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The CATESOL Journal

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1mj281qc>

Journal

The CATESOL Journal, 23(1)

ISSN

1535-0517

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Publication Date

2012

DOI

10.5070/B5.36193

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“Little by Little:” Classroom Practices That Can Silence Latino Kindergartners

This study explored the role of school in promoting positive bi-cultural and bilingual identities through the encouragement of Spanish use in 7 Latino children in 1 kindergarten classroom in North Carolina. Using a case study approach, researchers collected data through participant observations and interviews to examine the classroom practices of teachers with self-reported positive attitudes toward the use of Spanish by their students in this school. The results from the data revealed that there was a disconnect between what teachers espoused about heritage-language retention and the actual practices used to encourage native language use. While teachers openly stated in interviews that it was important for the Latino students to continue to speak and use their native language, the culture of the classroom and common practices used in this classroom failed to provide these Latino students with meaningful interactions with one another or their native English-speaking peers. In fact, mandates for silence and the separation of students in the kindergarten classroom resulted in very little use of language, whether in Spanish or in English. Implications for educators are discussed.

The acquisition of English is a critical factor in determining academic achievement and overall educational success for the immigrant child (Guerrero, 2004; Holmes, Hedlund, & Nickerson, 2000; Tse, 2001). While the theories that offer connections between first and second language (L2) development vary (Myers-Scotton, 2006), evidence supports the multiple ways in which native or first language (L1) maintenance can support L2 development (Krashen & McField, 2005). In fact, research on students with two fully developed languages show that they have an academic advantage (de Jong & Howard, 2009; Lindhom-Leary & Block, 2010; Rojas & Reagan, 2003). Empirical studies show that bilingual children have a deeper awareness of language itself, are more creative, have greater academic success, and perform better on standardized tests than their monolingual counterparts (Cook, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Research findings have consistently shown that children in bilingual programs that foster dual languages typically outperform or match their

counterparts in all-English programs on English assessments that measure academic achievement (Baker, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008; Krashen & McField, 2005; Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010).

Even with powerful evidence that supports bilingual programs and the maintenance of L1 skills, instruction for immigrant students in U.S. schools is often based on monolingual and subtractive frameworks in which the only language of instruction is English (Menken & Kleyn, 2010). While immigrant children have the potential to develop into fully functioning bilinguals, the messages that they receive about their heritage languages are too often negative and can result in language attrition. In addition to the loss of the fundamental ability to communicate in students' native languages, the unintended consequences can be profound. Researchers have found that native language loss can negatively influence students' social interactions, identity development, and create tension within immediate and extended family units (Kouritzin, 1999, 2000). This attrition, according to Lee and Oxelson (2006), "is more than just a loss of a linguistic system; it is a separation from their roots, a denial of their ethnic identity, and a dismissal of their potential as a bilingual and bicultural member of society" (p. 455). With the current influx of immigrants to the US, researchers from multiple fields have begun to examine the factors that contribute to the maintenance [or loss] of heritage languages in immigrant students (Guiberson, Barrett, Jancosek, & Yoshinaga-Itano, 2006). To add to the current literature base, this study explored the role of the classroom, teachers, and peers in promoting heritage-language retention. Specifically, the purposes of this study were to (a) examine how and when Spanish was used by Latino students, and (b) explore the classroom practices that can contribute to either additive or subtractive bilingualism.

Significance of the Local Context

National demographic data show that while immigrant populations in the US show a steady increase in all geographic areas, the number of Latinos has exploded in the Southeastern regions of the US (Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002; Wainer, 2004). More than 530,000 Latinos are now living in North Carolina, making it one of the fastest-growing immigrant populations in the country. According to the most recent U.S. Census data, Latinos make up 16.3% of the U.S. population. In North Carolina, there are more than 800,000 Latinos represented, making up 8.4% of the state's population (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Unlike the six states (California, New York, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey) that have been historically identified as primary destination points, North Carolina is populated by newcomers primarily from Mexico who have arrived mostly since 1995 (Fix & Passel, 2003). Inevitably, an increase in immigrants to this area has resulted in an influx of nonnative English-speaking immigrant children, affecting both teachers and students. However, most immigrant children are placed in classrooms with untrained or ill-prepared teachers (Antunez, 2002; Menken & Antunez, 2001). Data collected from "Teacher Quality: A Report on The Preparation and Qualifications of Public School Teachers" revealed that on a national level, more than 50% of teachers taught

limited English-proficient (LEP) or culturally diverse students, and only 20% of teachers reported being well prepared to address the needs of these students (NCES, 2004). With this rapid growth of English language learners (ELLs) in the state of North Carolina, schools have been unable to keep up.

Review of the Literature

After reviewing the relevant literature (see Fishman, 2001; Wright, 2004), Menken and Kleyn (2010) asserted that most immigrant groups in the US will lose their native language skills and use only English by the third generation. Theorists have termed this frequent loss or replacement of language as *negative* or *subtractive bilingualism* (García, 2009). Negative bilingualism occurs as a student's L1 is gradually replaced by a more dominant and prestigious L2. The myth that maintaining native language skills can be confusing to students learning English, and that it can potentially hinder their cognitive development, is frequently perpetuated in schools (Espinosa, 2008). Neves (1997) stated that individuals affected by negative bilingualism "develop low levels of language proficiency in both languages," resulting in a significant cognitive disadvantage throughout their lives (p. 191).

