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## ABSTRACT

This paper was written as a response to the political debate in California regarding the proper role of bilingual education in the state's kindergarten through high school public school system. Specifically, it examines, in light of the positions and prescriptions of Proposition 227 (an initiative holding that all California students be taught English as rapidly as possible, effectively mandating substantial revision in the operation and design of bilingual education programs in the state, and approved by the voters by a 61-39 margin in the election in June 1998), how educators of up and coming bilingual education professionals should prepare their students to deal personally and professionally with this emerging situation. The purpose of this study is to gain understanding of how potential bilingual education teachers and researchers should grapple with the complex relationship of research, policy, and practice within the field of bilingual education. Specifically, what does it mean to focus on scholarship that strongly supports native language instruction when, at the same time, public opinion and policy are swiftly shifting in the opposite direction? Most importantly, what kinds of pedagogical experiences can be provided for these students to assist them in making sense of these incongruities? It is concluded that engaging these newly-minted professionals in their own research in bilingual settings, based upon their own questions, provides the best response. (KFT)

**Promoting Bilingualism in the Era of Unz:**  
**Making Sense of the Gap between Research, Policy and Practice**  
**In Teacher Education**

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Introduction

“Therefore, It is resolved that: all children in California *public* schools shall be taught English as rapidly and effective possible ...” This resolution lies at the heart of Proposition 227, passed by California voters on June 2, 1998, by a 61-39 margin. The requirements of Proposition 227 are not incorporated in state law as Education Code sections 300-400. Proposition 227 represents “the worst setback for bilingual education since the World War I era” (Crawford, 1998b).

At the same time as Prop. 227 was approved, longitudinal research studies showed that certain bilingual programs lead to highly successful results (Crawford, 1998 forthcoming; Thomas & Collier, 1997; Ramírez et al., 1991). A 1998 report of student achievement (as measured in standardized test scores) revealed that second language learners who had been enrolled in bilingual programs in San Francisco and San Jose, California, schools actually outperformed native-born English speakers in all content areas (Asimov, 1998).

How can we understand this acute discrepancy between research and policy that occurs in the area of bilingual education? Furthermore, how can we address this discrepancy in our School of Education classrooms where we are training future teachers of bilingual children? These are the critical questions I wish to address in this presentation, offering solutions based upon research of my own teacher education courses.

This research study examines efforts to promote bilingualism in a course for prospective teachers, “Education of Bilingual Children: Theory and Practice.” This course is regarded as foundational to the Cross-Cultural, Language and Academic Development (CLAD) credential in California and is taken during the very first semester of the program. The course is accompanied by two hours per week of fieldwork in local bilingual/ESL

classrooms. I first developed this course in 1996, and since then I have jointly taught it with three other Bay Area bilingual educators, including a teacher in a Spanish-English two-immersion bilingual program and a principal of a Filipino newcomer elementary school

The purpose of this study is to gain understanding of how our students - as prospective teachers of bilingual children - grapple with the complex relationship of research, policy and practice within the field of bilingual education. Specifically, what does it mean to focus upon scholarship which strongly supports native language instruction when, at the same time, public opinion and policy are swiftly shifting in the opposite direction? Most importantly, what kinds of pedagogical experiences can we provide for our students to assist them in making sense of these incongruities? We have found that engaging our students in their own research in bilingual settings, based upon their own burning questions, provided the best response to that question. In addition, creating an atmosphere in which students felt that their own reflections were respected allowed the opportunity for personal transformation.

### Theoretical Framework

Our teacher education program shares the belief that students learn best when theory is grounded in solid practice (Dewey, 1938) and when students themselves are engaged in productive social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). The Education of Bilingual Children course, in particular, uses the theoretical contributions of such contemporary educators as Cummins (1995), Nieto (1994), Krashen and his critics, McLaughlin (1987) and Wong Fillmore (1991). The course includes readings by researchers who have conducted extensive studies of bilingual programs (Thomas & Collier, 1997; Ramírez et al., 1991) as well as autobiographical accounts of bilingual students (Rodriguez, 1982; Olsen, 1988). This study of the course is framed in the Freirean notion (1986) that students learn most effectively if they participate in personally meaningful dialogue on the readings and then deepen their understanding through social practice, such as classroom observation and action research (Montero-Sieburth, M. & LaCelle-Peterson, M., 1992).

