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## NUESTROS SONIDOS: A CASE STUDY OF BILINGUAL MUSIC AND PLAY AMONG PRIMARY-SCHOOL AGE HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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NUESTROS SONIDOS:  
A CASE STUDY OF BILINGUAL MUSIC AND PLAY AMONG PRIMARY-SCHOOL AGE  
HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Masters of English in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By

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2014

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### NUESTROS SONIDOS: A CASE STUDY OF BILINGUAL MUSIC AND PLAY AMONG PRIMARY-SCHOOL AGE HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The demographics in the United States continue to show a dramatic increase of immigrant students who speak a language other than English at home (Smitherman; U.S. Census); however, schooling ideologies and practices continue to treat developing bilingualism as a detriment to students entering school rather than a resource (Canagarajah; Heath; Matsuda; Valdés et al; Richardson; Santa Ana; Street). In this case study, conducted in the “Nuevo New South” (Mohl; Rich and Miranda), I observed how bilingual music and play in school-like settings can promote bilingual literacy practices and bridge gaps between traditional schooling practices and communities ways of languaging. Engaging in structured music and play practices creates spaces that can generate moments of felicidad and meta-construction of heritage language users as bilinguals.

**KEYWORDS:** Heritage Language, Bilingualism, Music and Play, Language Socialization, Nuevo New South.

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Sara P. Alvarez

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May 1<sup>st</sup> 2014

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## CHAPTER ONE--INTRODUCTION

Studies of population growth in the United States continue to show a dramatic increase of students who speak a language other than English at home (Smitherman; U.S. Census). However, students are rarely encouraged to develop their ability to speak and write in their heritage language<sup>1</sup>. Instead, schools' ideologies and practices marginalize such students rather than treating their developing bilingualism as a resource (Canagarajah; Kanno and Harklau 1-16; Matusda; Valdés et al; Santa Ana). This practice is alarming because multiple longitudinal studies continue to point to the numerous benefits and forms of empowerment related to heritage language usage and literacy (Valdés et al; Wang and García; Zentella).

As a graduate student committed to creating more consistent bonds between Latino students and the academy, I engaged in a service-learning project at the Village Branch Public Library (VBPL) in Lexington, Kentucky. I conducted a pilot study in which I observed how bilingual “music and play” can promote bilingual literacies among primary-school age heritage language users. I focused on heritage language learners/users, or children who “have a family background in which a non-English language is, or was spoken [and] manifest very different strengths in their two languages” (“Bilingualism, Heritage Language Learners, and SLA Research: Opportunities Lost or Seized” 412-414). The purpose of the pilot study was to raise awareness that after-school efforts like this one can greatly benefit the Lexington Latino community. In this case study, I explored heritage language children's attitudes and development

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<sup>1</sup> The (re)affiliation with a language that is or was part of the family's heritage (Valdés, “Bilingualism” 412).

of their L1 and L2<sup>2</sup> usage through bilingual music and play. I paid close attention to moments in which the children exhibited *felicidad* (joy) in participating in both of their linguistic repertoires. I propose that efforts like this class may be beneficial to heritage language students' literacy practices because they can bridge the gaps between traditional school literacy expectations and community ways of languaging (Heath; Street). Classes like this pilot study encourage socio-cognitive and visual-motor practices, children-to-children and children-to-adult interactions, and metalinguistic awareness, which have proven beneficial to children's traditional literacies (Heath; Zentella). Most importantly, bilingual music and play classes, like the one conducted for this study, employ play as a community schooling practice, which may increase students' self-esteem and self-awareness in being bilingual and bicultural.

### **THE COMMUNITY AND PARTICIPANTS**

The class took place at the Village Branch Public Library (VBPL), a bilingual library located in the Cardinal Valley area of Lexington, Kentucky. Though initially geared toward preschoolers and their families, the class attracted and enrolled elementary school-aged children between the ages of five to eight. All 10 participants were Mexican-American heritage language users. Only one of the participants received traditional literacy instruction in his L1 and L2, while all other participants received literacy instruction in their L2s alone. All participants were exposed to bilingual print at both VBPL and their community neighborhood (Reyes and Azuara 377). However, most participants showed a strong inclination for the use and practice of their L2s. They often communicated with their monolingual Spanish-speaking parents in English, even when parents explained to them that they did not understand what they said.

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<sup>2</sup> The L1 refers to the heritage language, and the L2 refers to English.

Typically, the class had 6-10 participants throughout the weekly hour that it took place. All participants attended the Cardinal Valley Elementary School except for one, who attended the Maxwell Spanish Immersion Elementary School. Most of the children's families lived in the proximity of the library and grew up in the Cardinal Valley area. Overall, children in the Cardinal Valley area—including all class participants—had not taken part in early intervention schooling practices, such as pre-school or Head Start programs. Thus, they demonstrated struggles with their use of hand-eye coordination exercises and fine-motor practices. Yet, they possessed a rich musical repertoire in their L1 and knew many of the songs we sang together. Most participants had strong oral practices in Spanish and demonstrated positive disposition toward telling stories about their homes (“What No Bedtime Story Means” 64). Though the youths expressed difficulty in following complex instructions in their L1s, most exhibited a fair level of “metalinguistic awareness” as they seemed to seamlessly switch from one language system to another.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

My research was informed by two theoretical frameworks: a) The Instructed Language Acquisition (ILA) perspective that Guadalupe Valdés proposes in “Bilingualism, Heritage Language Learners, and SLA Research: Opportunities Lost or Seized,” and b) a sociocultural viewpoint deriving from works of the linguistic anthropologist Shirley Brice Heath.

ILA positions its analysis of language acquisition by using the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) “Continuum of L1/L2 Users,” which treats L1 and L2 as separate language systems that can be nurtured, learned, and used simultaneously, but rarely develop the same “strengths” (see Figure 1). In figure 1, the letter A represents a speaker's L1 and the letter B

represents the L2. If a speaker only uses A as her/his system of communication, the speaker is more likely to be a monolingual, and vice versa. However, if the speaker uses A in combination with B (to some degree), the speaker is more likely to become a bilingual. Thus, according to the continuum and the ILA framework, AB is an idealized and desired position for a bilingual, but rarely a reality.