Societal Forces That Affect Loss

Preference of English over native languages in immigrant children has been documented in different studies (Stafford, Jenkes, & Santos, 1997). Scholars have argued that this preference is influenced by societal forces that place English at the center and less dominant linguistic forms and languages in the margins (Cummins, 2009; Worthy, Rodriguez-Galindo, Assaf, Martinez, & Cuero, 2003). Wong-Fillmore (2000) claimed that children quickly come to discover that language is a social barrier, and that English is the only language that is valued at school. Other researchers have shown that although many students demonstrate pride in their cultural heritage and language, they feel pressure to become fluent English speakers, despite the cost (Worthy et al., 2003). As an unintended consequence, many researchers have argued, when students learn to value English over their native languages and cultures, they often become highly critical or resistant to these languages and to the people within their communities who speak them (Baker, 2006; Nieto & Bode, 2008). Ignoring children's bilingual and bicultural identities and failing to maintain home languages actually perpetuates the educational inequities they face in U.S. schools (García & Kleifgen, 2010). Supporting this position, Cummins (2009) argued that the disparities in the educational achievement of immigrant learners are shaped more prominently by interactions between power and privilege than on linguistic variables.

The Role of Schools

Although the benefits of maintaining heritage languages have been documented (de Jong & Howard, 2009), few efforts have been made to promote native language use in schools and classrooms. Researchers have shown that negative messages from schools and teachers can play a great role in language

loss (Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Worthy & Rodriguez-Galindo, 2006). Halcon (2001), for example, found that school personnel in one school “treat Spanish as a deficit that needs to be eliminated in order for Latinos to succeed in school” (p. 75). Shannon (2008) argued that any restriction of native language use implicitly teaches students that there is a societal devaluation of any language other than English.

Research conducted on attitudes and beliefs shows that teachers without proper training in working with linguistically diverse students believe that the responsibility of heritage-language retention falls directly on the parents, claiming that schools do not have the time or resources to foster bilingualism (Lee & Oxelson, 2006). In fact, Lee and Oxelson reported that teachers believed that “heritage language maintenance will prevent fully acculturating into this society” (p. 266). Far from supporting L1 use and preservation, research has also shown that classroom practices often discourage immigrant students from using their native language skills. Toohey (2000), for example, documented how immigrant students are often isolated and strategically placed away from other students who share the same native languages as a means to limit their abilities to communicate in a language other than English.

Rather than supporting students’ development as bilinguals with bicultural identities, teachers who discourage native language use can, in fact, contribute to heritage-language attrition and subtractive bilingualism. Micro- and macro-level variables within the school context have been cited as potential forces that can contribute to this loss. Of particular interest to this study is the extent to which teacher/school attitudes toward native language use and classroom practices contribute to the perceptions students develop about their native languages and cultures. In an effort to add to the literature base, the following research study examined the school attitudes toward the use of Spanish within one rural school in the Southeast. More specifically, the researchers explored how teacher attitudes and classroom practices within different academic spaces encouraged or discouraged the development of bilingualism and bicultural identity development of 7 Latino students.

Methodology

As one of the most common ways to conduct qualitative research, case studies have been conducted in multiple fields and disciplines (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2001; Yin, 2003). Whether the case serves to refine theory or to suggest complexities for future research, the primary purpose of this type of methodology is to accurately represent the case (Silverman, 2000). For the purposes of this study, we chose to explore one kindergarten classroom in depth to better understand the complex relationships and interactions in the classrooms that promote or hinder heritage-language development. This classroom was situated within a rural school community that had recently experienced a large growth in newly arrived immigrant families. Triangulation was used to reduce the possible misinterpretation of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1988). Triangulation has been described as a “method of cross-checking data from multiple sources to search for regularities in the research

data” (O’Donoghue & Punch, 2003, p. 78). This was achieved through in-depth observations of the classroom, interviews with teachers, and researcher reflections.

Context of the Study

Consistent with larger state demographics, increased numbers of immigrant families have settled in this area, which has resulted in the substantial increase in the number of ELLs. Situated 45 minutes from a large urban area in the Southeast, Magnolia Elementary School historically served both low-income and middle-class families from a predominantly white rural community. Because of rapid development and the building of a new highway that provided access from the larger city to the smaller farming communities in the area, Magnolia Elementary became increasingly diverse in its racial composition. To protect the identities of the school, teachers, and all participants, pseudonyms are used throughout the case study.

At the time of data collection, 10% of the population at Magnolia Elementary School comprised native Spanish speakers. This number, while small in comparison to the growth in the surrounding areas, has affected the teachers and the larger community on multiple levels. While the teachers struggled in meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of the ELLs, the school as a whole embraced the increase in cultural and linguistic diversity of the student population in different ways. It was important for the school to appear friendly and inviting toward its Spanish-speaking students. Visitors entered the building and found a large area rug containing Spanish and English vocabulary and pictures that reflected diversity covering the floor of the main office. Painted on the wall was the school’s motto—a Spanish phrase that read, *Poco à Poco* (Little by Little).

The focus of the study was in one kindergarten classroom at Magnolia Elementary School. In this classroom were 23 students, one teacher, and one full-time teacher assistant. Of the students, 16 were white native English speakers with an equal number of boys and girls represented. The 7 native Spanish speakers in the classroom were the focus of the study. Participating in this study were 2 girls and 5 boys. All of these kindergarten ELLs were strategically placed in the same classroom by the administrators at the start of the school year. All of their teachers were white and native English speakers. When asked to participate in the study, all 7 students accepted with excitement. The teachers were all certified in the areas they were teaching and had impressive credentials, including numerous years of experience, several advanced degrees, and two National Board certifications. Only one of them, however, had completed any formal training for working with ELLs.

