución de problemas (Davis, 1996; Dewey, 1966; Kamii & Housman, 2000; Ke & Grabowski, 2007; Piaget, 1951). Por ejemplo, Piaget basó mucha de su investigación en el juego y cómo éste favorece el aumento cognoscitivo; declaró que el conocimiento es desarrollado por medio de la interacción con el ambiente a través de juegos y objetos concretos. Al igual que Piaget, Dewey destaca el mérito de los juegos en el crecimiento y madurez del individuo.

De acuerdo con Rubin (1982), los juegos ayudan al desarrollo de la creatividad, al igual que permiten la práctica y dominio de actividades que más tarde serán necesarias en la edad adulta. No obstante, para sacarle provecho a los juegos es importante que éstos cumplan con ciertas características, como por ejemplo: que provean una dilación temporal a las frustraciones y disminuyan el temor al fracaso, que sea un proceso voluntario y de iniciativa propia (Sylva, Bruners, & Genova, 1976).

Los juegos matemáticos son divertidos, efectivos y útiles para el procedimiento de práctica, al igual que para la enseñanza (Kamii & Housman, 2000; Ortiz, 2003); éstos motivan al estudiante a tomar parte activa en el desarrollo de su aprendizaje y entendimiento matemático, ya que promueven una actitud positiva hacia esta materia en un ambiente donde no se penaliza el tomar riesgos y cometer errores (Holton, Ahmed, Williams, & Hill, 2001). De igual manera, los juegos suscitan la comunicación entre alumnos, y como exponen Torres-Rimbau y de Kanter (2005): “el aprendizaje en matemáticas resulta más efectivo dentro de un contexto social” (p. 29).

En resumen, los juegos son un excelente instrumento para fomentar el aprendizaje significativo de los conceptos matemáticos, ya que por medio de ellos es posible reforzar el conocimiento actual, promover la resolución de problemas, y crear lazos entre el conocimiento previo y el concepto de aprender.

Los estudiantes bilingües no tan solo se favorecen de los beneficios ya mencionados, sino que a ellos también les sirve para el desarrollo del segundo idioma, ya que los juegos incitan la comunicación y, como es sabido, el propósito del idioma es la comunicación. Por tanto, la mejor manera para desarrollar un idioma es mediante interacciones sociales en donde los participantes se ven obligados a negociar la comunicación ya sea por medio de repetición, reformulación de vocabulario, expresiones faciales y corporales (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001; Wong Fillmore 1985). Los juegos no solo amplían el contexto para la práctica del idioma, sino que también crean un ambiente de ansiedad baja donde los estudiantes se sienten cómodos al tomar el riesgo de producir un idioma imperfecto (Rothenberg & Fisher, 2007; Krashen, 1982).

No solo los juegos matemáticos pueden ser provechosos para enseñar o practicar un concepto, sino que también pueden servir de vínculo didáctico entre el hogar y la escuela. Muchos investigadores y pedagogos afirman que los padres pueden influir significativamente en el aprendizaje de sus hijos (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Vail, 2001; Wherry, 2003). Para la mayoría de los niños sus padres son los primeros y más importantes maestros, por consiguiente la participación de los padres en la educación formal de sus hijos es trascendental; sin embargo muchos padres, especialmente aquellos de pocos recursos, no se sienten suficientemente capacitados para tomar parte activa en la educación de sus hijos (Chrispeels & Gonzalez, 2004; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991), es por esta razón que las escuelas necesitan crear relaciones estrechas con los hogares de sus alumnos. Estas

relaciones fomentan la confianza de los padres en cómo ayudar en la educación de sus hijos y a la vez promueven el desenvolvimiento académico del estudiante (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Wherry, 2003). Por medio de los juegos matemáticos los padres pueden ayudar a sus hijos a practicar el concepto y a promover el pensamiento crítico de una manera divertida y poco intimidante, especialmente para aquellos padres que se sienten poco capacitados en el área de matemáticas. Muchos de los juegos matemáticos pueden ser enviados a la casa como tarea, evitando así el desencanto de los estudiantes hacia estas actividades ya que promueven una participación activa de su parte, además de que servirán de enlace entre el hogar y la escuela

*¿Cómo hacer uso de los juegos matemáticos en el salón de clase?*

En ocasiones los docentes, en especial aquellos que han sido educados bajo el método tradicional o aquellos que no tienen mucho conocimiento de las matemáticas, encuentran difícil la posibilidad de usar juegos matemáticos como medio de enseñanza y práctica (Holton, Ahmed, Williams, & Hill, 2001); pero en realidad no lo es tanto. No obstante, para que ocurra un aprendizaje significativo por medio de los juegos es esencial que se cree un ambiente seguro, donde se utilice frecuentemente el aprendizaje a través de la colaboración en grupo, y se provea una retroalimentación inmediata. De igual manera, para poderle sacar el mejor partido a los juegos matemáticos es importante que se planee bien la actividad y luego que se dedique tiempo en el salón de clase para practicar el juego antes de asignarlo como tarea. Como nos dice Olson (2007), al escoger un juego es importante que el docente lo practique antes de enseñarlo a los estudiantes, para que así se familiarice con las reglas, determine los conceptos matemáticos implicados en el juego, desarrolle una serie de preguntas que fomenten el pensamiento crítico, al igual que anticipe posibles respuestas y estrategias que utilizarán los estudiantes. También es importante que se planee cómo será enseñado el juego: ¿El docente lo demostrará al frente de la

clase o lo enseñará a grupos pequeños, o lo jugará individualmente con cada estudiante? De igual importancia es decidir cuándo se usará el juego, cuánto tiempo se utilizará para la práctica del juego, y cuánto adiestramiento es necesario antes de que éste se convierta en tarea o actividad independiente. Tan pronto como los estudiantes comiencen a jugar es necesario que el maestro supervise la actividad, escuche las conversaciones de los estudiantes, y suscite el pensamiento crítico haciendo preguntas de sondeo (Olson 2007). Después que el juego ha sido experimentado en el salón de clases los estudiantes están listos para jugarlo con sus familiares.

A continuación se presentan varios juegos que pueden ser enseñados en el salón de clase y luego ser enviados como tarea con el propósito de practicar los conceptos aprendidos de una manera divertida y poco intimidante, no tan solo para aquellos padres que tal vez no se sienten cómodos ayudando a sus hijos con las matemáticas; sino también para aquellos estudiantes que están aprendiendo el concepto a un paso más lento que sus compañeros. Para que los juegos promuevan los altos niveles de pensamiento se han añadido una serie de preguntas que requieren un pensamiento analítico por parte del estudiante, al igual que pueden servir para estimular la interacción entre los padres y sus hijos.

*¿Están de acuerdo los juegos matemáticos con los estándares nacionales?*

El Consejo Nacional de Profesores de Matemáticas de los Estados Unidos (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, NCTM), una organización compuesta de maestros y educadores matemáticos, ha tomado parte activa en los cambios que han ido ocurriendo durante los últimos veinte años en la educación de matemáticas en los EEUU.

En el año 2000, El Consejo Nacional de Profesores de Matemáticas (NCTM) hace pública la guía *Principios y Estándares para la Educación Matemática*, la cuál establece un lineamiento acerca de cuál debe ser el enfoque de las matemáticas escolares. Esta guía insta

cinco Estándares de Contenido, los cuales describen lo que los estudiantes deben de aprender; y cinco Estándares de Procedimiento, los cuales explican las maneras para adquirir y aplicar esos conocimientos. Los cinco Estándares de Contenido son:

1. Números y operaciones
2. Álgebra
3. Geometría
4. Medida
5. Análisis de datos y probabilidad

Para efectos de este artículo se trabajará con juegos matemáticos que aluden al primer estándar, números y operaciones, el cual se centra en la comprensión de los números, el desarrollo del significado de las operaciones matemáticas, y la fluidez de cálculos.

*¿Qué juegos se pueden utilizar para promover el concepto numérico?*

Aunque los niños entran a la escuela con un entendimiento del concepto numérico y de como contar (Baroody & Wilkins, 1999; Fuson, Grandau, & Sugiyama, 2001), es necesario desarrollar el concepto numérico, ya que éste es la base de las matemáticas; NCTM (2000), explica que un buen dominio del concepto numérico “permite aprender y recordar con facilidad los procedimientos de cálculo aritmético” (p.4). Para ayudar a los estudiantes de kinder y pre-kinder a desarrollar el concepto de los números del 0 al 12, el juego *Tres en Línea* es un excelente medio (ver Tabla 1). Este juego promueve el reconocimiento de patrones y conjuntos de números para ayudar al estudiante a desarrollar un mejor sentido numérico, evitando así el hábito de contar de uno en uno, ya que esta práctica le puede afectar más adelante cuando tenga

que aprender y manipular conceptos más abstractos. Este juego también promueve las destrezas de cuentas regresivas y progresivas, al igual que la combinación de números.

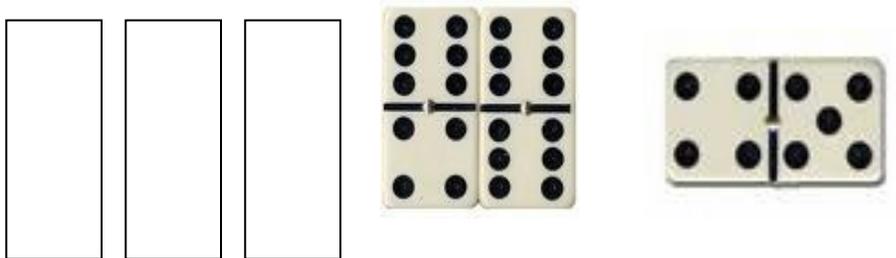
TABLA 1: *Juego Tres en línea*

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**Materiales:** Tableros de números (en una tabla de 3 columnas por 3 hileras escriba números del 0 al 12 sin repetirse), marcadores, fichas de dominó.

**¿Cómo jugar?:** Voltear las fichas de dominó boca abajo. Dar a cada jugador un tablero de números. Uno de los jugadores voltea una ficha. Los jugadores buscan en su tablero el numeral que representa el patrón numérico representado en la ficha y lo marcan. El jugador que tenga marcados tres numerales en línea (horizontal, vertical o diagonal) gana.

3	8	9
5	12	0
10	2	7



**Preguntas para hacer durante el juego:**

¿Qué número es este?

¿Si le añado un punto qué número hará? ¿Cómo lo sabes?

¿Si le quito un punto qué número hará? ¿Cómo lo sabes?

¿Cuántos puntos más tengo que añadir para que forme el número...?

¿Cuántos puntos tengo que quitar para que forme el número...?

---

En los grados de primero a tercero, los estudiantes ya comienzan a pensar en conjuntos de diez y a crear relaciones con el sistema de valor posicional (Van de Walle, 2007). El juego *Tres en Línea* se puede modificar para que los estudiantes entiendan que la posición de los dígitos en un número determina lo que representan (ver *Tres en Línea Base 10*, Tabla 2). Con frecuencia a los estudiantes se les dificulta este concepto; de acuerdo con Ross (1989), hay cinco niveles de comprensión con relación al valor posicional:

1. *Cifra sencilla*: el estudiante entiende el número 48 como una sola cifra en donde los dígitos 4 y 8 no tienen valor por sí mismos.

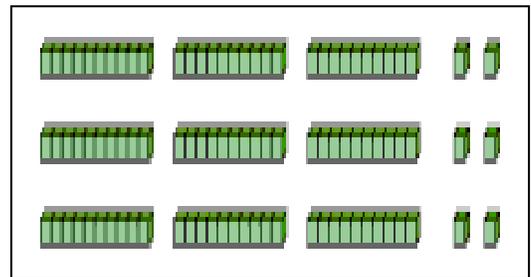
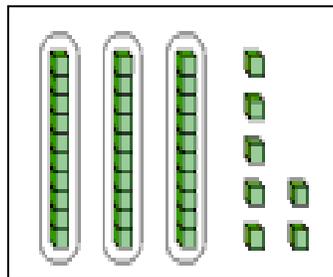
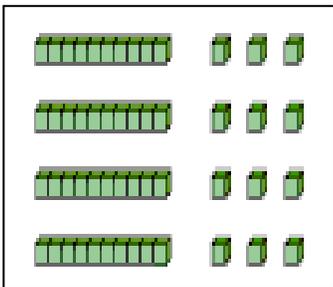
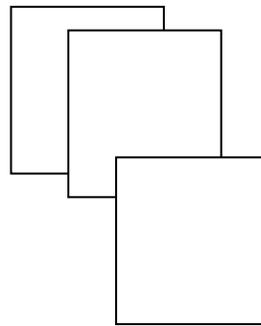
2. *Nombra la posición:* el estudiante identifica correctamente la posición de las decenas y centenas; pero no relaciona cada dígito con los bloques de base diez.
3. *Valor nominal:* el estudiante iguala 4 bloques con el número 4, y 8 bloques con el número 8.
4. *Transformación al valor posicional:* el estudiante iguala el 8 con 8 bloques y el 4 con los restantes 40 bloques, pero no como 4 grupos de diez o 4 decenas.
5. *Comprensión absoluta:* el 4 es igualado con 4 grupos de bloques de diez (decenas) y el 8 con 8 bloques sencillos (unidades).

Para la comprensión absoluta del valor posicional es necesario que los estudiantes tengan la oportunidad de integrar el concepto de base diez con el número, ya sea de manera oral o escrita.

TABLA 2: *Juego Tres en Línea Base 10*

**Modificaciones:** En lugar de las fichas de dominó también se pueden usar tarjetas con dibujos que muestren números representados por bloques de base diez, de ese modo los estudiantes tienen que encontrar en el tablero de números el que está representado en las tarjetas.

30	80	96
25	37	90
52	26	77



Otra área que es parte integral del concepto numérico es la posición relativa de los números. Por medio del juego *¿Quién es más grande?* los estudiantes tienen la oportunidad de practicar el concepto de mayor y menor. Referirse a la Tabla 3 para las explicaciones de este juego y cómo puede ser modificado de acuerdo al nivel esperado.

TABLA 3: *Juego ¿Quién es más grande?*

---

**Materiales:** 50 tarjetas (5 de cada numeral del 0 al 9)

**¿Cómo jugar?:** Barajar las tarjetas y amontonarlas boca abajo. Cada jugador toma 2 tarjetas y trata de formar el número más grande posible usando ambas tarjetas. El jugador que forma el número más grande se gana todas las tarjetas que se utilizaron en esa ronda. Se continúa jugando hasta que las tarjetas amontonadas boca abajo se acaben.

El ganador es el jugador que ha obtenido más tarjetas.

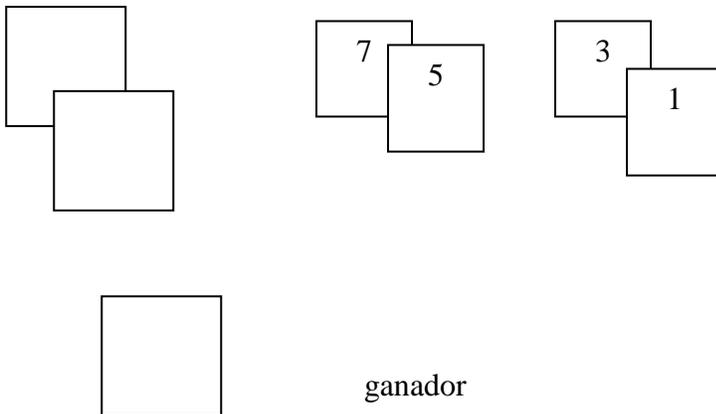
**Preguntas para hacer durante el juego:**

¿Por qué este número es más grande?

¿Por qué este número es más pequeño?

¿Qué número formo si cambio el orden de mis tarjetas?

Si cambiamos el orden de las tarjetas que hemos puesto en la mesa ¿Quién ganaría entonces?



### **Modificaciones:**

1. En lugar de dos tarjetas se puede usar 3 para formar números de tres dígitos.
  2. En lugar de formar el número más grande se puede formar el número más pequeño
  3. También se pueden formar números de 3 dígitos pero siguiendo alguna regla en específico, como por ejemplo el que gana es el que tenga el número más pequeño en la posición de las decenas, o unidades, o centenas.
- 

### *¿Qué juegos se pueden utilizar para promover el concepto operación con números enteros?*

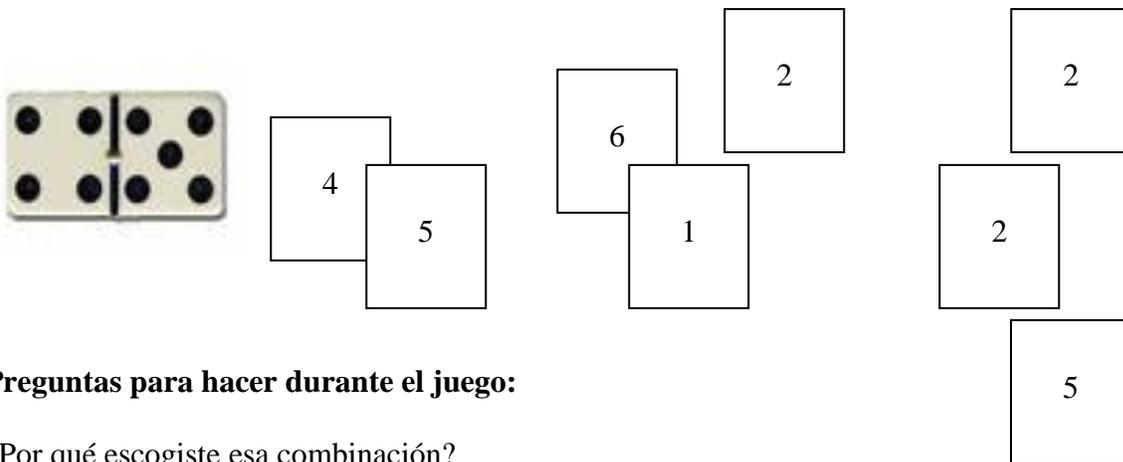
Con relación al estándar de números y operaciones, una de las recomendaciones de NCTM (2000) es que los estudiantes desarrollen fluidez al calcular suma, resta, multiplicación y división. Van de Walle (2007) explica que la fluidez de cómputo facilita el cálculo mental y como resultado promueve la habilidad de razonar numéricamente en cualquier situación relacionada con números. La práctica juega un papel fundamental en el desarrollo de la fluidez de cálculos, especialmente si es implementada efectivamente. Los juegos *Remate* (Ver Tabla 4) y *Guerra de Naipes* (Ver Tabla 5) pueden ser utilizados para fomentar la fluidez al resolver operaciones matemáticas.

TABLA 4: *Juego Remate*

---

**Materiales:** 60 tarjetas (10 de cada numeral del 0 al 6); fichas de dominó.

**¿Cómo jugar?:** Repartir todas las tarjetas entre los jugadores y poner todas las fichas de dominó boca abajo. Los jugadores toman turno para voltear una ficha y anunciar el resultado total de la suma de ambos lados de la ficha. Todos los jugadores tratan de formar este resultado de todas las maneras posibles. Por ejemplo, si al voltear la ficha salen los números 4 y 5, los jugadores pueden formar  $4+5$ ;  $6+1+2$ ;  $5+2+2$ ;  $5+1+1+2$ ;  $4+2+3$ ;  $3+3+3$  y así sucesivamente. El primer jugador que use todas sus tarjetas es el ganador.



**Preguntas para hacer durante el juego:**

¿Por qué escogiste esa combinación?

¿Crees que hay otras combinaciones posibles?

¿Qué combinación de números debe salir para que puedas soltar muchas de tus tarjetas?

