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Source: *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 3, Special-Topic Issue: K-12 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 537-561

Published by: [Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. \(TESOL\)](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3587307>

Accessed: 21/10/2011 14:38

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# *Reframing the Debate: The Roles of Native Languages in English-Only Programs for Language Minority Students*

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The use of languages other than English in schooling is a subject of great controversy in the U.S., pitting those who hold assimilationist views (favoring English-only) against those who hold cultural pluralist views (favoring inclusion of the native language) (Secada & Lightfoot, 1993). A study of nine exemplary K-12 programs for language minority students in which English was the primary language of instruction showed that the incorporation of students' native languages in instruction need not be an all-or-nothing phenomenon. The use of the native language appears so compelling that it emerges even when policies and assumptions mitigate against it. Teachers who are monolingual English speakers or who do not speak the languages of all their students can incorporate students' native languages into instruction in many ways to serve a variety of educationally desirable functions. This article explores the complexities of the uses of students' native languages in schooling, describes and illustrates various ways these languages were used in the English-based but multilingual programs, and argues that programs for language minority students should be reconceptualized to move beyond the emotional and politically heated debate that opposes English-only instruction to native language instruction.

We have been trapped in the past in an endless and often fruitless debate over the best language of instruction. I hope that this reauthorization [of federal education programs for English L2 students] can rise above this tired issue, so that we can turn our attention to more substantive problems—how to provide language minority students with an equal opportunity to learn challenging content and high level skills. (Hakuta, 1993)

**T**he use of languages other than English in schooling is a subject of great controversy in the U.S. Educators, politicians, and others

hotly debate whether, when, how, and to what extent students' native languages should be a part of their formal education. Those engaged in this debate address the issues from a multitude of perspectives: legal, political, theoretical, research-based, social, humanitarian, and commonsensical, to name a few. And, of course, people who take the same perspective on the issues may take different sides of the argument, aligning themselves with an assimilationist view or with a cultural pluralist view (Secada & Lightfoot, 1993).

In fact, the controversy about the use of native languages other than English in schooling encompasses much more than educational effectiveness. Cummins (1989) argues that the "bilingual education debate" is "more strongly based on political than on pedagogical considerations" (p. 39). Focusing specifically on ESL instruction, Auerbach (1993) similarly asserts that "monolingual ESL instruction in the U.S. has as much to do with politics as with pedagogy" (p. 29). Many people perceive the growing numbers of speakers of languages other than English in the U.S. as a problem. They may also see increasing numbers of language minority (LM) residents as a threat to their status as speakers of the dominant language and as members of the dominant culture (see Cummins, 1989, for an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon). They believe that the presence of LM students lowers standards and places an unwanted burden on resources.

One response to this perceived threat has been strong opposition to the use of other languages besides English in public and official contexts. Since its founding in 1983, a group called U.S. English has been advocating for a constitutional amendment to establish English as the official language of the U.S. through the English Only movement (see Crawford, 1989, for a description of the background and activities of this movement). Several states have passed English-only laws. Although these laws so far have had little direct impact on educational programs, they will likely be used eventually to challenge the use of native languages other than English in schools.

Research has shown that it takes 2–3 years to become proficient in basic communication skills in an L2 and 4–10 years to approach grade-level competence in L2 academic skills (see Collier, 1989; Cummins, 1981, 1984). If nonnative-speaking students are immersed in English, they will not have access to the content area knowledge and academic skills that their English-speaking peers are learning. They are likely to get further and further behind in their academic development while they are concentrating on learning English.

Unfortunately, concern about the language of instruction and a "fixation on teaching English as quickly as possible" (Stanford Working Group, 1993, p. 8) have greatly overshadowed concern about content instruction for LM students. This emphasis is misplaced. First, federal

law (i.e., the *Lau v. Nichols* Supreme Court decision in 1974) requires that all students be provided meaningful access to a school's educational program, not just to English language development. Second, because it takes at least 4 years to become proficient in academic uses of an L2, it is impractical to postpone teaching students content until they become proficient in English. For students with little or no proficiency in English, their native language is the only effective means for providing access to content area development. By discussing content in their native languages, students can interact more effectively about more sophisticated content and have greater access to their own knowledge and experience (see Moll, 1992).

Native language use and development have psychological benefits in addition to serving as a practical pedagogical tool for providing access to academic content, allowing more effective interaction, and providing greater access to prior knowledge. Using and valuing students' native languages in schools and classrooms supports and enhances the students' learning because they themselves are indirectly valued (see Lucas, Henze, & Donato, 1990). The use of students' native languages can also increase their openness to learning by reducing the degree of language and culture shock they are encountering (Auerbach, 1993). Because "relations of power and their affective consequences are integral to language acquisition" (p. 16), student learning can also be enhanced by integrating students' native languages into their educational experiences, thus giving their languages a status more comparable to that of English (Auerbach, 1993).