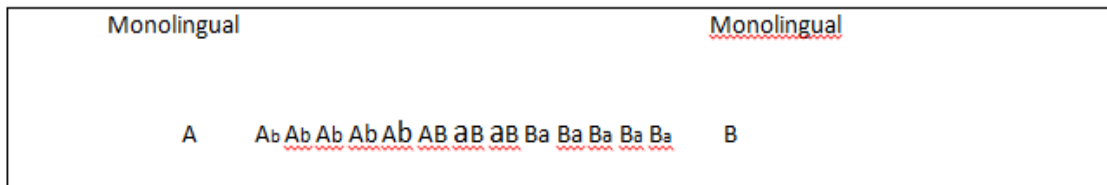


Figure 1: “A Continuum of L1/L2 Users”

In addition, it is important to note that ILA clarifies the common erroneous view about SLA—because of its nomenclature—that a heritage language user must first learn one language and then the other (Valdés 411-414, 420). As shown in Figure 1, both A and B, or the L1 and L2, can be present and emerging at the same time – one does not need to show before the other. In addition, ILA acknowledges and foresees the differences that may arise in the teaching and learning of the L1 (heritage language) because of differences in heritage language registers. ILA defies the often imposing and hegemonic expectation that L1 users must also learn to use a standard L1<sup>3</sup>.

ILA theory cherishes the (re)acquisition of the L1 heritage language to its greatest extent. In the “National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages: Heritage Language Learners,” Shuhan C. Wang and María Inés García identify that not all heritage language users stand in the same position in terms of the “continuum of L1/L2 users.” Instead, they argue that (re)acquisition of the L1 language plays a crucial role in a heritage language learner’s personal

<sup>3</sup> For example, in the case of Spanish, teachers will often impose Castilian Spanish and deem other “Spanishes” as deficient (Valdés 420- 423; Zentella “Dime con quién hablas:” 28-34; Zentella *Growing Up Bilingual*: 41-44).

and academic achievements (1- 6). The ILA spectrum reiterates the benefits of L1/L2 usage in a global world, and more specifically emphasizes the role of identification and minority “empowerment” through the ability to use both languages.

Moreover, ILA comprehends the challenges that may surface in nurturing the heritage language along with the L2, especially in areas where the L1 is marginalized. For instance, in the United States “Spanish is the language of a stigmatized minority and the target of anti-immigrant sentiments” (Valdés et al “Maintaining Spanish in the United States” 4; Chavez; Richardson). This framework notes that heritage language usage and development requires practice, community, and institutional support. While the framework maintains that traditional literacy practices are the most suitable for the (re)acquisition of the L1, it invites alternative practices that are geared towards heritage language students in particular (Wang and García 1-7; “¿Quieren que sus hijos hablen el inglés y el español?: Un manual bilingüe / Would you like your children to speak English and Spanish?: A Bilingual Manual” 1-3). Bilingual music and play, thus, can offer an alternative method for L1 instruction. This framework can foster practices developed with and geared to heritage language users.

Community practices and social contexts are important builders of children’s literacies. For over thirty years, Shirley Brice Heath’s ethnographic research has observed community practices and “funds of knowledge” (Moll; Genzuk) in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. Heath has analyzed her research by employing a sociocultural context framework.

In *Words at Work and Play*, Heath traces the lives of three different communities for a period of three decades. Heath situates her ideas through her perspective of socialization and the ways in which children’s learning practices and “ways of taking meaning” vary depending on the community’s resources and cultural traditions (“What No Bedtime Story Means”). She also

analyzes the ways in which these practices either match or mismatch traditional schooling practices and expectations. Heath notes the crucial impact of children's interactions with other children and adults—who are not just family members. She also highlights how early involvement in extra-curricular activities or volunteer opportunities help youth grow not only professionally, but personally (*Words at Work and Play* 84-104). In the case of youth heritage language learners who may not have these kinds of literacy practices<sup>4</sup> readily available within their own homes, these activities serve as a bridge to their schooling experiences.

In addition, Heath explores how the current move toward readily available entertainment and toys for children has transformed the act of playing. She argues that while this new context offers many benefits, it can also lead children to miss the opportunity to develop necessary socio-cognitive and visual-motor practices. Heath argues,

Young children are social creatures who need direct face-to-face interaction that enlists eye gaze, mutual tuning-in to the world around them, and collaborative projects that enlist fingers, hands, and arms... Tactile and visual input stimulates mental modeling of objects in space and promotes a sense that consequences generally follow from actions. Brain circuits that link perception and action of self, other, and object support learning by looking and touching. (*Words at Work and Play* 117-118)

In short, Heath notes that children should engage in visual-motor practices, such as hand-eye-coordination and motor development, because these practices can nurture foundations for their academic and personal growth. This is important to note because these types of practices have shown to promote language learning, and can allow children to learn from one another in

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<sup>4</sup> I utilize the term “literacy practices” to indicate socio-cognitive, meta-cognitive, socio-dramatic, and visual-motor practices, which aid in matching traditional schooling expectations and children's development (Heath, *Words at Work and Play* 66, 84-85, 117).

structured environments. Children's acts of playing, using their senses to share knowledge and "produce meaning" with objects, their bodies, and minds, are part of community practices and promote future literacies.

Combining Heath's sociocultural perspective with ILA permits a close examination of how adults and educational institutions can encourage heritage language practices for children's literacies. In addition, combining the two frameworks demonstrates how individuals and institutional out-of-school contexts can aid in the validation and encouragement of L1 (re)acquisition. Heath exposes this process of socialization in her article "Linguistics and Education" when she writes,

From preschool teachers to college professors, or vocational training counselors and then employment agents, nurses, or recreation planners in retirement homes, individuals resocialize other individuals, adding to the educations acquired in the family and early schooling. (252)

Here, Heath reminds us of the influential positions that people representing a variety of institutions play in the development of an individual's identity and linguistic formation. Heath speaks about the role that different institutional sectors add to students' understandings of literacy and language, raising awareness about how L2s are often encouraged by children's immediate surroundings and schooling institutions. At the same time, children's heritage languages become marginalized and/or forgotten by these same institutions and people in the position of influencing legitimate institutional knowledge (251, 257; Fishman 169).

