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Discovering Pride and Enthusiasm at a Dual Immersion School

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In California, dual immersion programs are increasing. Knowing more than one language is a valuable skill for all students. In order for educators to support students in developing their multilingual abilities it is important that we have constant reflection about our teaching pedagogy and try multiple strategies to engage students. As a first-year teacher in the Teacher Education Program (TEP) at UCLA, I decided to focus my Master's Thesis Inquiry Project on instilling enthusiasm and pride among students who demonstrated a resistance to learning Spanish in a dual language immersion program. To address the issue of resistance, I created a unit of study around the value of bilingualism. The theories that informed my study were culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). My main data collection strategies included semi-structured interviews, participant observation, collection of student work, and survey collection from six parents and eighteen students. Findings from this study suggest that personal narratives can be a powerful medium for inspiring pride and enthusiasm in the process of becoming bilingual.

What follows is a reflection about my teaching practices as a novice teacher during my inquiry project. The methodology of my project will be discussed, as well as my positionality as an educator. I will go further into detail about the site where I conducted my study. The theoretical frameworks that informed my study and how they relate to practice will be addressed. I start the discussion section by providing an analysis of student and parent perceptions. Followed by a description of strategies that educators use to engage students in learning Spanish. A discussion of my findings, which include the importance of personal narratives in creating effective strategies for engaging students in learning another language as well as the importance of sharing personal narratives in the classroom, will be explored.

### **Context**

According to the Pew Research Center (2013) California has the largest overall Hispanic population (14.7 million). It is evident that in the state of California dual immersion programs are on the rise. Los Angeles is home to one of the biggest Latino populations in the United States. My inquiry project was conducted at August Immersion Charter in Baldwin Village, a low-income neighborhood in South Los Angeles. According to the Los Angeles Times (2015), 70.3% percent of its residents are Black and 17.3% are Latino. This elementary school is in its third year of existence and has Transitional Kindergarten (TK)-4<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms. It practices the 90/10 model of dual language immersion, starting in TK/Kindergarten 90% of instruction is in Spanish and 10% is in English. Each year the amount of instruction in Spanish decreases by 10%, while English increases. The mission of this dual immersion school is to provide an environment focused on project based learning and constructivism, in order to

develop students' critical thinking skills and bilingual ability. The school was founded by parents and community members, who created a parent council that focuses on fundraising for the school and advocating for parent and student rights. This school has developed an inclusive atmosphere in which parents, staff, teachers, and community members work together to ensure that student needs are met. Teachers are placed in grade levels teams to collaborate and develop curriculum.

Overall, at this site, the majority of its students come from English-dominant families, making this school a very unique institution. Even though the 90/10 model of dual immersion is in place, the demographics make this model more challenging to implement because there are more Spanish Language Learners or English Only students than English Language Learners (ELL). The teacher does the majority of the modeling of the Spanish language. Bridging between both languages is used as a way to further support students' language development. Concepts are first introduced in English and then reinforced in Spanish.

I taught first grade at August Immersion Charter and 80% of my instruction was in Spanish while 20% was in English. Language Arts and Math were taught in Spanish. Social Studies and Science were taught in English. I had 18 students in my classroom: ten males and eight females. In terms of language development there were a total of nine English Language Learners (ELL) and nine English Only (EO) students. My English Only students were placed in the Spanish Language Learner category. My students ranged in age from 5-7. Eight of them were Latinos, five were African American, and five were Caucasian. Four of the eighteen students lived in the neighborhood where the school is located while the rest lived in more affluent neighborhoods in the surrounding area. Although this is a dual immersion school where the languages taught are English and Spanish, the dominant language spoken by students is English. Within the first weeks of teaching 1<sup>st</sup> grade, I noticed that students were resistant to speaking Spanish. Throughout the day, I would provide instruction to students in Spanish and all eighteen students would respond in English. In August, when I asked them if they wanted to learn Spanish, the majority did not want to learn it. Given the resistance to Spanish that I noticed early on, I wanted my project to support students' bilingual development. I implemented my eight-week unit between the months of January 2016 to March 2016.

### **Positionality**

I grew up in a small town in the Central Valley of California and experienced educational inequities, which inform my positionality as a social justice educator. As the daughter of Salvadoran immigrants who came to the United States to avoid the violence of the Civil War in El Salvador during the

1980s, I have learned the value of pursuing an education. I identify as a first-generation college student and woman of color.