## Research Methods

### Site

The University is located in the metropolitan school district of San Francisco, where a majority of the children in the public schools live in non-English speaking homes. San Francisco and surrounding counties were unique in the state in voting against Proposition 227. San Francisco Unified School District was the site of the 194 Lau v. Nichols U.S. Supreme Court decision which mandated support for English language learners in the nation. Ever since, SFUSD has been an advocate for bilingual education. During the campaign for Proposition 227 in 1998, the SFUSD school board publicly opposed the initiative and the superintendent vehemently debated against Ron Unz. Since its passage, however, the district's official position has been to comply with 227 legally through requiring signed parental waivers for its bilingual programs. In addition, the district claims it cannot be sued for lack of compliance because of its responsibility to uphold the federal law of Lau v. Nichols.

In 1997, the SFUSD's bilingual department reorganized itself as the Language Academy, an administrative unit which oversees all programs for English language learners. With an innovative new director recruited from Texas, the Language Academy's goal was to promote only those bilingual models shown by Thomas & Collier's (1997) and Ramirez et al.'s (1991) research to be most effective - namely maintenance and two-way bilingual immersion. All field observations for the Education of Bilingual Children course are conducted in schools affiliated with the Language Academy. However, since Proposition 227 passed, the original director of the Language Academy's returned to Texas, and some of the original impetus has left as well. Bilingual programs are now called "English Plus" and their quality is much more uneven.

### Participants

Participants in this study represent 200 teacher education students enrolled in the University of San Francisco. All have received their B.A.; many are working towards their M.A. A large range exists in their ages (22-55) as well as in their past teaching and overall life experiences. Approximately 30% are students of color; 70% are European-American. Most of the students of color are teaching full-time in the San Francisco school district on emergency credentials and are receiving AmeriCorps grants to help offset the tuition. As of

Spring 2000, current bilingual teachers are also eligible for Title VII funds. Overall, the students' initial views towards bilingual education range from enthusiastically positive to greatly skeptical. Many relocate to the Bay Area from other parts of the U.S. to attend USF and are completely unfamiliar with Proposition 227.

### Data Collection

This study uses qualitative research methods to analyze student transformation throughout the semester by focusing on five main "literacy events" as sources of data. According to Heath (1982), "The literacy event is a conceptual tool useful in examining within particular communities of modern society the actual forms and functions of oral and literate traditions and co-existing relationships between spoken and written language. A literacy event is any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes" (p. 350). Whereas Heath's concept refers to social practices that occur naturally, I am using the term "literacy event" to describe classroom practices that occur in response to the instructor's assignments. For the purposes of this course, I have selected certain activities in which students interacted with text (such as course readings) through the media of written assignments or class discussion.

Specifically, these literacy events include:

- 1) weekly written reflections based on both the readings and the class sessions;
- 2) four written field observation reports of bilingual and ESL classrooms;
- 3) family linguistic history charts;
- 4) oral debate on pro's and con's of Proposition 227 (with written summary);
- 5) final I-search project: original, self-initiated project incorporating a review of the literature, two interviews and observations.

### Data Analysis

The analysis is based upon themes which emerge consistently throughout the literacy events for all 200 students. Specifically, these themes include: 1) making sense of the discrepancy between research that promotes bilingualism and classroom practice that stifles it, 2) making sense of the discrepancy between research that promotes bilingualism and statewide policy that blocks it, 3) initial resistance to promoting bilingualism and transformation over time and experience through both study and observation, and 4)

grappling with the gap between one's own monolingualism/monoculturalism and multilingualism/multiculturalism in the urban classroom.

### Limitations

A major limitation of this study lies in the fact that as the researcher, I am also the teacher of this course. Given that I evaluate the students and assign their grades, it is possible that students slant their oral and written responses in the direction of promoting bilingualism because they perceive that perspective as one which I favor. I do state in the introduction of this course that I want to create an open, safe environment in the classroom where students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts honestly even if unpopular. However, I know that students either consciously or unconsciously often anticipate what they think the instructor wants to hear. Particularly when a student like Marianne has a perspective different from my own, I make a special effort to assure her I respect her opinion. Nevertheless, I need to seriously consider this potential limitation from being both the teacher and the researcher.