**Modificaciones:**

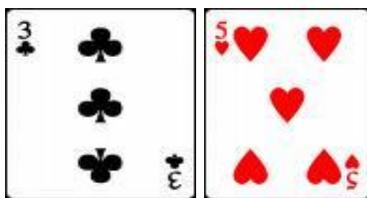
1. En lugar de practicar sumas este juego se puede usar para practicar multiplicaciones. Se pueden buscar todas las combinaciones posibles del producto total de la multiplicación de ambos lados del dominó.
  2. En lugar de fichas se pueden utilizar naipes (barajas) para encontrar las diferentes combinaciones necesarias formando, ya sea el resultado total de la suma de ambos naipes o el producto de la multiplicación de éstos.
- 

TABLA 5: *Guerra de Naipes*

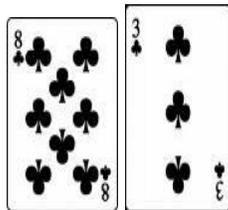
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**Materiales:** Naipes/barajas/cartas (sin las cartas A, J, Q, K)

**¿Cómo jugar?:** Repartir todos los naipes entre los jugadores, cada jugador debe de poner sus naipes en un montón y mantenerlos boca a bajo. Al mismo tiempo cada jugador voltea 2 de sus cartas. El jugador que obtenga la suma más alta gana todos los naipes jugados en esa ronda. Cuando todas las tarjetas en la mano son volteadas y sumadas, el jugador con más puntos obtenidos es el ganador del juego.



3+5



8+3

**¡Ganador!**

### **Preguntas para hacer durante el juego:**

¿Cuánto más/menos fue tu suma que la mía?

¿Cuánto más/menos tengo que añadir/restar a mi resultado para que sea igual a tu resultado?

¿Por qué tú/yo ganaste/gané las cartas esta vez? ¿Por cuánto de diferencia?

¿Por qué tú/yo perdiste/perdí las cartas esta vez? ¿Por cuánto de diferencia?

### **Modificaciones:**

1. En lugar de sumar los naipes, éstos se pueden multiplicar con el propósito de obtener el producto más alto.
- 

*¿Cuál es el propósito de los juegos aquí presentados?*

Los juegos presentados en este artículo sirven específicamente para la práctica de ciertos conceptos numéricos y operacionales. Es muy importante recordar que antes de iniciar estos juegos los estudiantes deben de entender el concepto. Como educadores tenemos que estar conscientes que la práctica no hace que el estudiante aprenda el concepto, por el contrario, la práctica ayuda a reforzar lo aprendido. Nuestra meta primordial debe ser que los estudiantes aprendan y comprendan bien el concepto, de tal manera que lo puedan aplicar en otros contextos y lo recuerden a largo plazo. Si solamente nos conformamos con que el estudiante memorice la información para que rinda bien en los exámenes o pruebas, entonces la información es solo recordada a corto plazo, olvidada rápidamente, y el estudiante no sabrá utilizarla en otros contextos; y por consiguiente, seguiremos fomentando la creencia de que las matemáticas son difíciles y que solo unos pocos están dotados matemáticamente.

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## **Literacy Development for Kindergarten Bilingual Students: Going Beyond the Basal**

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### **Abstract**

Teachers of early childhood children must consider using developmentally appropriate literacy practices that recognize children's development, language differences, and literacy knowledge. This study examined the literacy development of 108 bilingual students during a three-year period. The treatment used included 1) grouping bilingual kindergarten students for reading and language arts instruction, 2) using literacy development materials beyond the basal, and 3) teacher training on build-up readers.

Basal instruction and heterogeneous student grouping were used the first year of the study. The results showed that ten students did not move beyond Level A. Fifteen students moved from Level A to Level B, eight moved from Level A to Level 1, five advanced from Level A to Level 2, and three progressed from Level A to Level 3.

In the second and third years, teachers incorporated literacy development materials beyond the basal and grouped bilingual students for reading, language arts instruction. In the second year, five out of 36 students remained in Level A and five moved from Level A to Level B; seven students reached Level 1. Twelve others progressed to Level 2, and seven others reached Level 3.

In the third year, no students remained at Level A, and five placed at Level B. Six students reached Level 1, and nine students advanced to Level 2. However, 12 ended the year at Level 3. The data gathered throughout this study showed that the strategic and effective use of

literacy activities can be matched to meet academic, linguistic, and literacy needs of bilingual kindergarten students.

Although the researchers did not focus this study on Spanish oral language proficiency level gains, the results from this area indicate that increased literacy development may have an impact on language development as well.

## Introduction

Language does not merely reflect a thought; it is the nurse and tutor of thought which provides a schema for understanding and interpreting experience (Vygotsky, 1978). Language development, social development, and cognitive development are interdependent. Additionally, Vygotsky (1978) proposed that word meanings are social, and with development, become personalized as the child comes to possess them. The optimal language learning environment promotes both language acquisition and a positive sense of self.

Caregivers promote these positive aspects by interpreting their children's communicative attempts as meaningful and elaborating upon the children's utterances to make them feel competent communicators long before children say their first recognizable words. Children are often submersed in a language-rich environment that is filled with meaningful, spoken language (Cambourne & Turbill, 1987; Bennett, Weigel, & Martin, 2002). Thus, caregivers who provide this type of nurturing language environment become encouragers, providers, and expanders of language. Since children are motivated to learn by "using words," grammar is learned within a meaningful conversational context and not in isolation (Bruner, 1986; U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

Equally important are literacy development and the acquisition of oral language. Oral language plays a crucial role in children's cognitive development and serves as the cornerstone for written language. Moreover, reading proficiency is directly linked to oral language development (Strickland, 1990). Research in oral language development has influenced the way we perceive how children learn written language. Reading development hinges on oral language development, just as oral language development depends on the interactions between early caregivers and the infants in their care. Oral and written languages are interrelated and can be

acquired simultaneously. Moreover, the underlying process of learning written and oral language is the same. Like oral language, written language is learned best through actual use in a meaningful social context (Bruner, 1983).

Speaking, listening, reading and writing are all important aspects of literacy development. Teaching these four skills simultaneously helps contribute to strong literacy development. Research shows that when reading and writing are taught together, their benefits are greater than when each component is taught alone (McGee, 2005). Writing leads to improved phonemic awareness and word recognition, since children need to focus on sound-to-symbol relationships to accomplish both tasks (Gunning, 2000).

In addition, extensive reading leads to better writing performance for many reasons, in part because frequent reading opportunities are associated with students developing more extensive vocabulary and deeper insights about how ideas can be organized and expressed through written language (Pikulski, 1994). When children are provided opportunities to have interactive experiences with reading and writing, they acquire skills and strategies that help them understand written texts. These experiences help children transition from oral language, which is face-to-face and interactive, to written language, which is more formal and provides abstract contextual cues for interactions in a context-reduced fashion (Cummins, 1981b). According to Holdaway (1979, p. 54), “Written language, unlike oral language, must carry the total load of meaning without ambiguity. It is more formal, more complete, and more textured than spoken language.”

## Statement of the Problem

As an increasing number of children with limited English proficiency enter schools throughout the United States, teachers face the challenge of educating these children. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2003), Hispanics constitute nearly 20% of the nation's kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade student population. Teachers who work with second language learners at times may need to be prepared to foster these students' first language and to understand the process of second language learning. To allow the native language to be lost or replaced by the second language jeopardizes the well-being of our second language learners (Wong-Fillmore, 1991a).

At times, educators may encounter bilingual children who do not seem to be proficient in either their first or second language. This lack of proficiency may occur because bilingual children may not be sufficiently instructed in their native language at school to build a strong literacy base for long-term acquisition of skills in reading and writing in their first language and subsequently in the second language (Cummins, 1981b). Moreover, bilingual children may be expected to demonstrate age-appropriate proficiency in the second language before they are ready. Bilingual children's performance in either language often lags behind that of a monolingual student at some point in their development. This developmental phase may look like a deprivation in both languages, but is more appropriately described as language imbalance. This imbalance signifies certain points in the development of bilingual children's languages where these children do not perform as well as native speakers in either language (Wong-Fillmore, 1991a; Pease-Alvarez, 1993).

Literacy development and second language learning are of utmost importance for bilingual children's success with reading and writing in their first and eventually in their second

language. More than one fifth of American school-age children come from families in which languages other than English are spoken. Many of these children also come from families with very low literacy backgrounds (McDonnell & Hill, 1993; Makin & Jones-Diaz, 2002), where the parents may not be able to read and write. Because these children may not be exposed to books or literacy activities until they enter school, teachers need to realize that the books they use to instruct these children may not directly relate to the children's experiences. Consequently, reading and writing for these children may appear to be meaningless and unimportant. The necessary ingredient for these children's literacy development and second language learning is the development of instructional materials that reflect the learners' own language and culture. Additionally, the changing views of literacy development in a multicultural society call for the establishment of partnerships among educators and families in order to incorporate culturally meaningful reading opportunities (Makin & Jones-Diaz, 2002).

### **Significance of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine the literacy development of 109 kindergarten students in Spanish, which was their native language, during a three-year period. Particular importance was given to exploring the role of a focused literacy plan on the literacy development of kindergarten bilingual students that included 1) increased reading/language arts Spanish instruction, 2) team-teaching and regrouping options for maximizing Spanish literacy and language development time, 3) incorporating build-up readers as one source of meaningful and relevant literacy materials for these students, given the predictive nature of the language included in these materials (Guszak, 1997), and 4) involving parents in the literacy development process.

## **Limitations of the Study**

This research study is limited in several ways. First, the participant sample is limited to one school in one school district. Second, it is limited to a border geographic area. Third, it is limited to 109 kindergarten bilingual students and five kindergarten teachers, two of whom were designated to offer native language instruction for literacy development. Fourth, it is limited by the number of components implemented at once in these classrooms and not just “going beyond the basal,” so it is difficult to attribute the success of these students to just one component. Fifth, the oral language proficiency scores are limited in validity, based on the fact that the outcomes were reported by various test administrators. Testing conditions, test administrators, and time factors are also a limitation of this study because they were not monitored by the researchers.

## **Review of Literature**

Relevant literature examined to explore this literacy development issue focused on several areas, including a review of the role of oral language and its relationship to emergent literacy, the structure of a well-balanced literacy program, and the role of build-up readers within a balanced literacy program.

### *Oral Language and Emergent Literacy*

Oral language and emergent literacy are fundamental to the subsequent literacy success of young children. Bruner’s (1983) research claims that the crucial variable for stimulating language development is a pattern of responsiveness. During early communication exchanges between a child and a caregiver, social routines are established and basic rules of human interactions are learned. Bruner (1978) also suggests that an infant’s success in achieving mutual

attention with caregivers leads to language learning. Language develops through interactive engagements with responsive adults and peers. The most critical factor in young children's linguistic and cognitive development comes from the numerous opportunities to engage in conversations. Children need to talk as well as listen.

According to recent research, children's literacy development begins long before children start school (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999; Holdaway, 1979). Literacy is developed and nurtured in children through the caregivers and exposure to literacy materials such as storybooks, children's literature, poetry, etc. Children start experiencing social interactions with adults and literacy in a variety of ways and at different ages (Sulsby, 1991).

In 1966, Marie Clay, a New Zealand researcher, introduced the term "emergent literacy" to describe the behaviors seen in young children when they use books and writing materials to imitate reading and writing activities, even though the children cannot actually read and write (Ramsburg, 1998). Emergent literacy emphasizes the connections and interrelationships between reading, writing, and oral language development (Crawford, 1995). Children's skills in reading and writing are developed simultaneously rather than sequentially. A print-rich learning environment sets the tone for ways in which children can discover the relationships between spoken and written language. As children have more experiences with reading and writing, their understanding of the concepts of reading and writing expand and grow to fit their knowledge. A young child's concept about print changes as literacy development evolves. Lifelong learning and reading are achieved through positive literacy development learning environments (Tankersley, 2004).

Reading and writing are thinking processes, and emergent literacy must be considered in the context of children's cognitive skills. Emergent literacy is partly discovered. Children

construct their own ideas about literacy as they actively participate in literacy activities.

Additionally, emergent literacy is based on behaviors modeled and nurtured by caregivers that encourage children to change and refine their own ideas to more closely match conventional ones. Through the manipulation of language such as rhyming, children develop a degree of phonemic awareness on their own. As noted by McGee & Richgels (2007), “Because children construct their own knowledge, this knowledge does not come fully developed and is often quite different from that of an adult. There are differences between how an adult understands reading and writing and how a child understands reading and writing” (p. 7).

Special considerations must be given to children who do not have strong skills in oral English. According to Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998), non-English speaking children need proper preparation before they are taught to read English. The ability to speak English provides the foundation for learning alphabetic principles, the structure of language, and the content of the material children are reading. If children cannot speak English, they can be taught to read and write in their native language while becoming proficient in English, since research indicates that many of the foundational literacy skills may transfer from a student’s native language to English language literacy (Cummins, 1991; Roberts & Neal, 2004).

Teachers of young children must also consider using developmentally appropriate literacy practices that recognize children’s development, language differences, and literacy knowledge. Children need to be read to on a daily basis in order to experience reading in different contexts (e.g., read aloud, shared reading, and paired reading). Further, it is important for teachers to provide writing experiences that allow children the flexibility to use non-conventional forms of writing first (e.g., creative, invented spelling, phonetic spelling), and over

time move to conventional forms (International Reading Association, 1998; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998; Nueman & Dickinson, 2002).

As children begin to read, a balanced literacy approach that incorporates both reading and writing will provide them with the skills they need to become proficient readers and writers. One critical component in developing literacy in young children is to use the children's home language and culture as literacy resources. Teachers should be able to gather and share ideas from parents and caregivers to create an optimal environment to support children's literacy development (Villarreal, 1995; International Reading Association, 1998; Whitehead, 2002).

### *Components of a Well-Balanced Literacy Program*

A well-balanced literacy program includes phonemic awareness, lexical development, interactions and input, language manipulation opportunities, multi-sensory activities, reading activities, writing activities, and publishing activities (Strickland & Morrow, 1988; Cowen, 2003). A classroom environment that fosters second language learning and literacy development in the native language should incorporate the following components: 1) a print-rich environment; 2) labeling of items around the classroom in both the first and second languages; 3) a stimulating linguistic environment that promotes language interactions and language input; 4) opportunities for the development of basic interpersonal communication skills in the first and second language for communication purposes; 5) opportunities for the development of schemata to facilitate the acquisition of cognitive academic language proficiency; 6) integration of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing; 7) opportunities for language play that can be facilitated through the use of learning centers; 8) opportunities for storytelling and story retelling; 9) incorporation of literature, poetry, big books, trade books, and other reading

resources; 10) opportunities for role-playing and book publishing; 11) diverse instructional strategies that include all learning and cognitive styles; and 12) opportunities for higher level thinking skills development (Strickland & Morrow, 1988; Texas Education Agency, 1997a; Taberski, 2000).

In support of the preceding components, Strickland (1990) has described critical elements of a positive reading-writing classroom. These include the following: 1) integration of literacy learning into everything that occurs throughout the day; 2) an inviting reading center filled with books within the reach of children and where children interact with these books daily; 3) a writing center with plenty of writing tools, paper, magnetic letters, and an alphabet chart at the eye level of and used daily by the children; 4) printed materials provided everywhere to create a “print-rich environment;” 5) a wall or walls adorned with graphs, poems, lists, and other important information related to the theme currently under study; 6) read-aloud time that occurs at least twice each day; 7) encouragement provided to the children to scribble and invent their own spelling, since the emphasis is on the process rather than the product; 8) teachers who model reading and writing and their enjoyment of it; and 9) assessment and instruction that are integrated, and assessment that is primarily dependent on systematic observation and analysis of children’s classroom participation and work.

Another vital component for effective language and literacy development is the role of culture. Children’s parents and the home environment during the early childhood years have a tremendous influence on children. When a gap exists between the culture of the home and the one at school, teachers and parents need to work together to create ways to bridge it (Villarreal, 1995). The first step toward better serving language minority children is to learn about the home

cultures and incorporate these cultural components, as appropriate, into the school's curricula and instructional decisions and practices (Samway & McKeon, 2000).

The term "literacy scaffolding" refers to reading and writing activities that provide built-in teacher or peer assistance in manners that are culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate for the children. This assistance may occur in various forms. First, literacy scaffolds can be applied to reading and writing activities aimed at functional, meaningful communication found in whole texts such as stories, poems, reports, or recipes. Second, these scaffolds also make use of language and discourse patterns that repeat themselves and are, therefore, predictable. Third, literacy scaffolds provide a model, offered by the teacher or by peers, to help students comprehend and produce particular written language patterns. Fourth, scaffolds of this type support students in comprehending and producing written language at a level slightly beyond their competence in the absence of a scaffold. Finally, literacy scaffolding is temporary and may be suspended when the student is ready to work without support (Peregoy & Boyle, 1990b).

### *Build-Up Readers*

Build-up readers can be used very effectively to enhance and support any literacy program (Guszek, 1997). Teachers can create many reading opportunities for students in both regular and bilingual education classrooms. According to Guszek, build-up readers are teacher-made books that feature vocabulary, syntax, and story characters from a basal reader. The readers are called "build-up" because they start with a few words and then build up by adding only one new word per page. For example, the pages of a teacher-made build-up reader could include the following pattern:

1. Go, go

Go \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_go.

Go \_\_\_\_\_go.

Go, go \_\_\_\_\_.

Go \_\_\_\_\_go.

2. Can, can

\_\_\_\_\_can go.

Can \_\_\_\_\_go?

\_\_\_\_\_can go.

Can \_\_\_\_\_go, go, go?

\_\_\_\_\_can go, go, go.

The practice of using pattern vocabulary books has parallels with the New Zealand reading programs, where students are introduced to colorful, easy books with repeated patterns. The New Zealand books do not follow the same type of patterning as build-up readers, but instead have repeated phrases and sentences about the illustrations in the books. In the United States, the *Dick and Jane* reading series is an example of pattern books similar to build-ups. The idea seems to be that students will transfer their reading knowledge from the predictable books to new books that incorporate similar elements. Interactive reading through pattern books leads to literacy and language development as well as the transfer of reading knowledge (Wasik & Bond, 2001).

It should be noted that some slower readers may need to go through the build-up reader of a given book before going through the book itself. Other children, however, may read these books alternately with the basal readers. Many children enjoy build-up readers and learn to read independently while they develop confidence.

Vocabulary development is a distinctive feature of build-up readers. A strong lexical foundation expands word knowledge and promotes success in reading and writing. Build up readers introduce vocabulary a few words at a time—and in some instances one word at a time—

in a format that utilizes repetition. The repetition of vocabulary words in context allows children to learn the form, function, and meaning of the words being learned, as well as different syntactical patterns.

Syntax awareness is strategically interwoven into the build-up readers, thus facilitating the meaning-making process. While working to build literacy skills, teachers need to consider the language that children bring from home and use it in literacy activities in order to make language relevant and meaningful. Once the process for building literacy begins, the next step is to introduce more and more words that will become part of the students' lexicon and eventually contribute to their cognitive language proficiency. Children learn vocabulary and acquire syntax skills through visual, aural, and oral practice. Build-up readers utilize both acquired and learned language opportunities (Guszak, 1997).

Another feature of the build-up readers is that they allow for extensive practice in reading. Aside from the classroom exposure to build-up readers, children are given a small version of the build-up readers to take home daily to read to their parents and thus establish a parental involvement component in the literacy development process of their children. The small build-up readers follow the same format as the one used in the classroom, but the print is similar to that found in actual readers. The book and print sizes provide uniformity between build-up readers and basal readers. These books play a very significant role in making reading a school and home activity, which reinforces vocabulary and language development.

Teachers can develop build-up readers using everyday vocabulary that is familiar to the children, or a variety of word lists. These strategies help form the foundation on which new vocabulary and language skills will be built. Build-up readers may include 1) environmental vocabulary; 2) basal reader vocabulary; 3) high-frequency words; 4) Dolch words; 5) color,

number, and shape words; 6) math, science, social studies, and health words; 7) thematic units' vocabulary; 8) word families; and 9) words found in children's literature and poetry (Guszak, 1997).

All the features of the build-up readers come together to provide students the opportunity to practice and develop the skills needed to acquire and learn language and reading. The success of build-up readers depends highly on their daily use in the classroom and on daily practice at home. The intent of these readers is to supplement the regular literacy program.

