

# From ELLs to Bilingual Teachers

## Spanish-English Speaking Latino Teachers' Experiences of Language Shame & Loss

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### Introduction

By traversing boundaries globally, transnational individuals supply first-world economies with labor forces in countries such as the United States, France, and Japan (Vertovec, 2001, 2004; Winstead, 2010). Transnationals are people who are residents in the post colony yet continue to maintain socio-economic relations in their country of origin, are hired for unskilled labor, and are often identified as immigrants (Darder & Uriarte, 2013; Vertovec, 2001, 2004). The recruitment of transnationals from prior colonies and neighboring countries contributes to worldwide multilingualism and diversity in schools and classrooms (Hay, 2008; Rueda & Stillman, 2012; Wang & Winstead, 2016).

The children involved in transnational movements leave their respective countries of origin and corresponding ways of cultural, social, and linguistic understanding. As they enter the host state with their parents, they are placed in schools with the expectation that they will acquire the dominant language, understand the host country rules and norms, and perform well in school. Yet at the same time, their native or home language support has been removed in schools that reflect restrictive language policies in such states as California and Arizona, both with high populations of Latinos (Austin, Willett, & Gebhard, 2010; Flores & Murillo, 2001; Macedo, 2000; Valdez, 2001).

As their native language is restricted

or rejected, these children feel a sense of shame not only about their language but also rejection of their heritage, which affects their sense of well-being (Phinney, Horen-cyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Despite the high demand for teachers who have the cultural and bilingual expertise to teach these children of transnationals, there is a shortage of certified bilingual teachers to teach English language learners (ELLs) (de Cohen, Deterding, & Clewell, 2005; Hones, Aguilar, & Thao, 2009).

In addition to the shortage and demand for highly qualified bilingual teachers, teachers in countries such as the United States and Great Britain do not reflect minority populations in the schools (Bireda & Chait, 2014; Gollnick & Chinn, 2013; Vonderlack-Navarro, 2014) and often lack the necessary cultural and linguistic expertise to work with transnational children.

While much relevant research concerns preparing mainstream teachers to work and support ELLs culturally and linguistically (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Hite & Evans, 2006; Honawar, 2009; Leavitt, 2013; Lucas, 2008), more study is needed to validate and consider the dual language expertise of bilingual individuals as resources to address the increasing needs of multilingual populations of children in schools.

Adopting an identity framework, this multiple case study explored bilingual and bicultural Latino teachers' lived experiences of language shame and loss influenced their teaching in classrooms with mainstream and multilingual children.

### Literature Review

#### Language Status and Language Learners

Immigrants, as well as their descendants who become citizens, are often marginalized and retain social and language status reflective of post-colonial history (Bordieu, 1977, 1986; Darder & Uriarte,

2013; Feagin, 1984). Prior historical memories of territorial conflict (e.g., French-Algerian War) and acquisition (e.g., U.S. acquisition of prior Mexican territories) is also associated with notions of first-world nation dominance and third-world subordination as reflected in present-day societal attitudes and language policies (Darder & Uriarte, 2013; Macedo, 2000; Wang & Winstead, 2016).

Language hierarchies as seen in state policies and practices reveal how language status is often tied with immigrant country origin status around the world. Thus, a major issue with this expectation of dominant first-world powers is the insistence of one nation and one language at the expense of the native or heritage language (Crawford, 2004; Macedo, 2000; Wang & Winstead, 2016), especially languages associated with lower status in society (Beardsmore, 2008; Darder & Uriarte, 2013; Helot, 2002).

For instance, despite plurilingual citizens/residents in France and language policies that promote multilingualism, language hierarchies exist that favor some languages over others. Foreign languages such as German, Spanish, and Italian are accorded higher status in France than regional languages and non-European immigrant languages such as Arabic (Beardsmore, Helot, & Young, 2005) which has reportedly been restricted as a primary language tool to promote student instruction (Young & Helot, 2003).

Revealing similar patterns of language marginalization, historical language policy in the United States has been in response to the increasing numbers of Latinos and, correspondingly, the growth of English-only movements (Barker, 2001; Padilla, Lindholm, Chen, Duran, Hakuta, et al., 1991; Schildkraut, 2001).

English-only movements that restrict the use of the primary language have been enacted since the 1850s, typically associated with anti-immigrant sentiment, and are now revealed in more current policies such

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as Proposition 63 which decreed English as the official language of California in 1986 (Padilla et al., 1991; San Miguel, 2008). While this proposition provided for English as the official language in government functions, it also prompted restrictive school-oriented referendums in highly Latino-populated states. California passed Proposition 227 in 1998 and Arizona passed Proposition 203 in 2000 which restricted primary language use in schools.

Devaluation and restriction of languages reveal the reproduction of social hierarchies associated with native language status (Beardsmore, 2008) that are influenced by prior colonial status (Wang & Winstead, 2016). For example, Arabic-speaking North Africans have lower academic achievement than their European Spanish or Portuguese classmates in France (Alanis, 2010; Brinbaum & Cebolla-Boado, 2007; Régner & Loose, 2006) and are perceived as having less ability to integrate with the mainstream (Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Holland, 2010; Sabatier, 2008).

Studies in the United States similarly reveal that Mexican and Latino achievement is lower than that of their mainstream counterparts (Gandara, 2010) and those students are typically viewed as resistant to learning English (Barker, 2001; Padilla et al., 1991; Tse, 2001).