Using students' native languages in schooling can also help them develop English proficiency. Although it may appear contrary to common sense, maintaining and developing one's native language does not interfere with the development of L2 proficiency. Experience shows that many people around the world become fully bi- and multilingual without suffering interference from one language in the learning of the other (see, e.g., Beardsmore, 1993). Research findings show that "one of the best predictors of second-language proficiency is proficiency in the mother tongue" (Stanford Working Group, 1993, p. 9). Cummins' linguistic interdependence principle (1981, 1989, 1991, 1992) explains this phenomenon by identifying a common underlying proficiency that enables cognitive/academic and literacy-related skills to transfer across languages.

Given the right circumstances (i.e., sufficient numbers of students who speak and are literate in the same native language and qualified bilingual staff), the development of native language skills and native language instruction in academic content areas give learners the best hope for building a solid foundation in content and cognitive development and support the growth of their self-esteem and their English

abilities (for research showing the benefits of native language instruction, see Ramírez, 1992; Ramírez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991; Willig, 1985). However, if schools wait to implement curricula for LM students until those circumstances exist, millions of children will lose the chance to be educated. In reality native language content classes and even formal classes in native language development (e.g., Spanish for Spanish speakers) are not always possible; “the human and material resources are not [always] available to implement comprehensive bilingual models” (Dolson & Mayer, 1992, p. 139). Programs, schools, and classrooms in which English is the principal language of instruction and which incorporate students’ native languages offer the only practical option for LM students in many situations.

## **SPECIAL ALTERNATIVE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS**

Since 1984 Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act has funded a type of instructional program called Special Alternative Instructional Programs (SAIPs), which offer this option to schools and districts. In 1968, the first Bilingual Education Act became law as Title VII. Under this act, which was compensatory in its focus on poor and “educationally disadvantaged” children (Crawford, 1989, p. 36), schools were not required to use students’ L1s or to apply any specific instructional approaches. Not until the so-called Lau Remedies (named after the 1974 *Lau v. Nichols* Supreme Court decision) in 1975 were specific guidelines for addressing LM students’ needs and a timetable for doing so established. These remedies rejected the sole use of ESL for teaching limited English proficient (LEP) students,<sup>1</sup> implying that bilingual education programs were preferable in many cases, and the Office of Civil Rights “embarked on a campaign of aggressive enforcement” (Crawford, 1989, p. 37). In 1980, the Carter administration set down a more prescriptive set of guidelines mandating bilingual education in schools with sufficient numbers of LEP students of one language group. The Reagan administration, which came into office in 1981, did not support these guidelines.

In the 1980s, approaches that used only English were again accepted alongside approaches that used students’ native languages. The reauthorization of Title VII in 1984 placed greater emphasis on preparing

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<sup>1</sup>We acknowledge that the term *limited English proficient* suggests a deficit perspective of students so labeled. We use it in this article because it is the official term used by the Department of Education to refer to students who are learning English.

students in academic skills and content areas, thus making Title VII less compensatory in nature. In addition, several new funding categories were added, including SAIPs, which provide instruction in English. Although most Title VII funding continues to go to programs that use students' native languages, the addition of SAIPs as a funding category has allowed districts to deemphasize bilingual instruction in favor of instruction solely in English. The arguments for funding SAIPs were (a) that bilingual programs are not feasible in districts with students of many different language backgrounds, especially if very few students speak the same language, and (b) that qualified bilingual teachers are not available in large enough numbers to staff bilingual programs for all LEP students.

Although the original rationale for SAIP funding was expressed in pedagogical terms, both political and pedagogical factors underlie the designation of SAIPs as a category for federal funding. From the political perspective, the addition of SAIPs can be seen as one reflection of the movement to limit the use of languages other than English in U.S. schools, which gained support in the 1980s, as indicated by the success of the English Only movement (see Secada & Lightfoot, 1993). This unspoken and unacknowledged political motivation for allowing instruction only in English is suspect. If all instruction is provided in English, students who are not fluent in English cannot hope to successfully compete with those who are. Thus, this situation perpetuates the power differences that already exist between native-born speakers of standard (middle-class) English and others. As Villegas (1988) has pointed out, "The manipulation of language in the struggle for power is evident in school . . . . The school is not a neutral ground for proving talent . . . ; it functions to maintain the advantage of the socially powerful" (p. 260). Considered from a pedagogical perspective, however, SAIPs represent one practical approach to educating students who are not fluent enough in English to succeed in the regular academic program in contexts where students speak several different native languages and where qualified bilingual staff are not available.