### Results

Overall, I found that all the students experienced a process of transformation in developing more positive attitudes towards bilingualism, some more dramatically than others. The general trends were:

1) Those with initially positive attitudes towards bilingual education became stronger in their conviction and were more able to clearly articulate their beliefs. I encouraged students who supported bilingual education to take the opposite position in the debate in order to gain a more solid understanding of the opposition. This strategy proved effective, as evidenced in the following summary statements:

“My position on Prop. 227 has remained the same, but now I have a lot more evidence and specific research to support my position.” (March, 1999)

“My stand against Proposition 227 has been validated by the readings and class debate. Before this class my belief was based mainly on personal feelings and personal success. However the research supports my feelings and I now have more fuel.” (March, 1999)

“When I initially voted against 227, I did it because I felt it was a race/class issue, and that, like the affirmative action proposition, it was another effort to keep the ‘lower’

socioeconomic classes down. Now I have the research to back a decision I made a year ago.” (March, 1999)

2) Those with little or no prior exposure to bilingualism became openly favorable. These students were generally ignorant of Proposition 227. As one woman wrote in her summary statement after the debate: “Before coming to this class, I did not know much about Proposition 227. I had heard of it, but I was not very informed about what its implications were and the research, if any, that backed it up. But, now after being in this class and participating in the debate, I have formed a solid view of which side is right. I am definitely against Proposition 227 even though I think that learning English is a necessity for anyone living in America” (March, 1999).

Many of these same students were self-critical about their original ignorance about Prop. 227. The following summary statement exemplifies this sentiment:

Prior to the debate we just held in class, my feelings about Prop. 227 were mixed. When it was in the original limelight, I didn't take the time to truly grasp what the initiative was proposing. I am extremely embarrassed to say that I was influenced by people who were fighting for assimilation and a common language - English. That was before I began taking courses that introduced me to the value of multiculturalism and multilingualism. It's hard for me to believe now that my ideas were once so narrow-minded, insensitive and naive. I can now choose my position based on an informed and thorough perspective. I believe that bilingual education programs really do help our language minority students, and as a future teacher I have made the academic and social needs of all students my top priority. I really enjoyed the debate. I feel that I learned much more about Prop. 227 today than I ever would have by just reading the endless points on each side in print. It was fun to actually interact with Prop. 227 research and material (March, 1999).

3) Those with initial skepticism or resistance towards bilingual education changed slightly towards becoming more receptive but with caution. These students wanted to be open towards bilingualism but were concerned about issues such as the uneven quality of bilingual programs in schools, the appropriateness of primary language instruction at the secondary level, or limited exposure to the English language. For this group of students, the field observations served as the most critical transformative point. If they experienced a

highly successful bilingual program (such as two-way immersion) or teacher, they were more likely to transform their view towards being favorable. If, however, they witnessed a classroom that was labeled “bilingual” but offered little primary language support or academic challenge, the students remained skeptical.

### Three Case Studies

To illustrate these results more vividly, I highlight the cases of the three focal students. These three represent a range of perspectives towards bilingual education and exemplify the three trends discussed above. I look at how their perspectives evolved during the course and which literacy events significantly shaped their evolution. Following is a table describing these three students: (Note: All personal and place names are pseudonyms).

Table 1: Three Focal Students

<u>Name</u>	<u>Ethnicity &amp; Languages</u>	<u>Original Perspective</u>	<u>Final Perspective</u>	<u>Significant Literacy Events</u>
Roger	Filipino American English/Tagalog	Favorable	Favorable School activist Move to BCLAD	Linguistic History Chart, I-search
Barbara	European- American English Only	Neutral	Favorable	Observations I-search Reflections
Marianne	European- American English Only	Skeptical	Cautious	Observations I-search Reflections

#### Roger

Roger is a Filipino American man who teaches English and initiated a law academy at a local high school considered one of the district’s most challenging. He graduated from law school but decided that his passion lay not in studying law but in teaching youth. He is highly committed to maximizing access to higher education for his students, particularly those who are marginalized. Roger was a main player in the production of a full-length PBS documentary called, “Making the Grade,” which revealed inequities in the UC



admission process after the demise of affirmative action.

Roger started the course with a highly favorable attitude towards bilingual education. As a American born Filipino, Roger lamented that he had been torn from his Filipino roots and language. During his college years, he affiliated with an campus organization called the Pilipino American Alliance (PAA), composed of Filipino Americans “who thirsted for learning about their Filipino roots while simultaneously understanding decolonization” (I-Search paper, May 1999). In tracing his family’s linguistic history chart, Roger was struck with the loss of his ancestral language. As a result, he went to the Philippines the following summer and participated in an immersion program with the objective of revitalizing Tagalog, the dominant language of his family.