Reading Gloria Anzaldúa's work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), helped me understand the importance of language and identity. Anzaldúa always accepted her language and has fought to have her culture accepted. I am bilingual and can speak English and Spanish; as a result, I have embraced both languages and learned how to use both in order to preserve my past and culture. These languages are a part of my identity—thus, "I am my language" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 59). I have come to a firm understanding that bilingual education provides children with cognitive benefits as well as an affirmation of their culture, which can create a positive environment for students to reach their educational goals. I am passionate about bilingual education and I hope to transfer that same passion to my students.

As a Latina woman who has managed to navigate the educational pipeline, I continue to strive to achieve my academic goals and motivate other youth of color to pursue their academic aspirations. I define social justice as an appreciation of the experience of those in my community and acknowledgment of the struggles faced by people of color. Social justice is working together to end oppression and create social change. Education is crucial to creating social change and is used to empower youth. I know that I should not concentrate solely on the deficits within my community, but validate the experiences that my students come to school with.

## Methods

A mixed methods approach was used for this qualitative study, which included participant observation, survey collection from both parents and students, and semi-structured interviews with students and teachers. Pre-surveys were collected at the beginning of the study and post surveys were collected at the end of the study, in order to track how students' perceptions about learning Spanish changed. All eighteen students in my classroom participated. One second-grade teacher and a first-grade teacher were interviewed about the strategies they used in their classroom to make learning Spanish more engaging. Six parents participated in the survey, and three parents shared their language journey and views about language in the classroom.

In order to address the issue of resistance, I created an eight-week unit of study around the value of bilingualism. The unit that I developed focused on the importance of knowing more than one language, the history of Spanish in the United States, higher education, the cognitive benefits of being multilingual, and how multilingual individuals can help their community. I provided examples of how being bilingual could help them learn to read and write in other languages. In addition, I provided them with examples of how knowing more than one language can help them in pursuing higher education. I focused on how useful it is to know multiple languages while studying abroad. Throughout the unit the focus was on raising awareness of Spanish speaking countries. The three countries that I focused on were Spain, El Salvador, and Mexico. This unit allowed students to think critically about the world around them and especially about the history that they know about the United States. In addition, students learned the value of translating in their community and how they can use their knowledge to empower others. The research questions guiding this study were: *What are the perceptions that parents and students have about learning Spanish and English? Are the perceptions of both students and parents the same? What strategies can I use in my classroom to counter the resistance of students to speak Spanish and instead inspire pride and enthusiasm to learn a second language?* During the first two weeks of my inquiry, I conducted pre-surveys asking students and parents their perceptions about English and Spanish. In addition, I interviewed two teachers at this site about the strategies that they use to engage students to learn a new language. During the third week, I focused on the history and context surrounding Spanish in California. During the fourth week, the focus was on raising awareness of different Spanish speaking countries such as Spain, El Salvador, and Mexico by connecting the value of knowing more than one language to higher education. During the fifth week, students, community members, and parents discussed their language journeys. During the sixth week, the focus was on how by knowing more than one language students could help others in their community. During week seven, I focused on the cognitive benefits of knowing more than one

language and what a dual immersion program is. And finally, during week eight, I had students complete post surveys, interviews, and facilitated community circles. The community circles allowed students to share their experiences with language development and to talk about how they felt about learning Spanish. In addition, community circles served as focal points for students to hear multiple viewpoints about the same topic.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The two main theories that inform my study are culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2005) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). In my classroom, I have created a space where we are a community of learners, where the students, parents, and myself learn from each other, and support one another in learning (Rogoff, 1994). I take my students feedback into account when developing lessons. Through this unit students learned through interactions with each other, other individuals, and myself in our community. Sociocultural theory states that “The basis for all learning is social interaction,” this is key for ensuring that students have multiple entry points for learning (Walqui, 2002, p.2).

According to Ladson-Billings (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three pillars: “(a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they can challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p.160). Culturally relevant pedagogy includes being in a state of critical reflection. Critical reflection as an educator “requires one to seek deeper levels of self-knowledge and to acknowledge how one’s own world view can shape students’ concept of self (Howard, 2003, p. 193). In my teaching practice, I continuously analyzed my classroom and looked for the assets my students brought to the learning space in order to fully support their academic success.