The role of SAIPs in the education of LM students, then, is complex. For some, SAIPs represent a way to prevent the use of languages other than English in U.S. schools. For others, they represent a practical way to provide some special services for LM students when native language instruction is not possible. In many districts and schools, SAIPs exist side-by-side with bilingual programs. In some, the bilingual program serves Spanish-speaking students, and the SAIP serves speakers of all other languages. In others, the SAIP is for students whose English language skills are intermediate—that is, those who are more likely to benefit from instruction in English—and the bilingual program is

reserved for those who have little or no fluency in English. The fact that a district or school operates a SAIP may indicate an opposition to bilingual education, or it may not.

The motivation for designing a SAIP instead of or in addition to a bilingual program and the symbolic meaning of that SAIP for a particular district depend upon a variety of contextual factors, including “the backgrounds and training of school and district staff; the nature, size, stability, educational backgrounds, countries of origin, and recency of arrival of the [language minority] students and their families; the history of and attitude toward linguistic and cultural diversity in the community, the district, and the school; the history of programs for LM students in the district and the school” (Lucas, 1992, p. 115). District policy grows out of such factors as these. Because the exclusive use of English is likely to be “rooted in a particular ideological perspective, [to] rest on unexamined assumptions, and [to] serve to reinforce inequities in the broader social order” (Auerbach, 1993, p. 9), educational policy makers, researchers, and practitioners must carefully consider the motivation for and symbolism of a program that does not provide opportunities for students to use and develop their native languages. For example, if district policy makers decide to place all LM students in linguistically heterogeneous groups and offer only an English-based program even when there are enough speakers of one language to make a bilingual program feasible, their reasons for making this decision should be carefully examined (see Lucas & Schecter, 1992, for a fuller discussion).

## **BEYOND THE LANGUAGE-OF- INSTRUCTION DEBATE**

The emotional and political nature of the debate between linguistic and cultural pluralists and assimilationists makes it all the more important to gather evidence from research to help in understanding the roles of students’ native languages in schooling. A 3-year study of exemplary SAIPs funded in 1988 by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA), gave us the opportunity to do so. The primary purposes of the study were to identify, describe, and analyze significant features of exemplary SAIPs. Because most English learners in U.S. schools are not in full bilingual programs, knowledge of effective programs that use English as the primary language of instruction is sorely needed.

On our visits, we found that most of these programs, thought of as English-only programs, were characterized by the pervasiveness and

variety of uses of students' native languages. We knew that native languages in schooling can give English learners greater access to content knowledge and to their own prior knowledge and experiences, offer opportunities for social and academic interaction, and support the development of their English language skills as well as their self-esteem. We decided, therefore, to examine the data to determine in what contexts, to what extent, for what purposes, and in what ways students' native languages were used in these English-based programs. The classes we observed were not, for the most part, either bilingual or English-only. Students' native languages were used to various extents and in various ways, depending on such factors as the participants in the interaction, the immediate situation, the purpose and content of the communication at hand, the needs of individual students and of the class as a whole, and school and community attitudes and circumstances. Many exemplary SAIPs have risen above the tired issue of the best language of instruction to address more substantive issues, providing English learners with some of the benefits of native language use even without full bilingual programs.

## **METHOD**

We identified nine SAIPs across the country as exemplary through the following process: 147 educators involved in various aspects of the education of LM students were asked to nominate SAIPs they believed were exemplary in terms of student outcomes. SAIPs were defined as "preschool, elementary and secondary school projects designed specifically for language minority limited English proficient students in which children's native language is not a primary instructional tool" (Tikunoff et al., 1991, p. 11). The nominators were 19 people in the Title VII Evaluation Assistance Center and Multifunctional Resource Center network; 59 representatives of bilingual departments at State Education Agencies; 59 directors of SAIPs; and 10 Desegregation Assistance Center directors. This open nomination process allowed for consideration of the widest possible range of programs.

The 147 educators nominated 70 SAIPs (24 funded by Title VII), which were then contacted and asked to submit information about program features and student outcomes. Thirty-nine SAIPs responded with sufficient amounts of information to be considered. A Site Selection Panel of five educators used that information to rank the programs in terms of the quality of their program results. The study staff then visited the 17 most highly rated SAIPs to verify the information that had been submitted and to gather further information. Based on these



site visits, the 9 most exemplary sites were selected, along with 2 alternate sites.

Two sets of data were collected at the nine sites. First, contextual, demographic, and descriptive information was collected at the district, program, and school levels for each site from documents submitted and from teacher and administrator interviews and classroom observations conducted during three site visits. From this information, a prose portrait of each SAIP was compiled.