### *Grouping Students for Reading/Language Arts Instruction*

For years, grouping patterns and other instructional options such as team-teaching have been used to maximize learning opportunities for English language learners as well as other students requiring focused instructional practices. Regrouping strategies differ significantly from segregating or tracking students because students involved in this type of strategy are heterogeneously grouped for most of the instructional day in the regular classroom and regrouped for native language literacy development during the reading/language arts block. This grouping pattern enables teachers to create a learning environment that promotes native language instruction in literacy development and helps build a strong linguistic foundation. This foundation will help English language learners acquire basic knowledge and skills in their native language that will eventually transfer to learning the second language (Cummins, 1991). Regrouping allows teachers to teach the whole reading class without having to break the class into reading groups.

Ability grouping has been defined as a practice that places students in classrooms or small groups based on an initial assessment of their levels of readiness or ability (Kulik, 1992).

Kulik found that grouping practices have different effects on student achievement, based on the type of grouping practice and the subsequent curriculum developed for those groups.

A large body of research indicates that moderate gains occur in students' academic achievement when teachers adopt practices from gifted education pedagogy, such as ability grouping (Kulik, 2003; Slavin, 1987), curriculum modification (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), and differentiation (Tomlinson, 2004) strategies. Moreover, because it is unlikely that one strategy operating in isolation is as effective as multiple interventions, it is recommended that combined effects of grouping practices and differentiated curriculum be examined. If these practices are used with other student populations such as gifted and talented, why not use them for English language learners?

### **Areas of Research Emphasis**

The research addressed the following issues: 1) the importance of literacy development in the native language of second language learners, 2) literacy activities relevant to the bilingual students' daily lives and culture that could make a difference in attaining reading and writing proficiency, 3) an increase in literacy level attainment and Spanish oral language proficiency scores for bilingual kindergarten students, and 4) use of grouping strategies that maximize instructional time in reading and language arts.

### **School District and School Profiles**

The school selected for this research study is one of 33 schools in a school district located in a South Texas border area that serves a predominantly Hispanic student population. The

immigrant student population in this district comes mainly from Mexico; thus bilingual education is provided for these students in Spanish and English.

The school involved in the study had a total of 425 identified, participating bilingual students out of 700. There are a total of five kindergarten teachers in this school. The five teachers involved were certified bilingual educators who had taught kindergarten bilingual students for from 3 to 15 years. One of the researchers was the principal of this school for the three years of the study and was aware of the need for changing the instructional dynamics of this grade level to help students prepare to face the challenges of the state standardized—test the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)—that they would have to take as third graders.

### **Method**

The present descriptive and comparative study, which was conducted over a three-year period, involved a total of 109 bilingual kindergarten students and their teachers. Forty-one students and five teachers were involved during the first, or benchmark year. They were followed by thirty-six children and two teachers in the second year and thirty-two others and the same two teachers during the third year. These students were at the same literacy level, Level A, at the beginning of kindergarten, as shown on their student records. The teachers involved in this study volunteered to implement literacy activities that went beyond the district-adopted basal program. The basal program provided small books with very simple texts for kindergarten reading instruction.

The researchers selected five kindergarten classes in this elementary school as the focus of this study, since bilingual students were provided literacy instruction in their native language.

All five teachers were taught how to create and use build-up readers so that all students could benefit from this literacy development plan, which emphasized going beyond the basal. For the purpose of the study, the data gathered focused on Spanish literacy development of the identified bilingual students. The five kindergarten teachers continued to receive literacy development training during the second and third years.

The Primary Assessment Instrument was used to measure literacy growth of the students each year of the study. This assessment instrument, which was developed by the school district as part of its literacy support grading system, was administered in the students' primary language, i.e., Spanish.

Moreover, Spanish oral language proficiency pre and post-test scores were used to examine native language development as well, both for this group and the two subsequent groups. Although the researchers did not focus this study on oral language proficiency level gains, the results from this area indicate that increased literacy development may have an impact on language development as well.

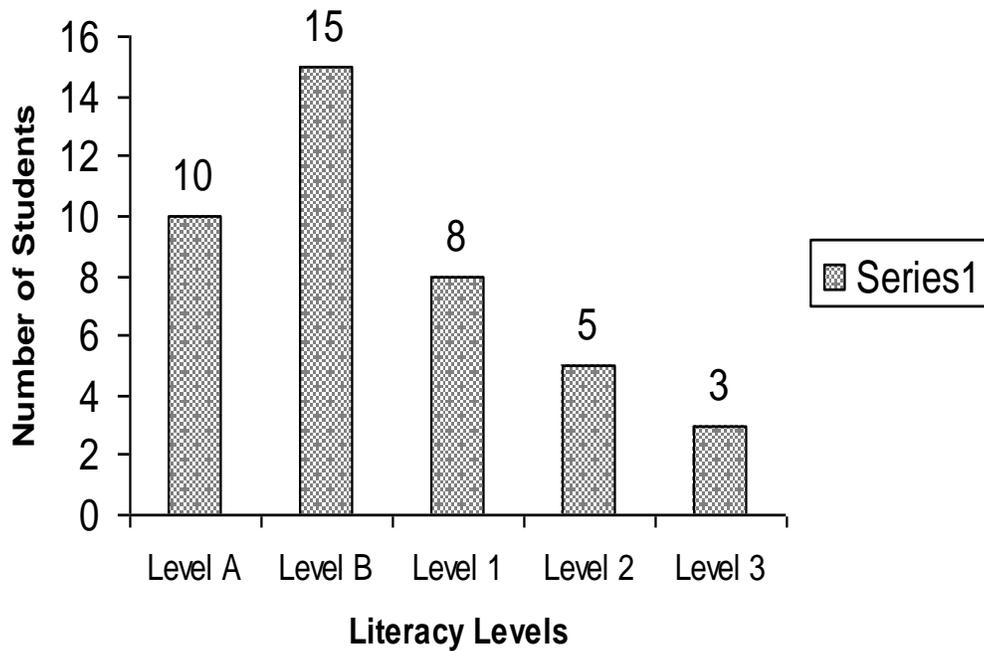
## **Findings**

Data for the first or benchmark year revealed the literacy level attainments for the identified bilingual students without the use of other literacy development activities beyond the basal. Table 1 shows the literacy level attainment for the first cohort of kindergarten bilingual students who were grouped within their own classrooms.

*Table 1*

*Bilingual Kindergarten Students' Literacy Levels Using Basal-Only Literacy Development*

*Group 1 (n=41) First Year*



The data clearly reflect the concerns teachers expressed about some of their students not moving out of Level A. Additionally, the researchers and the kindergarten teachers observed that the students' Spanish oral language proficiency scores were not increasing to higher levels, which seemed to indicate that most of the students were still at the limited English-beginner stage (Levels 1 and 2) at the end of kindergarten (see Table 5). This result placed the students at a disadvantage in being prepared to exit the bilingual program at mid-year in second grade, as outlined in this school district's policy. Some students who are in Levels 1 and 2 have "good oral English skills," but are not prepared to take on the cognitive demands of the Cognitive

Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in their native language, much less in the second language, if not instructed appropriately (Cummins, 1991).

The information in Table 1 indicates there were ten students who did not move beyond literacy Level A during the course of the year. Nonetheless, fifteen students moved from Level A to Level B; eight moved from Level A to Level 1; five students advanced from Level A to Level 2; but only three progressed from Level A to Level 3, thereby reaching the targeted end of year level. Only 16 (39%) students made it to Levels 1, 2, and 3 collectively.

The need for creating a more focused literacy development plan was obvious, and the teachers were very willing to do whatever it took to improve their instructional practices to help their students attain higher levels of literacy and language development. The outcomes of this effort became evident with the literacy level attainments and Spanish oral language proficiency gains of groups 2 and 3.

By this time, teachers had become more aware of the types of literacy development activities that would be beneficial to their English language learners. Teachers began to utilize more hands-on activities with the students and created opportunities for several interactive experiences with the build-up readers at school and at home. The reading achievement of the 36 bilingual kindergarten students who received native language instruction that included the use of build-up readers is depicted in Table 2.

*Table 2*

*Bilingual Kindergarten Students' Literacy Levels With Basal and Other Literacy Development Activities, Including Build-Up Readers Group 2 (n=36) Second Year*

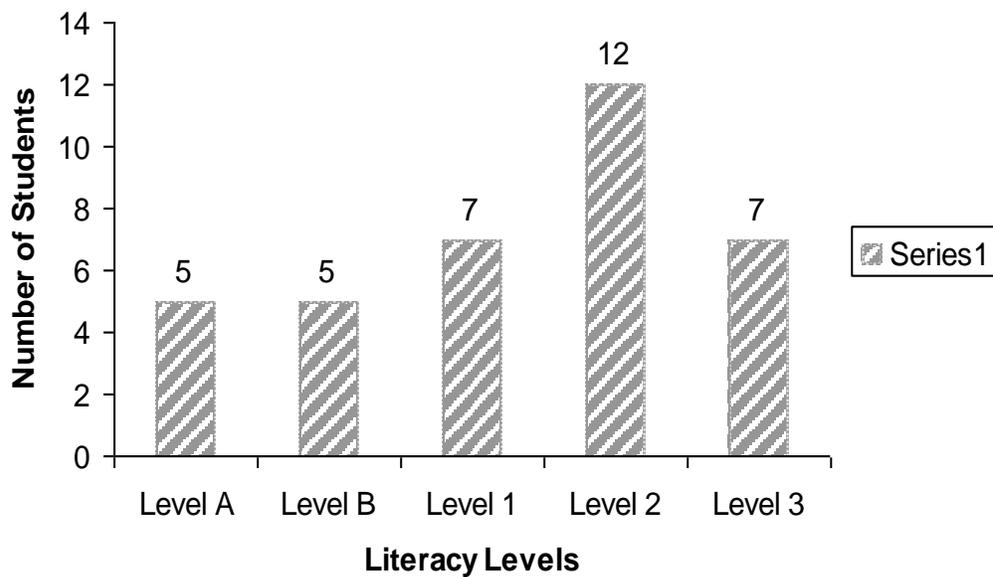


Table 2 reveals that the identified bilingual students who were grouped for reading and language arts instruction with two bilingual teachers, instructed in their native language, and exposed to other literacy activities, including the use of build-up readers, did better than the first group of students. The data show that 5 out of 36 students remained in Level A, and 5 moved from Level A to Level B by the end of the year. Seven students reached Level 1. Twelve others progressed to Level 2, and seven others reached Level 3.

Table 3 shows the results of literacy instruction for bilingual kindergarten students that incorporated several literacy activities and native language instruction. The teachers used teaming efforts to continue to provide intensified reading and language arts activities that would promote and encourage literacy development of bilingual kindergarten students.

*Table 3*

*Bilingual Kindergarten Students' Literacy Levels with Other Literacy Development Activities, Including Build-Up Readers Group 3 (n=32) Third Year*

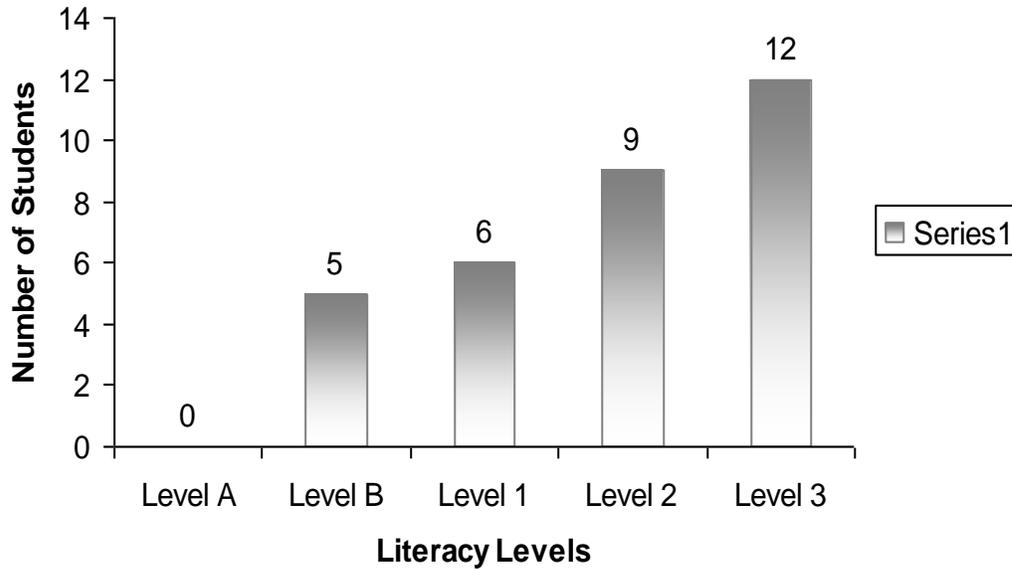


Table 3 indicates the most dramatic change of the three-year period. By the end of the year, no students ended the year at Level A, and only five placed at Level B. Six students reached Level 1, and 9 students advanced to Level 2. However, 12 students ended the year at Level 3.

The data shown on Table 4 indicate that there was impressive growth in literacy level increases when teachers started using 1) concentrated native language instruction in reading and language arts; 2) maximized instructional time in reading and language arts through student grouping and regrouping for instruction; 3) team teaching by having two teachers in the grade level teach all the identified bilingual students for the reading and language arts block, and by having the remaining teachers divide the non-bilingual students for the same amount of time; and

4) a variety of literacy activities that go beyond the basal. One major addition to the instruction of literacy was the “build-up” readers.

Table 4

*Bilingual Kindergarten Students’ Literacy Levels: A Three-Year Comparison (n=109)*

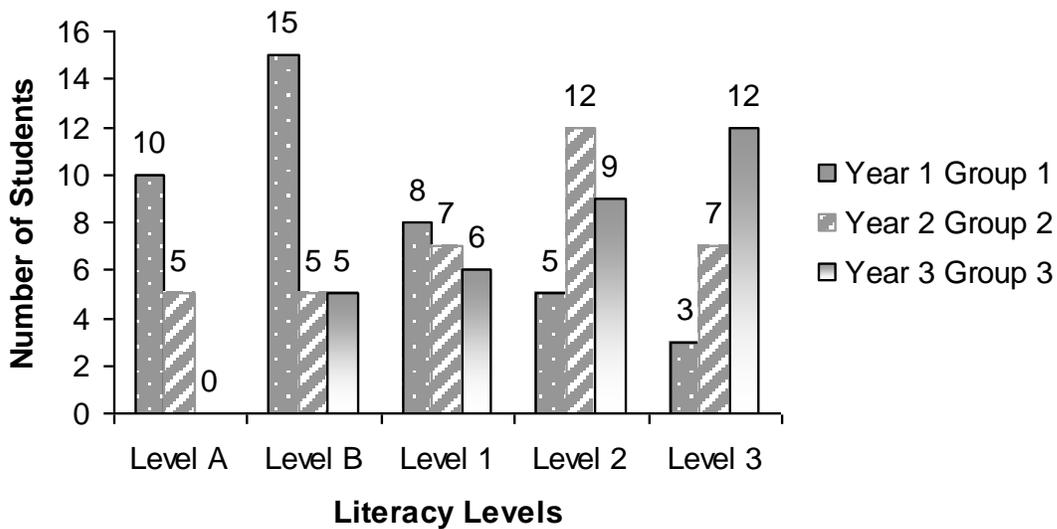


Table 4 results seem to reflect that teachers took into consideration students’ interests, language needs, and literacy development needs to help develop relevant and meaningful build-up readers. Long-term learning comes when students are able to take ownership of the oral and printed word.

### Additional Data

Pre and post-test scores were used as resources for gathering additional data to explore the impact of literacy development and the increase in literacy scores and oral language proficiency for the Spanish-dominant bilingual students. Oral language proficiency scores for

the Spanish-dominant bilingual students were tracked for the three groups involved in the study. The following tables show the pre and post-test scores for the three student groups that were collected over the three-year period. Table 5 shows the pre and post-test Spanish oral language proficiency test scores for Group 1 (n=41) before the implementation of the literacy plan.

*Table 5*

*Spanish Oral Language Proficiency Test Scores for Group 1 (n=41) First Year*

Mixed Groups	Pre-Test Scores Mixed Groups	Post-Test Scores Mixed Groups	Gains Mixed Groups
Student 1	1	2	+1
Student 2	1	1	+0
Student 3	1	3	+2
Student 4	2	2	+0
Student 5	4	5	+1
Student 6	1	3	+2
Student 7	2	3	+1
Student 8	1	2	+1
Student 9	5	5	+0
Student 10	2	3	+1
Student 11	3	3	+0
Student 12	2	1	-1
Student 13	1	2	+1
Student 14	2	2	+0
Student 15	1	3	+2
Student 16	1	2	+1
Student 17	1	1	+0
Student 18	1	2	+1
Student 19	3	2	-1
Student 20	5	3	-2
Student 21	2	4	+2
Student 22	3	4	+1
Student 23	2	2	+0
Student 24	3	4	+1

Student 25	1	2	+1
Student 26	1	3	+2
Student 27	1	2	+1
Student 28	1	2	+1
Student 29	3	4	+1
Student 30	3	2	-1
Student 31	5	5	+0
Student 32	1	2	+1
Student 33	1	2	+1
Student 34	1	3	+2
Student 35	1	2	+1
Student 36	2	3	+1
Student 37	1	3	+2
Student 38	2	5	+3
Student 39	2	4	+2
Student 40	1	3	+2
Student 41	2	1	-1

The Spanish proficiency scores for Group 1 seem to indicate that there is growth in the language for most students. Of utmost concern for the teachers was that there seemed to be first language loss for five students in this group. First language literacy levels were low, as were oral language proficiency levels, which showed these students as increasing by only 1-2 levels. In some cases, such as with Students 2, 4, 9, 11, 14, 17, 23 and 31, there was no increase in Spanish oral language proficiency. Eighteen out of the 41 students showed an increase of one level, while Students 12, 19 and 30 and 41 showed a decrease of one level. Ten out of 41 students increased by two levels, while Student 20 showed a decrease of two levels. Student 38 was the only one to gain three levels by the end of the year. There were no students who reached level 4. Spanish oral language proficiency scores in the post-tests for this group were (Levels 1-2 n= 28 out of 41). Eight students did not show an increase and five showed a decrease.

Table 6 represents Spanish oral language proficiency scores for Group 2, which included the students who were regrouped for reading/language arts instruction in their native language. Class 1 scores indicate that there were six students who increased by one level, eleven students who showed an increase of two levels, and two students who increased by three levels; no students increased by four levels. Class 2 results indicate that Student 11 did not increase in levels; this student was already at a level 5 in the pre-test, the highest level in this oral test. Five students increased by one level, eight students increased by two levels, three students increased by three levels, and none increased by four levels.

Both classes in Group 2 showed an improvement in Spanish oral language proficiency scores in the post-tests (Levels 2-3 n=24 out of 36) after being regrouped for literacy instruction in reading and language arts in Spanish. Eleven students increased by one level and one student retained a level 5.

*Table 6*

*Spanish Oral Language Proficiency Pre and Post-Test Scores for Group 2 (n=36) Second Year*

Class 1 /Class 2	Pre-Test Scores		Post-Test Scores		Gains	
	Class 1/Class 2	Class 1/Class 2	Class 1/ Class 2			
Student 1	1	1	3	3	+2	+2
Student 2	1	2	3	3	+2	+1
Student 3	1	1	2	3	+1	+2
Student 4	2	2	3	4	+1	+2
Student 5	2	1	5	3	+3	+2
Student 6	1	1	3	3	+2	+2
Student 7	3	2	4	5	+1	+3
Student 8	2	1	4	2	+2	+1
Student 9	2	2	3	4	+1	+2
Student 10	2	3	4	4	+2	+1

Student 11	1	5	3	5	+2	+0
Student 12	2	1	4	3	+2	+2
Student 13	1	1	3	4	+2	+3
Student 14	1	1	2	3	+1	+2
Student 15	1	3	3	4	+2	+1
Student 16	1	1	2	4	+1	+3
Student 17	1	2	3	3	+2	+1
Student 18	1		4		+3	
Student 19	2		4		+2	

Table 7 shows the results of the Spanish oral language proficiency pre and post-test for Group 3, which was also regrouped for Spanish reading/language arts instruction. The data show that Spanish oral language proficiency increased for many students as literacy levels increased.