According to Bordieu (1977; 1987), cultural capital is measured by one's ability to follow expected language and social rules associated with adaptation within the host state. Thus, one is often judged by presumably appropriate cultural expertise and behavioral expectations which can include adopting language attitudes that reflect the dominant ideals and notions of the nation-state. If one's language and culture conflicts with dominant cultural and linguistic ideals, this can affect one's status in mainstream society. Barker (2001) reports that 23 states in the U.S. have English-only policies and statements that have negative consequences for second language learners in schools.

The number of states with English-only policies has since been reduced by one. Proposition 227, California's English-only policy, was repealed by voters through Proposition 58 in 2016. This paradigm shift appears to reveal Californians' greater awareness of the benefits of primary language support, bilingualism, and dual immersion in schools.

### **Language Shame and Loss**

The majority of teachers who teach in schools are primarily from the dominant

mainstream and are not adequately familiar with minority and immigrant lived community experiences (Delpit, 1995; Foote et al., 2013; Howard, 2005; Nieto, 2000;). In addition, instances exist in which Spanish-speaking bilingual student teachers are often told not to utilize their primary language in classrooms where the majority of Emergent Bilinguals speak Spanish as a second language (Austin, 2010; Fitts et al., 2008). While the literature often promotes integration, individuals who have collectively experienced bias or prejudice often regain a sense of pride and validation of their bilingual expertise only through dialogue and collective conversations with like-minded or culturally similar individuals, such as in bilingual cohort programs (Fitts et al., 2008; Weisman & Hansen, 2010).

Evidence of minority language negation and shame are exhibited in social settings leading not only to language loss (Montrul, 2005; Varghese, 2006) but also the loss of intergenerational primary language communication between parents, grandparents, and children (Flores & Murillo, 2001). Typically intergenerational communication occurs when children can speak the language of their parents and their grandparents.

Intergenerational conflict then occurs when descendants lack the language to communicate with their parents and family members (Flores & Murillo, 2001; Flores, 2005; Gim Chung, 2001). Moreover, the heritage language acts as the transmitter of cultural values, norms, and heritage information to the next generation. Without this knowledge and ability to communicate, misunderstandings and communicative distance can occur among family members.

Schools act as purveyors of state linguistic policy and contribute to the restriction or allowance of use of the primary language and, thus, can affect the ability to retain communicative closeness with family relations. Many bilingual teachers work with children who are linguistically similar to themselves and who have correspondingly been taught in schools affected by monolingual policies.

Accordingly, monolingual policies have contributed to language loss and negative feelings by students towards their own culture and background (Fitts et al., 2008; Martinez-Roldan & Malave, 2004). These deficit notions not only affect the bilingual student's sense of identity but also their sense of self-value (Kaplan & Flum, 2012; Phinney et al., 2001). Furthermore, those

bilinguals who have become teachers have also been taught to adopt these deficit discourses (Arellano-Houchin et al., 2001). In addition, these discourses often influence bilingual teachers' pedagogical practices, which due to policies in some states become inherently monolingual in nature, restricting the ability of Latinos to socially communicate intergenerationally (Barker, 2001; Arellano-Houchin et al., 2001).

Cultivating social justice orientations in bilingual-bicultural teachers is crucial to their empowerment so that they may become role models and change agents who acknowledge, support, and utilize the bilingual-bicultural capital of diverse student populations in ways that will prevent heritage loss (Flores & Murillo, 2001; Weisman & Hansen, 2010). Schooling instruction should be geared to the students' background, community, and cultural and linguistic experiences (Gutiérrez 2008).

### **Bilingual-Bicultural Identities**

Bicultural is a term that refers to individuals who are from two or more cultural backgrounds (Weisman, Flores, & Valenciana, 2007). Bilingual-bicultural individuals often negotiate meaning in their adjustment to the dominant social and cultural environment (Darder, 1991; Fitts et al., 2008). Bilingual teachers who have been exposed to monolingual environments representative of restrictive language policies, programs, and attitudes may develop negative feelings toward their own heritage, language, and identity. Yet Latino bilingual teacher candidates have access to both English language as well as Spanish heritage language capital that can be used to provide heritage language support for ELL newcomers classrooms in accordance with the *Lau vs. Nichols* Supreme Court decision (Winstead, 2016).

In this study we, as the researchers, utilized identity as a lens to describe the conditions of individuals who must negotiate meaning within society and social institutions. Individuals' identities are shaped in societal and institutional contexts (Gee, 2000; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Often, the heritage language, e.g., Spanish, has been subordinated due to English-only and monolingual policies established in various states and structured English immersion (SEI) programs established in schools which disallow heritage language use to bridge bilingual children's learning of English (Winstead, 2016).

Thus, expectations of English-only instruction develop not only through policy but also as such restrictions play

out within particular contexts such as schools. Accordingly, how individuals are viewed within these contexts promotes perceptions of their identity based on how they are recognized in society and by institutions, e.g., ethnicity (Latino, Mexican), ability (ADHD), language (English Language Learner), or being labeled “at risk” as suggested by Gee (2000). Additional examples can include schooling and policy restrictions such as speaking only English in the classroom despite the possibility that the children are newcomers and have little knowledge of the new second language—English.