Teachers were interviewed before and after they were observed. Preobservation interviews elicited information about class makeup, the activities planned, and the teacher's goals, background, experience, and instructional philosophy. Postobservation interviews asked whether the class had met the teacher's expectations and clarified particular events, strategies used, and decisions made. In addition, observers filled out a postobservation checklist to record comments regarding student behavior, involvement of aides, specific uses of different languages by the teacher and students, and teaching strategies used.

Second, classroom observation data were collected using three instruments: the Instructional Environment Profile (IEP), the Student Functional Proficiency (SFP) profile, and the Description of Instructional Practice (DIP) profile. The IEP focused on 18 features of the organization of instruction, including the number of languages spoken by students; the number of and criteria for instructional groups; and the language(s) used by the teacher, aide, and students. The SFP focused on three general areas: student engagement, task completion, and task description. Specific aspects of these areas that were coded included students' contact with the teacher or aide and the mode of their responses to tasks (oral, written, nonverbal, no response). The DIP focused on the teacher rather than the students, providing an overall impression of the extent to which the teacher engaged in several aspects of instruction that research has identified as indicative of effective teaching, including encouraging high levels of student engagement, allowing/encouraging students to interact, exhibiting sensitivity to students' languages and cultures, emphasizing meaning rather than the structure of language, and allowing/encouraging students to use their native languages.

Researchers spent a minimum of 5 days at each site. Classroom observations using the three instruments were conducted by pairs of observers who spent an entire day in each teacher's classroom. During a class period (or its equivalent), one person observed and coded with the IEP while the other used the SFP. To code the IEP, the observer watched the classroom activities, paying attention to the 18 factors included in the IEP, and filled in the coding sheet at 2-min intervals.

For the SFP, the observer watched four students, one student at a time, stopping after 30-s intervals to code the sheet before moving to the next student. The four students were observed five times before the coder moved on to another group of four students. Once these two instruments had been completed for one period of classroom instruction, both observers completed the DIP.<sup>2</sup>

The findings presented here were drawn primarily from the interviews and classroom observations conducted during site visits. These qualitative data allow us to describe how students' native languages were used in the programs and classrooms. We also present some summary quantitative data on the use of languages other than English gleaned from the results of the IEP and SFP.

## FINDINGS

The nine SAIPs selected for study were located in six states (California, Oregon, Texas, Florida, New York, and Massachusetts). They varied in degree of urbanness, size, percent and number of LEP students, number of languages, and specific languages represented. For the most part, the SAIPs were serving multilingual populations, reflecting one of the pedagogical rationales for this Title VII funding category. Thirteen percent of the classrooms were bilingual; that is, all students spoke the same non-English language. All of the remaining classrooms, or 87%, were multilingual environments in which from 3 to 10 languages were represented among the students.

As SAIPs, these programs, unlike traditional bilingual education programs, were designed to provide instruction primarily in English. In practice, however, the classrooms were multilingual environments in which students' native languages served a multitude of purposes and functions. They gave students access to academic content, to classroom activities, and to their own knowledge and experience; gave teachers a way to show their respect and value for students' languages and cultures; acted as a medium for social interaction and establishment of rapport; fostered family involvement; and fostered students' development of, knowledge of, and pride in their native languages and cultures. Across sites, native language use emerged as a persistent and key instructional strategy realized in very site-specific ways.

Drawing on observations across sites, we illustrate below the variety of ways the SAIPs used students' native languages to create environments in which learning could take place. In the following sections

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<sup>2</sup>See Tikunoff et al. (1990) for a more detailed description of data collection and for information pertaining to interrater agreement in the use of these instruments.

we present three different, yet representative, learning environments ranging from urban to suburban to rural. Across the different sites, the policy for using native language varied, and, not surprisingly, so did classroom practice. Each site addressed the issue of providing appropriate instruction to student populations in unique ways. Our intent is not to evaluate the practices found within each but rather to illuminate the linkages among context, policy, and practice.

## **Contextualized Uses of Native Language**

### ***Site 1***

**Context.** Located in the Southwest, Site 1 (names of programs and individuals are pseudonyms) had a downtown where boarded-up stores shared the avenues with cooperatives under construction. The people of this city lived, played, and shopped in its 150-plus neighborhoods fanning out from the city's center, each distinct in character and reached by relatively free-flowing highways. Agriculture-oriented industries from its frontier history, like major livestock marketing, grain, and agribusiness services, existed alongside aerospace industries, high-technology electronics manufacturers, and automakers. The fifth fastest growing center for immigrants in the state, the city had the second largest rate of Asian immigration in the state and the fastest growing Hispanic population, the largest segment of which was Mexican.

At the time of our visit, almost 68,000 students were served by district schools. The third largest school district in the state, it served a multiethnic student population that was 40% African American, 30% Hispanic, 8% Asian, and 22% other. About 12% of the students enrolled in the district were identified as LEP. Approximately 52 minority languages were represented, with Spanish, Cambodian, and Vietnamese the most common.