## **DATA COLLECTION**

The methods for data collection for this field-research came from a number of sources. I recorded notes every night after the class met, later coding these notes for moments in which children exhibited struggle in demonstrating language and play practices. I carefully approximated where heritage language users stood in their linguistic L1 and L2 continuum (See Figure 1). I noted this based on two factors: 1) by engaging in Spanish and English conversation with each of the participants at the beginning of the class and after the class had ended, and 2) by observing and noting their participation in each of their two linguistic systems. Here it is important to clarify that I strategically used both of my linguistic systems to address the children, noting their responses and raising awareness that we were all Spanish/English bilinguals. Lastly, I took notes based on informal open-ended conversations with parents and the library's staff to uncover contextual history of the library's outreach into the local Latino community.

In order to make sense of the impact that the class generated as a way to promote bilingual practices, especially with participants L1s, I employed a case-study approach. I taught the class for eight consecutive weeks over the course of an academic semester. As the class's framework targeted heritage language (re)acquisition, I opened the class to all children interested, but I recruited only heritage language users in my study. During the course of this pilot study I interacted with all participants, their family members, and the library's staff and volunteers.

As a participant/observer, I engaged in this class from multiple ideas and experiences, first as a bilingual and bicultural individual who recognizes the value in multilingualism and preserving heritage languages (Canagarajah; Smitherman; Villanueva). Also, I engaged with the class as a student and educator who has experienced the advantages of bilingualism at the



personal and academic levels. In addition, I stepped into the instructor role with the experience of having taught these types of classes as a private instructor for nearly ten years to children ranging from the ages of 1 to 10. My experience working with children and my academic training as a teacher have given me an insight into the crucial role of bilingual music and play in creating bridges for children's traditional schooling experiences. Finally, and most importantly, I came into this class with the practice of having volunteered for a non-profit, after-school program serving the Mexican immigrant community in New York City for several years; although I saw outstanding differences in how Mexican-American families and their children adapted to their respective regions in the United States, access to higher education and ILA continued to be common factors of concern for both communities (Howard; Ben Meade et. al 4-5).

## CHAPTER TWO--HISTORY OF LATINO MIGRATION TO LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Lexington, Kentucky, located in Fayette County, is the second largest city in the Commonwealth with a population of 295,803 persons of whom approximately 6.9 percent identify as Latino. The Latino population has risen dramatically in Lexington, more than doubling in the past decade. These statistics not only become evident through the 2000 and 2010 Censuses, but also by closely looking at the “Lexington/Fayette County schools where K-5 Latino enrollment is more than double that of the middle [schools] and high schools” (K’LEA Integrated Action Plan 2). In “The Sociopolitical Dynamics of Mexican Immigration in Lexington, Kentucky 1997 to 2002: An Ambivalent Community Responds,” Rich and Miranda explicate what accounts for the rapid growth of Latinos in Lexington, and why Latino immigrants inhabit marginal spaces in the South. Rich and Miranda explain that about 90 percent of this new influx of Latinos comes from Mexico and “began [to arrive] in the early 1990s in response to labor needs in the region” (187). They point out that this predominantly Mexican population engages in more permanent low-wage jobs—as opposed to seasonal jobs—and they do not constitute men travelling back and forth between the U.S. and Mexico border. Scholars like Rich and Miranda attribute this trend, more recently termed by Raymond A. Mohl as the “Nuevo New South,” to the 1986 amnesty and the implementation of severe U.S.-Mexico border policies to discourage further immigration from Mexico. These border control measures caused a new seasonal worker population to establish families in the United States, but in particular in Southern states because of the demand for agricultural labor (Mohl 31-33; Rich and Miranda 194, 198; Massey, Durand and Malone).

Rich and Miranda’s field-research (conducted up until 2002) also analyzes the way in which Lexington has responded to this emerging ethnic community, a way which they refer to as

“ambivalent.” They argue that the source of this ambivalence is Kentucky’s long history of being a “north-south border state [which places it] ‘on the edge’ of southern culture, while still maintaining an openness to northern and western U.S. influences” (192). They claim that a great part of the tensions that make this relationship ambivalent occur because of the “language and cultural barriers that make many English-speaking residents uncomfortable with the new Hispanic presence here” (203). However, Rich and Miranda also argue that the city of Lexington attempted to accommodate its saliently growing community by supporting the foundation of Latina/o and migrant entities. For example, the advocacy work of the Asociación de Hispanos Unidos (AHU) (founded in 1997) and the Kentucky Migrant Network Coalition (founded in 1994) resulted in the city government forming and funding the Hispanic Initiative Network (HIN) (Richard and Miranda 206; AHU; Migrant Network Coalition). The formation of the HIN demonstrated the city’s commitment to recognize its growing Latino population and brought about the formation of other groups that focus on the well-being of the Latino community in the city.

Due to the fact that Rich and Miranda’s research was conducted only until 2002, it can be argued that Lexington’s relationship with its increasing Latino community has transformed meaningfully. Since then, Lexington’s relationship with this community has become more progressive. It has generated more government and private recognition for its new ethnic population. Two significant markers of this changing relationship were the opening of the VBPL<sup>5</sup> in the summer of 2004 (Ku 1) and the 2011 formation of the Kentucky Latino Education Alliance (K’LEA), “a cross sector, cross agency partnership dedicated to increase the number of Latinos who obtain a high quality degree or credential in Kentucky” (K’LEA Integrated Action Plan 1). As partners and collaborators, these two entities recognize the importance of raising

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<sup>5</sup> The only all bilingual staff and texts (Spanish/English) Public Library in the state of Kentucky.

awareness about Latinos reaching higher education levels through bicultural and bilingual support.

### CHAPTER THREE--THE LIBRARY

The opening of the VBPL demonstrated the growing awareness of Lexington agencies and their desire to see the Latino youth thrive. The library received funding from a diverse number of sources in the private and public sectors, such as the Fifth-Third Bank and the Lexington Public Libraries (Ku 1). Located in Cardinal Valley, the center of the Mexican immigrant enclave, VPBL became a space which encouraged both biculturalism and bilingualism: all their staff spoke both English and Spanish, the library had a wide variety of books in the two languages, and the library was eager to provide the space for bilingual pedagogies. At the time I conducted this research, the library offered many different programs such as ESL classes, Story-time Hour, Creative Writing Workshops and homework help four days a week (Village Branch Public Library).