Thus, the institutional identity, derived from social and political policy as well as mainstream notions of identity affect how students are viewed. Looking at who we are in the context of the institution, such as an ELL, or being a bilingual teacher, versus being mainstream and monolingual, or whether a child is officially diagnosed as an ELL or ADHD becomes part of the institutional identity. How the child may be treated in this situation depends on the disposition of those individuals who set school policy and their educational philosophies. Similarly, individuals “... can negotiate and contest how their traits are to be seen (by themselves and others) in terms of the different perspectives on identity” (Gee, 2000, p. 108).

Those who persist in believing that English-only should be the approach for ELLs in schools restrict the students’ language identity. When students are not allowed to utilize their home language in school, cultural and linguistic communication with their respective family members become undervalued. Knowledge is constructed based on world views within societies and how children can and are socialized (Kaplan & Flum 2012) to the dominant norms and dispositions of the host country.

Congruently, Latino social and cultural dispositions, in contrast with a mainstream and subtractive language environment, can cause conflicts of identity as students negotiate their bilingualness within a monolingual-oriented world (Fitts et al., 2008; Martinez-Roldan & Malave, 2004; Quiocho & Rios, 2000; Tellez, 1999; Weisman, 2001). Positive cultural and social identity is associated with the well-being of the child (Phinney et al., 2001) and should be promoted in schools.

As national educational policies continue to devalue the cultural capital of a growing cultural and linguistic population, researchers and academicians have a moral obligation to illuminate and

explore how to address deficit discourses in schools (Arce, 2004; Fitts, et al., 2008; Flores & Murillo, 2001). Educators and researchers need to counter deficit narratives with teacher- and student-oriented approaches that honor the linguistic and cultural diversity of all players in schools (e.g., children, teachers, parents).

As the researchers for this study, we advocate for bilingual teacher agency. We have found that bilinguals grasp immigrant learner cultural and linguistic challenges associated with their identity and self-esteem and, therefore, have the wherewithal to help children counter subtractive discourses and practices (Arce, 2004; Fitts et al., 2008; Weisman & Hansen, 2010). The challenge in teaching is to ensure that bilinguals have opportunities to work with individuals who are like themselves, e.g., serving as bilingual teachers who are acutely aware of the deficit discourses that they might, unconsciously, engage in due to their prior scholarization (Fitts et al., 2008, Valdez et al., 2001).

### The Study

Bilingual teachers come into the workplace with a plethora of language capital, language registers, and language varieties as well as cultural understanding associated with knowing more than one language. Such expertise and capital can be used to promote positive well-being for plurilingual children in schools.

However, according to the literature, bilingual-bicultural individuals have complex and contradictory ideas about their own selves, voices, and identities as well as the ways in which they may regain their cultural and linguistic capital due to deficit discourses in schools (Fitts, et al., 2008; Tellez, 1999; Quiocho & Rios, 2000; Weisman, 2001; Weisman, Flores, & Valenciana, 2007). Exposure to deficit discourses and monolingual expectations in society not only affects bilingual children’s sense of bilingual-bicultural identity but also how mainstream teachers and bilingual teachers instruct and behave in schools.

As researchers we were interested in whether the challenges bilingual teachers faced as children have ameliorated or changed over the years as they work in school settings as adults. As such, we employed a participatory research design promoting dialogue and self-analysis through critical reflection about the participants’ perceptions of their lived experiences in schools as bilingual-bicultural children

and subsequent preparation as bilingual teachers (Dewey, 1933; Freire, 1990; Shor & Freire, 1987).

Our intent was to have Spanish-English bilingual-bicultural Latino teachers question and reflect upon the linguistic, social, and political contexts of their scholarization. These teachers were challenged to deconstruct and reconstruct their lived experiences through critical reflection of social and historical issues concerning Latinos in education.

### Methodology

This multiple case study of eight Spanish-English speaking bilingual-bicultural Latino teachers addressed their lived experiences as bilingual children and teachers in today’s classrooms.

Research questions explored include:

How do bilingual bicultural teachers perceive their native language use and sense of self within society from childhood to adulthood?

Correspondingly, what are bilingual teachers’ perceptions of how their own language learning experience might affect teaching students of similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds?

### Participants

The study took place at a state university in a large urban area in the Pacific Southwest of the United States. Over 34,000 students attend this Hispanic-serving institution. To collect in-depth data from teachers of a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, three male and five female teachers from different Latino communities and of differing teaching experience were chosen to participate in this two-year multiple case study. All of them were U.S. born Spanish native speakers who were raised in different Latino cultures (e.g., Mexico, Guatemalan, Salvadorean) and initially only spoke Spanish in the home but became fluent in English.

A recruitment survey indicated a variety of teaching experience among the participants, aged from 22 to 39, including three full-time inservice teachers and six substitute teachers. Participants have K-8 teaching credentials and worked at various school sites. They were enrolled in a Spanish-English bilingual authorization program. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants’ age, background, school design experienced in their early childhood, the type of teaching credential they hold, and a summary of their teaching experience and teaching positions at the



time they were taking the two semester courses.

**Context**

Participants who passed oral and written interviews demonstrating proficient level of Spanish-English bilingual ability were enrolled in a two-semester Spanish Bilingual Authorization program. This program prepared them to teach Spanish-speaking ELLs through English-Spanish dual immersion teaching methods. The curriculum concerned language and how language is learned within society.