Roger found that his students faced similar choices. He was very concerned about the tensions at his school between American-born Filipinos (FilAms) and Filipinos who recently had immigrated to the U.S. and were placed in ESL classes. These tensions were so severe that they nearly erupted in violence. At root of these tensions was the issue of language - the FilAms tormented the Filipinos for not speaking English and vice versa. As a result of the course, Roger saw that a two-way immersion program could help heal these tensions and result in second language proficiency for both groups.

Along with Victor, a colleague who was also enrolled in the course, Roger conducted his I-search project on this tension between the two groups of students. His paper was entitled, “Do Filipino Americans and Recent Filipino Immigrant Students at Cabrillo High School Get Along? Why or Why Not: Deconstructing Privilege and the Hidden Curriculum” (May, 1999). He dedicated the paper “to my Filipino students who are my young brothers and sisters disempowered and voiceless because of an unconscious system that leads them invisible and divided” (p. 3).

In the spirit of “listening to the students” (Nieto, 1996), Roger and Victor did extensive interviews with Filipino students from both groups. Despite the surface divisiveness, the Filipino American and the Filipino immigrant students supported bilingual programs. The students believed that these programs were integral to maintaining their language and culture and were necessary for academic success in the U.S. Thus, in their process of interviewing students, Roger and Victor contributed towards unifying the Filipino students at Cabrillo High School. Roger became an activist at his school in favor

of bilingualism and biculturalism. Moreover, he decided to start teaching in the Filipino bilingual program instead of the law academy as of Fall 2000. He will pursue coursework for the Filipino BCLAD credential at the same time.

### Barbara

Barbara, a European-American woman in her late 20s, moved to San Francisco from New England in Fall 1999 with no familiarity with bilingual education nor Proposition 227. She took on the study of the issues very seriously, however, recognizing that she had much to learn. In her final reflection (12/1/99), she wrote:

... I did want to tell you how valuable this class has been for me, especially since I haven't had any prior exposure to much of what we covered - from bilingual education in schools, to issues of immigration, to ESL, etc. etc. And coming from a 'neutral' background, it's good for you to know that this course (and your teaching style specifically) does a great job covering all the materials and all the issues effectively. I really do feel like I've learned quite a lot about dealing with second-language learners that will help me enormously in my teaching career, no matter where I may teach eventually (December, 1999).

Ongoing reflections in writing gave her the opportunity to articulate her thoughts on the differing dimensions of the course. The two most significant events for her were: 1) field observations in an elementary school with a solid two-way bilingual immersion program, and 2) an I-search project in which she investigated ways to raise children bilingually. She read Francois Grosjean's book, Life with Two Languages, and collection of essays called "Bilingualism in Early Childhood: Papers from a Conference on Child Language." In addition she interviewed three people as references: two mothers who are currently raising their children bilingually, and her friend who grew up with two languages as a child. One of the two mothers was the teacher whose second grade classroom Barbara was observing. This teacher was born in South America, has been a strong advocate of bilingual education publicly, and adopted a daughter as a single mother. The second mother was raising her children with a "Spanish only" rule in the home, but was actually opposed to bilingual education programs in school at the elementary level. The mother believes the school should be responsible to teach her children English only, although she wants them to study Spanish as a foreign language in high school.

With her growing knowledge of bilingual education overall, Barbara eventually gained the sophistication to understand the specific reasons for these apparent contradictions rather than interpreting them as a blanket condemnation of bilingual education.

### Marianne

Marianne is a European American woman who wants to become a secondary math teacher. At the onset of the course, she was highly skeptical of the need for bilingual education, particularly in her content area and age group (teens). In her view, since math represented a “universal language,” students did not need support in their primary language. She decided to explore this topic in her I-search paper entitled, “SDAIE, Primary Language Instruction and Mainstream Classes in Secondary Mathematics.” [SDAIE refers to Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English, or Sheltered English.] In the introduction to this paper, Marianne clearly expressed her concerns:

While being in Education of Bilingual Children, I began to wonder how much bilingual education affects secondary mathematics, my future classroom. Is language going to inhibit my ability to effectively teach mathematics to all my students? But mathematics is a universal language. For this reason, I question how necessary it is to teach math in a student’s primary language, rather than in the dominant language.