Most importantly, VBPL symbolized a safe place for meeting and engaging the social and linguistic needs of the Latino community. In many ways the library worked like a schooling agency because of their homework help and professional teaching staff. This became an obvious factor for me, when I saw the large numbers of adults and children (predominantly Mexican-American) who received a careful and nurturing service on a daily basis. However, the library's purpose could also be traced through the philosophy expressed by Ms. Betty Abdmishani, the library's manager. In an interview with *Southsider Magazine*, Abdmishani expressed the following in response to the general view of the library as not just a library, but also "a referral agency for immigration services":

A lot of people, when they visit us or when they learn about us, they say, "You're more like a community center," Abdmishani said. That, in and of itself, doesn't make the library any different from other libraries, she was quick to add.

“Libraries have always been the center of a community, or a very important part. It’s just that we do it a little differently.” [...] “We’ll go a step further” [...] “We don’t want our patrons to feel like, the minute they’ve come in, they’ve just hit another wall. They hit so many walls in their everyday life.” (Brewer)

Social context and understanding of the difficulties that the predominantly Mexican-American community of Cardinal Valley faced on a daily basis—either because of language, cultural, and/or immigration status barriers—demonstrated the library’s support for biculturalism and biliteracy. It also demonstrated how VPBL as a local library and community center, resembled the work that ethnographers do when they go out into the field and observe, listen, and try to understand a community’s needs (Aikman; Heath; Street; Wright); yet, in VPBL’s case, their goal was to serve those needs as efficiently as possible. By offering bilingual texts and hiring bilingual staff, VPBL not only attempted to meet the Cardinal Valley’s socio-cultural and bilingual needs, but also nurture their biliteracies.

In a study conducted in a predominantly Mexican-American neighborhood of L.A., Reese and Goldenberg, both highlight that “accessibility to literacy opportunities in different domains and for a variety of functions is a potential contributor to children’s biliteracy development” (44). Like Fishman in “Minority Language Maintenance and the Ethnic Mother Tongue School,” Reese and Goldberg explain that the context of access to books, instructed heritage learning, and good attitudes towards the heritage language in relation to English promote biliteracy (Reese and Goldenberg 45; Fishman169). VBPL offered both text sources in English and Spanish and a welcoming attitude towards bilingualism and biculturalism. Though the library did not offer programming centering on heritage language learning, the staff always showed eagerness for heritage language learning pedagogies. Both Abdmishani and the Adult Volunteer Coordinator

were very enthusiastic about my pilot class and providing the space to nurture a study into the language and literacy practices of the local Latino community.

VBPL functioned as an informal educational institution that legitimized learning for the children; as six-year-old Janet, told me, “This is my school, after I go to my other school.” This role became essential in many ways because it meant that the library as a space could promote the kinds of bilingual and bicultural practices that I hoped for the class to encourage. In her manual “¿Quieren que sus hijos hablen el inglés y el español?: Un manual bilingüe / Would you like your children to speak English and Spanish?” Zentella writes, “children learn language best when they are interacting with others, their activities in Spanish should include other children whenever possible” (5). VBPL offered this opportunity because children often interacted with one another and were encouraged to use both their L1 and L2. Most importantly, the children saw people who they perceived as “teachers” or guides—the library’s staff members, teachers and volunteers—using both languages; As Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco note in *Children of Immigration*, “a charismatic mentor can also play a decisive role [...] let us never underestimate the powerful influence a teacher can have in a child’s life” (152-153). Thus, in many ways, the library fulfilled many of the crucial aspects needed in the development of bilingualism among heritage language learners/users.

## CHAPTER FOUR--INSTITUTIONAL SOCIALIZATION AND PRACTICES

As I prepared to write this report, I revisited my field notes many times, looking for links between heritage language usage and socialization practices and behaviors. I analyzed the data through the combined ILA/sociocultural theoretical framework described above.

From day one, this class reinforced arguments that most scholars in bilingual studies and education have raised before: institutions influence children's attitudes toward language, and in the case of heritage language users, it especially marks their attitudes towards their use of L1s vs. L2 (Fishman 169; Heath 251, 257; Martin-Beltrán 258).

Out-of-school educational institutions, like the VBPL, help counter the many times subtractive orientations and practices of language stigmatization found in formal schools (Anzaldúa; Richardson; Santa Ana). Places like VBPL, offer and respond to detrimental language ideologies by creating positive spaces which can nurture and foster bilinguals' practices. However, because other socializing institutions, such as schools and churches, similarly legitimize learning and language practices, children also infer ideas within these contexts (Richardson; Santa Ana; Valdés et al). Socialized subtractive ideologies were salient during the first class when I asked all participants if they spoke Spanish at home. All participants assented, so I began to converse with each of them in Spanish and asked them whether or not they spoke Spanish at home. Most of the participants replied in English and seemed surprised to see someone they perceived as a teacher speak to them in Spanish. Yet, what caught my attention was when I came upon Carol and Jenny (5 and 7-year-old sisters)—for whom Jenny did most of the talking. Jenny, a bright eyed and smiley girl told me that her parents spoke Spanish, “but I like English better.” I thought about her response and asked her why she thought so, she responded by saying, “it’s just better.” I continued to ponder her response. I wondered how



Jenny had formed such a strong opinion about Spanish in relation to English, but I simply made a mental and written note and soon began the class. During the class, I noticed Jenny's reluctance to sing in Spanish, so I asked her if perhaps she was struggling with the songs in that language. She quickly responded, "I speak Spanish at home, not in school." Soon after, 8 year-old Carlos interceded and said, "I speak Spanish and English in school."

During this first exchange I realized the extent to which language and schooling practices operate. I thought back to Jenny's reluctance to participate in L1 singing and the way in which she held strong reservations about the use of Spanish outside of home and in a place that resembled school. Conversely, Antonio, who attended a bilingual school, was willing to participate in both languages, and in fact expressed that Spanish made a part of his schooling experience. Although this encounter with language socialization presents only a small example of the sociocultural role of institutions in heritage language (re)acquisition, it is important to keep in mind. Such hierarchical attitudes have unfortunate consequences for heritage language (re)acquisition.