Participants took courses which covered historical, theoretical, political, and legal aspects of bilingual education. Throughout the courses, the participants reflected upon and analyzed historical, theoretical, political, and legal implications of federal and state policies on bilingual programs in both English and Spanish. Furthermore, participants studied how language variation, as well as how students' life experiences, can be used to foster bilingualism.

As part of this dual language program participants were asked to read about bilingual education issues including sub-

tractive schooling practices associated with primary language loss. Participants then juxtaposed their own lived bilingual childhood and teaching experiences on blogs and in journals to reflect upon these issues and how to create culturally and linguistically responsive learning environments. The teachers were encouraged to discuss language issues and instructional approaches in groups. They also had opportunities to juxtapose personal narratives with broader social contexts, thereby allowing them to examine and critique the ideology and curricula of schools.

The teachers were asked to reflect upon their assignments including answering questions about factors affecting language use from their own culturally and personally relevant perspectives. As a consequence, they became aware of the ways in which deficit discourses shamed their home language, their families, and their communities in ways that led to language loss. Moreover, the teachers reported how this context continues in present-day schooling situations in ways that limit or invalidate their bilingual-bicultural expertise when teaching in mainstream school contexts.

**Data Collection**

Data were collected over a period of two years from the point when participants were interviewed for the program, during the program, at program completion, and then as follow-up to the program. In order to address the overarching questions pursued in this study, we analyzed qualitative data for recurring patterns using an open coding scheme involving: (a) field notes from course participation, site visits, and teachers' classroom observation; (b) bilingual teacher survey; (c) taped, translated, and transcribed interviews of individuals and focus groups; and (d) artifacts from class reflections. The data corpuses were transcribed and reviewed for recurring themes and a final coding paradigm was achieved through intercoder agreement (Patton, 2002).

Initially, participants who indicated an interest in the program were interviewed to determine their dispositions toward teaching in bilingual schools. In order to get a basic understanding of participants' initial Spanish proficiency, a Spanish essay writing assessment and the Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM) in Spanish were used.

**Table 1**  
**Participants**

<i>Participants' Pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Background</i>	<i>School Design</i>	<i>Type of Credential</i>	<i>Experience Teaching</i>
Hernan	37	Salvadorean, born in U.S.	Transitional bilingual program	Multiple Subject	Substitute in dual immersion
Susana	23	Mexican, born in U.S.	Structured English immersion (sink or swim), taught from kindergarten under Proposition 227	Multiple Subject	Completed student teaching; also substituted in mainstream
Angela	35	Mexican, born in U.S.	Transitional bilingual program	Multiple Subject	Teacher in mainstream, 1 year
Karina	39	Mexican, born in U.S.	Structured English Immersion	Multiple Subject	Teacher in mainstream, 11 years
Tomas	31	Mexican, born in U.S.	Transitional bilingual program; mainstream after 5th grade, taught from age of 14 under Proposition 227	Single Subject Social Studies	Student teacher; substitute
Erendira	29	Guatemalan, born in U.S.	Bilingual transitional program, taught under Proposition 227	Multiple Subject	Teacher in mainstream, 1 year; six months in dual immersion
Gabriela	42	Mexican, born in U.S.	Sink or swim	Multiple Subject	Teacher in mainstream, 4 years; pink-slip
Juan	36	Mexican, born in U.S.	Structured English immersion program	Multiple Subject	Teacher in mainstream, 13 years; pink-slip

Participants were rated from one to three (weak, average, strong) based on: (1) their Spanish proficiency; and (2) their answers to questions about their dispositions towards maintaining the first language, communicating with parents, and knowledge about factors that contribute to ELL achievement. Afterwards they wrote an essay in Spanish about a topic related to ELLs. Those who had passed the initial assessments received feedback about any language weaknesses they could work on before as well as during the two-semester courses and fieldwork.

Data gleaned from their fieldwork included journaling about content lessons taught in Spanish (e.g., science, mathematics, and social studies) as well as a documentation of competencies met by their field supervisor. Additional data related to critical reflection about their course readings (e.g., three textbooks, and articles) in both Spanish and English and other assignments were also collected and reviewed.

At the end of the program, participants were provided with a demographic and qualitative survey to garner information about their teaching dispositions as well as teaching experiences before and during the bilingual program (e.g., teachers were asked to reflect upon their own experiences as bilingual students, their work with mainstream as well as bilingual teachers in the program, any major challenges they believe bilingual teachers and ELLs face, and describe their application of their knowledge and pedagogical practices). Phone interviews were conducted to clarify information. A follow-up focus group interview was conducted five months later to see if they had new perceptions or notions about their experiences in the program. Thus, these combined data sources served as the basis for each “case” or bilingual authorization program participant.

### Data Analysis

The authors utilized a multiple case approach employing within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2006, p.172). All data (e.g., interview transcription, journals, and field notes) were input into a computer and archived separately in individual case folders. A detailed description of each individual case and its setting were made at the beginning of the data analysis. The within-case theme analysis started after the first round of data collection pre-interviews, journals and survey data were collected.

For recurring patterns within each individual case, the “template for coding a case study” (Creswell, 2006, p. 172) was used. Recurring codes were further collapsed into major categories and themes. The coding paradigm was used for re-analyzing the data to achieve intercoder reliability (Patton, 2002). The within-case analysis continued until the second round of data collection was finished, including: (1) bilingual teacher survey; (2) blogs and artifacts from class reflections; (3) taped, translated, and transcribed interviews of focus group interviews; and (4) field notes from course participation.