Observations

Data were collected both formally and informally over 8 months. Informal observations occurred twice a month over the entire 1st semester of school. Formal data were gathered the following spring semester using field notes from classroom observations over a 6-week period. Observations were conducted

three days per week, with each observation period lasting between 3 and 4 hours. Most of these classroom observations were conducted with the kindergarten classroom teacher, whom we called “Mrs. York,” and her assistant, “Mrs. Reynolds.”

A typical observation day began just before the official start of the school day when students were seated at the rug, ready to begin their morning routine. The observations were made on a semistructured instrument with ample space for field notes. Observations were also conducted when the students left the homeroom, in the cafeteria, and during connect (or enrichment) classes that included physical education, art, music, and media that all of the kindergarten students attended weekly. The 5 students who attended ESL pull-out sessions were followed to that classroom and observed in that setting as well.

Semistructured Interviews

As a secondary tool for gathering data, we conducted open-ended semistructured interviews with all of the teachers who interacted with these Latino students on a regular basis. These interviews lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes each and occurred at the end of the formal observation period at scheduled times. The purpose of the semistructured interviews was to gather background information on the teachers’ years of experience, their previous experience working with minority-language students, their feelings about working with these students, and their attitudes toward the students’ use of Spanish at school. All interviews were guided by questions, digitally recorded, and transcribed. Informal interviews with teachers were also conducted throughout the observation period to gather more information from the teachers about specific events or observations. Although we requested parental consent for student interviews using a Spanish translator, all of the parents declined to have their children interviewed.

Data Analysis

The primary data for this study were handwritten field notes from the formal observations and the transcribed interviews conducted with the teachers. MacLean and Mohr (1999) emphasized the importance of observations and reflective practice, taking into account the various backgrounds, expectations, and experiences that researchers have, combined with the environment of their research study. Through reflection on the field notes, we were able to critically analyze the events and identify important moments documented during the day. Preliminary analyses occurred at the end of each week, when we reviewed field notes and reflections, discussed what was observed, and recorded initial themes that emerged. We coded and interrogated the data for dominant themes and patterns as well as regularities and irregularities. Moving from coding to interpretation required that the data were examined systematically by engaging in the process of retrieval, exploration, and transformation (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). We identified themes, as Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggested, before, during, and after data collection. Using Atlas.ti (Version 6.2) we identified sub-themes and coded and analyzed the complete set of field notes at the end of the

data collection. Specific descriptions and incidents were coded with a numerical system noted with details from each observation day.

Findings

Magnolia Elementary School is presented as a case study of one rural school in North Carolina and its response to the growing numbers of Latino students in the local community. The findings are organized in three main sections that include:

1. Snapshots of the students;
2. Snapshots of the teachers; and
3. Snapshots of the classroom.

In the snapshots of the students, we describe the 7 participants and the ways they interacted in and out of the classroom. In snapshots of the teachers, we include data from semistructured interviews to capture their general beliefs and attitudes. The main focus of the study is presented as snapshots of the classroom. In this section, we provide examples from our field notes that reflected how and when Spanish was used by Latino students and what practices hindered or supported language use in the classroom.

Snapshots of the Students

There were 2 girls (Xuxa and Mireya) and 5 boys (Chale, Carlos, Rico, Santo, and Tajo) who participated in this study. All of the students spoke Spanish as their L1 and had attained varying degrees of English proficiency at the time of data collection. Of the 7 students, 5 received English as a Second Language (ESL) pull-out services.

The New Arrivals. Rico, Carlos, Santo, and Tajo were in the early stages of L2 development and received pull-out ESL services several times a week. They were friends who spent as much time together as they could. None of the 4 boys had knowledge of English before starting school, but Carlos and Tajo had some exposure to English in the school system's prekindergarten program. Rico was the leader of this group of boys, both academically and socially. Rico had a tendency to "act out" in small settings. He was spoken to daily for what teachers described as the "mischief" he created. Carlos was more reserved than Rico. He was quiet and shy, yet he always greeted his teachers with a big smile. He was eager to participate in class and volunteered often to perform various tasks. Carlos practiced what teachers described as "exemplary" behavior in the classroom by always sitting quietly and raising his hand before speaking out. When students around him became talkative, Carlos remained quiet. Santo and Tajo were the least proficient English speakers of the 7 participants. Santo enrolled at Magnolia Elementary after the beginning of the 2nd semester and spoke very little English at the time of his arrival. He remained unable to identify letters and numbers, in contrast to the other students in the class, who were able to write sentences using inventive spelling and create number sentences from models they had made from manipulatives. Tajo was enrolled in this kin-

dergarten class from the start of the school year, yet he struggled a bit more than the other students. He was much smaller than they were and described by teachers as “less mature.” He became angry easily and would refuse to participate in various activities. His feelings would be easily hurt by comments made by teachers or other students. Even though Rico, Carlos, Santo, and Tajo were in the early stages of L2 development, they all showed an eagerness to learn and engage in the classroom.

More Advanced English Language Learners. Xuxa, Chale, and Mireya added a different dimension to the research study. Xuxa and Chale entered kindergarten with advanced levels of English proficiency. Neither of them was served through the ESL pull-out services. Xuxa had attended the school system’s prekindergarten program, but Chale had not. According to the teacher, both of these students were “very bright” and participated often in class. They both always performed at or above grade level on individual assessments and could easily outperform many of their classmates on a variety of tasks. Xuxa was a reserved child and very quiet during class instruction. In contrast, Chale was considered to be a “very social little boy who was often addressed for talking in class.” He was often reprimanded for this disruptive behavior. With a proficiency level of intermediate-high, Mireya received ESL pull-out services about half as often as the 4 boys. While the other Spanish-speaking students involved in the study associated with each other whenever possible, Mireya could often be found alone or in the midst of English speakers sitting very quietly. When engaged and concentrating on classroom activities, Mireya could successfully complete kindergarten objectives with ease, but her mind often seemed to wander. All of the participants in the study were highly intelligent and eager to learn, although they expressed their levels of engagement in different ways.