During my observations, I also began to question the helpfulness of even SDAIE classes for teaching mathematics content. I have been observing at Newton High School [pseudonym] this semester. Every week, I observed 10th graders in a mainstream class and a SDAIE class, which allowed me to get a good feel on what occurs in each of these classes. I also had the opportunity to observe a 10th grade primary language instruction mathematics class that was taught in Chinese, not a language I speak or read. SDAIE mathematics classes seemed to be holding students back in terms of not teaching them as much mathematics and also not realizing students’ full potential by assuming they could comprehend complex ideas (December, 1999).

Unfortunately, the research studies which Marianne used to explore her question were either weak methodologically or not applicable culturally. For example, one of her

main sources was a paper, "Doing Math in French in Australia," which compared Australian students' performance in math tests conducted in both English and French. Overall, her references did not adequately challenge her original notion that bilingual programs were not needed to teach math effectively.

But what was even more influential for Marianne was her field observations in math classes at Newton High, a large school where 42% of the student body are Chinese speakers learning English. Although the school is part of San Francisco's Language Academy, only 5 out of 63 mathematics classes were designated as providing primary language instruction. Marianne's conclusion from this fact was "I believe that the administration also believes that mathematics is a universal language that it does not need to be taught in students' primary language in order for them to comprehend mathematics."

Furthermore, even the Chinese bilingual math class which Marianne observed relied heavily on English. As she noted, "... the student's homework consisted of handouts written in English only and their tests were written in English. This means that in order for students to do well in a Chinese taught class, they still need to know English. So, it does not matter if bilingual education is beneficial to students, because even in classes that are supposed to be only taught in the primary language, students are expected to know English" (December, 1999).

Marianne also noticed that none of the bilingual or SDAIE math classes were for honors students. In fact, the teachers she interviewed commented that their SDAIE classes were significantly behind their mainstream classes. All of these factors led her to conclude in her I-search paper that, "The problem is that teachers and schools are not using SDAIE and primary language classes as they are intended to be used." Marianne was confronting the gap between bilingual education in theory and bilingual education in practice. Her case study shows how essential it is for students to have first hand experience in exemplary bilingual programs. Since Proposition 227, however, these programs are even more scarce.

#### Conclusion: Implications for Educators

At an AERA panel discussion on Proposition 227 in 1999, Eugene García used the metaphor of a "tornado" to describe the impact of the initiative in California. Local districts which previously had strong bilingual programs were working hard to maintain them; districts which previously had weak bilingual programs were dissolving them. The

metaphor is somewhat applicable to describe the impact on students in teacher education classes. Those who were previously supportive of bilingualism become more articulate in their support once they become exposed to the research in the field and gain the opportunity to provide evidence for their beliefs. Similarly, those who were previously skeptical of bilingualism tend to refute the research and look for evidence to support their belief in English Only education. But my research shows that transformation is most possible for those students who enter teacher education without previously held notions or with little background knowledge about bilingualism. For these students, a course which promotes bilingualism can yield very positive results.

As a teacher of the Education of Bilingual Children course, I am not neutral. My students know this. I aim to promote bilingualism and I want to effect change in my students' perspectives towards that direction. Through this research, I found that the central factor in transforming students' perspectives is active student engagement in literacy events. Pedagogy matters. If the students are solely reading texts and listening to lectures on the positive consequences of bilingualism, their views change very little. But their understanding does deepen and evolve if they are reading and listening along with observing in exemplary classrooms, creating their own action research projects, debating and discussing with other students. Observing in exemplary classrooms with effective bilingual programs may be the most important factor. Unfortunately, this is where Proposition 227 can wreak the most damage. Model programs are harder to find. No representative from the California State Department will mandate a school district to provide primary language instruction as it once did. No administrator will care if a classroom labeled "bilingual" offers only English. For all these reasons, teacher educators must work even harder to locate the best observation sites for our students.

With the advent of the 21st century, bilingualism is at a crossroads both in California particularly and in the United States generally. Is this country moving to respect and preserve all of the languages spoken here? Or, is the future direction towards English Only? These are essential questions underlying the bigger issue of who will rule America?

AERA officially opposed Proposition 227 in the annual meeting of 1998. As educators, we all need to take a stand on this issue and to promote bilingualism and multiculturalism in our own research, policy and practice. We can take action in our

classrooms as well as in our courtrooms and state boardrooms. First and foremost, it is our responsibility to figure out the best ways to train prospective teachers and educators to uphold and promote bilingualism in all arenas. Given that many other states are now looking to California for exemplary leadership, we need to take well-informed action now. My hope is that this presentation can offer fellow AERA participants helpful suggestions in that direction.

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