To increase reliability, the two researchers coded and analyzed the data separately by using the same case approach and then compared codes and analysis. To clarify information and confirm codes patterns and interpretations, member check and follow-up interviews were conducted and revisions were made during the data analysis.

In order to compare results with the complexity of the issue identified in the literature review, cross-case analysis was used to compare and contrast similarities and differences between cases and further subtract cross-case patterns based on patterns identified in the single-case analysis. This step helped “develop generalizations about the case in terms of the themes and how they compare and contrast with published literature” (Creswell, 2006, p.164).

## Results and Discussion

Discussion and analysis indicated the bilingual teachers were able to relate their teaching experiences through critical reflection about language policy, linguisticism as stimulus for discovering their bilingual selves, voice, and role as a bilingual teacher vis a vis social justice orientations and native language use in the program. Major themes emerged based on data coding and analysis, including: (1) language retention and pride at home and in the community while (2) language shame in school contributes to (3) language loss, (4) negatively affects teaching, and causes (5) cultural rejection and intergenerational distance.

### Home Language Retention and Language Pride

The data revealed that primary language retention and development was tied to familial and positive academic support. Language and cultural maintenance was primarily due to contact with others who spoke Spanish (e.g., family and friends,

boyfriends or girlfriends, teachers who valued the language, as well as religious and political community organizations). These participants recalled often feeling proud of using Spanish as their primary language before entering schools.

### Family and Friends

Family and friends made these bilingual teachers as children and adolescents feel welcomed and “special.” Thus, outside the schooling system they had the support of their families where their language was valued in contrast to monolingual discourses and messages. Angela noted in her autobiography,

Having a big family meant that we also had many birthday celebrations, graduations, quinceañeras, weddings, anniversaries, and other special family events where most of the family (uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, and other family members) gathered. So, I was constantly exposed to my primary language. [...] I remember going to Mexican markets, restaurants, or clothing stores and speaking in Spanish to the employees. The signs and brochures were written in Spanish, so that helped me with my Spanish writing. [...] All of these experiences helped me become bilingual/biliterate.

Thus, family and their connection to community activities and cultural events helped keep the Spanish language and cultural heritage alive. These children were validated within their homes and their communities.

### Church and Community Programs

The church and other community programs (e.g., *Puente Project* for Karina) were also noted as foundations for their language retention and maintenance. As Juan noted, “Church is a place that rings loudly in my ear when reflecting upon my experiences with listening to the Spanish language.” And, similarly, the church provided more formal training and understanding in Spanish for others, “I would attend Sunday school and summer camps/special events at church in Spanish” (Angela, autobiography).

Gabriela spoke about how her parents and siblings helped her maintain and develop her primary language. Moreover, reading periodicals such as *La Opinión* and attending church reinforced this practice. “Sundays, going to mass, I remember learning how to respond and listen to the homily...everything seemed and sounded perfect in Spanish.” As they wrote their

pieces, a nostalgia for Spanish and “feeling right” in Spanish was often noted.

Erendira similarly mentioned, “My grandma also always had her bible around and she would read it to us. So that’s how I was introduced to reading in Spanish.” There is an acknowledgment among the participants that language communication within the community was a valid way of learning the primary language. Those in the community can pull from rich cultural and linguistic resources (Weisman et al., 2007).

### **Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teachers and/or Schooling Practices**

Participants reported that particular teachers valued their language and cultural expertise as well as commented about instances in which primary language was used to help students in the classroom. In Angela’s case, her kindergarten teacher allowed the use of Spanish support, “My kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Dalton, did not speak Spanish, but I remember Ms. Paz was an aide in the classroom who helped me and other English learners.”

Hernan similarly attributed his increased confidence with both languages and higher grades due to a White male high school teacher who showed interest in him, his language, and his culture. He wrote in his autobiography that

... my English teacher, coach, and mentor [...] taught me to become acculturated and respectful to all people. I learned the importance of getting educated. Most importantly he taught me about myself and how I have so much potential but I had to become confident and proud of what I have and what I am. [...] He would make jokes and occasionally speak Spanish. He loved the language and mentioned that he would have liked learning the language when he was younger. He always maintained a positive attitude and helped me various times with homework, classwork and projects [...] My attitude for school and life changed drastically. *I had made my mind and was going to go to college.* Although, I was not sure where I wanted to go and/or what I wanted to do I was going to work on my reading and writing in English.

### **Language Pride**

When these teachers were younger, family and friends, church and the Latino community, and culturally and linguistically responsive teachers and/or schooling practices as a whole contributed to bilingual-bicultural primary language retention (e.g. verbal, written, reading, and communication) as well as language pride.

Despite Hernan’s initial negativity towards his language and bilingualism, he had gained a new perspective, “I initially did not value becoming bi-literate/ bilingual because of all the adversity I dealt with, but today I do take great pride and value for the decision my parents took for both my sister and I [to utilize Spanish at home].” As Tomas also noted,

Young children are like sponges and I was taking everything in. My grandmother never referred to me by my name. Rather, she referred to me as, “mi rey” (“my king”). At 5 years old, I wondered if perhaps I really was a king and it just hadn’t been made official yet. My grandmother always had a way of making me feel special. It’s no wonder that I always listened to what she had to say. Conversations I had with my parents and grandmother during these times still ring clearly in my head today.