Snapshots of the Teachers

Eight different teachers worked with these 7 students in a variety of settings. The students spent the majority of their time with the mainstream classroom teacher, Mrs. York, and her assistant, Mrs. Reynolds. Mrs. York and Mrs. Reynolds evolved as the predominant figures in the study. The students also spent time with a physical education teacher, an art teacher, a music teacher, a guidance counselor, and the media specialist. The 5 students who took part in ESL pull-out services also spent time with the ESL teacher, “Ms. Cline.” All of these teachers were white females, except the physical education teacher, who was a white male.

In their interviews, teachers were explicitly asked to describe how they felt when the Latino students in their schools used Spanish. While two had some reservations, all of them were open to the idea. A couple of the teachers talked about the students’ using Spanish as if it were to be expected. They made comments such as, “I think they’re going to do that,” and “At the beginning, I expect them to use a lot.” A few teachers expressed indifference by saying, “I don’t have any opposition to that,” “I think it’s fine,” or “I don’t have a problem with it.” Some of the teachers even reported that they wanted to hear the students

use Spanish. Mrs. Reynolds enthusiastically responded, "I think they should." The art teacher claimed, "I even encourage it," and the music teacher emphasized with wide eyes, "They have to. I mean they *have* to." Despite their lack of training in working with ELLs, these teachers seemed to understand, or at least acknowledged, that native language use plays an important role in L2 learning.

In the teachers' responses to some of the other interview questions, they all agreed that it would be "great" or "awesome" for their students to be bilingual. When we asked them how they felt about working with ELLs, three of the teachers responded that they "enjoy it very much," "think it's exciting to work with them," or "think it's very fun." Three teachers, however, expressed feeling "a little intimidated" or nervous about working with the students. Two other teachers said simply that they "did not have a problem working with them." Most of the teachers also reported that they "didn't mind" if the students used Spanish in their classrooms. This was "allowed" as long as they could "tell" that the students were using the language "to help another student by clarifying or explaining an assignment."

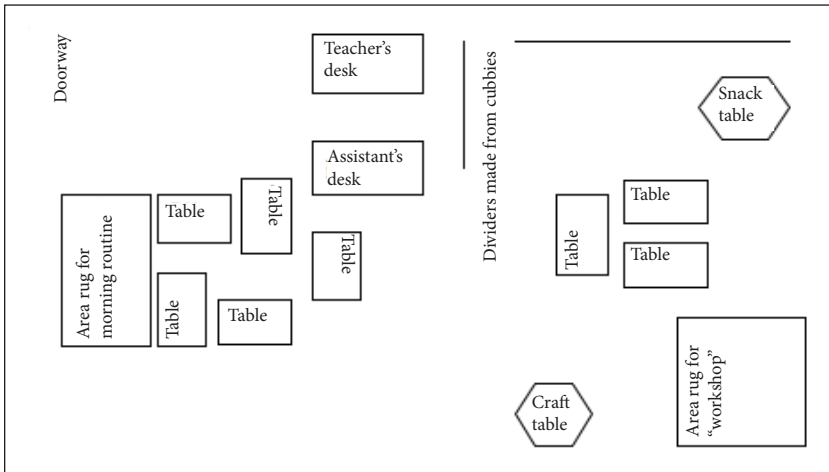
Some of the teachers did express some concern about Spanish use. They said that they did not like "not knowing what they were talking about." One teacher stated, "Who knows what they might be saying. I know I don't know, so I wouldn't like that situation and I wouldn't let that go." Only two of the eight teachers expressed less receptive attitudes. Overall, most of teachers described positive attitudes and could give examples of when the students used Spanish in their classrooms. They described the ways that students sometimes interpreted for one another and expressed how "grateful" they felt that the students were able to help them [the teachers] and each other in that way. Overall, teachers generally expressed that it was important for students to preserve their native languages.

Snapshots of the Classroom

In this section, the data are organized around the major themes that emerged from the classroom observations. The data showed that there was an emphasis on silence both inside and outside of the mainstream classroom, where a system of reward and punishment maintained what we call a *culture of silence*. We also observed a very common practice of separating the Latino students from one another. In addition, the only time Spanish use was observed was in the translation of a few words. Field notes are incorporated throughout these sections to support the emergent themes.

Silence in the Mainstream Classroom. Most of the children's mornings were spent on the rug at the front of the classroom (see Figure 1). During their time on the rug, as Mrs. York delivered instruction and as they performed activities, the students were expected to remain quiet and still. In some instances, Mrs. York called for quiet before the principal came over the intercom for morning announcements. As students gathered on the rug to chat with one another, looked at the books on display at the front of the room, or counted through the number chart, Mrs. York began each day telling the students to "sit down, face the front, be quiet, and listen for announcements." Through-

Figure 1
Mainstream Kindergarten Classroom



out the rest of the morning, these calls for quiet continued. Mrs. York often said, “I need you to be quiet,” “Shh. Don’t anybody talk,” “Everyone on the rug, quiet,” or “Shh. Let’s be quiet, please.” She often called out a particular student’s name to quiet him or her. One day as the children were lining up to go to the library, Mrs. York caught Chale talking near the back of the line. She asked him, “How does it sound at the back of the line. Is it quiet?” On the day the students returned from their spring break, the class was particularly loud. Mrs. York named a student who was sitting quietly. She asked, “Is Julie the only one who remembers how to be quiet?” Daily field notes indicated that the study’s participants took cues from their mainstream English-speaking peers. When the whole class was quiet, the participants usually were too. When the class talked, the participants tried to talk a little among themselves as well. When Mireya, Rico, Xuxa, or Chale tried to initiate an exchange with a native English speaker, their peers ignored or dismissed their efforts. Mrs. York always easily regained their attention with her calls for quiet.