My unit was grounded in the theory of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), which includes 6 different forms of capital. Community cultural wealth focuses on using students’ assets as a tool for empowerment. According to Yosso (2005) linguistic capital “reflects the idea that Students of Color arrive to school with multiple language and communication skills,” (p.78) students that are fluent in a language other than English should be seen as an asset to their community. Aspirational capital includes showing resiliency given barriers and obstacles. According to Yosso (2005) “Resiliency is evidenced in those who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances,” (p. 78) given the institutionalized barriers that exist for students of color it is important to note that they come to school with aspirational capital. During this project, students were able to see the assets that their community has and how they themselves are assets to their own community. In addition, parents

were able to share their goals and aspirations for their students, which further supported resiliency in their community.

## **Discussion**

### *Student Perceptions about Learning Spanish*

In order to gauge students' perceptions of learning English and Spanish, I conducted pre-and post-surveys. The questions on the pre-and post-surveys included items such as: When I think of Spanish, I think of \_\_\_\_\_. When I think of English I think of \_\_\_\_\_. In addition, I compared student answers in the opening and closing community circles, which included the question: Do you want to speak Spanish? Why or why not? For the students that had a negative perception in the pre-survey and continued to express it in the post-surveys, I interviewed them as well.

In the pre-surveys my nine Spanish Language Learners and nine English Language Learners drew images of their family members, friends, their favorite animals or me in response to the above questions. The perceptions that students had were positive towards both languages. In the community circle during week one I asked: *Do you want to speak Spanish? Why or Why not?* A total of 14 students said yes and 4 students said no. Out of the four students that said no, three of them were English Language Learners and one was a Spanish Language Learner. Even though, the results of my pre-surveys made it evident that the majority of students showed positive perceptions about Spanish or English, there were still four students that did not want to speak Spanish.

During the post community circle in week eight only Enrique, an English Language Learner further elaborated on his resistance to speaking Spanish by saying, *"I don't want to speak Spanish because I already speak it at home,"* (personal communication, Enrique, March 2016). Another English Language Learner, Liliana who initially said that she did not want to speak Spanish in the pre-survey, answered in the following way during the post community circle: *"Yes, so I can translate for my brother"* (personal communication, Liliana, March 3, 2016). Dominique, a Spanish Language Learner who had initially said that he did not want to speak Spanish during week one stated in the post community circle, *"Yes, because I want to help my community"* (personal communication, Dominique, March 3, 2016). Jorge another English Language Learner initially stated that he did not want to speak Spanish in the pre-survey, but by the end of our unit (in our post community circle during week eight) he confirmed that he did in fact want to speak Spanish.

The results of this survey showed me that the perceptions of three of the four "Spanish Resistant" students changed over time through the course of our

unit on the value of bilingual education. The three English Language Learners that initially said in week one that they did not want to speak Spanish were Latinos and the Spanish Language Learner that did not want to speak Spanish was African American. This is important to note because even students who have a background in Spanish may be resistant to Spanish, which I found interesting. One insight provided by Enrique that explains his resistance to his home language is that he already spoke Spanish at home so he did not want or need to speak it at school—perhaps his parents encourage him to develop his English at school while they provide Spanish development support at home. For English dominant speakers, the resistance seems to be related to the difficulty associated with learning a second language. For example, Destiny a Spanish Language Learner stated, “*I want to learn Spanish but it is hard. Like um...words like um...pero (points to a picture of a dog) and pero*” (personal communication, Destiny, March 17, 2016). It is also important to study both student and parents’ perceptions about language.

#### *Parent Perceptions about Learning Spanish*

In order to gauge the perceptions of parents in the classroom, a survey was sent home to students’ families. Parents also had the opportunity to come into our classroom and discuss their language journey with our community. Six parents filled out the survey and three parents came to share their language journey with us. The survey that was sent home had questions similar to those of the language journey. They included questions such as: *What language(s) do you speak? What do you think is the value of knowing more than one language? Why did you enroll your child at this school? Do you have conversations with your child about being bilingual?* Two Latino parents submitted surveys and their students were English Language Learners. The other four were parents of children who are Spanish Language Learners; two of them were Caucasian and the other two were African American. The perceptions of eight out of nine parents who either participated in the language journey or survey matched those of their students. All nine parents value knowing more than one language and they enrolled their student in a dual immersion program to either help their community or to help them understand another culture. In response to the question: *What do you think is the value of knowing more than one language?* Uriel’s father wrote: “*El valor de ser bilingüe es ser mejor en su persona....para mi hijo ayudar a la demás gente que no entienda el inglés o español a la vez y seguir superandose*” (“*The value of being bilingual is in being a better person....for my son to help other people who don’t understand English or Spanish while advancing in his own life*”). Uriel’s father emphasizes how the value of knowing more than one language is for his child to not only be a better person, but to also help others in his community. Uriel is an English Language Learner and his mom also participated in the language journey.