*Table 7*

*Spanish Oral Language Proficiency Pre and Post-Pre and Post-Test Scores for Group 3 (n=32)*

*Third Year*

Class 1 /Class 2	Pre-Test Scores		Post-Test Scores		Gains	
	Class 1/Class 2	Class 1/Class 2	Class 1/ Class 2			
Student 1	2	2	5	4	+3	+2
Student 2	1	1	4	5	+3	+4
Student 3	1	2	3	5	+2	+3
Student 4	2	5	5	5	+3	+0
Student 5	1	1	3	4	+2	+3
Student 6	4	2	5	5	+1	+3
Student 7	2	1	4	5	+2	+4
Student 8	2	2	5	5	+3	+3
Student 9	3	3	5	5	+2	+2
Student 10	2	1	5	4	+3	+3

Student 11	1	2	3	5	+2	+3
Student 12	2	1	5	4	+3	+3
Student 13	1	2	4	3	+3	+1
Student 14	1	1	5	5	+4	+4
Student 15	1	2	4	5	+3	+3
Student 16		1		4		+3
Student 17		2		5		+3

The post-test scores for Class 1 show that Student 6 increased by one level, while there were five students who increased by two levels, eight students who increased by three levels, and one student who increased by four levels. Class 2 post-test results show that Student 4 did not increase in level, being that this student scored a level 5 on the pre-test, and Student 13 only increased by one level. Scores for two students showed an increase of two levels, ten students showed an increase of three levels, and three students increased by four levels.

The Spanish oral language proficiency scores for this third group seem to coincide with the literacy level attainments. It can be observed that most of these kindergarten bilingual students were showing an increase in Spanish oral language proficiency (Levels 3-4 n=22 out of 32) as well as the attainment of increased literacy levels as shown on Table 4. Nine students remained at level 1 or 2, while one student retained a level 5.

### **Conclusions**

Because several components of literacy development were implemented at once in the classrooms used for this study, it cannot be concluded that one single factor such as the “build-up readers” was significant in making a difference in the students’ literacy level attainments. It seems that the combination of several literacy development activities impacted the results. The

data gathered through this study showed that the strategic and effective use of literacy activities as outlined in the literacy development plan can be matched to meet academic, linguistic, and literacy needs of bilingual kindergarten students. The literacy levels established by the school district for students to reach by the end of the school year can be reached, and in some instances exceeded, if teachers are willing to go beyond the basal. Furthermore, students who are not moving from Level A in the course of the year should be closely observed to determine whether their level of oral language proficiency is limited (levels 1 and 2).

Additionally, teachers must take into consideration students' experiences and background knowledge to insure that materials, instructional strategies, and activities are meaningful and appropriate for the students. Through close observation of their students, teachers may discover a need for providing oral language development instruction to help bilingual students acquire more vocabulary. Also, students' learning styles may be considered to determine if their learning can be maximized through teaching that corresponds to their style(s) of learning. Finally, teachers working with the bilingual students who are not achieving the targeted literacy levels should consider the following: 1) intensifying oral language instruction, 2) providing students with individualized instruction, 3) creating learning opportunities that incorporate a variety and abundance of literacy activities beyond the basal, and 4) working with the parents to establish a literacy network between the home and school to optimize students' literacy development. These components provide students with important support needed to help them begin a successful road to literacy success.

The overall conclusions gathered from this study are simply that when school administrators take a closer look at their students' needs and try to find solutions and alternatives rather than problems and excuses, both teachers and students will rise to the challenges.

Moreover, teachers working together and taking responsibility for all students in their grade levels makes a difference because then they all become equal stakeholders. This sense of ownership also encourages administrators and teachers to take educated risks, incorporate innovative, research-grounded instructional practices, and take whatever steps are necessary to help their students succeed.

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## **Improving Reading Comprehension in Dual Language Programs**

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### **Abstract**

The low achievement levels and high dropout rates of English Language Learners (ELLs) continue to be a great challenge for educators. One area that can provide us with useful information on how to improve the education of ELLs is dual language programs. Research in this area indicates that native language development is important for academic success. The present study examined the cognitive reading strategies of students enrolled in a dual language program. The results indicate that both language groups of students were using successful cognitive reading strategies to comprehend text. The study also describes how the questionnaire used in the study can assist teachers in diagnosing the type(s) of cognitive reading strategies that students use.

## **Improving Reading Comprehension in Dual Language Programs**

The rate of growth of the English Language Learner (ELL) population in schools has been dramatic over the past decade. Some states, for example, have experienced 300-400% increases in the ELL population. In parts of the country, more than 50% of the preschool population comes from non-English-speaking homes (Olsen, 2006). As a group, however, ELLs have lagged behind in terms of academic achievement and have had school dropout rates almost twice those of native English-speakers (Padrón, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002).

These factors have created an urgent need to design and implement instructional approaches to ensure that ELLs attain high levels of achievement. The inclusion of research-based methods and ongoing assessment of students' progress are essential in implementing appropriate instruction for second language students and enhancing their academic achievement. The purpose of this study is to examine the cognitive reading strategies that students enrolled in dual language programs used while reading text. In addition, the questionnaire used in this study to assess students' use of cognitive reading strategies can assist teachers in diagnosing whether students use successful (strong) or unsuccessful (weak) reading strategies while reading text. Utilizing student data, such as that which comes from a reading strategy questionnaire, in the context of research-based instructional practices allows teachers to make informed pedagogical decisions and has the potential to improve the quality of reading instruction for ELLs.

### *Dual Language Development*

Dual language development is one area that can provide useful information on how to improve instructional practices for ELLs. According to Thomas and Collier (2002), for example, in order to produce the highest achievement in both the students' first and second languages

there must be systematic exposure to English combined with ongoing opportunities to learn important concepts in the home language. This means that transitioning students who have not yet mastered the elements of their first language to a new and unfamiliar language too early may have a negative effect on the students' ability to achieve academically.

Dual language programs have been shown to provide access to both the first and second languages and to be effective in educating students who are native speakers of Spanish and English (de Jong, 2002; Reese, Goldenberg & Saunders, 2006; Thomas & Collier, 2003, 2004). Dual language programs combine equal numbers of English-dominant students and minority language-dominant students in the same classroom. These programs maintain an additive philosophy of bilingualism, which shifts the notion of bilingual education from a program that is compensatory in nature to one of enrichment. The program emphasizes cooperative learning since each language group serves as a peer language model. In addition, it is critical that teachers are fully bilingual and biliterate in both of the students' languages. Administrative support, home-school collaboration, strong leadership, and student-centered instruction are also critical to the program's success (Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2003).

The benefits of dual language programs are that the language minority students as well as native English speakers are provided the opportunity to develop and learn through their native language. Thus, dual language programs corroborate the philosophy that an additive bilingual environment supports the development of both languages and enhances students' self-esteem and cross-cultural awareness (Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Soltero, 2004). In addition, program evaluations indicate that dual language programs are an effective approach to improving academic achievement for Spanish-speaking students and are similarly beneficial for native-

English speakers (Collier & Thomas, 2004; Gándara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003).

Although there has been documentation of the benefits of dual language programs for native-Spanish speakers and native-English speakers, it is important to examine how students enrolled in these programs compare academically in critical areas such as reading comprehension. Undoubtedly, reading is an integral aspect of academic learning and particularly important for students who are learning a second language. According to the National Reading Panel (2000), reading comprehension is essential in enabling the development of children's reading skills that subsequently impact students' ability to obtain an education. The panel also suggests that reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process and that teacher training is vital to help students develop and apply strategies that enhance understanding and consequently increase students' achievement.

### *Reading Comprehension and Second Language Learners*

Examining the cognitive reading strategies used by students who are learning a second language is important, considering the complexity of the cognitive processes involved in reading comprehension. In addition, it is essential to develop instruments that can help teachers assess the cognitive reading strategies their students are using. Being able to determine students' use of reading strategies can help teachers design more appropriate instruction, which subsequently can improve student achievement (Padrón & Waxman, 1988).

According to Chamot and O'Malley (1994), cognitive reading strategies are those that enable students accomplish the reading task, while metacognitive strategies involve self-reflection and thinking about reading and learning. Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008)

consider a reading strategy to be a deliberate attempt to understand and construct meaning of text. When a student reads but does not understand the text, for example, the student may enact the strategy of self-questioning in a conscious effort to improve comprehension. If the student's use of the strategy is successful, s/he will continue to utilize the strategy; eventually the use of self-questioning will become automatic and unconscious. At this point, when strategy use is effortless, Afflerbach and colleagues assert that the reading strategy becomes a skill. Other researchers, such as Lawrence (2007), whose work specifically addresses second language learners, have highlighted that although studies have concluded that effective readers use strategies to comprehend text, there is still a lack of information for teachers regarding bilingual students and the students' use of strategies. Lawrence emphasizes the need for strategy instruction as a major component in the classroom, specifically to meet bilingual students' individual needs.

Research examining differences between elementary school English-monolingual and bilingual students with regard to the use of cognitive reading strategies has found that bilingual readers who are academically successful use cognitive reading strategies more often than their less-able peers, but not as often as the successful English-monolingual students (Padrón, Knight, & Waxman, 1986; Padrón & Waxman, 2001). That is, the successful elementary school bilingual readers reported using cognitive reading strategies less often than the successful English-monolingual readers.

The cognitive reading strategies of elementary bilingual Spanish-English speaking students and monolingual-English-speaking students were examined in two separate studies (Padrón, Knight, & Waxman, 1986; Padrón & Waxman, 2001). In both studies, bilingual students were enrolled in a transitional bilingual program, while the English-monolingual

students received instruction exclusively in their first language. In the study by Padrón, Knight, and Waxman (1986), the cognitive reading strategies of 23 bilingual and 15 English-monolingual third and fifth grade students were examined. The researchers conducted a structured interview and found that students were able to identify 14 different cognitive reading strategies that they used while reading text. They also found that overall, bilingual students used cognitive reading strategies less frequently than their English-monolingual peers (Padrón et al., 1986).

In another study, 317 third-fifth grade English-monolingual and bilingual students were administered the Reading Strategy Questionnaire (RSQ) (Waxman & Padrón, 1987). The results revealed that bilingual students reported using more of the strategies that have been found to be negatively related to students' reading success. For example, bilingual students were found to use the strategies *Read words over and over again* and *Skip parts of the story I don't understand*. The researchers suggested that strategy instruction with bilingual students at an early age may be necessary, so that students do not begin to develop negative reading habits (Waxman & Padrón, 1987).

In addition, Padrón and Waxman (1988) examined the effects of students' perceptions of their cognitive strategies on reading achievement. Eighty-two Latino ELLs from the third through fifth grades participated in this study. The reading comprehension section of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test was used to establish the relationship between the students' strategy use and the students' improvement in reading. The RSQ was administered to determine students' perceptions of the cognitive reading strategies they were using. The researchers' findings corroborated previous research findings: lower-achieving readers used less sophisticated strategies, and the use of these cognitive reading strategies negatively affected ELLs' reading comprehension. In summary, not only did students who were less successful use

more of the weaker cognitive reading strategies, but the use of these weaker strategies hindered their reading achievement.

In sum, previous research has identified the type and number of cognitive reading strategies used by students enrolled in transitional bilingual programs. These studies have found that students enrolled in transitional bilingual programs use fewer and less sophisticated strategies when compared with their peer English-monolingual counterparts. Research revealed similar results whether using structured interviews or the RSQ. In addition, when investigating the effects of students' perceptions of the cognitive reading strategies they use on reading achievement, the results indicate that using less sophisticated strategies hinders reading comprehension for students enrolled in transitional bilingual programs.

The research on cognitive reading strategies with students enrolled in transitional bilingual programs has indicated that students need to develop a more expanded repertoire of cognitive reading strategies. Perhaps the lack of strategies can be attributed to the fact that students received instruction in their second language before they demonstrated well-established oral language abilities in their own language. Research has indicated that students who are transitioned into English before they have an opportunity to develop oral language skills in their first language have difficulty achieving high levels of English fluency and do not do as well as students who had the opportunity to learn in two languages (Thomas & Collier, 2002). It is important to examine whether students enrolled in programs where their first language is being developed, such as the dual language program, exhibit the same strategic reading processes. Findings from this research may provide additional information on how instruction in the students' first language enhances or hinders students' strategic processing and subsequently students' reading achievement.

Considering the positive effects of dual language programs and the importance of reading comprehension for students, the purpose of this study is to examine the types of reading strategies that both native-Spanish-speaking and native-English-speaking students enrolled in dual language programs are using. The research questions are as follows:

- (a) What are the cognitive reading strategies that native-English speakers enrolled in dual language programs report using?
- (b) What are the cognitive reading strategies that native-Spanish speakers enrolled in dual language programs report using?
- (c) Are there differences in the type of strategies that native-English speakers and native Spanish-speakers report using?

It is hypothesized that there will be few differences, since both sub-groups are developing their respective native languages.

## Methods

This descriptive study was conducted in an elementary school located in a major city in the south-central region of the U.S. The school, which enrolls nearly 800 students, was rated as exemplary through the state's accountability system for the 2007-2008 school year. This rating signifies that all student groups on the campus had a 90% or higher passing rate on all state-mandated standardized subject area exams. The ethnic composition of the student population is 47% white, 22% Hispanic, 18% Asian, and 13% African American. Approximately 36% of students are considered at-risk, and 24% are labeled economically disadvantaged. ELLs represent 13% of the school's population. Most Spanish-speaking ELLs are enrolled in the dual language program; however, the school also offers ESL classes for speakers of other languages.

Parents make the choice of whether to enroll in any of these programs or waive their children's rights and enroll in the mainstream classrooms.

This school is unique in that it is a magnet school for literary development, meaning that listening, reading, script-writing, dramatizing, writing, illustrating, and publishing activities are highlighted in the school's curriculum. The school's dual language program provides a cohesive, bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural environment for an equal number of Spanish-speaking and English-speaking students. Following the 90:10 model, all Kindergarten and first grade instruction occurs in the target language, and oral language development is provided in English. Both groups learn literacy skills in the minority language. This model increases the ratio of the majority language progressively throughout the program. For example, second grade has an 80:20 ratio, and formal English reading is added in the third grade. Instructional time is balanced between English and the target language in the upper grades. In brief, all participating students receive instruction in language arts and content subjects primarily in Spanish in the early grades (K-3), and gradually increase their English instruction until reaching a level of proficiency in both languages that leads to a 50% Spanish/50% English curriculum in grades 4-5.

### Participants

Data were collected from all 21 students in the school's third grade dual language program. The 21 students, 11 females and 10 males, had been enrolled in the two-way dual language program since Kindergarten. Spanish was the native language of 9 of the students, while the remaining 12 students reported English as their native language. In terms of ethnicity, 10 (48%) were Hispanic, 9 (43%) were white, and 2 (10%) of the students were African-American.

## Instruments

The Reading Strategy Questionnaire (RSQ) (Padrón & Waxman, 1988), was adapted from Hahn (1984) and Paris and Myers (1981). The RSQ is a 20-item, Likert-type questionnaire on which students indicate the extent to which they use various described strategies by responding with (a) yes, (b) sometimes, or (c) no. The instrument has been found to be reliable with samples studied in previous research (e.g., Arnold, 2001; Padrón & Waxman, 1988). Responses for each item were tallied, and frequency tables were compiled. The percentage of students selecting each response for each item was calculated. Finally, cross-tabulation was used to determine item responses by language group, either native-Spanish speaker or native-English speaker.

The following 11 strategies included on the RSQ have not been associated with successful reading comprehension (Chou Hare & Smith, 1982; Hahn, 1984; Knight, 1987; Padrón, 1985) or have not been examined systematically to determine their relationship to reading comprehension:

1. Reading the story over again upon completion of the first reading,
2. Remembering the interesting parts and skip others,
3. Skip parts of the story that I don't understand,
4. Read the story as fast as I can,
5. Say the main ideas over and over,
6. Say the words in the story over and over again,
7. Read slowly and carefully,
8. Think about what I am reading,
9. Look for things that are different in the story,
10. Ask a friend for help if I don't understand, and

11. Look up a word I don't know in the dictionary.

The following nine strategies on the RSQ have been designated by research and theoretical literature (Knight, 1987; Morrow, 1985; Olshavsky, 1976-77; Singer & Donlan, 1982; Weinstein & Mayer, 1986) as strong strategies and to be positively related to students' achievement:

1. Keep a picture of the story in my mind,
2. Ask questions about parts of the story that I don't understand,
3. Try to tell the story in my own words,
4. Ask myself questions about the story,
5. Think about what's going to happen next in the story,
6. Think of something that has happened to me which is similar to the story,
7. Imagine the story like a movie in my mind,
8. Check through the story to see if I remember all of it, and
9. Underline important parts of the story.

### Procedures

Students were administered the RSQ by a teacher and a trained graduate student researcher. Students were given the questionnaire in their first language. Items were read aloud to the students, so that reading proficiency would not interfere with the students' ability to respond to the items.

### Results

Table 1 reports the results of all third-grade students enrolled in the dual language program who were administered the RSQ. Results from the RSQ indicated that *all* third-grade students enrolled in the dual language program were generally using positive cognitive reading

strategies. The results indicated that the strategies that the largest percentage of all third-grade students responded “yes” included three positive strategies: *When I read a story, I think about what’s going to happen next in the story* (86%); *When I read story, I try to keep a picture of the story in my mind* (81%); and *When I read a story, I imagine the story like a movie in my mind* (81%). Two weak strategies were also cited often: (1) *When I read a story, I think about what I am reading* (86%), and (2) *When I read a story, I read it slowly and carefully* (81%). It must be pointed out that in previous studies, bilingual students reported using these weak reading strategies often (Waxman & Padrón, 1987). As a matter of fact, students in transitional programs use these weak strategies almost exclusively. The weak strategies cited have been identified in the literature as less successful, in that little cognitive processing may be involved when students use these strategies. For example, when reading slowly and carefully the student must also use other strategies in order for this strategy to be effective.

When combining students’ responses “Yes” and “Sometimes,” the results indicate that, in addition to the strategies mentioned above, there are a number of strategies that a large percentage of students are using or sometimes using: *After I read a story, I read it over again* (100%); *When I read a story, I look for things that are different in the story* (95%). While these two strategies are negative, a large percentage of students also indicated that they “Yes” and “Sometimes” used the following positive strategy: *When I read a story, I ask questions about parts of the story that I don’t understand* (95%).

The results indicate that a large percentage of students indicated that they are using 15 of the 20 strategies addressed on the RSQ. This indicates that students have developed a great repertoire of strategies. In addition, when examining the type of strategies that a large number of students use, the results indicate that of the 15 strategies that a large percentage of students report

using, eight are positive and seven are negative.

The cognitive reading strategies that students reported not using include the following: *When I read a story, I remember the interesting parts and skip others* (5%), *When I read a story, I read the story as fast as I can* (5%). None of the students reported using the following strategy: *When I read a story, I skip parts of the story I don't understand* (0%). Overall, all third-grade students in the dual language program reported using a variety of cognitive reading strategies, most of which are positive.

Table 2 reports the percentage of native Spanish-speaking (NSS) and native English-speaking (NES) students in a dual language program who report using each of the cognitive reading strategies. Results indicated that a large percentage of NSS students reported using the strategy: *When I read a story, I read it slowly and carefully* (89%). Although NES students reported using this strategy, it was not reported by as great a percentage of students (75%). The cognitive reading strategy reported by the greatest percentage of NES students was, *When I read a story, I think about what's going to happen next in the story* (92%); a slightly lower percentage (78%) of NSS students report using this strategy. Generally, similar percentages of students from each language group (NES and NSS) report using the following strategies: *When I read a story, I try to keep a picture of the story in my mind* (83%; 78%); *When I read a story, I think about what I am reading* (83%; 78%); and *When I read a story, I imagine the story like a movie in my mind* (83%; 78%). Although both language groups are reporting using these strategies, a slightly larger percentage of NES than NSS students reporting using the strategies.