Rewards for Silence. Mrs. York rewarded the students who cooperated with her demands for silence. She called on them more often for participation and let them or the group they were a part of be first in line to go to lunch. She used silence as an incentive by telling the students as they began an assignment, “You can finish if you’re really, really quiet.” Very often, as she called on students to work with the morning message or to participate in the storytelling for the big book, Mrs. York would remind the class how she decided which students to choose with a statement such as “You know I choose people who are quiet.” For example, one day she had chosen a few students to reorder words on a chart to make a sentence. One native English speaker asked, “Are you picking boy, girl, boy, girl?” Mrs. York replied, “I’m just picking people who are quiet, basically.” Another day, as students were volunteering for the same type of activity, Mrs. York said, “Put your hands down. I’m just going to call on somebody who is quiet and listening.”

The participants in this study caught on to this reward system and applied this understanding of rewards in their ESL class. This was exemplified by Rico one morning. As he completed a project for the class, he looked up at the teacher and said, "I be quiet while I working." When the time came to have a bathroom break or to line up for lunch, it was always the quiet students or the quiet groups who were chosen first. One day when the students were getting ready for lunch, Mrs. York noticed that Carlos was sitting quietly. She, in turn, rewarded him by calling his group to be the first to wash their hands and get their lunches. On another day when Santo and Tajo were waiting quietly, their "good behavior" was recognized and Mrs. York praised them for it. Tajo made a fist and pulled his arm back by his side and gestured, "Yes!" Students learned quickly that they would be rewarded for being "quiet unless spoken to." On yet another day, students were asked to name characters in a story they had read. The class was noisy and a native English speaker yelled out, "She ain't going to pick the people who are talking." Mrs. York responded with "That's right." In response, the class quieted down immediately. The students in this classroom clearly understood that there were rewards for being quiet and responded accordingly.

Punishments for Talking. In contrast, when students talked, there were negative consequences. The teacher often gave out punishments when students talked out of turn or responded when they were not given permission. When this happened, students would be sent to the assigned seats at the tables behind the rug while the rest of the class remained on the rug for instruction. On other mornings while the class was on the carpet, we found multiple students sitting at their seats before the morning bell rang. We observed Chale often sitting at his seat while the other children were on the carpet. One day, Mrs. York called Xuxa over to sit beside her during the morning message time after she caught her talking. Mrs. York sent Tajo to his seat after the students had returned from gym class. She reminded the class, "Do not say anything. Raise your hand if the answer is 'yes.'" She then asked, "Did the gym teacher let you get a drink of water?" When Tajo and another English-speaking peer both called out, "Yes," Mrs. York immediately scolded them for talking and sent them to their seats. She told them to raise their hands, but they yelled out their response. It was common to find Mrs. York sending individual students or groups of students to their seats on a daily basis because they had talked out of turn.

Punishments for talking went beyond the classroom to the lunchroom. On another day of observation, Mrs. York made the students put their heads down and remain in the cafeteria for an extended time as a punishment for talking. She also took them to the cafeteria and watched very closely for those who talked in line. Mrs. York first pulled Mireya out of line and moved her closer to the front. Then she moved Rico. When we asked Rico why this happened, he gave a big smile and said, "Because I talking." Three days earlier, Mrs. York scolded Xuxa, Chale, and Tajo for talking while they were waiting in the lunch line. Field notes also revealed that students were scolded and often lost privileges for talking on many occasions.

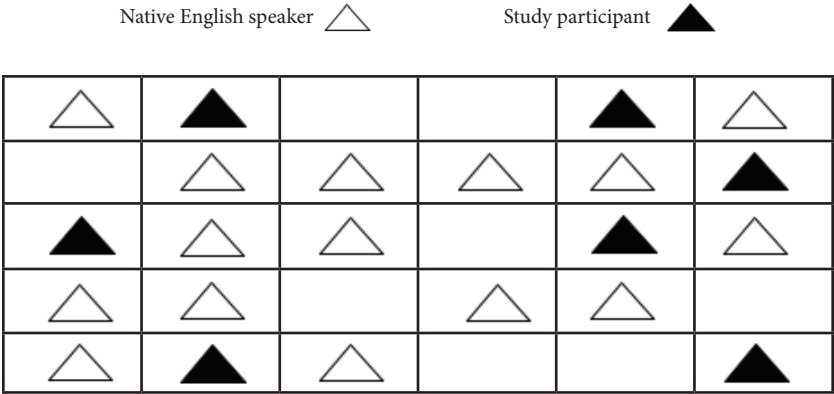
Silence Outside the Mainstream Classroom. This culture of silence fol-

lowed the participants to their “connect” and ESL classes. The media specialist and the guidance counselor struggled to keep the class from talking while reading books and watching videos. The music teacher gave the class “strikes” for talking. The art teacher placed students’ names on the board when they talked. On another day, we found the art teacher singling out Chale and Carlos for talking at their table in the back corner of the room while she was giving instructions for the day’s project. As they talked she asked, “What is going on back there?” and then ordered them to stop squirming and talking. The look she gave them stopped their talking immediately.