One way the district addressed LEP students' needs was through the Center for Language Development Program, the program identified as exemplary by our study and offered by five middle schools and three high schools. Each Center operated as a school-within-a-school. That is, each program was housed at a school site but operated as an individual educational unit, physically separated from the rest of the school and offering a special program serving the needs of LEP students in the district.

**Policy.** The program coordinator in the district described the role of students' native languages in the SAIP as varying from site to site depending on the capability of the teachers. The native language was used for explanation, she pointed out, rather than instruction as there

were students from several language groups in each class. She emphasized, however, that it was not a district policy but rather up to the teacher to make a decision about the use of students' native languages. "We don't discourage it," she explained, for either social or instructional purposes, for example, pairing students with the same native language for tutoring.

**Practice.** The school we visited, approximately 15 min by uncrowded freeway from downtown, was located in a Hispanic section of town, near a shopping mall centered around Sears and J. C. Penney stores and reached by streets lined with small, brick bungalows edged with aluminum awnings. The school sat alone on a large, sloping piece of land, a red-brick building framed on either side by parking lots. Like that of the school district, this school's student population reflected the city's ethnic diversity. Seventy percent of the students were Hispanic; of the remaining students, 10% were Asian, 10% African American, and 10% Anglo. Thus, the mainstream was Hispanic. Many of the Anglo students served by this school were transient, the sons and daughters of seminary students who stayed at the school generally for about 2 years.

The program we visited was staffed by three teachers and two aides—including two Spanish-English bilingual teachers and two Spanish-English bilingual aides. As a result of their fluency, these teachers and aides could check comprehension or explain an activity to Spanish speakers with beginning-level proficiency in English. The following vignette illustrates this use of native language:

The math period is about half over; after a class review of how to add mixed fractions, these sixth-grade students are working at their desks on a problem from the board. Carolina, their teacher, moves from desk to desk, checking each student's progress. At Felipe's desk she stops, squatting next to him as they both examine how he is working out the problem. Leading him through the process for converting mixed denominators into common denominators, Carolina asks him questions softly in Spanish, and he answers, tentatively, in Spanish with occasional key math words in English.

Although a large percentage of the students in this center's classrooms were Spanish speakers, students speaking other languages also had opportunities to use their native languages in classroom activities, as the following vignette illustrates:

Tables with groups of four students sitting around them crowd the classroom. The walls are covered with graphic material: commercial posters for books, words, animals, even punctuation marks; teacher-generated posters displaying editing guidelines, class rules, and encouraging words for coop-

erative behavior; student work, some displayed under the heading *Masterpiece Gallery*; and notices of student recognition, for example, the Student of the Week award. At their tables, students write silently in their journals as soft music plays. In this beginning segment of the lesson students write about three things they learned the day before. Thus, what is important is content rather than language. Tran, a Vietnamese eighth grader whose English language skills are still very limited, writes in Vietnamese. As those language skills improve, his teacher explains, he will use less and less Vietnamese. Students more proficient in English, like Teresa and Miguel, write almost entirely in English.

Teachers also utilized their students' linguistic resources to enhance instruction for other students, pairing students with the same native language but different levels of English proficiency so that a more proficient student could tutor a less proficient student.

Norma, the second-period ESL teacher, has just finished a review of the Kennedy family history she has used as an exemplar of her students' next project. She sets out the steps for the day's lesson on the process of writing a family history. The class, a heterogeneous grouping of middle school students whose native languages are Spanish, Vietnamese, and Korean, watch quietly and attentively as Norma brainstorms the topic, scribbling notes about her family history on the overhead projector as a model of how this prewriting technique can help them begin exploration of this topic. Next, she turns to the chalkboard, writing her first draft as she explains the students' task. When she is done, students turn to each other at their tables to exchange ideas for their own family histories. After about 5 min, Ana leans over Rosa's paper, already three-quarters filled with writing in Spanish and English. Rosa has only been in the program for 1 month even though it is the middle of the school year. Norma describes her level of English as low intermediate. Ana, on the other hand, has high-intermediate English skills. Norma has carefully constructed students' groups to make sure each contains students with different skill levels so that students can help each other in either English or their native languages. Her brow furrowed, Rosa consults with Ana, discussing both what is on the sheet and what still needs to be added. She speaks quickly and quietly in Spanish, an occasional word from the sheet in English breaking the flow.