One strategy was reported as being used by a greater percentage (78%) of NSS students than by NES students (42%). This strategy was, *When I read a story, I underline important parts of the story*. A possible explanation for the use of this strategy by a greater percentage of NSS

may be due to the type of reading instruction they receive. During reading instruction, students are asked to underline sections of the reading passage. This is an activity that is done to prepare students for the state's accountability test in Spanish. Because students take the test in the third and fourth grade in Spanish, teachers may focus on doing this activity more in Spanish than in English. Future research needs to examine the use of this strategy for both language groups and its effect on reading achievement in both languages.

No native English-speakers or native Spanish-speakers reported regularly using the following strategy: *When I read a story, I skip parts of the story I don't understand*. Other cognitive reading strategies that were reported by NES and NSS students as not being used often included the following: *When I read a story, I remember the interesting parts and skip others* (0%; 11%); *When I read a story, I read the story as fast as I can* (0%; 11%). There was, however, a difference found in terms of the percentage of students who reported not using the strategy, *When I read a story, I say the words in the story over and over again*. None of the Native-English speakers reported that they used this negative strategy, while 33% of the Native-Spanish speakers indicated that they used this strategy.

## Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the students perceived using a variety of cognitive reading strategies. In addition, they are reporting consistently using more positive reading strategies than negative reading strategies. The most frequently cited strategies were positive and included strategies focusing on imagery and prediction. The least cited strategies were negative strategies, such as skipping text and reading quickly. Additionally, the results demonstrate few differences in terms of strategy use between native Spanish-speakers and native

English-speakers. Overall, native Spanish-speakers and native English-speakers generally reported using the positive and negative strategies to a similar extent, suggesting these findings may indicate that the dual language context is providing equitable reading instruction that develops students' cognitive reading strategies for both language groups. Additionally, these findings suggest that results from previous research, documenting the use of less sophisticated strategies by bilingual students in comparison to English-monolingual students, may be due in part to the subtractive instructional context in which the bilingual students were learning to read (Padrón, 1985).

This study describes students' reported use of strategies in a dual language context and how teachers can utilize instruments such as the RSQ to generate student data and tailor reading instruction. There are, however, several limitations of the study that need to be addressed. First, the present study did not examine cross-linguistic transfer in order to determine the extent to which elementary students in dual language programs transfer the strategies used in their native language to their second language, as has been done in middle school context (e.g., Jiménez, García & Pearson, 1995, 1996). In addition, this study did not determine how the use of each type of strategy affects student achievement. Knowing which strategies are more effective in enhancing student achievement can further assist in designing instruction that is more effective. Finally, the limited sample size restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future research studies should include a larger sample that includes students from various grade levels.

Most teachers receive little training in the assessment of students' strategic reading (Afflerbach, Ruetschlin, & Russell, 2007). While some reading teachers can accurately assess students' use of reading strategies in everyday classroom contexts such as during guided reading, the use of a student questionnaire is a starting point for teachers who wish to be deliberate about

using student data to inform instruction. Becoming purposeful about collecting, using, and reflecting on student data is an important piece in empowering teachers of ELLs to make informed pedagogical decisions and provide the most effective instruction for their students (Kandel-Cisco & Padrón, 2008). Student self-report instruments, such as the RSQ that was utilized in this study, can help educators use data to develop a more diagnostic stance toward their instruction.

In spite of the small sample size, the study provides information about the strategic use of reading strategies by native Spanish speakers and English speakers while reading in their first and second language. In addition, the RSQ has the potential to assist educators in assessing and understanding the types of positive reading strategies that should be taught in the classroom as well as those negative strategies that teachers should encourage students to eliminate. Knowing the type and number of strategies that students use while reading text can help determine the most effective type of instruction for students. Pinpointing the areas where students need reading strategy instruction can enhance students' reading comprehension and may subsequently contribute to academic achievement in reading.

Using the data from the present study, for example, a teacher could conclude that the majority of students use imagery and prediction to comprehend text. It is important to note, however, that just because students report using a strategy, this does not signify that students are appropriately executing the strategy (Afflerbach et al., 2008). Thus, after establishing that a strategy is used, it is important for a teacher to ascertain that students are using reading strategies—in this example imagery and prediction—in appropriate contexts and that the strategies are indeed supporting accurate text comprehension across genres. In other words, the teacher's job is to help students use strategies in a productive manner and eventually as an

automatic and unconscious response to breakdowns in reading comprehension. The negative strategies that students report can also be a point of departure for a teacher's reading instruction. Again, using an example from the results of the present study, a teacher could conclude that the majority of students use the negative strategy, *When I read a story, I think about what I am reading*. This strategy is considered negative because executing the strategy requires limited cognitive processing. The teacher, therefore, can plan instruction to model the use of this strategy in a more cognitively sophisticated way, such as using self-questioning as a means of thinking about the text read.

While the RSQ is a valuable tool in helping teachers gather data to inform instruction, the instrument can also be used to assist students in comprehending text. Besides giving a name to and legitimizing the reading strategies that students already use, completing the RSQ requires students to reflect on the cognitive processing they employ when reading. Being metacognitive is a process that many students, especially those at the elementary level, may not automatically employ. Teachers can highlight the awareness of cognitive processes that may be catalyzed by the RSQ and encourage students to implement this metacognitive approach with actual reading tasks.

Future research should also begin to look at the role of teachers and instruction in ELLs' reading strategy use (Kandel-Cisco, 2007). The teacher has been identified as an important element to student learning (e.g., Haycock, 1998), yet little is known about how teachers' comprehension instruction may influence ELLs' strategic reading abilities. While the extant literature documents bilingual students' reported reading strategy use, it provides little information on how educational practitioners should provide reading strategy and comprehension instruction to ELLs (Roe, 2004). The present study suggests the use of student self-report data as

one avenue for providing effective and appropriate reading comprehension instruction to language learners in dual language programs. Future studies should continue to examine the reading strategies used across a variety of language learning contexts and suggest other avenues for teachers to improve their reading comprehension instruction with language learners.

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Table 1: Percentage of third grade students enrolled in a dual language program responding *Yes*, *Sometimes*, and *No* to specific cognitive reading strategies

<i>Cognitive Reading Strategies</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>+/-</i>
1. After I read a story, I read it over again.	43	57	0	-
2. When I read a story, I remember the interesting parts and skip others.	5	14	81	-
3. When I read story, I try to keep a picture of the story in my mind.	81	14	5	+
4. When I read a story, I read it slowly and carefully.	81	19	0	-
5. When I read a story, I think about what I am reading.	86	14	0	-
6. When I read a story, I look for things that are different in the story.	43	52	5	-
7. After I read a story, I try to tell the story in my own words.	33	48	20	+
8. When I read a story, I ask myself questions about the story.	43	43	14	+
9. When I read a story, I skip parts of the story I don't understand.	0	29	71	-
10. When I read a story, I read the story as fast as I can.	5	24	71	-
11. When I read a story, I think about what's going to happen next in the story.	86	14	0	+
12. When I read a story, I think of something that has happened to me that is similar to the story.	19	62	19	+
13. When I read a story, I ask a friend for help if I don't understand something.	29	52	19	-
14. When I read a story, I check through the story to see if I remember all of it.	38	38	24	+
15. When I read a story, I say the main ideas over and over.	19	61	19	-
16. When I read a story, I imagine the story like a movie in my mind.	81	10	10	+
17. When I read a story, I look up words I don't know in the dictionary.	19	52	29	-
18. When I read a story, I underline important parts of the story.	57	24	19	+
19. When I read a story, I ask questions about	62	33	5	+

parts of the story that I don't understand.				
20. When I read a story, I say the words in the story over and over again.	14	72	14	-

Table 2: Percentage of third grade native Spanish-speaking (NSS) and native English-speaking (NES) students enrolled in a dual language program responding *Yes* to specific cognitive reading strategies

<i>Reading Strategies</i>	<i>NSS</i>	<i>NES</i>	<i>+/-</i>
1. After I read a story, I read it over again.	44	56	-
2. When I read a story, I remember the interesting parts and skip others.	11	0	-
3. When I read story, I try to keep a picture of the story in my mind.	78	83	+
4. When I read a story, I read it slowly and carefully.	89	75	-
5. When I read a story, I think about what I am reading.	78	83	-
6. When I read a story, I look for things that are different in the story.	56	33	-
7. After I read a story, I try to tell the story in my own words.	44	25	+
8. When I read a story, I ask myself questions about the story.	22	58	+
9. When I read a story, I skip parts of the story I don't understand.	0	0	-
10. When I read a story, I read the story as fast as I can.	11	0	-
11. When I read a story, I think about what's going to happen next in the story.	78	92	+
12. When I read a story, I think of something that has happened to me that is similar to the story.	22	17	+
13. When I read a story, I ask a friend for help if I don't understand something.	22	33	-
14. When I read a story, I check through the story to see if I remember all of it.	56	25	+
15. When I read a story, I say the main ideas over and over.	22	17	-
16. When I read a story, I imagine the story like a movie in my mind.	78	83	+
17. When I read a story, I look up words I don't	11	25	-

know in the dictionary.			
18. When I read a story, I underline important parts of the story.	78	42	+
19. When I read a story, I ask questions about parts of the story that I don't understand.	56	67	+
20. When I read a story, I say the words in the story over and over again.	33	0	-

## **What a Difference a Year Makes: A Large Urban School District's Transformation from Remedial to an Enrichment Dual Language Education**

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### **Introduction**

In an era of increasing accountability and a growing trend toward globalization, many urban school districts are finding themselves at a crossroads. Paramount among the challenges they face is the exponential increase in the population of English Language Learners (ELLs), particularly of Hispanic descent, coupled with a continued failure to provide these students an *equitable educational opportunity* that allows greater numbers to graduate from high school and prepare them for postsecondary education. In telling this story, it is important to share a philosophically and theoretically based discussion on the importance of moving bilingual education policies, programs and practices from a *remedial* to an *enrichment* paradigm (Collier & Thomas, 2004). While educators across the country have used varied approaches for meeting the needs of ELLs, the philosophical and theoretical bases for such decisions adhere to principles of an either an enrichment or remedial perspective.

### **Remedial vs. Enrichment: An Important Distinction**

There are two major and distinct differences that characterize enrichment or remedial bilingual education models. *Enrichment models* of bilingual education view the non-English language as a *learning language*, an asset that should be linguistically and cognitively developed and a strong resource for English acquisition. *Remedial models* of bilingual education perceive the non-English language as a deficit or a problem that must be corrected; the sooner the learner

is moved out of first language instruction, the faster the acquisition of English. Remedial models typically aim for learners quickly acquiring *communicative abilities* in the L2 and immediate transition into the mainstream classroom. As Baker (2001) explains, unlike enrichment programs that promote pluralism, these models impact the degree of bilingualism and biliteracy and of social and cultural pluralism by emphasizing assimilation.

Research consistently states that ELLs are more academically successful in schools if they receive formal schooling in their first language, at the same time they are learning English (Cummins, 1981; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Thomas & Collier's (2002) program effectiveness studies clearly indicate that only enrichment forms of bilingual education that provide instruction in both the first and second languages close the *English* academic achievement gap between ELLs and native English speakers as they continue their schooling. They explain that the number one predictor for long-term ELL academic achievement *in English* is the *extent* and *quality* of L1 schooling. This type of education is centered on the *grade level* academic and cognitive strength that the first language provides as the ELL simultaneously learns the second language through language-rich and academically-based activities.

Enrichment bilingual education adheres to an instructional philosophy that all students, regardless of language background upon entering school, can achieve high levels of biliteracy, given that one of those languages is the first language. Enriched education, as described by Cloud, Genesee, and Hamayan (2000) are programs that give all students the opportunity to linguistically, academically, and culturally develop their first language while they similarly develop a second or possibly third language. Figure 1 provides a clear dichotomy explaining

potential practices and outcomes between enrichment and remedial bilingual education and English as a Second Language (ESL) models serving ELLs.

*Figure 1*

*Characteristics of Enrichment and Remedial Instructional Paradigms*

### **Characteristics of Enrichment and Remedial Instructional Paradigms**

- ***Enrichment***

- Students learn academic/cognitive skills, while they develop/acquire English;
- Learners learn at grade level or above;
- Carefully sequenced content-based English development, no translation;
- Additive, enrichment model, positive self-concept;
- Learners are challenged, higher expectations;
- Produces balanced bilinguals with positive cognitive advantages;
- Strong long-term academic achievement and increased graduation;
- Full closes the academic achievement gap;
- Strong language arts instruction in first language; adds academic English;
- Strives to assess initial reading achievement in first language.

- ***Remedial***

- Students develop English, but learn weak academic/cognitive skills;
- Learners *learn* below grade level;
- Inconsistent English; concurrent translation;
- Deficit, subtractive model, negative self-concept;
- Low expectations; remedial, watered down curriculum;

- Produces limited bilinguals with negative cognitive effects;
- Poor long-term academic achievement;
- Maintains or widens academic achievement gap;
- Weak language arts instruction in first language; weak English;
- Tests initial reading in second language; English testing encourages English.

There are also cognitive advantages to learning content through two or more languages.

Research studies demonstrate that strong bilingual/biliterate students acquire *cognitive advantages* over equally learned monolingual students (Cenoz & Genesee, 1998; Collier & Thomas, 2004; Cummins, 1981). Biliterate students typically outperform monolingual students in problem solving, divergent thinking, and recognition of patterns. Strong bilinguals typically also acquire enhanced metalinguistic awareness skills, or increased knowledge of language structures and usage. Simply stated, learning in two languages is just as normal and possible as learning in one (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000). The decision by educational leaders on which instructional model to use not only impacts achievement results as we have seen in recent research, but *limits* or *enhances* the educational, socio-cultural, and economic capabilities of students and future generations.

By contrast, remedial bilingual education perceives the first language as an obstacle—at best simply a bridge to the acquisition of English. The central purpose and goal of these instructional models is acquiring the English language, in most cases at the expense of the first language. It does not perceive the first language as a viable language for learning *grade level knowledge and skills*, which allow ELLs to keep up academically with native English speakers.

This type of remedial education typically produces ELLs who are linguistically and academically weak in *both* languages and incapable of functioning at grade level in a demanding English academic environment beyond fifth grade. This point is clearly stressed in Thomas & Collier's (2002) program effectiveness studies.

Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan (2000) explain that students who do not receive first language instruction struggle to learn both oral and written academic proficiency in their new language (English) while simultaneously remaining at grade level in their academic subjects. Some remedial bilingual education models provide limited first language instruction and instead emphasize English instruction and oral development. ELLs tend to focus on English language development and sacrifice grasping strong *grade level knowledge and skills* needed to stay on grade level. These remedial programs fail to recognize the original *purpose* of bilingual education as defined by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (1971): (1) full proficiency and literacy (biliteracy) in English and the native language; (2) acquisition of basic and higher order thinking skills for academic achievement and beyond; (3) development of a strong self-concept; and (4) successful transition from completion of school to higher education, work, and community life (p. 21).

As schools across the country strive to provide greater educational parity for the students they serve, more and more seek out the research and knowledge base to do things differently as they move from a remedial to an enrichment instructional paradigm. The most commonly used program models for educating ELLs in the United States are Submersion, ESL, Early-Exit Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE), Late-Exit TBE, Maintenance Bilingual Education (BE)

and One-Way and Two-Way Dual Language Enrichment (DLE) Education (Gómez & Ruiz-Escalante, 2005). Figure 2 provides a brief description of each model or program, including its linguistic and cultural goals.

Remedial or subtractive models aim to minimally use the first language (or not utilize the ELL's first language at all) while enrichment or additive models aim to use the first language for academic *grade level* learning while adding the second language. For ELLs, it is clear that the second language goes as the first language goes. That is, the academic level in the second language (English) is largely dependent on the academic level of the first language; the stronger the first language the stronger the second. Conversely, the weaker the first language is, the weaker the second.

*Figure 2*

*Remedial and Enrichment Models for Educating English Language Learners*

Model or Program	Description	Linguistic and Cultural Goal
<b><i>Remedial and Subtractive Models of Bilingual Education</i></b>		
Language-Based ESL (pullout)	Language instruction in L2 for ELLs only. Typically, L2 language instruction, taught by second language specialist, is sequenced and grammatically-based.	Monolingual and full assimilation
Content-Based	Academic instruction in L2 for ELLs only.	Monolingual and

ESL	L2 instruction is taught via a content-area by second language specialist. L1 minimally used for concept clarification.	full assimilation
Early-Exit Transitional Bilingual Education	Academic instruction in both L1 and L2 for ELLs only, with initial but <i>not</i> sufficient emphasis on the L1, strong emphasis on L2. Quick reduction of L1. Typically implemented PK-3 <sup>rd</sup> grade.	Minimal bilingualism and full assimilation
Late-Exit Transitional Bilingual Education	Academic instruction in both L1 and L2 for ELLs only, with sufficient emphasis on the L1 and increased emphasis on L2. Gradual reduction of L1. Typically implemented PK-5 <sup>th</sup> grade.	Moderate bilingualism and assimilation
<b><i>Enrichment and Additive Models of Bilingual Education</i></b>		
Maintenance Bilingual Education	Academic instruction in both L1 and L2 for ELLs only, with strong and continued emphasis on the L1. Typically implemented PK-6 <sup>th</sup> grade.	Biliteracy Pluralism
One-Way Dual Language Enrichment	Enriched academic instruction in both L1 and L2 for ELLs <i>only</i> . Percentage of L1 & L2 instruction varies in 90/10 and 50/50 models.	Biliteracy Pluralism

Education		
Two-Way	Enriched academic instruction in both L1 and	Biliteracy
Dual Language	L2 for <i>both</i> ELLs and native English speakers	Pluralism
Enrichment	<i>learning together</i> . Percentage of L1 & L2	
Education	instruction varies in 90/10 and 50/50 models.	

### **Taking a First Step**

As hope for long-term academic success for ELLs fades with the continued implementation of remedial bilingual programs, school districts are being forced to look closely at their instructional practices and make decisions that will affect the future of their students. The Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) is a case in point. The second largest school district in the state of Texas, Dallas ISD serves approximately 159,000 students across 217 schools. Of the 87,000 students in pre-kindergarten through 5th grade, 36,700 (42%) are identified as ELLs. By far the greatest numbers of identified ELLs are Hispanic with a home language of Spanish; these ELLs are eligible to be served through the district's transitional bilingual education or ESL programs.

Historically, Dallas ISD followed the state trend of providing transitional bilingual education as the preferred instructional model for English language learners with a home language of Spanish. The goal of the program was to transition students as quickly as possible from native language instruction and support in pre-kindergarten through 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, to almost all-English instruction by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Success was equated with reaching a level of English

proficiency that allowed students to transition from the bilingual classroom to the mainstream. This instructional model validated the public's *erroneous* perception of bilingual education as a remedial program for students who were not quite ready for the more rigorous curriculum of a general education classroom and fostered a form of subtractive bilingualism that only set many of these students up for failure in the upper grades (Lessow-Hurley, 2000).

Also in line with the state trend were the poor academic results for Dallas ISD ELLs that unknowingly were largely attributed to this subtractive remedial bilingual education program. Poor results of ELLs on standardized reading tests in English continue to validate the research findings on the ineffectiveness of transitional bilingual programs and long-term student success that adversely affected the district's graduation rate. Based on state standardized assessments, students see their peak performance in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, followed by a gradual decline in their academic success and the inevitable widening of the academic achievement gap over time, with many not completing high school, or at best graduating lacking college-level skills (Thomas & Collier, 2002). Unable to ignore the research and the continued struggles of ELLs in the district, the Dallas ISD Multi-Language Enrichment Program began the search for alternative programs with the hope of initiating a district-wide instructional paradigm shift.

### **Creation of a Dual Language Planning Committee**

In a district the size of Dallas ISD, it is difficult for any one department to move forward with a new initiative alone. The need for buy-in from the district at large, regardless of its size, is necessary for successful planning, implementation, and program sustainability (Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2005; Soltero, 2004; Sugarman & Howard, 2001). Luckily, the district's

administration, including the district superintendent, were also ready to explore more effective instructional models for educating ELLs. As a result, the district created a Dual Language Planning Committee made up of stakeholders from a variety of departments and levels of administration.