Ms. Cline expected the participants to talk in ESL class, but she had specific rules for speaking. Even when they were in small groups, she required that all students raise their hands, take turns, and use correct grammar. She often scolded the students for talking out of turn or for interrupting one another. She disciplined the children by speaking harshly to them. She made comments such as “Tajo, hush,” “Carlos, you’re interrupting,” “Are you talkin’ while I’m talkin’ cause you’re really startin’ to irritate me,” and “Are you waiting your turn?” When asked about why she sometimes dealt with the students in this manner, she told us that she was “pretending” and not really angry. In fact, she said she often acted angry as a way to get the students to behave. The demands for silence permeated each classroom we observed.

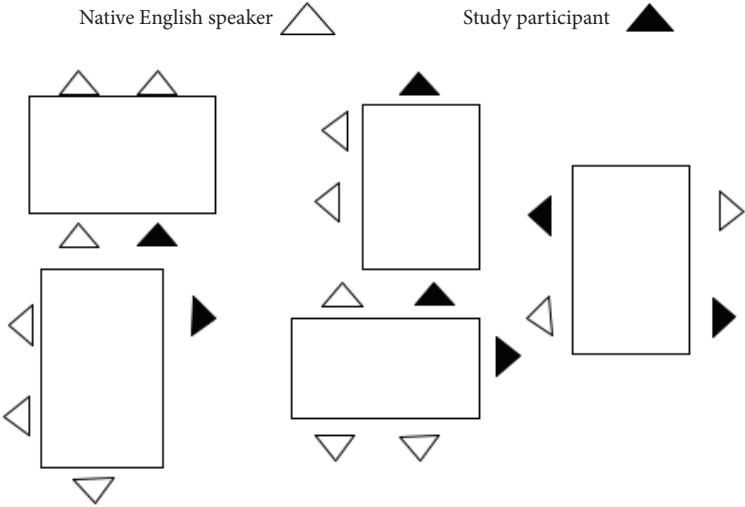
Separation of Latino Students. The separation of Latino students from one another was also observed in each classroom we visited. In fact, nearly all of the teachers separated the group of participants from one another during class. This practice often limited their opportunities to use Spanish with their native Spanish-speaking peers. When asked about this practice, teachers openly said this was to “encourage them to use English.” Others said they wanted to “make it more difficult for them to talk to one another.” In the mainstream classroom, the students had assigned seats both on the rug and at the tables behind the rug. At their seats on the rug, the participants were scattered with native English speakers between and all around them (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
Assigned Seats on Area Rug



There were five tables and 7 native Spanish-speakers in the classroom. Xuxa, Chale, and Tajo were each placed at tables with native English speakers. Carlos and Santo shared a table with English speakers. Rico and Mireya also sat with one another at a separate table with other native speakers (see Figure 3).

Figure 3
Assigned Seats at Tables



The students were each assigned to a different color group. Mrs. York would often call students to take a bathroom break or to line up for lunch according to their color groups. The students also spent time at activity centers with their assigned color groups in the afternoon. There were four color groups. Mireya and Santo were in the green group, Chale and Tajo were in the red group, Rico and Xuxa were in the yellow group, and Carlos was in the blue group. During the time spent in the mainstream classroom, students were separated from one another as much as possible. While the pairs of Latino students who sat with one another at a table had the potential to interact, the demands for silence hindered this opportunity.

Similarly, the separation of the group of participants occurred in the connect classes. In the music room, the teacher began every class session by checking to make certain that each student was in his or her assigned seat. If any students were out of their correct locations, she would promptly move them so that they were seated where she wanted them. The chairs in the music room were arranged in three rows, each in the shape of a semicircle (see Figure 4). Rico, Chale, and Mireya were scattered on the first row with native English speakers between them. Xuxa, Carlos, and Santo were scattered in the same manner on the second row. Tajo was seated on the third row with two other native English speakers. The students also had assigned seats in the art classroom (see Figure 5).