At times, student assistance was less formal, amounting to an occasional helping hand when needed:

Books line the chalkboard and fill rotating racks in this reading classroom for secondary-level students. Inez, the reading teacher, has just completed writing a student-generated summary of the first half of a previously read story on the chalkboard. The students are now supposed to finish the summary and write the main idea. Five min into this segment of the lesson, Inez realizes that Quong has written nothing on his sheet of paper. Today is Quong's fourth day in her class, and Inez suspects that although he has sufficient proficiency in English for him to work at the assignment, he may

not understand all of her directions. Inez asks Pen to explain the task in Vietnamese. By the end of the class Quong has been able to generate a few sentences in English in response to the task.

We witnessed extensive use of students' native languages at this site, no doubt both because of a policy that viewed native language use as a medium for aiding academic understanding and because of such rich linguistic resources as bilingual teachers and aides. The other sites we visited utilized students' native languages in different ways, reflecting different contexts and policies.

## **Site 2**

**Context.** West of a large metropolitan sprawl, Site 2 was located in a suburban area, characterized in a school district brochure as a locale of well-kept homes, successful businesses, active churches, and excellent recreational facilities. The district served two distinct populations living within its boundaries: children from homes whose prices ranged from \$150,000 to more than \$300,000, their green lawns and landscaped gardens protected from view behind solid walls; and children from newly constructed apartments, many of their families recent immigrants from other countries. Among the approximately 25,000 students in the district, the ethnic breakdown was as follows: White, 50%; Hispanic, 32%; African American, 10%; Asian, 8%. Of the students, 16%, the majority of whom were Spanish speakers, were identified as LEP.

The English Language Development Program (ELDP) provided intensive English instruction for all LEP students in the district at a central location. Located on a tree-lined, two-lane road, the white, modern building and its parking lots took up nearly half the block. Glass doors opened onto a wide terrazzo-floored entryway. Large glass cabinets along the side walls displayed colorful exhibits representative of the diverse student populations at the center.

ELDP students came from the six junior high schools and four high schools in the district. They were bused to the center, where they spent half of their school day; the other half was spent at the home school, where they received instruction in advanced ESL and regular or sheltered content areas. At the center, instruction varied for students depending on their level of English proficiency. Less proficient students spent all three periods taking ESL classes. More proficient junior high students, intermediate level and up, took social studies as well as ESL. More proficient senior high students took math and reading in addition to ESL.

**Policy.** Although a few of the teachers were fluent in other languages, instruction at the center was conducted entirely in English. Teachers, in accordance with program policy, tried to use only English in the classrooms. One notable exception was a seminar on self-esteem for students, conducted in Spanish by the community liaison who worked at the ELDP and, when needed, as a resource at the 10 home campuses. The curriculum specialist explained there was a strong rule at the ELDP that teachers should use only English except during these self-esteem seminars.

**Practice.** Although policy dictated an English-only approach, teachers generally were more open to allowing students to use their native languages than the rule would suggest, varying in the degree to which they allowed and encouraged their use. One teacher, for example, felt that students “get enough of it [native language]” outside of class. In her class, after the first day only English was allowed. She believed that “they need to be bombarded with the language [i.e., English].” Another teacher felt native language had a place in instruction although her own skills in other languages were limited. She explained,

I don't speak Spanish, which I really think is a detriment. I'd feel a lot more helpful to the students if I spoke Spanish. I don't hesitate to use it if I can—looking up words, for example. I think people are wrong to worry about using the first language in class . . . I've sent students to another teacher to ask what a word means in Spanish sometimes.

Not surprisingly, then, students were permitted to use their native language in her class to have access to content. Another teacher felt that native language “absolutely” had a place in her classroom although she went on to say that she wished students would “actively” try to practice using English more. Several teachers noted that students used their native language in class among themselves. One pointed out that she “would dignify their own language and culture” by not discouraging the use of native language because a lot of students learned from each other. Because they believed that it was important for students to achieve academically as they were acquiring English language skills, these teachers ascribed a value to students helping each other in their native language.

In addition to instructional uses of the native language that crept into classrooms at this site, we witnessed the native language used for social interaction. Although at their home campuses ELDP students might have been somewhat isolated, for more than 3 hours a day they were grouped with other LEP students, many of whom spoke the same native language. In their courses at the ELDP, students remained in the same group for all 3 hours of instruction. Thus, students formed

social networks at the ELDP with students speaking the same native language. The following vignette illustrates the social interaction use of native language.

The students can be heard long before they are seen entering the rather large classroom furnished with a cast-off sofa and overstuffed chairs as well as the regulation desks and tables of most secondary schools. Although the language of instruction is clearly English, the only language used by their teacher, these students chatter away in Spanish, Vietnamese, or Taiwanese during the down time between classroom activities. For example, Alma talks with her friends in Spanish, catching up with news from other campuses and exchanging comments about the amount of work they are expected to do in a short amount of time.