In November 2005, the committee held its first meeting to discuss the impetus for the new program proposal. The need to improve the quality of education for ELLs had been a long-standing priority in the Multi-Language Enrichment Department, but the district at large was now primed for change. The goal of transitioning students as quickly as possible from native language instruction to English instruction was replaced with the desire to validate and develop the students' native language while developing both social and academic proficiency in English. The new vision and priority were bilingualism and biliteracy for all students.

The Multi-Language Enrichment Department was well-versed in the research on these enrichment forms of bilingual education and noted the increase in the number of dual language programs in the state and across the country, namely two-way dual language programs. Two-way dual language programs serve both English language learners and native English speakers in an enrichment setting with a focus on challenging students through a rigorous curriculum and developing high levels of academic vocabulary and proficiency in two languages.

The integration of language-minority and language-majority students in one classroom provides opportunities to model and support language and content development, not just between the teacher and students, but through peer interactions (Genesee, Hamayan, & Cloud, 2000; Gómez, 2000; Gómez & Ruiz-Escalante, 2005; Alanís, 2006). With the success of two-way dual

language programs well documented in research, the committee began the search for the model best suited to meet the needs of the district's population of students. After the initial discussion about possible considerations and challenges for developing and implementing a plan, the committee adjourned with the task of formulating recommendations for the program design and reviewing the existing literature on two-way dual language models as well as reviewing different models and possibly visiting dual language schools currently in implementation.

The Dallas ISD Dual Language Planning Committee reconvened in December 2005. Members reported their findings from the literature reviews, and representatives from the Multi-Language Enrichment Program presented a proposal for the instructional model to be implemented. The Gómez and Gómez 50/50 Dual Language Enrichment (DLE) Content-Based Model was recommended to meet the district's need for structure and consistency across campuses through the strict adherence to specific instructional guidelines, including the separation of languages by content area (Gómez, 2006; Gómez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005). Keeping in mind the question, "Who are we serving?" the committee began the evaluation of the different model components and initiated the discussion on the implementation timeline and the need for continued learning.

With a model in mind, but also with need for additional information, the Dual Language Planning Committee developed an itinerary for dual language school site visits in Ysleta ISD, located in El Paso, Texas, and Brownsville Independent School District in Brownsville, Texas, in January 2006. Several committee members utilized the site visits to further evaluate the recommended program model and witness in action the celebrations and challenges of a two-way dual language program. Of particular interest during the visits in Brownsville was the

opportunity for committee members to see the implementation of bilingual pairs, one of the key components of the Gómez and Gómez 50/50 DLE Content-Based Model. In grouping students with different language proficiency levels or content area knowledge, the teachers were able to capitalize on peer teaching and tutoring to support comprehension (Gómez, 2006; Gómez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005).

When the committee reconvened in late January 2006 to share information from the site visits, members learned that the district's superintendent requested that at least one Dallas ISD school begin implementing the two-way dual language program in August of 2006, with up to three additional schools beginning implementation the following school year. With little time to spare, sub-committees were assigned to expedite the planning process. School selection parameters, staffing considerations, and community engagement were all critical topics to be discussed. Likewise, the sub-committees were given the goal to return in February to clarify and articulate program goals, finalize the model, and establish a timeline for implementation.

In February 2006, several Dual Language Planning Committee meetings were held to share sub-committee recommendations and make final decisions for implementation. With the Gómez and Gómez 50/50 DLE Content-Based Model chosen as the most appropriate model to meet the district's needs, the committee began work on how best to present the plan for implementation to the district's six area superintendents and select the campus to implement the program. Invigorated by the research and the possibility of not only serving ELLs through this program, but also giving native English speakers the opportunity to participate in an enriched dual language program, the area superintendents requested that the district allow for the selection of six campuses, one per area. Soon thereafter, each area superintendent selected a campus that would begin implementation in the fall of 2006.

## Plan for Implementation with the Consultants

With the course set, the Multi-Language Enrichment Program began the monumental task of putting the implementation plan into practice. First on the agenda was the need to contact Dr. Leo Gómez and Dr. Richard Gómez, authors of the Gómez and Gómez 50/50 DLE Content-Based Model, to serve as consultants to ensure the district was on the right track with the implementation plan. The Drs. Gómez visited the district in late March of 2006. With a full itinerary, the consultants first met with the Multi-Language Enrichment Department to clarify goals and discuss the planning process and the district's timeline. The area superintendents were then provided an opportunity to hear the program overview and expectations. The consultants discussed the research in depth and provided insight into the benefits and challenges of the program. Principals interested in implementing the program were also provided an opportunity to hear about the Dallas plan and recommend their campus for consideration.

With over 20 administrators attending the information meeting and evidence of support for implementation overwhelmingly positive, the consultants took the opportunity to present another critical concept to the Multi-Language Enrichment Department. They noted that in implementing a *two-way* dual language program, the district provides both ELLs and native English speakers the opportunity to learn in a dual language setting. However, by beginning with one campus per area the first year, and adding up to three schools the following year, it would take *too* long to provide all ELLs the opportunity to participate in a quality enrichment education in a district the size of Dallas. Keeping the goal of serving *all* ELLs through a quality enriched bilingual education program in mind, the consultants recommended that the district

consider a *one-way* dual language model. One-way dual language programs provide instruction in two languages for *one* language group (Collier & Thomas, 2004; Gómez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005).

The power of one-way dual language is that the Dallas ISD would convert its current transitional bilingual program to a *one-way* dual language enrichment program following the Gómez and Gómez DLE Content-Based Model, exclusively serving *all* ELLs in the district! The incredible change from one year to the next was that, effective fall 2006, the district was to serve over 25,000 ELLs through an enriched bilingual education instructional model versus a remedial one. The plan now was for the Dallas ISD to *officially adopt One-Way Dual Language as the district's bilingual education program* serving its ELL population. The two-way dual language program would be implemented as a pilot program in addition to the new one-way program and would also provide native English speakers an opportunity to participate along with ELLs.

As the consultants described this new possibility, the Multi-language Enrichment Department staff reflected on the goals for bringing on an enrichment bilingual program. The original impetus for the program change was to ensure educational equity and success for the district's ELLs. Providing dual language instruction to native English speakers was an added bonus, but not the overarching goal. As a result, the department decided to follow the consultants' recommendation and propose that the district move forward with a one-way dual language model as the *new* bilingual education program and designate six campuses for the two-way dual language pilot program. What the consultants were not ready for was the department's drive and motivation to carry this plan out with not just a few campuses, but with all 132 schools

implementing currently transitional bilingual program. The goal was now to roll out a comprehensive enrichment bilingual education program at the PK–1<sup>st</sup> grade level district-wide!

With support from the district’s administration and with School Board approval, the Multi-Language Enrichment Department moved forward with its plans to offer one-way dual language enrichment beginning at the PK-1<sup>st</sup> grade level in fall 2006. In spring 2006, the department provided opportunities for staff and community meetings at each of the now seven identified two-way dual language campuses (changed from 6 to 7). As the consultants planned for the Dallas training, notices were sent to all pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and 1<sup>st</sup> grade Bilingual teachers in the district to attend the 3-Day Dual Language Institute in summer 2006.

Beginning in July 2006, the consultants provided district-wide training to future implementing teachers and campus principals and assistant principals on the Gómez and Gómez 50/50 DLE Content-Based Model. Scheduled in three-day cohorts, teachers received in depth training on the research and rationale for providing enrichment bilingual education through one-way and two-way dual language education. Additionally, participants acquired the knowledge necessary to implement the program with a high level of fidelity. The DLE model’s components—a separation of languages by content area, language of the day, conceptual refinement, and bilingual pairs—were discussed in detail.

Training also included a strong preparation on best practices through *enriched pedagogy* based on the principle of creating *challenging, interactive, and authentic* dual language classrooms. Once all 11 cohorts were completed, more than 900 Dallas ISD bilingual teachers were prepared for program implementation as dual language teachers. The Drs. Gómez returned to Dallas in late August 2006. Teachers who were unable to attend the summer institutes were

given an opportunity to attend a make-up three-day session. Additionally, campus administrators and area superintendents were provided the opportunity to attend additional more *practical* training on the model that included the preparation and expectations for effective implementation at the campus level.

Throughout fall 2006, the Multi-Language Enrichment Program staff provided technical support to campuses, including classroom walk-through, phone and email support, and the development of instructional configurations to meet individual campus needs based on the student and staff demographics. To support implementation of the new enriched model, the department, in collaboration with several content area departments, began a series of training mini-sessions held after school to clarify and deepen understanding of the program guidelines and components. Session topics included science and social studies training in Spanish, math support in English, learning centers, and language of the day.

In October and November 2006, Dr. Leo Gómez and Dr. Richard Gómez, along with eight of their colleagues, began visiting the Dallas ISD schools implementing one-way and two-way dual language. Each classroom visit consisted of a 25-minute walk-through and a debriefing with the campus administrator and teachers. Summaries of the level or stages of implementation were provided to teachers, campus administrators, the bilingual department, and area superintendents. By November 10, 2006, more than 380 classrooms across 52 campuses had been visited, and by the end of January 2007, more than 900 classrooms across 132 campuses were visited and were well on their way to effectively implementing one-way or two-way dual language education and, more importantly, effectively serving ELLs.

## **The Key to Success: Administrative Knowledge and Support**

During the 2005-2006 school year, as the Multi-Language Enrichment Program began an internal dialogue about alternative program models for Dallas ISD ELLs and the desire to move toward enrichment models of education like dual language, the district was going through a change of its own. A new district superintendent had recently joined the Dallas team, along with a host of other top administrators. The new leadership was poised and ready to lead Dallas ISD to become one of the top urban school districts in the nation.

The new district initiative, Dallas Achieves, had the mission to provide all students a coherent and rigorous education. With this move toward a more challenging, enrichment-based education for all students, including the district's ELLs, the move toward one-way and two-way dual language enrichment could not have come at a better time. As a result of the perfect alignment between the direction the Multi-Language Enrichment Department was taking with the education of ELLs, and the overall vision the district administration had for the entire student population, the district superintendent and deputy superintendents strongly committed to the implementation of one-way dual language district-wide. The clear message was that all stakeholders, from administrators to classroom teachers, are accountable for providing students the best education possible. All stakeholders have become well versed in the research and rationale behind enrichment bilingual education, supporting the implementation of the district's new enrichment bilingual education program in their talk and practice.

In addition to the district level, the department itself has seen a change in administration. The new assistant superintendent for the Multi-Language Enrichment Department accepted the position in midstream of the planning process. Without hesitation, the department administration embraced and moved forward with the implementation plan. As the initiative has grown, so have the dedication and motivation of the department to seek out best instructional practices and support for Dallas ISD ELLs. The buy-in and support of the district's different levels of administration, along with an alignment between Dallas Achieves and the goals of the new enrichment bilingual program, have ensured a commitment to high levels of implementation of and fidelity to the program.

### **Lessons Learned: Recommendations**

Rolling out any program district-wide in a school district the size of Dallas ISD is a challenge. While the level of implementation and growth experienced just a year after the initial discussion has exceeded all expectations, the department and district at large have learned a great deal from the challenges encountered. While a district-wide roll out is an expedient way to ensure *all* ELLs are served through an enrichment bilingual education program quickly, it is imperative that the district understand the need for at least one planning year. The planning year allows for district-wide information sharing and provides the opportunity for all stakeholders to develop a level of buy-in necessary to commit to implementation (Soltero, 2004; Sugarman & Howard, 2001). School board members, district-level administrators, content area departments, campus administrators, and teachers should all have opportunities to dialogue and contribute to the development of a plan and provide input in regard to student needs. Also included in this planning year should be the anticipation of long term goals and future program plans.

Districts considering the implementation of one-way or two-way dual language programs should ensure identified campuses have staff and community understanding of the program goals and expectations, along with unwavering buy-in before moving forward with implementation (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000; Sugarman & Howard, 2001). For two-way settings, demographics should support an approximate 50/50 balance of ELLs and non-ELLs in the program, and families should be asked to commit to the program through 5<sup>th</sup> grade to avoid challenges arising through attrition.

The anticipation of the ripple effects from implementation should also be considered by districts moving forward with implementation of one-way or two-way dual language. The availability of instructional resources in both languages, including textbooks, teacher guides, and classroom libraries should be assessed ahead of time, and plans for the acquisition of necessary materials should be developed. Personnel resources should also be considered when planning for implementation. Not only are committed and knowledgeable departmental staff needed for the behind-the-scenes development and planning, they are also needed to provide training and field support at the district and campus levels. Likewise, district staffing needs should be considered when identifying the instructional configurations (self-contained vs. team-teaching classroom designs) to be used within the model. Curriculum alignment with the new instructional program should be discussed and developed in the spirit of collaboration between the content area departments.

Additionally, districts must consider changes to the existing grading policy, the local assessment policy, and the effect implementation will have on any existing grant or special programs. Finally, since the district has replaced its old remedial bilingual program serving ELLs with One-Way Dual Language, it now needs to consider modifying its existing policy documents so as to clearly describe its new enriched dual language program. This policy action will provide clear directive of the systemic change to all district and campus administration and the district's teaching staff regarding the newly adopted one-way and two-way dual language programs. Moreover, it will also provide greater long-term security for teachers, students, and their families that this enriched program will continue regardless of any future administrative changes at the district or campus level.

### **What the Future Holds**

As year one of implementation raced along, the consultants returned to the district the following summer to continue the three-day training for the second grade teachers who picked up the first grade cohort of students, as well as provide more in depth training to campus administration. The Multi-Language Enrichment Program will continue to support implementation through campus visits and specialized training based on identified areas of need. With the commencement of the next two academic school years, the district saw the implementation of the one-way dual language program grow district-wide in grades PK–3rd along with increasing the number of two-way campuses to provide additional opportunities for *more* native English speakers to receive an enriched education.

An additional 21 two-way schools (at one time one-way schools) were identified based on a host of district approved criteria, including the level of school and community interest and support, and the school's level of implementation of the one-way dual language program during the first and second years. Identified two-way dual language campuses began implementation of the program at the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten levels (serving both native English speakers and ELLs), while 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade levels at those schools will continue one-way dual language serving only ELLs.

As of 2008-2009, the district is implementing PK-3<sup>rd</sup> grade one-way programs and PK-1<sup>st</sup> grade two-way programs. Long-term goals include program growth into the secondary level. At this point, anecdotal data from teacher observations and annual benchmarks across implementing levels indicate that participating ELLs are achieving greater academic success and participating native English speakers are doing equally as well. We are in the process of collecting, organizing and analyzing this data as well as upcoming Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) data from current participating third graders that we hope to publish in a future article.

## **Conclusion**

One of the greatest district epiphanies was the understanding of the power of One-Way Dual Language Enrichment Education to provide *equal educational opportunities* for our traditionally underserved ELL population. More and more school districts are recognizing that *One-Way Dual Language Enrichment Education* can more effectively serve large numbers of ELLs and be adopted as *the* official bilingual education program serving this population. For

instance, in Texas, there is a growing realization and trend being promoted by both bilingual educators and school leaders where a significant number of large urban and small rural districts are replacing their existing remedial bilingual or ESL program (typically early-exit or ESL pullout) with an enriched One-Way DLE for serving their ELL population. It is important to note that regardless of population composition, *both* One-Way and Two-Way dual language enrichment programs *close the academic achievement gap* between ELLs and native English speakers (Collier & Thomas, 2004).

It is important to keep in mind that educators and researchers continue to learn from the past and have come a long way in efforts to achieve *educational equity* in our schools. Bilingual education policy has been greatly affected by both state and federal policies, and there continues to be a lack of understanding of the purpose of bilingual education and the benefits of first language instruction, particularly among political and educational leaders.

There is still extensive misunderstanding in the field among policymakers and educational leaders on the benefits of an enrichment bilingual education. This gap in understanding at both a policy and pedagogical level must be closed if we are truly committed to closing the academic achievement gap between ELLs and native English speakers. In light of the ever increasing number of Hispanic ELLs in America's schools, can we afford not to close the equity and achievement gap between these two groups?

According to Berliner and Biddle (1995), by the year 2030, approximately 40% of school-age population in the U.S. will be linguistically and culturally diverse. To do this, we

must have a complete understanding of the historical, socio-political, and theoretical factors affecting the quality education of ELLs. By more effectively educating Hispanic ELLs at the K-12 level, we can only increase the pool of these students entering college and completing higher education degrees. Discussions on the pipeline for increasing the recruitment pool of Hispanics entering higher education must begin at the elementary level and be a K-16 issue.

While the development and implementation of one-way and two-way dual language programs in Dallas ISD have exceeded expectations, the district is by no means content with the status quo. The district as a whole must move from simply following the model to *embracing* the philosophy and goals of quality enrichment education for all students. The development of a stronger instructional pedagogy is of utmost importance, and supporting the implementation of a more student centered, constructivist curriculum is a priority, and will take time. It will not be easy, but look how far we have come.

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## **Superintendent as Advocate: Leading a District-Wide Dual Language Program**

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Superintendent leadership for accountability and district-wide reform is an essential component for student achievement (Petersen & Young, 2004). The varied roles of instructional leader, transformational leader, and school-community leader represent only some of the key responsibilities of a superintendent. In addition to providing district leadership for improved academic outcomes (Forsyth, 2004), today's superintendents must also address issues of tolerance, diversity, and social justice. Therefore, it is crucial that issues pertaining to social justice for all students must be shared and discussed among all educators (Marshall & Ward, 2004). Working with students and families from diverse backgrounds affects all school leaders, especially superintendents (Lytle, 2004), and this is evident in the exploration of a school district that successfully implemented a dual language education program.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the ways in which the superintendent of Star School District<sup>1</sup>, a high-performing, high-poverty school district modeled attitudes and behaviors that demonstrated advocacy for an additive language model for all students. Information gathered from semi-structured interviews with the superintendent, central office staff, and school principals has yielded evidence of a social justice philosophy that is evident throughout the district. Concrete examples of the superintendent's work and interactions with district staff and campus leaders will be integrated into the paper using Rorrer's (2001) three-stage framework.

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<sup>1</sup> Star School District is a pseudonym.

These examples will serve to provide evidence of how this superintendent served as an advocate for students.

## Review of the Literature

This review of literature will discuss elements of effective district leadership and the superintendent as instructional leader. The research studies presented in this section serve to ground the focus of the superintendent's role in Star School District.

### Effective District Leadership

Important strategies of effective leadership for district-level change were identified by Fullan, Bertani, and Quinn (2004). Some of these strategies included shared vision, collective purpose, and capacity building. Districts achieve high goals with each of these components in place. Similar themes emerged from research of performance-driven practices in urban school districts (Petrides & Nodine, 2005). One major theme that stands out is the focus on improving student achievement goals. This is a shared vision by district personnel that keeps students at the center of decision-making efforts.

In another study, Skrla, Scheurich, and Johnson (2000) identified equity beliefs and practices in which districts engaged to improve instruction, to include aligning curriculum and instructional delivery, holding people accountable, and ensuring continuous performance. The aforementioned practices stemmed from a research study of four Texas school districts that served minority student populations. Similarly, Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll, and Russ (2004) reviewed research about schools that served economically disadvantaged students. Some

strategies that educators in these schools demonstrated included focusing on curriculum and instruction, building a learning community, and providing ongoing professional development.

In a study of 12 instructionally effective school districts (IESD) in California, Murphy and Hallinger (1988) identified common characteristics of curricula and instruction. These characteristics include establishing a curriculum focus; maintaining consistency and coordinating instructional activities; and having the superintendent provide strong instructional leadership. Specifically regarding the role of superintendents, there were several critical components in supporting the instructional program: these superintendents coordinated professional development activities, introduced teaching strategies, and maintained a positive climate.

### Superintendents as Instructional Leaders

Björk's (1993) discussion of the instructional leadership role of superintendents asserts that they are the catalyst for change. The conditions principals set regarding support, advocacy, and the channeling of resources for instruction are the backbone of program success. Björk also supports the reciprocal learning that takes place between district leader and individual campus leaders.