Ten minutes before our second class began, participants had already formed a circle around me and were browsing through the books and CDs I brought. Jenny approached me, leading her little sister Carol by the hand, and asked, "Are we doing the music class today?" I answered, "Of course." She then asked, "Can we sing just in English?" I answered that we were doing a bilingual class and would be using the two languages. She replied, quickly, "I don't want to do Spanish." Jenny then turned around, pulling Carol by the hand. Carol let go and said, "I want to stay," and Jenny left.

Jenny never joined us again, but she would sometimes watch the class 5 to 10 minutes at a time, while sitting in the back. I would ask her if she wanted to join us, but she always politely said “no, thank you.” Her clear interest in the class and her determination to only participate if the class was conducted in English reminded me of the impact that social entities play in children’s heritage language attitudes. Frankly, it disheartened me. But Jenny’s attitude in relation to Spanish is not isolated notion from the socio-political realities of the language—and its tied identity—in the United States. In fact, her position towards Spanish and her inclination for an English-only education demonstrated the behavior of someone misguidedly trying to act in her own interest.

As mentioned earlier, Latinos face enormous amounts of prejudice in the United States. They are not only depicted as a racial and immigrant menace, but also a linguistic peril to national unity. In discussing California’s 1998 Proposition 227, which eliminated bilingual education, Santa Ana shows how Latina/o xenophobia was intertwined with metaphors of English-only as literacy to create a “fallacious diversion from the real structural problems facing Latinos in public schools” (157). In addition, he points out how these harmful and erroneous metaphors were (re)cycled through the LA Times, a newspaper regarded as objective and progressive. Santa Anna emphasizes that such metaphors violently spread the notion that nurturing children’s Spanish was a detriment to their literacies. Jenny’s privileging of English over Spanish and ideas about Spanish as a language that should not be in use in educational settings could then be understood as the resulting effect of nationalistic agendas and prejudices set against Latinos. While Antonio saw the class as an extension of his schooling practices, and other participants saw it as an opportunity to have fun, Jenny could not bear the idea of using her Spanish, or seeing it as worthy of what she perceived as a schooling environment. Their

opposing socializations and behaviors made me consider that Jenny's schooling orientation corresponded to the nationalistic ideologies that Santa Anna and Zentella (*Growing up Bilingual*) describe in their works, in which the use of English-only is equalized to literacy.

On the bright side, Carol stayed and the class accomplished most of its eight-week goals. Because this class was conducted to encourage and test bilingual literacy practices and heritage language (re)acquisition, I created a number of goals for the class to meet. The class expanded the heritage language users' vocabularies in both their L1s and L2s. For example, the children became more comfortable singing and saying words such as *acurrucaditos* (curled up), *telaraña* (spider-web), *hombros* (shoulders), *rodillas* (knees), *tejer* (to weave), *aplaudir* (to clap), *silbar* (to whistle), *alas* (wings), *izquierda* (left), *derecha* (right), *orangutan* (ape), and *serpiente* (snake). Also, a great majority of participants were able to point to the meanings of the words in English. They also learned English words such as wheat, index finger, bright, windshield wipers, hay, barn, humongous, gigantic, and eagle, and their metalinguistic awareness appeared stronger. Towards the end of the course, participants seemed to switch from one language to another with a greater level of ease. Thus, as Valdés points out, creating structured schooling experiences for heritage language users can foster more of a middle ground in the L1/L2 Continuum. Establishing a bank of Spanish and English words, creating consciousness about what language they represent, and being able to find the meanings for a word in a different language are all aspects of the important work that translators are able to do. In *Translating Childhoods*, Orellana emphasizes the service and work that "children translators" do for society and its multiple cross-cultural contexts. She explains that while children's experiences translating are not always positive, they represent a valuable linguistic and cultural resource. The music and play bilingual class not only acknowledged the children's bilingualism, but it attempted to engage their dual

linguistic resources. Thus, it can be argued that together the class and the library could promote a context and space for heritage language users to position and (re)construct themselves as bilinguals and “children translators.”

### **DUAL LANGUAGE PRACTICES**

In addition, most of the children began to recognize language differences in print. They were able to distinguish whether the materials we were using were in English or Spanish. I first saw this through Pedro’s lead. During our fourth class, 7-year-old Pedro recognized the word *pollitos* in print. This was a literacy practice that Antonio and I had first introduced. Up until the third week, only Antonio (the only participant who attended a bilingual school) had pointed out when books were in Spanish. Antonio also had the keenest ability to shuttle<sup>6</sup> and code switch<sup>7</sup> between English and Spanish. During this class, Antonio had not been able to join us because he was overwhelmed with homework; however, in Antonio’s absence, Pedro seemed eager to take leadership.

Like the week before, I asked the children in what language they thought the book was written. Pedro quickly answered, “*En español*” (In Spanish). He then asked me if he “could see the book for a second,” and looked for the two ls. He pointed to the word *pollitos*, specifically to the two ls, and said to the other children, “You see the two ls, that make the *ye* sound? That’s how I knew.” His pride showed in his cheerful expression. This particular moment of Pedro’s enthusiasm highlighted the contagious *felicidad* that children may take in their ability to apply a new concept from their heritage language in an educational setting. Pedro was excited to show his peers that he remembered how to distinguish the word *pollitos*, and the fact that it was in

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<sup>6</sup> See Canagarajah’s “Toward a Writing Pedagogy of Shuttling between Languages: Learning from Multilingual Writers” for the rhetorical power of shuttling.

<sup>7</sup> See Zentella’s *Growing Up Bilingual* on code switching between English and Spanish.

Spanish. He was proud to show that he recalled what Antonio said about Spanish as the language that puts together two ls to make a *ye* sound. *Felicidad* or “pride in helping others” is not something that school’s traditional literacy practices “test for,” but they can certainly lead to feelings of efficacy, accomplishment, and belonging (Orellana).