When she visited our classroom, she shared her experience as a Mexican immigrant who cannot speak English.

#### *Parents and Special Guests – Sharing Language Journeys*

Jorge's mom participated in sharing her language journey with our class. She values knowing more than one language and explained her journey as a Guatemalan immigrant to the United States and how this shaped her decision to enroll Jorge in a dual immersion program. Jorge's mom, Laura is bilingual and speaks both English and Spanish. When sharing her language journey Laura mentioned:

*“After 15 years that I live in Guatemala. My parents brought me here. I have to learn another language that is English. It was really hard. I was old and I had to go to big kids' school. They put me in a special program for people that doesn't speak English. They all speak English and I didn't. It took me a while, a few years. I was scared to talk. I am still learning now. No one in Guatemala speaks English and I want him to communicate with his cousins and family. Also, he(Jorge) says he wants to be a firefighter what about if you need to rescue someone that doesn't speak English and only speaks Spanish, how are you going to communicate with them? That's why I put him in this school so he can learn Spanish and be bilingual”* (personal communication, Laura, February 10, 2016).

When Verenice, Uriel's mom shared her language journey she emphasized her strong ties to language and culture that she wants her child to have. Through her journey students were able to see the role that they could have as bilingual because Verenice mentioned how they could translate for people like her that can only speak Spanish. Verenice shared the following:

*“Yo no hablo ingles no mas español. Por eso para mi es importante que aprenda los dos idiomas. En Mexico hablamos puro Español. Y mi cultura me gusta mucho y yo si quiero que mi hijo lo aprenda. El día de mañana pueden ayudar a gente como mi que no saben ingles. No es lo mismo hablarlo que al estudiarlo como es”* (“I only speak Spanish. It is important to me for him to learn Spanish. In Mexico, we only speak Spanish. I like my culture and I want my son to learn it. Tomorrow you could help people like me that don't speak English. It isn't the same to speak Spanish than to study it”) (personal communication, Verenice, February 10, 2016).

After both Laura and Verenice shared their language journey students asked questions and made comments. Miguel, an English Language Learner decided to make a comment and said the following:

Miguel: *I have a comment. Yo naci solo cuando yo (turns to me and asks) How do you say the first time when I started talking?*

Srta. Carranza: *Cuando yo primero...* (When I first)

Miguel: *Cuando yo primero comencé a hablar. Yo solo sabía Español.* (When I first started speaking I only knew Spanish).

Verenice: *Eso es muy bueno.* (That is great.)

Miguel made a connection with Jorge and Uriel's mom because he realized that just like them his first language was Spanish. In the parent survey, Beth's dad mentioned that: *It is important to embrace different cultures, as well as languages. The more we communicate and connect with each other as humans; the better.*" This is evident because just by having parents come in and share their language journey Miguel was able to connect with Laura and Verenice. In addition, Miguel is an English Language Learner and his parents had previously told me that he is bilingual, but refuses to speak Spanish. Miguel attempted to speak Spanish and formulated a sentence orally with my help. He usually will translate for other students, but will only speak to me in English. This showed me that he was really engaged because he not only made a connection with the two parents that came in but spoke in Spanish.

What I found really interesting is that Jorge initially did not want to speak Spanish when I surveyed the class early in the unit. In the post-survey, his perceptions changed and he said, *"I want to speak Spanish to help people"* (personal communication, Jorge, March 8, 2016). Initially his perceptions did not match that of his mom, but then his perceptions changed at the end of the unit. Listening to his mom's language journey and struggles as a Guatemalan immigrant may have contributed to changing his perception. Perhaps he felt proud at seeing the value his mother demonstrated in being an expert in the community, and it helped him develop more pride for speaking his native language.