A similar research study, one that included responses from over 300 superintendents, yielded information regarding two of the most frequently listed set of work responsibilities (Bredeson, 1996). The superintendents identified instructional support and instructional collaboration. Instructional delegation and instructional vision were the next two most frequently identified items for the superintendents.

A common variable among five superintendents in Texas (Byrd, McNaughten, & Whitley, 2002) was a strong work ethic set against a foundation of high expectations for all students. The districts that these superintendents represented were selected based on evidence of successful performance compiled through the state's Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS).

### Context of the Study

Star School District, in south Texas, is 99.75% Hispanic and has an enrollment of slightly over 3,100 students across four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. Ninety-two percent of the students are identified as economically disadvantaged, and 54% of the students are classified by the state as limited English proficient, a rate over three times the state average of 15.4%.

This district is located in a small city with just under 7,400 people, along the U.S.-Mexico border. Over 97% of the population is Latino, and approximately 42.7% are foreign-born, primarily from Mexico. According to the U.S. Census (2000), the median income is approximately \$19,469. Fewer than 39% of its citizens are high school graduates, under 6% have a bachelor's degree, and only 1.5% have a graduate or professional degree. These statistics reflect the findings of Chapa & De La Rosa (2004) whose review of U.S. Census data revealed that among Latino groups, Mexicans had the lowest rate of educational attainment.

Some might consider such statistics as presenting an insurmountable challenge, yet high-quality curricula and instructional strategies are the cornerstone of this district's modus operandi. The superintendent provided years of leadership for Star School District by promoting justice in schools (Shields, 2004b), raising issues concerning equity (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005), and supporting inclusive practices to meet the needs of a diverse student population (Riehl, 2000).

### Methodology

The researchers undertook a case study of the district to determine the nature of the district's instructional programs and the roles played by the superintendent. They were led by two major research questions: 1) Which leadership structures were in place at Star School District that led to the long-term implementation of a dual language program? 2) Which leadership traits did the superintendent demonstrate regarding support for the dual language program? Data for this case study were collected across three academic semesters. The results reported here came from semi-structured interviews with the district superintendent, elementary campus principals, and central office staff. All interviews were audiotaped, translated when necessary, and transcribed. All interview sessions were conducted by the researchers and extensive field notes were kept from each interview and focus group.

The open-ended questions and interview transcriptions were analyzed using a qualitative research methodology. Questions regarding the need for a dual language program, steps in program implementation, and successful methods for program consistency were among some of the questions asked of the superintendent, central office staff, and principals. Based on

participant responses to these questions, the researchers looked for patterns in the data concerning factors that demonstrated the superintendent's advocacy for all students. The researchers then categorized the data according to the patterns that emerged (Creswell, 2003). The researchers analyzed the data and looked for patterns separately. The researchers next shared their individual analyses, thus providing a peer check of the analyses (Carspecken, 1996). Multiple data sources and peer checks were used to triangulate the emerging findings and contribute to the credibility of the study (Patton, 1990). Additionally, credibility for the study was established through prolonged engagement and persistent observations at the site (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Conceptual Framework

The patterns that emerged from the data included examples of the superintendent's impact on the district community by transforming and restructuring district leadership capacity. Rorrer's Leadership for Equity Framework (2002) outlines the process by which educational leaders confront inequity, then "deinstitutionalize" the inequity, and "build the districts' capacity for equity" (p. 2). The three stages for the transformation and reconstruction of district capacity are as follows: a) the reproduction stage, in which inequity is perpetuated, b) the recognition stage, in which district leadership questions and begins to reject assumptions surrounding the inequity, and c) the reconstruction stage, in which leaders create an organization and community culture based on a search for both equity and excellence for public school students.

### Findings

The findings from the research conducted at Star School District will be presented within the three stages of Rorrer's leadership cycle. Synthesis of the emerging themes from the participants, including the superintendent, will be discussed in the three stages. Pertinent quotes from the participants were included to emphasize the emergent themes.

### Reproduction

In this stage, inequities in the educational system are identified. Given the history of Star School District, one of the primary inequities that was apparent in this district was the need to find effective ways to help English Language Learners (ELLs) succeed. For example, in 1981, only 35% of the students pursued higher education. Today, over 80% attend institutions of higher learning. This endeavor is supported, in part, by a scholarship that the district has established and to which all employees contribute.

The superintendent, district and campus administrators, and teachers of this district did not hold a deficit view (García & Guerra, 2004; Valencia, 1997) of the students they served. Quite the contrary, these education professionals had only the highest expectations for the children and maintained a "capabilities approach to leadership" (Larson & Murtadha, 2002, p. 155). This model promotes students' social capital (Arriaza, 2003) and cultural capital (McCollum, 1999; Trueba, 2002).

In a related study, the level of effectiveness in leading districts with large numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse students is correlated to the actions of the superintendent. Ovando & Troxell (1997) identified several areas representing the multicultural knowledge,

multicultural attitudes, and multicultural skills of superintendents. Some of these superintendent actions demonstrated the following: believing that students from diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds possessed individual learning needs, and acknowledging the interdependency among the diverse individuals who comprise the local community.

The superintendent in Star School District demonstrated similar actions in his advocacy for the dual language program. He stated that in a district with multiple schools and principals, the superintendent has to set a systemic goal that is to be emphasized on all campuses. The shared goal for language learning was not to replace the students' native language, but rather it was to add value. Adding value to the students' native language occurred during the district's goal of high levels of Spanish proficiency for students while building their English language acquisition. Thus, the outcome was to have students literate in both languages.

With regard to the achievement of English Language Learners, he emphasized that the performance of all students is critical:

Most of our students were ELL at one time, even if not officially designated as such.

They need the ability to work with the complexities of languages to function in "our" [border] environment. They need to function equally well as Spanish language learners and English Language learners and progress equally well in both languages. They need to be academically competent in both languages.

### Recognition

In this stage, district leaders find new ways of doing things that will support equity. The superintendent's approach to language learning for its largely Latino population, of which over half speak Spanish as a first language, included the development of a cohesive instructional program committed to developing bilingual and biliterate graduates and citizens. Star School District's geographic proximity to Mexico provides unique opportunities for a language program that supports linguistic diversity (Delpit, 1995; García, 2005). "They need to be academically competent in both languages," the superintendent explained. He acknowledged that having the students become proficient in both languages would benefit the community economically.

Star School District promoted the value of learning two languages through a language enrichment model, rather than through remediation. The district incorporated a dual language instructional model (Gómez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005; Lara-Alecio, Galloway, Irby, Rodríguez, & Gómez, 2004) that helped students become fully proficient in both Spanish and English. Both languages are given equal importance. The success of dual language instruction designed to meet the academic needs of English Language Learners (ELLs) and to maintain connections with native language and culture has been supported through recent research (Howard & Sugarman, 2007; Thomas & Collier, 2003). Administrator and teacher responsibilities that help to make this model of bilingual education successful include curriculum planning and on-going professional development (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000; Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2005).

The superintendent guaranteed the allocation of resources to support dual language program priorities. He plans to continue funding the program beyond the original grant money that has since expired:

Sustainability of dual language isn't an issue. We would've done it [dual language] grant or not grant. The grant allowed dollars for training and materials and allowed the implementation to occur quickly. When we wrote the second grant we didn't limit it to a particular model, i.e., 50-50. We can't put 50% English dominant into a classroom when we don't have them. We have to find a model that works or do our own model.

He and other district personnel believed that fluency in another language adds value as opposed to replacing students' native tongue with English. The superintendent made a long-term commitment to this language model by expanding it into the middle school so students there could continue to grow in a bilingual, biliterate academic setting. This effort was accomplished through the support of all stakeholders in the learning community. Parents and students advocated for the program extension into the middle school and this was promoted by the teachers, campus administrators, and district leaders.

It was important for all stakeholders to understand and accept the additive goals of a dual language program for students in Star School District. The superintendent discussed his three-pronged objective for stakeholder support of the dual language program: 1) accept the reality about the reasons for implementing a dual language program and viewing it as an enrichment model rather than remediation; 2) understand the need for all stakeholders to immerse themselves in an understanding of the educational and economical benefits of a dual language program, and 3) help educators and parents free themselves from the misconception that having students come to Star School District speaking only Spanish was a deficit. It was important for

all advocates to see both the short-term and long-term impact of learning Spanish and English would have for students growing into contributing citizens along the U.S.-Mexico border. The superintendent stressed the value-added capabilities of the students, and that their native language was used as a tool for language instruction and development. He emphasized this by saying, “dual language is part of how we educate kids. It’s not just a program.”

### Reconstruction

In this stage, leaders enact change to enhance teaching and learning. Rorrer (2002) identified three strategies that leaders engage in during this stage: (1) defining leadership through agency, (2) creating a culture of equity and excellence, and (3) integrating processes for achieving equity. Anecdotes and quotes taken from the two interviews with the superintendent and interviews with other district personnel will be incorporated into the three strategies outlined by Rorrer.

#### *Defining leadership through agency*

At the time this study was conducted, the superintendent was in his sixth year in that role at Star School District. The majority of the principals and assistant principals had been in their roles for just as long, and there was low teacher turnover. This continuity began at the top. School board member turnover was gradual, with never more than one board member leaving at a time. This leadership consistency (Björk & Gurley, 2003) helped maintain the district’s focus on what was best for students.

The superintendent strongly supported the idea of educating and empowering the people who worked for and with him stating “we must build knowledge and capacity.” This attitude reflects the tenets of building leadership capacity (Lambert, 1998; Lambert 2005). When seeking support for the dual language program, the superintendent educated the school board first. He stated that,

implementing a dual language program needs board commitment and support. The reality is that one or more board members will oppose it, but the right approach makes a difference. It’s important to educate the board on the issue of test scores. Doing what’s right is a higher priority than test scores. I’d rather not have the rating [Texas Accountability Rating] and do what’s best for kids

Board members and the superintendent shared a mutual respect for each other (Petersen & Short, 2001). During a school board meeting, two board members publicly acknowledged the superintendent’s instructional capacity. After he informed the board of updates in the state testing standards, one of the board members said, “We’re always a step ahead, Dr. \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you.” This comment demonstrated the board member’s appreciation for the superintendent’s expertise that served to keep the board current about educational policies.

Principals’ meetings with the superintendent served as opportunities for professional growth for district leaders and principals (Jones, 1999; Naso, 1999). The superintendent respected the principals’ time and confirmed that they were engaged in learning activities (Peterson, Murphy, & Hallinger, 1987) during these meetings that helped principals promote teacher learning and student achievement on their respective campuses. Participants typically meet for a working lunch and the superintendent holds these sessions to a two-hour limit to

ensure the focus is on curriculum-related issues. In turn, the principals agreed that the superintendent was approachable and open to ideas. While they understood that the superintendent held them directly accountable for student learning and expected that oversight of the instructional environment would occur frequently. The superintendent encouraged school principals to “take the lead role in educating staff and parents. Explain dual language in a positive light, and be excited about its [dual language program] potential to produce biliterate students with academic skills in both languages.”

### *Creating a culture of equity and excellence*

Star School District personnel had a shared vision of high expectations for all students (Koschoreck, 2001). These individuals shared a moral commitment to student success. All members of this learning community supported bilingualism and biliteracy for their students. The superintendent helped set the direction (Nestor-Baker & Hoy, 2001; Petersen, 2002) by demonstrating his knowledge of instructional practices and through his support with resources and professional development opportunities (Sullivan & Shulman, 2005). He explained,

I challenge central office personnel and principals about why we must continually make dual language better. We must be open minded on how to improve. Work with people to be more open minded and flexible and not locked in. We need to make the program work for our children here on the border. We can't borrow another model from a different geographical area.

Professional development was a practice shared by the superintendent, other district leaders, principals, teachers, and parents (Leithwood & Prestine, 2002). “Developing people and

developing the organization,” was one of the superintendent’s primary goals (Sherman & Grogan, 2003). He helped build this professional learning community that remained focused on sustainability of the vision for student success (Chrisman, 2005; Firestone, Mangin, Martinez, & Polovsky, 2005). He explained how he demonstrated advocacy for the dual language program beyond the borders of Star School District. For example, he discussed the following:

[I]n terms of being an advocate for dual language, I have spoken at conferences when invited; addressed regional superintendent meetings; provided testimony to the legislature regarding best practices despite challenging demographics.

However, the main focus is to do it [implementation of dual language] well here.

#### *Integrating processes for achieving equity*

Based on Texas school accountability data (Texas Education Agency, 2004), Star School District received a recognized rating. This is not the highest level that a district can receive. Nevertheless, the rating constitutes student success at high academic levels. The Texas accountability system determines school ratings based on the percentages of students passing the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). A recognized rating shows that at least 80% of the students passed the exam. The superintendent understood that there would be a period of transition for students as they progressed through the instructional model and their scores on the state standardized test, Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). He felt strongly that it was a higher priority for Star School District to focus on children and their future than on raising test scores. He said, “I equate it to building a strong foundation—doing fundamental things first—a building may go up fast, but it may not be strong.” This attitude

reflects the view presented by Valenzuela (2005), “Accountability is thus, not to the state, but rather to a citizen public and the communities that schools serve” (p. 28).

### Conclusions and Implications

The superintendent of Star School District demonstrated purpose-driven (Dantley, 2003) and equity-focused (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004) leadership. He constantly supported district staff by reminding them of their collective role within the organization that served to maintain continuity of purpose. The characteristics exemplified by this superintendent and his district staff reflect cultural characteristics identified in a research study of high-performing, high-poverty schools discussed by Scheurich (1998). It was also evident that the superintendent advocated for a non-deficit model (Shields, 2004a; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). He demonstrated high expectations for all students and staff in his interactions with the school board, district staff, campus leaders, parents, and students. The importance of a strong foundation in elementary school for children from Mexican immigrant parents (Crosnoe, 2005) is a philosophy that Star School District has taken to heart.

The superintendent served as the primary role model for the district. He demonstrated dispositions of accountable leadership (Elmore, 2005) and collaborative leadership and community building (Kochan & Reed, 2005). Serving the district as a model of student advocacy may inspire and motivate others to carry out their collective mission of value-added education for all students. His deeds and actions portrayed the border leadership qualities as identified by López, González, and Fierro (2005). The border epistemology of school leadership posited by these researchers affirms that effective school leaders promote equity for all students

through their actions and decisions. The superintendent worked to meet students' needs in a socially just environment and supported initiatives to promote this.

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**The Dual Language Dualism: ¿Quiénes Ganan?**  
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**Introduction**

Texas law mandates schools to implement a language program any time a school has 20 or more English language learners (ELL) in the same grade level (Collier, Thomas, & Tinajero, 2006). Traditionally, the language programs Texas schools have offered include transitional bilingual education (TBE) (49%) and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs (38%) (Alanís, 2000). This trend is slowly changing, however. School administrators, teachers, and parents are learning of the long term benefits dual language programs offer that TBE and ESL programs do not. The first statewide compilation of Texas data on dual language implementation indicated that 61 school districts were using it, and a total of 166 two-way dual language programs were operating in the state (Lara-Alecio et al., 2004). Four years after that report, dual language program implementation continues to grow, with a total of 263 programs currently registered on the Texas Two-Way Dual Language Education website (<http://texastwoway.org/>).

These numbers represent a dramatic increase in dual language implementation over the last decade and a half in Texas. In 1995, fewer than 10 dual language programs were registered with the Texas Two-Way Consortium (Gómez, 2006), representing more than a 3,000% increase over the last 14 years. These numbers continue to increase as more and more school districts are piloting and implementing dual language programs. In 2007, Governor Rick Perry signed into law a plan in which ten school districts, and up to thirty campuses, would pilot dual language programs for a period of six years (Oleck, 2007). In 2006, the Dallas Independent School District implemented a dual language model in the lower grades of its elementary schools; other

North Texas districts, including Irving and Grand Prairie, are doing the same (Ayres, 2007).

Austin Independent School District (AISD), one of the largest school districts in Texas that has not implemented a dual language model, will potentially open a dual language charter school, called Austin Community School, in the Fall of 2009 (<http://www.austincommunityschool.org/>).

The popularity of dual language programs in Texas, as well as nationally, makes for an exciting time in education history. Not only do dual language programs heighten the educational achievements, including literacy levels, for both language minority and language majority students, but the dual language model also provides a foundation for equitable education outcomes for language minority students. Excitement about the potential of dual language programs and the achievements that have been documented in the dual language research are balanced, however, by concerns that practitioners, researchers, and the media may be building up the dual language model as the universal cure for the achievement gap. When dual language programs are described in overly optimistic terms, educators may be discouraged from critically examining the distinctiveness of individual dual language programs or from identifying particular programmatic practices that may perpetuate the achievement gap.

This article poses questions to help educators critically analyze different aspects of dual language programs in K-12 classrooms. The underlying question in this analysis involves issues of power: Who stands to benefit most from the micro-level, curricular, and pedagogical practices of dual language programs? More specifically, and for the purposes of this article, we examine two areas of concern: placement strategies and parent involvement.

## **Dual Language Programs and What They Have to Offer**

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an extensive literature review, we would like to highlight the major components of the programs and the salient positive research outcomes.

### **The Dual Language Model**

Dual language programs in practice, as well as in research, are referred to by several different names, including dual language education (DLE), developmental bilingual education (DBE), two-way bilingual education (TWBE), two-way immersion (TWI), dual immersion (DI), and enriched education (EE) (Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2005). These variously labeled programs consist of classrooms where roughly half the students are native English speakers and the other half are native speakers of a language other than English (e.g., Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Navajo, French) (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003). These integrated classrooms are spaces where both languages are considered academic, and wherein students learn academic content through both languages while working toward oral and written literacy in their target language as well as their native language. In effect, the school curriculum is taught in both languages, without translation, which means language development is not separated out, as it is in many ESL and foreign language classroom designs. In general, dual language programs have the following common characteristics (Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2005; Gómez, 2006):

1. Participating students include English speakers and native speakers of another language.
2. Students are integrated during most content instruction.
3. Instruction is provided in two languages.
4. Students become proficient in two languages.

5. Student achievement in English for all students is equal to or exceeds that of students learning in English only.

While nearly all dual language programs have these characteristics in common, there are various features in the dual language model that can vary from program to program. In short, some of the ways dual language programs can vary include the following:

1. Languages used in the program (e.g., English and Spanish or English and Mandarin).
2. Student demographics, including ethnicity, social class, gender, etc., as well as the ratio of language minority and language majority students participating in a program.
3. Language distribution, including the percentage of time each language is spoken (50:50 and 90:10 models) and how language use is divided among subject areas and alternated throughout the class, day, week, etc.
4. Placement practices schools use to select the students who participate in the program.
5. Support network from administrators, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders.
6. Bilingual and minority language resources, including texts in classrooms and libraries, technology, teachers, administrators, community members, etc.

### **Dual Language Outcomes**

Research consistently demonstrates that students enrolled in dual language programs gain a high proficiency in core curriculum knowledge, develop strong bilingual and biliteracy skills in native and second languages, heighten their metalinguistic and metacommunicative awareness, and acquire positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors (Calderón & Minaya-Rowe, 2007; de Jong, 2002; Howard & Christian, 2002; Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003; Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2005; Lindholm, 1992; Olmedo, 2005; Senesec, 2002; Thomas & Collier,

1997, 2002, 2003). Aside from academic gains, dual language programs also potentially lift the stigma that has traditionally been attached to bilingualism and bilingual education.

Whereas traditional language programs, including ESL and TBE, segregate language minority students from their English-dominant peers, dual language programs integrate both sets of students as they work together toward the goals of bilingualism and biliteracy. In this context, bilingualism is not a deficiency to overcome so that students can be mainstreamed in English classes. Rather, bilingualism is embraced as a goal that all students work toward and often serves as an indicator of giftedness (Collier, Thomas, & Tinajero, 2006). Schools that commit to long-term bilingualism via dual language programs reconfigure school practices in ways that affirm language minority students' identities, potentially increasing language minority students' investedness and participation in school culture and curriculum.