Figure 4
Assigned Seats in Music Room

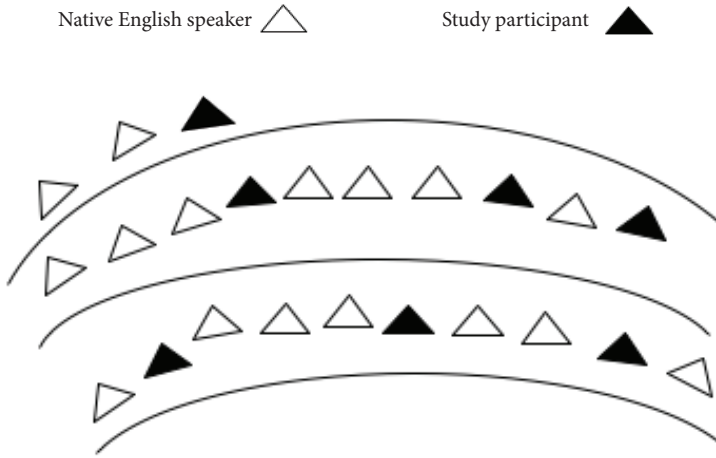
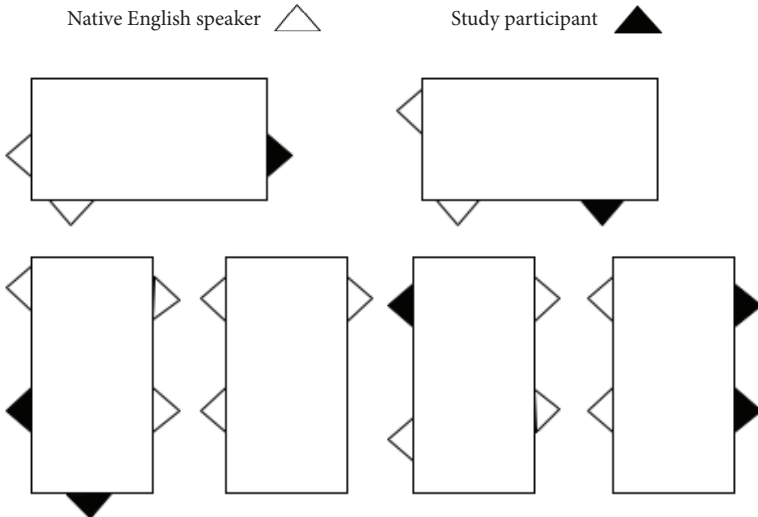
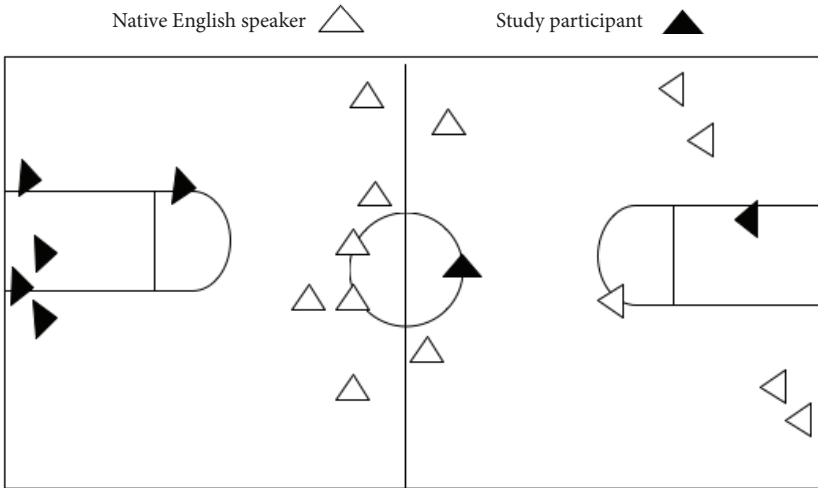


Figure 5
Assigned Seats in Art Room



Here, Tajo, Xuxa, and Rico were seated at tables with only native English speakers. Carlos and Chale sat at a table together, as did Mireya and Santo. Oddly, the pairs of students who sat beside or near one another interacted very little—even though they were in the most advantageous positions to do so. The only place where the Latino students clustered together was in physical education class, where they could decide where to be (see Figure 6).

Figure 6
Chosen Places in Gym During Physical Education Class



Overall, the students spent the most time separated from one another and never grouped together during class time for any reason.

Using Spanish to Translate a Few Words. On a few occasions, some teachers were observed encouraging the participants to use Spanish. During an observation after spring break, one of the teacher assistants engaged with Mireya in some conversation. Mireya told her about visiting with her grandmother during the time off from school. Ms. Cline encouraged Mireya's Spanish use by asking her how to say "grandma" in Spanish. She repeated it once and sent her back to her seat immediately after. Other times, teachers asked the Latino students to use Spanish when they needed help in translation. They often asked some of the participants with higher English proficiency to translate a word or two for a struggling peer. In the ESL classroom, Ms. Cline would sometimes give Carlos permission to help Tajo with a task. Carlos used Spanish as he helped Tajo. In the mainstream classroom, Mrs. Reynolds noticed one morning that Tajo had failed to get some papers signed at home the evening before. She called Rico back with him and had Rico interpret as she asked Tajo about the missing signatures. While there were some moments when Spanish was used by the teachers and students, these instances were limited and failed to move past surface-level communications. Overall, we observed many more times when students either hesitated to speak or were silent altogether. The newly arrived students learned not to speak at all, in either Spanish or English. In contrast, the students with higher levels of proficiency in English learned to hide and/or limit their use of Spanish in the different school spaces they occupied.

Summary of Findings

Throughout the informal and formal observation period at Magnolia Elementary, a culture of silence and separation intersected to create a climate that

could potentially silence these Latino kindergartners. The teachers' demands for a quiet and well-ordered classroom limited these students' opportunities to use language for meaningful interactions. Teachers rewarded those students who cooperated with their calls for silence and punished, often shaming, those who did not. Even at lunch, the children were encouraged to stay quiet through rewards for silence and punishments for talking. In such a restricted environment, there was little chance for Spanish or English use among the kindergarten students. Also reflected in the field notes were the few instances the Latino students did communicate with one another. The data showed that students spoke openly in Spanish only when they thought they were not being watched. In this type of learning environment, the ELLs were given little opportunity to hear or engage in authentic linguistic exchanges in English or Spanish. When students are not encouraged to use their native language in any way, how will they learn to preserve it?

Also noteworthy were the profound examples of separation of students through student seat assignments. This practice also contributed to the limited amount of Spanish spoken or classroom interaction with other students. It was common to find a novice English speaker surrounded by native English speakers at a table or in a row of seats, with no one to turn to when he needed help negotiating meaning. Although the teachers claimed they saw "no problem" with the students continuing to use Spanish as they were learning English, we observed that there were few efforts made to encourage it. Ultimately, very little Spanish was used in the school. As evidenced in the data, the demands for silence in the kindergarten classroom and the separation of students from other Spanish speakers failed to provide these students with meaningful opportunities for interaction or language development.