As children, some of the participants took pride in being able to help their parents understand the language as translators. Susana blogged,

I was also a translator for my parents. [...] I would talk to my mom/dad in Spanish and then I would translate it to the worker in English. The worker would then answer the questions in English and then I would translate back to parents what the worker has stated. This also continued with mail, when my mom received the mail and it was in English I would translate it from English into Spanish for my parents. I would read the letter and then I would tell my parents what the letter said in Spanish. This is how I maintained my Spanish and English through those early years.

Family and particular teachers were influential in promoting cultural and linguistic maintenance and pride. As such, inklings of their bilingual value and worth drifted against the wave of monolingual discourses.

### **Language Shame and Loss**

While these individuals wrote about how they felt supported by their families, in their home, and in their communities, they also revealed that they felt shame when they entered school. To understand the bilingual teachers’ perceptions of their native language and English development, participants were asked to reflect upon how their experiences shaped their lives within the context of society and institutions as teachers and students.

The following section reveals reports of shame specifically connected to native language restrictions which caused them to lose confidence in their learning ability and

tolerate deficit discourses. These bilinguals were reprimanded and humiliated for utilizing the Spanish language in schools, or for even having a Spanish accent.

### **Language Shame as Children**

All eight participants reported language shame or sensed language embarrassment and anxiety due to harsh criticisms as children and adolescents. While Susana, Karina, and Tomas reported language restriction while teaching in schools (the topic of the following section), they reported little or no language shame during their primary years in schools since they were enrolled in either transitional bilingual programs or programs that valued their primary language. However, five other teachers reported specific instances of shame. They were shamed and reprimanded about the use of Spanish or translanguaging between Spanish and English, or they were shamed due to their inability to pronounce English correctly or accurately utilize grammar when writing.

As Gabriela wrote in her autobiography,

Throughout my education I have been ridiculed by teachers in front of peers because of the way I pronounced words and my thick accent. I can remember my seventh-grade history teacher, “Speak English, what are you trying to say?” I remember being laughed at and since then I learned to stay quiet and avoid answering any teacher unless the teacher made me feel safe...but it was not easy speaking English at school or through my college years. [...] I still *fear* speaking in either language.

Not only did the teachers report “fear” or feeling intimidated about teaching Spanish, the term fear emerges again as they recounted their experiences as bilingual children. Fear was associated with criticism and ridicule about the “inappropriate” use of the primary language that affected their self-esteem and confidence in reading. As a result of these types of discourses, Gabriela, Juan, and Hernan reported being behind in reading and feeling as if they would never make it.

Hernan noted in his autobiography,

In elementary school I hardly participated in class discussions. Most of my teachers carried harsh consequences for using English incorrectly and worst for trying to use Spanish to replace English. My reading suffered greatly both because of practice and fear of being lectured. [...] Teacher remarks and constant reminders of my limitations was the biggest obstacle between me and a book. In class I had a *great fear* of reading.



In fifth grade I had a teacher who would write students names on the board every time you mispronounce words during reading. This teacher would almost always pick me to read. By the time I was done reading I had my name on the board with multiple checkmarks.

Hernan continued to speak about how his “miserable experience” in primary school made him “hate school,” which not only affected his self-esteem but also his confidence to succeed in school. Similar to Gabriela, he noted, “I graduated [from elementary] but was not proficient in either language. I became self-absorbed with all the negativity that surrounded me that I started to believe that I was not going anywhere but worst that I was dumb.”

These same teachers have noted in their experiences as bilinguals that it was not safe to utilize the native language. They were punished for the use of the language with which they identify with their families. They “were not going anywhere” as Gabriela said. They thought they were “dumb.” While in the Bilingual Authorization Program, it was emphasized that it takes at least five to seven years to learn a new language (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

### **Language Shaming Attitudes in Schools Affect Teaching of ELLs**

Field notes and focus group interviews revealed that participants were not initially confident about their language capital and questioned their ability to even become bilingual teachers. While growing up as bilinguals there was shame in being deficient in English associated with their use of the Spanish language, code-switching, and thick Spanish accents. All of them related how deficit discourses had affected their own schooling, and that they had been restricted and shamed from using their native language with newcomers in schools in present-day circumstances.

These bilingual-bicultural teachers reflected about deficit discourses and often commented about their own experiences or the experiences of other bilinguals like themselves within the context of their lives as teachers. They noted how present and past English-only deficit discourses are embedded in overall teacher notions of what are considered “appropriate” learning practice and how bilingual teacher language expertise is repressed in schools. All of the participants remembered experiences of language shaming practices, policies, or attitudes in schools.

Angela reported in the focus group interview that she was told by her admin-

istrator that she couldn’t speak Spanish with her students:

“You can’t speak Spanish. Only English in this class.” That was something really difficult for me. I remember a teacher that told me that she once played a song [in Spanish] that administrators who were conducting a class visit didn’t approve of. Being a recently graduated teacher in my first year, I was scared upon hearing that.