Overall, it is evident that at the end of the study the students and parent's perceptions were the same. Although there were four students that initially expressed that they did not want to speak Spanish, during the community circles in week eight the perceptions of three of them changed and they indicated that they wanted to speak Spanish. Some insights I gained from inviting parents to the classroom to share their language journeys are that students are very receptive to listening to parents come into the classroom. They are really excited to have guests come in and share their experiences. By hearing other parents share their stories students are more willing to share theirs, which provide students a chance to become aware of the linguistic capital that they bring to the classroom. Not

only did the students listen to the guest speakers, but they also used their communication skills to engage with them. In addition to bringing parents into the classroom I was able to explore strategies that other teachers are using to inspire pride and enthusiasm to learn a second language.

### *Strategies to Counter the Resistance to Learning Spanish*

In order to learn more about the strategies that I could use in my classroom to counter the resistance of students to speak Spanish, I interviewed two teachers that teach first and second grade at my school. The questions I asked included: *What strategies do you use to engage students in learning a second language? Are students resistant to speaking Spanish in your classroom? If so, how do you counter this resistance?* The answers to these questions provided me with insight into strategies teachers' use and also further understanding into how other teachers make sense of students' perceptions about learning Spanish. Everything I learned from more experienced teachers helped inform my inquiry project.

Ms. Cervantes has been teaching for 12 years and is currently teaching second grade. This is her second-year teaching at this particular dual immersion school. She has noticed the resistance that students have to speaking Spanish and notes the following:

*“It seems there is a lack of motivation and understanding about why they need to learn Spanish. It feels like they are learning Spanish because someone else wants them to learn Spanish and they don't know the benefits of learning Spanish” (personal communication, January 25, 2016).*

In order to counter this resistance Ms. Cervantes uses a lot of song and dance to make learning Spanish more fun and engaging. In addition, she states *“I try to make a personal connection to them so I tell them why Spanish is important to me and in a way, that helps them understand that they should give it a shot because it is important to me. Since they care about me they are trying to make an effort in Spanish” (personal communication, Ms. Cervantes, January 25, 2016).*

By having community circles, I made sure that I created space to make personal connections with students about why Spanish is important to me. My hope was that by sharing this, students would be able to connect with these reasons and if not, then be exposed to multiple rationales as to why knowing more than one language is valuable. It is important for students to be intrinsically motivated to learn another language. Ms. Santiago is a second-year teacher and currently teaches first grade. This is her second-year teaching at August Immersion Charter School. Ms. Santiago has noticed the resistance of her students to speaking Spanish and uses constant praise and encouragement to counter this. One of her

main strategies for making learning a second language engaging is visuals. When discussing how the demographics affect her classroom she said, “*The only model they have is me. It is hard when they can’t relate to it. I am the teacher - they need someone their own age and be more involved, instead of me telling them to learn it*” (personal communication, Ms. Santiago, January 25, 2016).

For my unit, I chose to include the participation of older students from our school. Two students, who were Spanish Language Learners from the 4th grade classroom, came in and shared their language journeys with our class. By having students come in and share their experiences, students were able to see Spanish modeled by other children near their age. When I asked students how it was to hear from their peers about their language journeys, the majority of them said that they did not know that one of the students, Johanna did not speak Spanish before coming to this dual immersion school. This showed me that the students were not aware of their peer’s language backgrounds and if there were more opportunities to have students from other classrooms engage, they would be able to create a stronger learning community.

The interviews I conducted with teachers gave me further insight and direction for how to approach my project. I learned from their experience and expertise by integrating the strategies that worked for them into my unit. One major lesson I learned from my study was the power of storytelling in inspiring pride and enthusiasm for learning a second language.

## **Findings**

### *Narratives Make a Difference*

Personal narratives can inspire interest and enthusiasm among students, and they can also positively effect the creation of teaching strategies for teachers. By working collaboratively with other teachers and listening to their own lived experiences, I was able to gain insights into our shared challenges while learning creative strategies to address the “resistance to Spanish” implications. While interviewing two other teachers at my site, I was able to not only implement their strategies in my classroom but also learn from their personal narratives. It is evident that by having teachers share their stories they can further help their teaching community. It is important for teachers to engage with other teachers to gain more knowledge about what strategies they can use in their classrooms—and the medium of storytelling can be very helpful.