Discussion

Collectively, the informal interactions with the school's faculty and administrators, warm and welcoming signs and mantras that occupied the school walls, and teacher interviews reflected positive attitudes toward the recent influx of immigrants to this rural community school. All of the teachers and administrators understood the need to create a school space that embraced the changing diversity of their student population. The administrators and teachers cared about their students and their success in school. However, classroom observations showed that there was a disconnect between the attitudes expressed by the teachers during the interviews and the kinds of classroom practices that dominated the school culture.

This incongruence between the good intentions of the teachers and their ensuing actions may be representative of what Valenzuela (1999) referred to as "aesthetic caring" (p. 62). The teachers at Magnolia Elementary School expressed caring attitudes and concern over the progress of their young Latino students. Their positive thoughts, however, did not often translate into specific actions to address the needs of these students. The teachers did not, for example, appear to modify their instruction to meet the needs of their Latino students or explicitly validate their Latino culture by integrating the Spanish language

into instruction or reading stories by Latino authors. Very little interest was expressed by the teachers (during interviews or informally in the classroom) to engage in professional activities or opportunities that related to the teaching of Latino students or other diverse populations. Similar to the teachers at Séguin High School in the study by Valenzuela (1999), the teachers at Magnolia Elementary School seemed to have a general lack of knowledge, understanding, and training with respect to issues related to teaching of diverse students learning English as a second language. Perhaps if teachers had a different or deeper understanding of the role L1 has on L2, we may have observed classroom practices that facilitated language development and encouraged native-language preservation. Best practices in the field support the need for classrooms to be places where ELLs have authentic opportunities to use language often—both socially and academically. Instead, what we observed were practices that failed to provide students time to interact meaningfully with one another.

While at Magnolia Elementary School, we did not observe teaching practices that were necessarily culturally congruent or relevant. In fact, we argue that the emphasis on traditional teacher-centered approaches we observed could potentially have an impact on the engagement of all students in negative ways, whether the students were native Spanish- or native English-speaking. The image of silent students sitting in assigned seats lies in sharp contrast to current descriptions of optimal language-learning environments (Gonzalez, Yawkey & Minaya-Rowe, 2006; Peregoy & Boyle, 2005; Savignon, 1999). Researchers have long argued that classrooms that are most successful in meeting the needs of diverse learners are those in which the teacher provides students with opportunities to interact in meaningful ways, to share ideas, and to participate in cooperative learning activities in which novices and experts work together (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004). As emphasized in the influential work of Swain and Lapkin (1995), it is equally important during the language-learning process to produce language output as it is to receive language input. In other words, students need to speak the language as well as to hear it. Ultimately, classroom practices that fail to consider the diverse backgrounds of the students and ones that hinder meaningful interactions between peers (in any language) can potentially hinder the progress through the different stages of L2 development.

Recommendations

Overall, the observations of 7 Latino students at Magnolia Elementary reinforce the need to pay attention to school and classroom practices that hinder both native-language retention and potential English development. We observed several compounding factors that have the potential to be detrimental to the preservation of Spanish and the acquisition of English. These factors, when intersected with negative attitudes, are cause for concern. Educators and administrators committed to the social and academic development of Latino students and other ELLs must acknowledge the need to monitor pedagogical practices of even the most well-meaning teachers, provide teachers with adequate training and preparation to meet the needs of diverse students, and

consider the role that negative attitudes play in the identity and language development of this population.

We understand the important work of all teachers and administrators and acknowledge the challenges that schools face, often with limited resources. Based on the results of this study, we argue for sustained teacher training and professional-development opportunities that focus on culturally responsive teaching practices and the use of research-based practices in the field of TESOL. Much research supports the notion that many of the teaching strategies used specifically to increase the academic achievement of ELLs can be beneficial for all learners. In addition, planning of instruction for diverse populations should be collaborative in spirit and involve multiple teachers and administrators working toward common goals. Teachers working with ELLs in their classrooms should create classroom communities that reduce anxiety and use instructional practices that encourage language use through student interaction, heterogeneous groupings, and student-centered instruction. In addition, the findings support the heightened need for teacher educators, teachers, and stakeholders to understand and address the role that daily interactions with teachers and other students have on the retention of native languages and the development of English. Further, the study emphasizes the need for teachers to create culturally responsive classrooms and to critically examine classroom practices that send negative messages to immigrant children about their native languages and cultures. The data show that classroom practices, coupled with both implicit and explicit messages that students receive from teachers, administrators, and peers about their languages and cultures, can systematically silence students. Therefore, all educators need to consider how their attitudes and practices can shape the educational experiences of ELLs and work to create classroom spaces that support the development of bilingual and bicultural identities in all students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Limitations of the Study

While the findings are important and the implications for educators are clear, we acknowledge that there were several limitations to our study. First, the data were collected in one school and focused primarily in one classroom and the results should not be generalized. Second, the study also lacked the voices of the students. Had we been able to obtain parental permission to interview the students, their perspectives could have been represented. For the purposes of this study, we were able to report only what we saw rather than describe the students' perceptions of their schooling experiences. Last, a longer observation period and follow-up teacher interviews would have strengthened this study. Spending a full year using ethnographic methods in the classroom and school may have helped us paint a more accurate picture of the school's efforts in supporting the Latino students. Although there were limitations to this study, the findings have real implications for all educators, administrators, and researchers in the field. More in-depth studies using ethnographic methods in diverse classrooms are needed to capture the complex intersections of the language and identity development in immigrant children.

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