Pedro’s recognition of the word and conceptualization about the two ls demonstrates the sociocultural approach in which children and adults may exchange literacy practices. Antonio and I had modeled the pattern of recognizing some distinctive features about the Spanish language in print, so Pedro was able to follow the same practice. Most importantly, Pedro may have observed the joy that Antonio took in demonstrating his knowledge and felt inspired to do the same. Pedro appeared to realize that our class valued practices that engaged with his heritage language.

During our first two weeks of class, I noticed that participants struggled to follow simple interactions in Spanish, and they seemed quite challenged by visual-motor practices. The students especially demonstrated difficulty in creating patterns with their bodies, while singing, waving, and looking at others. For this reason, I decided to employ a short introduction song. The song rhythmically placed emphasis on making students aware of their peers and greeting each other by their names (as displayed on their name tags). The English version of the song says, “Hello (name), hello (name), hello (name), how are you today?” The act of singing a short greeting song appeared to help children formulate patterns of language and socio-cognitive and visual motor engagement. Heritage language users acquired new words from the system of language in which they participated and expressed *felicidad* in using both languages (Runfola et. al 10; Moreno et. al 166). In addition, singing the familiar melody in the L1 provided the

children an opportunity to interact with this language in what they seemed to perceive as a welcoming schooling environment.

When I first implemented this song, I did not see it as a breakthrough song; in fact, I thought children would soon tire of it. But singing this song at the beginning of the class became a community practice. I realized the impact of the song after I noticed the children's eagerness to get their name tags on, sit in a circle, and try to recall everyone's names. I also saw the song's importance when children, like 8-year-old Lina, still struggled with simple translations, but were able to shuttle between languages with greater ease.

Lina was always one of the first participants ready to sing the "Introductions" song; however, she struggled with one particular sentence in the song and would consistently stumble on the word *hoy* (today). Lina sometimes inserted the word "*ahora*," meaning right now, or skipped that part altogether. Yet, after a few weeks of performing the song and reflecting on her own challenge to build fluency, she did something different. She had just sung the song and had once again mistakenly inserted the word *ahora* instead of *hoy*. This time, however, she stopped herself, looked around to her peers, and then looked me in the eye, and sensing that something was wrong said, "Ah *hoy* not *ahora*!" She then felt a need to explain that she thought back to the song's lyrics in English and realized that the word she was looking for was today, not now. Basic music and play songs in English and Spanish can encourage heritage language learners/users to create linguistic patterns in both of their linguistic repertoires. They may also encourage heritage language users to utilize their L2 knowledge to intervene in their L1, and viceversa.

## LINGUISTIC INTERVENTIONS

The most successful activity in this class was “The Vowels Leap Frog”/ “*Sapo, Sapito, Sapo,*” which consisted of recognizing when the song reached the “u,” after singing all the vowels. The song goes:

*Sapo, Sapito, Sapo; Sapo, Sapito Azul;*

*Sapo, Sapito, Sapo, que no sabe ni la u;*

*a, e, i, o, u:*

Frog, Froggy, Frog; Frog, Blue Frog; Frog, Froggy, Frog, who does not even know his u; a, e, i, o, **u** (emphasis added to reflect the goal of the song)

This song was performed as a game and required that students be attentive and refined with their hand-eye coordination abilities in order to effectively play. Participants needed to coordinate passing their left hand to the right-hand side, while listening carefully for the second “u,” without getting tricked with the first one. Through this game-song, an interesting event occurred: many more children were drawn into our circle. At one point, the game-song had 16 participants. As with a smaller number of participants, the larger group appeared eager to instruct one another and utilize their heritage language as a language of pedagogy and leadership.

Brenda, a joyful and eager 8-year-old participant, who almost always communicated in English, began to use some Spanish sentences when speaking to others. But what was remarkable was her first intervention in instructing 7-year-old Miguel. Miguel had just joined the class for the first time, and although I had provided him individual instructions and had asked others to help me demonstrate how to play the game song, he was very puzzled after the first

round. We encouraged him to try again, and the second time he seemed to improve after observing others. Miguel was able to coordinate passing his left hand to his peer's right hand, but when the second "u" returned to him, he did not remove his hand. It was then that Brenda explained to him what he needed to do when he heard the second "u." She not only expressed this verbally in her L1, but also visually demonstrated what he needed to do. This was a moment in which Brenda, a participant who was already acquainted with the game, helped Miguel reach the game's goal, to remove his hand at the second "u." This was also a sign that Brenda was now considering the use of her L1 as a system for pedagogical interaction.

Musical games like "The Vowels Leap Frog/ "Sapo, Sapito, Sapo" can serve as tools for language acquisition. According to Kendall King and Lyn Fogle's "Raising Bilingual Children: Common Parental Concerns and Current Research," "some activities are more effective than others in promoting second language acquisition and bilingualism [...] Researchers have found live interaction is more effective"(2). Audrey A. Berger and Shelly Cooper also speak about the importance and influence of live interaction as the "most effective" source for language acquisition. Based on their research, they explain, "children's focus during play is the activity, not the culmination of the activity. [...] Studies illustrate that play activities exert strong influences on children's development" (Berger and Cooper 2). In addition, Heath also notes the importance of play as sociocultural practice.

"The Vowels Leap Frog/ "Sapo, Sapito, Sapo" functioned as a game, which led participants to focus on patterns and expectations. Thus, participants seemed to acquire bicultural skills by assuming that the *felicidad* they experienced derived from their ability to participate with their L1 knowledge and usage. It is important to note, that Miguel quickly adapted and



became drawn to the game, just as the other children, who, in the words of Pedro, “had tons of fun.” Participants even made plans to play it on the next day.

### **MOTOR SKILLS AND TECHNOLOGY**

The bilingual class heightened moments of *felicidad*, but it also emphasized gaps in the participants’ familiarity with traditional schooling practices. Class participants demonstrated difficulty with multiple hand-eye coordination practices and socio-cognitive skills in general. Youths displayed high levels of frustration and when they were unable to perform some of the class’s activities. Participants’ struggles became evident and more frequent when the songs were in English and required multiple body movements along with singing.