Given the limited linguistic resources among the teaching staff and the stated program policy, native language use was more limited at the ELDP than at Site 1. Yet as many teachers pointed out, they considered native language use appropriate classroom behavior for giving students access to course content. Although the ELDP offered fewer officially sanctioned uses of students' native languages than Site 1, students' languages were still heard in the halls and classrooms.

### **Site 3**

**Context.** Twenty miles west of an urban center and just beyond its suburbs, Site 3 sat in a valley surrounded by green, low, rolling hills. Historically an agricultural area, it had become a study in contrasts as a result of recent growth in high-technology industry and in population (then 33,000). This site retained many of the features of a small town, including a town square and a preponderance of tree-lined streets of single-family houses. Agriculture remained a major activity in the surrounding area, with thousands of migrant workers moving in each summer to pick strawberries, grapes, and many other crops. On the outskirts of town, however, industrial parks and headquarters of high-technology companies provided a glimpse of the future.

The school district was small by most standards with two high schools, four junior high schools, and nine elementary schools. It was a largely White district; in the spring of 1990, the ethnic composition of the district was approximately 90% White, 6% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 1% African American. Of the 5,477 students in the district, approximately 3% were LEP students. Most of these were of Mexican heritage, but some were from China, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Korea, and Russia.

Located a few blocks from the center of town and surrounded by tree-lined streets and single-family houses, the junior high school build-



ing where Site 3's program was located was clean, well cared for, and spacious inside, with wide hallways and high ceilings. The great majority of students at the school were White native English speakers; minority students did not constitute a strong presence. The program classes met in the health, science, and social studies teachers' regular classrooms; this meant they were located in three different parts of the school. The only place where we saw large groups of minority students was in the ESL classroom, prominently located beside the main office of the school.

The program we visited, the Content-ESL Prep Program, consisted of health, science, and social studies classes for eighth- and ninth-grade LEP students with intermediate to advanced English language skills in two junior high schools. The classes were designed not to substitute for mainstream classes in these subject areas but to prepare students for such classes, which they would take when they entered high school. According to the program director, students learned the "mystique" of how content classes work as well as learning vocabulary and content. "What we're about," he explained, "is making the incomprehensible comprehensible."

Although the primary objective of the program teachers was to prepare students to succeed in health, science, and social studies in high school, they did not teach content alone. English language development was integrated into content instruction. "Probably the most innovative part of the program," according to the director, was the fact that the classes were taught by content teachers who had received special training to teach LEP students rather than by ESL teachers who were teaching content.

The Content-ESL Prep Program was only one of several types of courses and services provided for LEP students in the school district, and it should not be considered in isolation from the other programs. LEP students also had access to beginning, intermediate, and advanced ESL classes; Spanish for Spanish speakers; a study skills class; before- and after-school tutoring; assistance with nonacademic needs and concerns such as translations for themselves and their parents, transportation to events, and information about health services, all provided by the bilingual Home/School Consultant; and help from bilingual instructional aides in their ESL and regular classes as needed.

**Policy.** For several reasons, teachers in this program did not use students' native languages for instruction. First, students in the program were not beginning ESL students. To be placed in the content classes, students had to be sufficiently proficient in English to be able to handle the academic content of the classes. Second, the content instructors who taught these classes were not fluent in the students' languages.

One teacher reported no fluency in any language besides English whereas another teacher reported enough fluency in Spanish “to get by.”

**Practice.** Students’ native languages still had a place in the classrooms of this program even though the design of the program and teachers’ limited linguistic resources suggested an English-only learning environment. First, teachers were receptive to their students’ use of their native languages, particularly to serve instructional purposes. Students used English to answer and ask questions of the teacher but often used their native languages among themselves. In a science class we observed, for example, students worked quietly in pairs, searching for planaria under a microscope, adjusting the instrument’s focus and lighting. As they scanned their slides, the teacher directing and assisting in English, they consulted each other in Spanish until they had located the elusive worms. The native language was also used as a vehicle to establish rapport with students. One teacher described her use of Spanish in the classroom as “kind of fun . . . for camaraderie.” She added, smiling, that “students like to correct my grammar and pronunciation.” We observed her asking students about Spanish vocabulary and pronunciation.

Thus, whereas English was the primary language used between teachers and students in this SAIP, we heard Spanish in the classrooms as one student helped another figure out the meaning of a science term and as another student quickly asked to borrow a pencil for taking notes on first-aid techniques. Students felt comfortable using their native languages to work together or exchange social information, for teachers had created classroom environments in which students’ native languages had respected functions.

## **Uses of the Native Language Across All Sites**

The three site descriptions illustrate the uses of native languages in classrooms by students and teachers, uses embedded within a variety of contextual factors such as available linguistic resources, teaching strategies, district demographics, and district policies. To gain a fuller understanding of the variation in the use of native languages in SAIP classrooms as well as a sense of the broad patterns, we organized each of the uses of the native language we observed across sites into three categories: use of the native language by students, use of the native language by teachers and/or instructional aides, and native language support in the larger school context.