Hearing how another teacher utilized a Spanish song and was reprimanded was intimidating for Angela. The term *fear* or native language intimidation resurfaced in their reflections. Consequently, fear of reprisal prevented them from utilizing their native language to help bilinguals. Tomas indicated in his survey,

Some have preferred that I use as little Spanish as possible. As stated earlier, I have come across teachers that automatically have low expectations of ELs. I have even come across a teacher that directly said to a student that used Spanish to talk to a friend in class, “You are in the United States! We don’t speak Spanish here and not in my classroom” [...] very unfortunate.

As a child, Gabriela was similarly told not to use her primary language which she and two others attributed to the “delay” of their bilingual language growth. And, now, as a teacher, Gabriela also echoed the comments of seven other participants in this study who were told not to help ELLs when teaching in mainstream classrooms as substitutes or in their teaching placements. “You can’t use your Spanish to translate for your student, they need to speak and learn English” (Gabriela, survey).

In addition, the participants reported that negative native language dispositions or beliefs held by teachers and administrators often transferred to the students and parents. The lack of Latino success in schools was often blamed on parents’ use of the primary versus English language. Karina noted,

My experience has been that mainstream teachers think that students that do not speak English are stupid or incompetent. They are frustrated when they can’t communicate with students and complain about the lack of resources. A lot of teachers blame the parents for the language barrier, instead of taking the time to learn of ways to communicate with the parents and the student. [...] By working in a mainstream classroom, I got to see how students were being retained because they didn’t know the language. They would fall behind because they didn’t have anyone to help them for more than an hour a day. The parents were

not involved or informed with programs that were offered at the school.

The respondents mentioned that parents were typically blamed for children’s lack of language success even when the parents were not fully included in schools. Participants also reported that children were retained due to their lack of English without consideration of their prior content knowledge in the primary language. Parents, however, felt a sense of relief when they could communicate their ideas in the native language to find out how their children were performing in schools and what they could do to help.

In the focus group interview, Gabriela noted,

The school I was at previously did not make parents feel welcome. [...] Many mainstream teachers are not familiar with the culture. They were quick to make assumptions. Many families felt comfortable sharing their personal life experience [in Spanish with me] and shed tears during conference time. Not feeling they can use the [primary] language in the classroom because you feel that the district has stressed English-only.

The data also revealed how some professional mainstream teacher colleagues as well as principals who worked with them were misinformed in California. It was not illegal to use the primary language in classrooms despite the passage of Proposition 227. The initiative promoted the overwhelming use of English and actually allowed for native language and bilingual programs for newcomers. No percentage was provided as to how much English might be utilized. However, this proposition has been misrepresented and utilized to stem and shame primary language use in classrooms.<sup>1</sup>

In summary, for a number of the participants, the inability to use their language and punishment caused them shame which was, consequently, detrimental to their confidence in learning and overall well-being. However, all have noted that supportive experiences with particular teachers and professors at the university level who valued their language were instrumental in their success and motivated them to pursue bilingual educational career paths.

Four focus group interview participants mentioned they were unsure about their bilingual ability or whether they would be “good enough” to participate in the bilingual program. Initial interviews also revealed participants were skeptical about their actual language capital and expertise. However, supportive approaches and

positive acknowledgment of their bilingual and capital were essential in countering deficit notions and negative voices.

It may just be that without this type of support that acknowledged their language know-how and expertise, they might have heeded monolingual discourses that would continue to lower their sense of well-being and confidence and their ability to succeed. In addition, they might have lost not only their language and self-esteem but also their chances of working in bilingual careers, supporting and helping bilinguals like themselves.

Juan's words summarized the importance of primary language expertise for bilinguals,

Our language is so much more than communication to others. It is our connection to our family, culture, and community. I have learned first-hand that the weaker your primary language becomes, the less strength your connection to family, community and culture will be. I would not say that I have lost my language, but it has weakened over the years. Fortunately, I was able to communicate with my grandmother regularly and effectively, but my cousin was the one who was not as fortunate. He lost at least 80% of his Spanish-speaking skill and his connection with people like our grandmother was the cost. [...] Looking back, I see now how fortunate I was to have been exposed to so much Spanish at home.

### **Cultural Rejection, Intergenerational Distance**

While the prior section reveals issues about the non-welcoming atmosphere of native language use in the mainstream classroom, the participants also reported how the shame associated with deficit discourses contributed to their own cultural rejection. All eight participants noted that their language loss began in their elementary school years and was associated with deficit discourses and practices in schools.

Two participants, in particular, reported how some of their elementary and middle school teachers denigrated their language to the point that it caused them to question their bilingual identity. Others reported teasing and/or language and cultural stigmatization in schools as youngsters.

Tomas and Erendira's parents did not want them in English learner programs due to the stigmatization of being "other." Although Tomas reported not being ashamed, he reported shaming experiences that denied his language capital and ability to help others. Susana and Angela reported feeling the least shame about their language, but they reported language loss.

Reports of ridicule and shame in the classroom caused a number of the participants to speak and utilize Spanish less, contributing to their language loss and cultural rejection.

Even those who experienced more positive schooling practices reported language loss and that greater use of the dominant language minimized their use of Spanish by middle school. Thus, bilinguals are not inured to negative language discourses despite some Spanish language use in the classroom or at home.