One play song which amplified the children’s unfamiliarity with traditional U.S. pre-schooling practices was the “The Itsy Bitsy Spider.” Like with other songs, I asked participants whether they knew of it, but only Antonio assented. He added that he knew the song was in a book of nursery rhymes they had in school. I thought maybe the children just did not know the song by its name, so I hummed to its tune, hoping to get some reactions. Soon, Isamar (six) said she knew the song in Spanish, while others like Brenda and Carol mentioned they were somewhat familiar with the tune, but did not know the words. I told the participants that we could all learn the song together and they seemed eager to try. However, their attitudes shifted rapidly as I led them in a sing along to the “The Itsy Bitsy Spider.” I asked them to create “spider hands” modeling for them to point their left index finger and join it with their right hand thumb, and vice versa, and to continue doing this motion so that their hands would resemble spiders “climbing.”

Antonio, who in many occasions acted as the group's leader, expressed disappointment with this practice. He verbally repeated that the activity was "too hard." Other participants also demonstrated frustration. Brenda, however, soon figured it out and started to observe others trying to do it. I then repeated the instructions in Spanish, while simulating the "spider hands" and the children looked up and seemed even more puzzled; as they continued struggling with coordinating their fingers to climb up. Brenda turned around, faced seven-year-old Pedro, and began to instruct him in Spanish. She grabbed both his thumb and index finger and helped him simulate the "spiders climbing" motion. Pedro was happy to receive Brenda's help, and was thrilled when he was able to do the motion on his own.

In the meantime, I continued modeling the spider hands for others, and began to sing the "Itsy Bitsy" song in Spanish. Often times when I would switch to Spanish for instruction the children seemed perplexed, but singing this song in Spanish made the environment a lot lighter (literally and metaphorically). Rapidly, both seven-year-old Maritza, and six-year-old Isabel began to sing along and expressed that they knew "this song." Maritza said she heard it many times before while spending time with her grandmother in Mexico, and Isabel said her mother had taught her the song. In addition, Antonio put his frustration to the side and focused on the lyrics of the song in Spanish, and requested that I repeat two particular lines in the song. He later expressed that he now understood that our hands were the spiders climbing up a spider web. I will discuss how I believe Antonio came to this understanding in the following section.

"The Itsy Bitsy Spider" song play offers multiple angles of discussion. Like Antonio, most participants had a hard time following activities like this one. This may be attributed to the fact that all participants did not have the opportunity to engage in these types of traditional schooling practices before. As mentioned earlier, participants in this class had not attended

preschool programs. However, their struggles may also be attributed to the current shift of children's access to technology and entertainment, which has diminished the use of important motor skills tied to literacy<sup>8</sup> (Heath).

Moreover, it is important to note that, although Antonio knew the lyrics of the song in English, he was not familiar with the coordinating motions expected of the song play. He mentioned his school class had the book, and perhaps they had read from it many times before; however, because Antonio was in the third grade, his teacher may have assumed that her/his class was already familiar with the song's playful interactions and that those kinds of traditional pre-literacy practices had already been explored. Thus when our class's main focus became the practice itself, Antonio and others like him felt that they could not excel in the activity. Yet, the class dynamics changed, when we began to sing in Spanish. This linguistic switch not only opened a path for participants like Maritza and Isabel to take part in the activity, but also for Antonio to reflect on the meaning of the song.

While Antonio's struggles with the motions had to do with his unfamiliarity with the practice, the song's translation gave him an opportunity to think of the song in a different way. The English version of the song says that the spider goes up a "water spout," however the Spanish version says that "the spider climbs its own spider web." Thus, having a heritage language and engaging in translation allowed participants to build on their existing knowledge (Heath; Zentella, *Growing Up Bilingual*). It also demonstrated how participants understood the meanings of some words in both English and Spanish. For example, when Antonio and others realized that the Spanish song said "*telaraña*/spider web" other students questioned what a water spout was. I opened the query to all participants, and realized none of them knew the term. This

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<sup>8</sup> See Heath's "The Hand of Play" in *Words at Work and Play*.

gave us the opportunity to discuss a concept which, in this case, they seemed to know better in Spanish.

In addition, “The Itsy Bitsy Spider” song play and others like it allowed me to notice a new pattern in Brenda’s interactions. She had begun to instruct others in Spanish and to assist younger participants. While it would be feasible to claim that this was something she learned in our eight week class, it quickly became clear to me that this was not the case. Brenda’s reaction to helping others in Spanish certainly showed her now acquired comfort in utilizing the heritage language for instruction; however, her practice of helping the younger children seemed to come from home. Volunteering at the library and interacting with participants in and out of class gave me the opportunity to see Brenda’s level of responsibility and role as the older sister to a 10-month-old baby boy. I saw her carrying him, talking to him, and making sure that others were gentle and careful whenever they approached him. While Brenda’s caring interactions and skills may have been the result of a Latina gendered role, which tend to direct young girls to look after the younger ones (Zentella, *Growing Up Bilingual* 232-243), it also allowed her to become the leader of multiple traditional schooling practices. This may not have been the case if the class did not welcome bilingual and bicultural interactions.

Because the class made it evident that participants were unfamiliar with multiple expected hand-eye coordination exercises, and fingertip, socio-cognitive and body interactions, it is important to discuss that this change may not just be the result of the absence of traditional preschool practices, but also a generational gap. In *Words at Work and Play*, Heath discusses the problematic relationship with current entertainment technologies and children’s literacies. She explains that there people should not be afraid of these fast-changing technologies and their entertainment purposes, but rather of overusing them, and ignoring their tendencies to eradicate

physical hand play for children. The case study at the VBPL hinted to how a mismatch between home practices and expected schooling practices became wider with the addition of these entertainment technologies.