Despite the consistent research that positions dual language programs favorably, educators should not necessarily extrapolate that dual language programs guarantee educational equity for language minority students. As Gómez (2006) has argued, "No program for English language learners is a panacea" (p. 51). In addition to the many practical problems that can arise in hastily implemented programs (e.g., under-prepared teachers, lack of ongoing support systems, and insufficient materials in the non-English language), this article suggests that even the more well-prepared and successful programs need to be analyzed for practices that may unfavorably position language minority students.

This article posits that the very design of dual language programs (i.e., enrolling a racial and language mix of students) produces power dynamics that are under-researched and under-theorized in the bilingual education literature. It has been more than ten years since Valdés (1997) raised cautionary notes concerning the racial dimensions of dual

language programs. Considering the absence of significant research in this area since Valdés' work, the goal of this article is to pick up and continue discussion of the possible subtle, yet marginalizing practices that may emerge in dual language programs for language minority students. There are a number of practices that may create or reproduce deficit and/or assimilationist discourses and pedagogy. The focus of this article is narrowed to two different practices: placement strategies and parent involvement.

### **Placement Strategies**

The integrated classroom design in dual language programs contributes greatly to the uniqueness and overall success of the programs. The dual language classroom is usually split among language and ethnic/racial groups, allowing students to utilize peers who do not represent their language and/or ethnic/racial group as a resource for language learning as well as for developing effective cross-cultural interactions. As stated previously, this integrated model, for the most part, produces a positive outlook on bilingualism.

At the same time that integrative placement strategies provide learning opportunities in the dual language classroom that are largely absent in other language programs, they can also produce inequitable power dynamics. In short, the power dynamics surrounding issues of race, class, and language in a given school and social context can make for less than desirable outcomes in the placement strategies of dual language programs. The race, class and language power dynamics in these programs do not always signify the same level of prestige for all learners involved. Valdés (1997) similarly documented in her cautionary notes on dual language programs that the value placed on students' developing bilingualism is likely to be different for native English speakers than for language minority students. She explained that, "For minority

children, the acquisition of English is expected. For mainstream children, the acquisition of a non-English language is enthusiastically applauded” (Valdés, 1997, p. 417).

For the white and/or native English speaker, the dual language program usually signifies an academically enriched program (Collier, Thomas, & Tinajero, 2006). It is a program that challenges them and offers academic opportunities beyond what their white and/or native English-speaking peers are receiving within the same school. Thus, for these students, the opportunity to participate in a language program and become bilingual at a young age is usually associated with giftedness and translates into a currency that will afford these students more academic and employment opportunities later in life. As a result of the elitism and privilege white and/or native English speakers usually associate with dual language programs, there is usually a large demand for the spaces reserved for native English speakers. This demand creates long waiting lists and a number of screening guidelines to gain entry into the program. The screening practices usually consist of testing procedures wherein students are assessed prior to admittance, and those students who score the highest are among the set of students who are selected to participate in the program.

Contrasting placement practices for native English speakers and language minority students are noted in Howard, Sugarman, and Christian’s (2003) work. They state it is not uncommon for all Spanish speakers at a particular school, unless their parents request otherwise, to be placed in the school’s dual language program. Research demonstrates that the resulting sets of students (language minority and language majority) who participate in dual language programs therefore often have disparities or gaps in students’ social class, academic readiness, immigration status, and parents’ educational levels (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003; Howard, Sugarman, Christian, Lindholm-Leary, & Rogers, 2007; Lindholm-Leary, 2001;

Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2001; Lindholm-Leary & Ferrante, 2003). Howard et al. (2007) state, “As a group, Spanish-speaking children in dual language programs in the Southwest can be characterized as largely immigrant and with parents who are working class and have five to six years of formal schooling” (p. 33). Similarly, as Howard, Sugarman, and Christian (2003) explain,

The language minority students are more likely to come from homes where there is poverty and where parents have limited formal schooling, and the native English speakers are more likely to come from homes that are solidly middle class and where parents have substantial formal education. This difference in the backgrounds of the two groups of students makes internal comparisons of student performance difficult, as the students frequently differ by more than just native language (p. 8).

Needless to say, the placement of top-scoring, economically more affluent, native English speakers to participate in an already perceived elite academic program reinforces the conceptualization of native English speaking students in this program as gifted and privileged. This practice also produces a clear disjuncture of academic ability between the two sets of students along racial, ethnic, economic, and linguistic lines.

This disjuncture in student enrollment can potentially produce outcomes that work in contradiction to dual language goals. One of the primary goals and positive outcomes of dual language programs is that the minority language and culture is held in high esteem in a school that has made a commitment to value and nurture these skills. Since the language minority students’ language and culture are featured aspects of the program’s curriculum, this student population is perceived as knowledgeable and resourceful, especially to native English speaking peers who want to achieve fluent bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural skills in their native language and culture. This favorable positioning of language minority students is jeopardized,

however, in a classroom where their white and/or native English-speaking peers are classified as “gifted” and can often outperform them in everyday class assignments and activities. For example, in situations where native English speakers outperform their native Spanish-speaking classmates, the potential for native English speakers to perceive their native Spanish-speaking peers as academically resourceful is weakened.

Evidence for this finding is provided in Pimentel’s (2006) ethnographic study of a Spanish/English dual language classroom. In this study, Pimentel found that the placement strategies utilized at the school created a dual language classroom wherein white, native English-speaking students outperformed their Latina/o Spanish-dominant classmates, not only in activities conducted in the English language, but in activities conducted in Spanish as well. Pimentel (2006) also found that whereas “high performing” white, native English speakers were placed in the class, the Latino, Spanish-dominant students who were enrolled in the class were perceived by the school as students who were achieving below grade level, acting out, and generally “unteachable.” Given that there was no other language program in place at the school, teachers often referred the Spanish-dominant students who were not adequately adapting or learning in their English mainstream classrooms to this dual language classroom. They reasoned that these “at-risk” Spanish-dominant students would fair better in the dual language classroom where at least they could understand some of the instruction being partly delivered in their native language (Pimentel, 2006).

As a result of the placement strategies being employed at the school Pimentel (2006) studied, Latina/o, Spanish-dominant students often underperformed their white, English-dominant counterparts. Since many of the Latina/o, Spanish-dominant students in the class read several grade levels below average, it was often the case that the students were not perceived as

knowledgeable and did not serve as resources to their white, native English-speaking classmates. After spending some time in the class, Pimentel (2006) also found that the white, native English-speaking students often started to read in Spanish at grade levels that surpassed their Spanish-dominant classmates, clearly a result of the English-dominant students' already established literacy skills in their native language.

The placement strategies described here by no means represent the placement strategies in all dual language programs. However, in schools where these placement strategies are being implemented, and/or when students associate different meanings and/or different levels of social status with the program, there are educational equity implications that must be examined.

### **Parent Involvement**

Dual language programs usually require parents to be actively involved in their child's education, even more so than other educational programs. It is not uncommon for parents to sign a parental agreement or contract, in which parents ensure the long-term enrollment of their child in the program, as well as commit to a number of parent-involvement tasks. Some of these tasks can include parents offering time and assistance in the classroom, providing their child opportunities to hear/speak the target language to be exposed to different cultures, mentoring during after-school activities, and participating in school committees, PTA, and parent academic workshops. While parent involvement has traditionally translated to students' increased academic achievement, the amount and type of parent involvement dual language programs expect may present an additional challenge for poor, ethnic and/or language minority families struggling to function within the constraints of their jobs, child care, transportation, etc. While not all Latino students participating in dual language programs are Mexican, this section is

narrowed to focus on some of the cultural barriers Mexican immigrant parents have faced in U.S. schools. It then moves on to discuss some of the specific obstacles dual language programs may present to parents.

When considering Mexican parents' level of involvement in U.S. schools, it is important to examine the Mexican education system, which many Mexican immigrant parents have attended. As noted in Valdés (1996) and Bollin (2003), the Mexican education system has required Mexican parents to be passive in the schooling process and simply concentrate on the behavior patterns of their children. It has only been since 1998 that the Mexican education system has asked Mexican parents to play a much more active role in their children's education. Before then, the Mexican education system generally urged parents to focus on teaching their children to be "respectful, well-behaved, and hard working children," and not to interfere with the teachers' work (Bollin, 2003, p. 200). This conduct orientation to parent involvement and Mexicans' overall high regard for teachers often carries over to Mexican parents' involvement in their children's U.S. educational experiences.

Valdés (1996), in her ethnographic work with Mexican immigrant families, found that parents' interaction with school personnel, including teachers, was limited to discipline-specific issues. Valdés (1996) stated, "Parents considered it to be their proper role to ask: "¿Cómo se porta?" (How does he behave?); Mexican parents thought it to be their duty to be informed of the children's *conducta* (conduct)" (p. 165). As a result of the parents' conduct orientation to their children's education in Valdés' (1996) study, the parents interacted very little, if at all, with teachers in settings not specifically addressing student discipline. Valdés (1996) notes, for example, that parents did not regularly attend open houses, and when they did, they saw it more as "a pleasant social event that children liked to go to" (p. 161)— than as an opportunity to get to

know teachers, gain knowledge about the school's program, or understand their students' progress within that program. As can be seen in Valdés' (1996) work, Mexican parents, as a result of being educated in a qualitatively different educational system in Mexico, may have very different conceptions about where and how they should be involved in their children's education in the U.S.

As a result of limited access to schooling, some Mexican parents' educational level is often much lower than parents who were schooled in the United States. Worthy and Rodríguez-Galindo (2006) found that the average education level for Mexican parents in their study was a sixth grade education. Mexican parents' educational level in combination with their limited English skills can create a reluctance to interact with school personnel. Valdés (1996) explained that the Mexican parents in her study often avoided one-on-one interaction with school personnel and even ignored notes asking parents to call or come in because these parents felt inadequate to respond. Valdés (1996) explained, "In many families, ... neither of the two parents felt competent enough to deal with school personnel. They were embarrassed, and found almost any excuse not to go to the school and *"ponerse en evidencia"* (show how ignorant or incapable they were)" (p. 162). In addition to achieved educational levels, Mexican parents' education in Mexico differs in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy, which may cause incongruence between the ways parents and teachers think children ought to be prepared for school. As described in Valdés' (1996) study, participating parents did not see the value in teaching their children the ABCs—as opposed to the sounds of vowels—because the latter is what was emphasized in their own schooling experiences.

Pedagogical practices such as grading and ways of dividing up and labeling content (e.g., social studies and language arts) may also be unfamiliar to Mexican parents. Valdés (1996)

pointed out that report cards were sometimes unfamiliar and inaccessible to the Mexican parents in her study, and thus had relatively no correlation to the parents' understanding of their children's progress in school. Even though many Mexican parents may not use U.S. standards (e.g., a report card) for keeping track of their children's progress in school, many parents do develop and utilize alternative methods to gauge their children's academic progress. Worthy and Rodríguez-Galindo (2006) show that in contrast to teachers' perceptions, the Mexican parents in their study were commonly aware of their children's progress in school. They state, "Even though they knew very little English, parents seemed keenly aware of how well their children were managing English and were able to report with detailed description of their children's progress, and surprising accuracy that was supported by our classroom observations" (p. 590). Worthy and Rodríguez-Galindo also point out that their Mexican parent participants developed techniques outside of the school setting to evaluate their children's academic progress.

In addition to the barriers resulting from the contrasting U.S. and Mexican schooling experiences, there are a number of other structural barriers commonly prohibiting Mexican parents from participating in schools in the ways schools may expect. Mexican parents, and especially recent immigrants, commonly struggle to find substantial work in the U.S. As a result, Mexican parents often have to work extended hours or work two or three jobs to make ends meet. These extensive work schedules create difficulties in transportation, flexibility in work schedules, and babysitting that schools rarely take into consideration in their expectations for parent involvement (Zelazo, 1995; Worthy & Rodríguez-Galindo, 2006).

There are a number of barriers that commonly inhibit Mexican parents from participating at the level of parent involvement schools generally expect. When a child is enrolled in a dual language program, the expectations for parent involvement are even more demanding. Parents'

involvement in dual language programs usually starts well before the student even begins the program. For example, it is usually up to the parent to investigate where dual language programs are implemented and how to enroll their child in the desired program. This information is most readily available on the Internet *via* the school's webpage. These web sites are usually very explicit in stating what parents and students need in order to gain entry into the program, listing deadlines for testing and applications as well as the required criteria for entry. These web sites are usually almost entirely in English and require access to a computer and web services, obstacles that low-income and Spanish-dominant parents may not be able to overcome. These barriers alone may be enough to send the message that dual language programs cater more to middle-upper class, English-dominant students.

As was explained in the previous section on placement strategies, the demand for native English speaking spaces is often high, requiring native English-speaking parents to become involved early on in ways that language minority parents are not encouraged or expected to. As a result of native English-speaking parents' high levels of parent involvement at the onset of enrollment, these parents become more visible to school personnel and appear more invested in their children's education. In schools where there is a high demand for native English-speaking spaces, native English-speaking parents are likely to be in contact with the school of choice long before the child even enters the program, prepare the child for necessary entrance criteria (e.g., preliteracy and oral literacy exams), as well as take the child to the school for dual language orientations, testing, and to fill out the necessary paperwork. For these parents, the kind of parent involvement and the way children are expected to be prepared for school have been made very clear by the school.

The result is that parents participating in dual language programs may be preparing their children to enter school in sharply different ways. Whereas native English-speaking parents are likely to make sure their children meet the school's stated entrance criteria, Mexican parents are likely to base their children's preparation on Mexican education experiences, namely discipline and qualitatively different content preparation (Valdés, 1996). Thus, the kind of involvement that native English-speaking parents display, especially at the onset, may make language minority parents' seeming uninvolved appear inadequate to school personnel. More specifically, Mexican parent involvement, in contrast to that of native English-speaking parents, may be misread as not invested, uncaring, uninterested, and generally lacking the cultural and linguistic abilities required for adequate parent involvement.

It is also worth pointing out that for those Spanish-dominant parents who do actively seek out spaces in dual language programs for their Spanish-dominant children, their reasons for enrolling their children in a dual language program often differ from those of native English-speaking parents. Whereas native English-speaking parents often identify instrumental motivation, such as a better career and more job opportunities, language minority parents often identify integrative attitudes, including maintenance of native language and cultural identities and being able to communicate to others in their native language (Craig, 1996; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Peña, 1998). The motivation for native English-speaking parents to enroll their children—that is, upward mobility—is often more congruent with schools' desired outcomes for dual language programs, namely, a more demanding curriculum, the prestige of an academically enriched program, and high academic achievement, all of which are usually signified to the school by high standardized test scores. These contrasts in parent motivation and school conceptions of success produce a strong alignment between the school and native English

speakers, creating opportunities for native English-speaking parents to directly be involved and contribute to these goals.

In contrast, language minority parents may feel disfranchised, as was the case in Peña's (1998) study of a school that was converting from a transitional bilingual education program to a dual language program. Despite Mexican parents' interest and investment in the developing program, they felt detached from the school's planning process. Peña (1998) states that parents resented the school's emphasis on upward mobility and felt the school administration devalued the parents' interests in promoting family values, including cultural pride.

In Pimentel's (2006) study, wherein there was a sharp contrast in native English speakers' and native Spanish speakers' academic achievement, she found that white, English-speaking parents often voiced concern about whether their children were meeting their full potential in a classroom where the curriculum was potentially watered down to meet the needs of the less academically equipped Spanish-dominant students. The pressure that white, English-speaking parents placed on the teacher in this study pushed the teacher to adopt pedagogical practices that often worked against his desires and in contrast to dual language goals. As a result of parents' demands, the teacher spoke English more than intended, made Spanish instruction more accessible, and increased his tendency to teach to the tests. Additionally, the teacher implemented a daily homework assignment called translation sheets. These translation sheets included a number of words and sentences that students translated from either English to Spanish or Spanish to English. The parents signed these completed translation sheets nightly, and they served as evidence to white, English-speaking parents that their child was making progress in their target language. These translation sheets, which appeased native English-speaking parents'

concerns for their children's academic development, worked against the teacher's and program's goals to avoid the act of translating altogether (Pimentel, 2006).

## **Conclusion**

This essay is not simply concerned with offering a critique, but with educational access, equity, and social justice. There is the real possibility that dual language programs in general are being idealized and that there is a need for practitioners and researchers to critically analyze the power dynamics that operate in individual dual language programs. This article highlights the positive potential for dual language programs, as well as concerns for issues of power as the latter relates to placement practices and parental involvement. As explained previously, the unique quality of dual language programs lies in their ability to position language minority students' knowledge as academically valuable and resourceful. However, the placement strategies described herein jeopardize this uniquely positive positioning of language minority students' knowledge. If language minority students cannot be positioned as resources in a dual language program, and furthermore if they are being outperformed by their white and/or English-speaking classmates, they run the risk of being classified as deficient in a program that is supposed to counter their traditionally deficit status within the school. Such scenarios pose some serious problems in ethnic and language minority education that can potentially reproduce some of the same inequitable outcomes as have been observed and measured historically in traditional, deficit-oriented school programs.

In addition, many dual language programs from their very inception cater to the needs of English-speaking, middle-class white parents. By requiring time extensive commitments, especially during work hours, by not providing access to information equally in both languages,

and by not addressing cultural incongruence—especially with poor immigrant Latina/o parents— dual language programs can exclude and/or preclude Spanish-speaking parents’ equal and equitable participation. The outcome is that because native English-speaking parents are more likely to be involved in dual language programs, teachers and administrators are much more likely to hear their interests and concerns.

Lastly, dual language programs potentially offer language minority students opportunities to achieve academically in ways ESL, TBE, English Immersion, and even other varieties of developmental programs do not. However, in light of the potential power dynamics that operate in dual language programs, educators are encouraged to critically analyze the everyday micro practices of their local dual language programs.

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**TABE JOURNAL**  
**Spring 2009, Volume 11, Number 1**  
**Invitation to Submit Manuscripts**

*Editors:*  
*Dr. Josefina Villamil Tinajero & Dr. Judith Munter,*  
*The University of Texas at El Paso*

The TABE (Texas Association for Bilingual Education) Journal, a peer-reviewed publication, is distributed by TABE for the purpose of improving practice and advancing the knowledge base in bilingual education. The Journal seeks articles that examine policies, theoretical constructs, cultural issues or practices impacting bilingual teaching and learning. Review of books and other media and descriptions of successful classroom practices will also be considered. The TABE Journal will publish articles written in either English or Spanish. The Editorial Board will consider clarity of presentation and timeliness of the content in judging the quality of the manuscripts.

**Focus:** This issue invites researchers and practitioners to submit articles and essays on bilingual education in Texas with a special focus on data-driven decision-making in bilingual education. Qualitative and quantitative studies that can contribute to the growing knowledge base on bilingual education models and best practices are especially welcome. Other issues to be addressed include assessment and evaluation, social justice concerns, and the challenges of bilingual education in the context of high stakes accountability.

**Who Should Submit:** Higher education faculty, graduate students and staff with experience planning/designing/implementing and conducting research on bilingual education programs; K-12 teachers and administrators with bilingual education knowledge and experience.

Procedure, Requirements, Deadlines and Editing Policy: Manuscripts are to be submitted electronically as a **Word Document**.

Send e-mail attachment, MS-Word-doc-file type, to tinajero@utep.edu with copy to [jmunter@utep.edu](mailto:jmunter@utep.edu), and tabe@sbcglobal.net. We do not accept zipped or compressed files. To ensure reviews are "blind," the author(s) must include a separate MS-Word-doc-file with name(s), address, telephone number, E-mail address and institutional affiliation. E-mail will be our way to communicate with you. **It is further requested that a brief abstract of no more than 150 words describing the essence of the article be included.**

**Manuscripts are due by May 31, 2009.** Early submission is encouraged; it facilitates the journal's double-blind-peer reviewed process and provides longer time for revision.

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**Format and Style Requirements:** Authors should follow APA (5th edition) guidelines for citations and references. Manuscripts accepted for the publication are subject to editing. Manuscripts should be between 15-25 pages, double-spaced, standard 12" font, one-inch margins. It is the author's responsibility to ensure that any stylistic and grammatical errors are corrected prior to publication.

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