### *Storytelling*

Storytelling is how human beings communicate. According to McAdams (2008), “Meaning is expressed not only in what the storyteller says but also in the way he or she says it,” (p. 242) it was evident when parents came into the classroom and shared their experiences about immigration and the language

barriers that they have overcome, that they helped students become more engaged in learning another language. A major finding that emerged through my project concerns the power of storytelling. I have come to see that personal narratives can engage students in learning a second language and support their educational aspirations. For example, throughout my unit on the value of bilingualism, I shared my own personal stories surrounding my participation in protests, studying abroad in college, my translating experiences, and language journey. When I shared my experiences about studying abroad with my class and explained how it is really fun to learn another language in college, students were really engaged and had many questions about these experiences. In addition, they all said that they were going to go to college and study abroad in countries such as El Salvador, France, and Spain. The day after doing a presentation about college and studying abroad, I went to pick up my students from recess and overheard a conversation with two of my students. Jamal asked Miguel, “*Are you going to UC Berkeley with me and Eric?*” Jamal said, “*Yes I am going!*” (personal communication, Jamal & Miguel February 17, 2016). This allowed me to observe the kind of impact the sharing of my personal stories about college had on my students.

By reflecting on my daily experiences with my students, I examined exactly what strategies students responded positively to and what was relevant to them. Since my study focused on language development and instilling pride in learning Spanish it was important to make sure that the strategies that I used to reach my goal were culturally relevant to the students I was working with. Students need to be given material that they find useful and that can activate their prior knowledge. For example, instead of providing articles about people’s beliefs about language, I gave students the opportunity to listen to guest speakers from their community. It was evident that I needed to try new ways to make learning Spanish more engaging. The students needed different entry points for engaging in the value of knowing more than one language. This included books, videos, and real-life examples that could teach them the value of knowing Spanish and about the different experiences that each person has with language. I knew it was not enough for me to constantly tell my students why it is important to learn Spanish but instead provide them with other culturally relevant examples.

It is important to show the relevance of past social movements and the influence they have on others historically. During week 3, when we discussed the East L.A. Walkouts, I used the examples of walking out and protesting to explore how they can be used a powerful tool for social change. I shared my experience about walking out in protest of the fee hikes that were occurring at UC Berkeley in 2009. The students asked many questions, such as how did it feel when you walked out? What did you do after the protest? By making a personal connection between my life and the East L.A. Walkouts, I was able to make the importance of

using their voices to end injustices more relevant to my students. The students were able to see that fighting injustices is not a thing of the past but is still an ongoing phenomenon. This was important because language is a tool that is used to give people a voice. I wanted my students to understand that by knowing more than one language, they can use their voices to collaborate with others to create social change and empower those that are silenced. I learned that by sharing my own personal narratives, my students were able to engage critically and further develop a social consciousness, which is a pillar of culturally relevant pedagogy. The discussions we had surrounding these issues were in English.

Perhaps the most notable example of the power of storytelling happened when parents were invited into our classroom to share their language journeys. Students were genuinely interested in hearing from “elders” in the community and the stories that were shared seem to help inspire interest, pride and enthusiasm for being bilingual. Elders are older adults in the community that are seen with respect, because of their wisdom and knowledge. According to Villanueva & Hubbard (2001), “a cultural synthesis’ approach to education recognizes the cultural knowledge of students and their parents and invites them to participate in ways that are compatible,” (p.42) applying this approach in my classroom provided a way for students to learn from parents’ experiences with language, in particular Spanish. Activities where students bring their families into the classroom can validate their home life. Creating spaces for students to include it in the classroom was very important. By allowing parents to come in as guest speakers, students were able to learn about other parents’ experiences with language, and learn something new about their classmates and their home life. For example, during a community circle we asked the question: *How did it feel to listen to parents share their language journeys?* Six of my eighteen students mentioned that they learned that Uriel’s mom did not speak English and that it was good that Uriel translated for her. Beth, a Spanish Language Learner asked: *“Uriel, do you translate for your mom?”* He said, with a smile, *“Yes, I do.”* Beth responded with *“Wow”* (personal communication, February 11, 2016). This experience made students, like Uriel, who is an English Language Learner, feel validated, because students were impressed that he translated for his mom and were valuing his home life.

Another student whose mother was a guest speaker seemed to change his perception about language after his mother shared her own language journey. At the beginning of the survey Jorge did not want to speak Spanish but in the end, he said that he did want to speak Spanish. Inviting parents to come into the classroom to share their stories along with their perceptions about language and why they chose to put their child into this school seemed to have a positive influence on the students’ own ideas—they were able to see more of a connection between their home and school life and gained insight into the value of being

bilingual from a valued member of the community. By being culturally responsive and being inclusive of parent participation in the classroom, I was able to bridge the “meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities” (Howard, p.6, 2012). When students are able to bring their parents into the classroom, they are able to share their life experiences with their peers. This type of parent engagement allows for students to feel like their home life is validated at school.