My Spanish started to change when I entered middle school. I spoke less Spanish around my friends and family. The older I got, speaking in English became normal and more comfortable. I don't know where I got an accent from, but I started speaking English like I was from "The Valley." My friends would always make fun of me because I would say things like, "Oh my god!" or "My name is Erin." I changed the way I said my name because every time I said it to someone, they could never pronounce it right because they could not roll the "r." Honestly, I think I tried to lose my Spanish because I thought that I wouldn't be better than people because I was a minority. (Erendira, autobiography)

Thus, these individuals come to understand that English has higher status than Spanish not only in terms of use but also in terms of their placements in classrooms. Erendira also recalled that she was placed at the back of the classroom with other ELLs and aides who translated for them. "My mom did not like the idea of me being labeled as an English Learner" and, therefore, she was pulled out of the classes. Bilingual pull-out, unlike dual programs, does not allow for the equal treatment and use of both languages. Thus, the dominant language is seen as being better. There is a desire to change and succumb to the monolingual discourse, to deny one's background, to lose one's accent. In this case, Erendira learned to speak the "Valley Girl"<sup>22</sup> variety of English her mainstream English-speaking friends spoke.

Gabriela, who also reported being ridiculed for her accent notes that the loss of language or the replacement of English over Spanish caused intergenerational conflict. Tomas noticed that especially as a high school senior he had begun to distance himself from his family when he relied more on English than Spanish.

[...] we never gave Spanish a second thought. I hadn't realized it before now, but this was likely the point in my life when my speaking ability in English began to take the lead over ability to speak in Spanish.

[...] *Something interesting occurred as I got older: The interactions that I had with my family were becoming less.* (Tomas, autobiography)

Participants noted that intergenerational conflict occurred when the grandchildren are unable to speak to the grandmother or even their parents. Thus, less contact and use of the primary language provided a gap in social communication (Flores & Murillo, 2001). Karina and others had extreme instances in which this communication gap even occurred between parents and children. "This year I came across a parent who could not communicate with her son due to the English/Spanish language barrier. Mother only speaks Spanish and son only speaks English," (Karina, survey)

Language loss is due to hidden messages in schools that deny bilingual-bicultural identities through shaming as well as blaming. The native language use continues to be blamed for transnationals ability to learn in the second language. Language shame causes individuals to distance themselves from their loved ones and take on a more "mainstream" persona in schools, to change their names, change their accents, or maybe even more to be "cool." Furthermore, they end up blaming the native language for their lack of progress in school and their overall lack of confidence.

### **Conclusions**

Family and friends, Church, the Latino community, and culturally and linguistically responsive teachers contributed to the participants' primary language pride and development. However, exposure to negative discourses about participants' primary language in schools led to shame, silencing, and primary language loss. Despite having bilingual cultural capital and expertise, these bilinguals experienced some form of language shame and loss throughout their years of schooling as bilingual children and teachers in mainstream schools.

Bilingual teachers' native language was restricted due to language policies and schooling practices. Reports of ridicule and shame in the classroom caused these bilingual teachers to utilize Spanish less, contributing to their language loss as well as causing them to question their identity associated with Spanish. Language loss, as reported, is also related to a loss of oneself and one's identity as evident in their negation of the language, themselves, and rejection of their family.



Language shame that bilingual teachers experienced as children did not disappear once they became teachers. Instead this primary language negation continued when teaching in mainstream schools. Moreover, bilingual teachers reported Spanish language shaming and an inability to utilize their Spanish language expertise to help ELLs in classrooms. Language shame and loss extended well into their adult teaching careers.

Some participants were cajoled and intimidated into relinquishing Spanish as a language resource that could help scaffold ELL understanding of content knowledge. Similarly, participants describe how language shaming extends to ELLs and parents when teacher dispositions do not honor home language capital.

Such shaming experiences denied these bilingual teachers' language capital and ability to help students who may face similar challenges. Understanding bilingual-bicultural Latino teachers' language shame and loss should help educators and policymakers rethink issues in the education system and develop more welcoming programs that permit bilingual teachers to utilize their expertise to instill and retain cultural linguistic pride.

### Implications

Researchers are encouraged to conduct studies about ways to validate and tap the rich expertise that bilingual-bicultural teachers bring to the teacher workforce as transnationals and plurilinguists. Researchers also have a moral obligation to address whether bilingual teaching shortages can be used as excuses to promote monolingual policies reflective of mainstream and dominant societal prejudices that shame plurilingual students and bilingual teachers in schools.

Thus, researchers should further explore the context of students' and teachers' experiences associated with schooling practices that either impinged or possibly benefited bilingual-bicultural teachers' awareness about their own language experiences that prepare them to counter deficit discourses that affect learners like themselves. Research focus should be on the approaches that administrators and teachers can use to develop students' identities in ways that promote self-value through cultural connections (Gutiérrez, 2008; Kaplan & Flum, 2012). Researchers similarly have a moral obligation to question the parity of hiring practices as well as state initiatives intended to address gaps in ELL education

Further examination of policies and practices associated with ELL gaps and the preparation, or lack thereof, of bilingual teachers is indicative of societal agendas and postcolonial world views that continue to promote language of origin hierarchies and monolingualism. Researchers must continue to question policies and practices that negatively shape children as well as the teacher workforce in multilingual classrooms.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> When Proposition 227 passed in 1998, the first author, who taught newcomers in a bilingual program, was initially told by the school administration to speak only in English to the bilingual newcomers in her class. In the end, the administration decided that the Proposition did not prohibit primary language instruction.

<sup>2</sup> A type of accent used particularly in Southern California (Ehrenfreund, 2013).

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