Even though this class did not experiment with play song technologies such as music videos, and music tablets, many participants in the first weeks inquired about these items. In fact, many of them seemed surprised that I would not be playing music for them, but that instead we would be singing the songs together. Furthermore, it is important to note that although the class had great consistency in terms of participants, there were children whom it never reached. As a way of extending technologies and computer access to families who may not have this at home, the VBPL has more than 20 computers available to children and adults. Through my time volunteering at the library and conducting this class, I noticed that a great number of the younger children, who would not have much homework, if any, would come to the library and head straight to the computers. Though at first I thought this was a great thing, I soon realized that it was not always the case. Children as young as 4-years-old would watch YouTube music videos designed for adults; they would create and log-in to Facebook accounts (for up to half an hour), and while sometimes staff members would guide them to watch other things, they went greatly unsupervised. I invited many of the children to participate in the class, but they were focused on the computers. They not only turned down this class, but also the VBPL's conducted activities, such as story time, read to a sibling, and karate. When I inquired about this with staff members, I was told that it was a "50/50 situation" because, if they took away the technology, the children would not have the opportunity to engage with it at home as many of the families had told librarians that they did not have computers or Internet. Yet, when it came down to supervising

children's "technology engagement" times, parents were not as aware of the dangers and left children unattended.

## CHAPTER FIVE--CONCLUSION

Although it is too early to determine the long-term impact of this pilot study, the data collected demonstrated that bilingual music and play can foster opportunities for participants to engage in bilingual practices. The class appeared to create a space for heritage language users to bridge gaps in their traditional schooling practices by utilizing the heritage language and home practices as resources to their evolving literacies. In addition, the class attempted to extend the library's 5-year plan of participating as a stakeholder in the community's growth and its young participants' academic success (Village Branch Public Library). In addition, the class demonstrated that on a microscopic level, music and play—along with a safe “school” environment, such as the Village Branch Public Library—can encourage bilingual practices as they give heritage language users the opportunity to practice both of their linguistic abilities in a setting that they identify as similar to a school. Thus, participants' attitudes towards L1 literacy development seemed to be highly and positively influenced. Also, the class provided a small but consistent glimpse of the impact of allowing heritage language users to build on their home and language practices.

At the same time, the class highlighted many issues and questions raised by scholars studying the relationship between bilingualism and biculturalism of heritage language users. This case study highlighted how children negotiate social and linguistic norms, and how this can ultimately impact their educational attitudes and academic achievement (*Zentella Growing Up Bilingual*; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco). As noted earlier, Antonio was the only participant who had engaged in traditional literacy practices in his L1. He was also the only one to attend the Maxwell Spanish Immersion Elementary School, and display the greatest eagerness towards engaging Spanish in an educational context. Antonio's process of socialization seemed certainly outstanding, and proved encouraging for the kinds of benefits that can be gained if

students' heritage languages are engaged in their literacy practices; however, it is also important to note that Antonio's bilingualism, and proud biculturalism also heightened the social context tied to the treatment of the Spanish language as a heritage language in the U.S. Why was he the only one to receive this benefit? Why was he the only one seeing Spanish as educational from the beginning?

According to Movoto, a real state agency, the Maxwell Spanish Immersion Elementary School received a general performance and curriculum grade of an A since 2009, while the Cardinal Valley Elementary School received a D in 2009 and since 2010 earned a C grade. All the children except Antonio attended the Cardinal Valley Elementary School. Also according to Movoto, the Cardinal Valley Elementary School was predominantly Latino (Latino students made up 64.97% of the student population) while the Maxwell Spanish Immersion Elementary School was predominantly White (White students made up 49.72% of the student population, while Latinos composed 15.06 %) (Movoto). Moreover, through consensus generated in conversations with the library's staff, there was a general agreement that the students who attended the Maxwell Spanish Immersion Elementary School received more meaningful and extended homework than those who attended the Cardinal Valley Elementary School.

Although, Lexington's response to its growing population has been more progressive since the time Rich and Miranda first conducted their studies, there are still educational concerns and obstacles that need to be addressed. Located in the southern state of Kentucky, Lexington is considered a new immigrant destination and a place that has great potential to shift the dynamics in terms of Latino heritage language users' educational success. Even though statistics and primary research point to the Cardinal Valley Elementary (CVE) as a school that is in great difference with the bilingual orientation and educational attainment offered at the Maxwell



Elementary school, it is important to note that CVE will be offering a dual Language Program option for heritage language kindergarteners as of the fall of 2014. Their announcement brochure notes that they will follow a “one-way developmental model,” which is designed for

Spanish speaking students to first begin developing Spanish literacy skills with a small amount of English exposure. Each year the amount of English increases until third grade. In the third grade, the students will receive instruction in English and half in Spanish. (Cardinal Valley Elementary)

CVE will offer what appears to be a 90/10 bilingual model, which will begin with Spanish to establish a strong foundation in the heritage language before moving onto English. Offering a bilingual option designed for heritage language users sounds like it could be a step in the right direction for CVE; however, issues of race and minority group marginalization still need greater analysis. Furthermore, it is important to note that this program will be optional, and so far multiple inquiries with parents about their feelings on this new offering are pointing to rejection of the program. Socialization works in multiple ways, and not just with children, linguistic orientations and hegemony often work to influence parents of heritage language children. Many parents attending VBPL are hesitant about enrolling their children in this program as they have been socialized to see English-only as the path to success (Zentella).

Future research should provide quantitative evidence of the relationships indicated in this qualitative data. Research should also inquire into the social and racial dynamics of school zoning and academic achievement among Latino students in places like Lexington, which illustrate Raymond A. Mohl’s term of the “Nuevo New South” (Mohl 31-33). This research notes the importance of promoting pedagogies that leverage heritage languages as sources to

create school-based knowledge. In Lexington, Kentucky, the Village Branch Public Library provides a great example of such positive influences, but it is important to remember that schools can further extend these opportunities on a greater scale, especially if the concern is to see all students do well in school and have opportunities of social mobility (Fishman 169). Moreover, researchers interested in Latino educational attainment in the Nuevo New South, should look at how programs like the VBPL are not only addressing a growing population of Latino citizens, but also coping with current shifts in technology. Furthermore, teachers and education policy holders should carefully note how emerging writing dispositions and orientations such as translingualism or translanguaging, see and treat students' emerging bilingualisms as resources to their educational attainment (Canagarajah). Lastly, researchers should look further and cautiously when exploring the class and racial implications of bilingualism in the US, as multiple studies—including the primary research obtained in this case study—point to opposing attitudes towards bilingualism. While in predominantly Caucasian and middle-class schools bilingualism is highly valued, in predominantly minority schools bilingualism is treated as a detriment to traditional schooling practices (Flores and Beardsmore). This too, demands further exploration.

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