### **Teaching for Social Justice**

Social justice educators are not only implementing various teaching strategies, but also constantly reflecting on how these strategies can be changed to meet the needs of their students. Just because one strategy worked with a particular group of students does not mean that it will always work or that it cannot be modified. Through inquiry and trying different strategies, new strategies can be further developed or discovered. Constant reflection and modification is key for inquiry.

Engaging in this inquiry process made me a stronger social justice educator, because I was able to use this experience to reflect on my positionality and teaching pedagogy. Social justice is about recognizing the oppressions that exist in our communities and working as a community to create social change. I see language as a tool for social justice. Language provides those that are silenced in our community with a voice. One of the main reasons why knowing more than one language is valuable is because the ability to translate can help many. With that being said, it was difficult for me to be in a space where I felt that my strong views about language were not being shared or understood by my students. I grew up valuing and understanding the value of knowing more than one language.

When my students refused to speak Spanish at the beginning of the year, it was a struggle for me to teach, because of the lack of engagement. When I was teaching in Spanish, their level of engagement was lower than when I was teaching in English. This was an issue because the majority of the instructional day was in Spanish. Even though I understood the value of knowing more than one language and see being bilingual as way to end the oppression of others, it was important for me to understand why my students did not share these views. I had to think of ways to make learning another language more engaging and relevant for them. I wanted my students to see the impact they could make in their community by knowing another language and the positive outcomes it could have on their educational trajectory. It is evident that they were not aware of the value of knowing more than one language, and at the end of the unit they were able to understand the importance of learning another language.

### **Conclusion**

While teaching at a Dual Immersion School it is important to understand the perceptions that both students and parents have about the value of knowing more than one language. Constant communication with parents, teachers, and students about why being multilingual is important is necessary. If students do not know or understand why their parents have enrolled them in a dual immersion program, they are less likely to want to learn a language other than the language they are most comfortable speaking. Parents can support their students by explaining to them why they are placing them in the program and the value of being multilingual. If parents need support they can ask their student's teacher to identify literature or provide resources for them to discuss the value of bilingual education. Had my students not been exposed to the importance of being bilingual and not listened to other people's narratives about language, I believe their resistance to Spanish may have continued. From this study, it is clear to me that students benefit from being aware of the purpose of dual immersion programs, the history of language in California, the cognitive benefits of being bilingual, how knowing another language can benefit their community, and all the opportunities that open in combining bilingualism with higher educational experiences, like studying abroad.

The role of a social justice educator is not only to teach, but also to act as a mentor. During this unit, I shared a lot of my own personal experiences with language and higher education. Students of Color (SOC) are underrepresented in higher education, which makes it important to expose them to it at a young age. It is never too early to talk to students about college. Students react positively and are more engaged when they can make connections with the material being presented. In my future classes, I will continue to expose students to higher education and serve as a mentor for my students when they need help with their academic goals and aspirations. According to Chacón (2008), "In California, predominantly African American and Latina/o schools are increasingly the schools with the fewest resources, the highest rates of underqualified teachers, and the lowest number of college preparatory course offerings" (p.1223). Even though, students may not have all the resources to pursue higher education, teachers can use their community's cultural wealth to expose students to higher education. If every teacher talked to their students about their experiences with higher education, then there could be more Students of Color exposed to it. This could lead to more of them pursuing higher education.

If parents, students, and community members are not aware of the value of students knowing more than one language, programs like this will continue to not be as readily available. Dual immersion programs can enrich students' learning experiences and support them in critically engaging with the world around them. As social justice educators, it is our role to not only teach but to work with our communities to create social change. By working with others in our community,



we can also be advocates for change in our current educational system. Bilingual education provides students with a different epistemology to look at the world and appreciate the different cultures within it. It is time for Californians to value bilingualism and give students greater educational opportunities. My findings indicated that the perceptions of the students that initially did not want to speak Spanish changed over time. It is not enough to just teach my students Spanish. I need to also remind them of the value of learning a second language and the broader connections that they can form with others by being multilingual. As I continue my journey as a social justice educator, I will continue to reflect on my teaching pedagogy and constantly search for new ways to engage my students.

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### Appendix A