As Table 1 shows, students’ native languages were employed in a variety of ways and for a variety of uses across all the sites in the

**TABLE 1**  
**Use of Native Languages by Students and Teachers Across Sites**

Use of native language	Site								
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
<b>Students</b>									
To assist one another	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
To tutor other students								x	
To ask/answer questions	x	x	x	x		x		x	
To use bilingual dictionaries		x	x	x				x	
To write in native language	x	x		x	x	x		x	
To interact socially	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
<b>Teachers</b>									
To check comprehension	x	x				x		x	
To translate a lesson		x							
To explain an activity	x	x	x			x		x	
To provide instruction	x	x							
To interact socially	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	
<b>Native language support in the larger school context</b>									
Content instruction in native language	x	x		x			x		x
Instruction in native language culture, history, and/or language arts	x	x		x		x	x		x
Library books in native language	x	x			x			x	x
Communication to parents in native language	x	x	x		x	x			
Parents encouraged to read to students in native language	x	x			x				

study.<sup>3</sup> The following examples illustrate this taxonomy, providing glimpses of how teachers shaped instruction as they incorporated many of these uses of native language into the classroom. In this first set, teachers devised a number of ways to draw on the linguistic resources of their students so that their talk could function as a means of supporting academic development:

- Teachers set up situations or activities specifically calling for students to use their native languages with each other. For example, one teacher devised a group writing assignment using the native language. At another site, students read or told stories from their own countries to each other in their native languages and then translated them into English to tell to other students.

<sup>3</sup>We do not have data that allow us to quantify or rank these ways of using the native language. They were simply recorded as being used on at least one occasion at the site.

- Less fluent or experienced students were paired with more fluent or experienced students of the same language background during classroom instruction and activities so that the more fluent student could help the less fluent one with language, to understand instructions, or with other classroom demands.
- Teachers encouraged students to use bilingual dictionaries when they did not understand something in English and there was no one who could translate for them.
- Students were encouraged to get help at home in their native language from family members. For example, at one site a teacher, knowing that a student's father was more proficient in English than the student, instructed her student to ask her father to explain the social studies assignment to her in the student's native language.

When they were fluent in students' native languages, many teachers and instructional aides used their ability to help the students whose language they shared. The next set of examples illustrate how these teachers used students' native languages:

- Teachers gave instructions in students' native languages to make sure all students knew what they were supposed to be doing. To ensure that students had access to academic content, they clarified ideas and concepts originally presented in English and checked students' comprehension.
- Teachers or instructional aides formed small groups of students to provide instruction in the native language. At one site, after the teacher introduced a social studies lesson dealing with Spanish explorers coming to the New World, an instructional aide relocated to another part of the classroom with a small group of LEP students to teach the rest of the lesson in Armenian.
- Teachers engaged in social talk with their students before and after class as well as during class when appropriate.

Students' native languages were also incorporated into the structure of the programs serving them, sometimes into the curriculum, at other times into extracurricular activities and events supporting instruction.

- To keep students at academic grade level, teachers and/or aides provided instruction in the native language in language arts, mathematics, and/or content areas. At one site, all students received social studies instruction daily in their primary language. At another site, a Cambodian teacher and a teacher from the science department cotaught an ESL laboratory science course.
- To provide students with knowledge of the native language and culture, programs offered instruction in native language content

and/or language arts that reflected students' cultural diversity. At one site, Khmer speakers were offered three courses in Khmer: History of Cambodia, Literature of Cambodia, and Khmer Reading and Writing. At the same site, Spanish speakers were offered two courses in Spanish: Spanish Language and Culture, and History of Spanish-Speaking Peoples.

- Books in students' native languages were provided and students were encouraged to read them.
- Communications to parents were written in or translated into their native languages, and students' parents were encouraged to read to them in their native languages.
- Awards were given for excellence in languages that are not commonly studied (e.g., a senior award in Khmer language skill).

The amount of time English and other languages were used varied across teachers and students and across grade levels, as illustrated by the data from the IEP presented in Table 2. Teachers spoke only English 90% of the time they were observed whereas students spoke only English 58% of the time they were observed. As for language use across grade levels, teachers used only English in greater proportions in the higher grades whereas students used only English in greater proportions in the lower grades.

Three features of the organization of instruction (student grouping, length of student responses, and number of steps for task completion) help to explain how teachers managed to provide rigorous instruction while they and their students were often speaking different languages. The following shows the percentage of time students were observed in different classroom groupings:

- as a whole class: 40%
- in small groups: 28%
- as individuals: 32%

**TABLE 2**  
**Observed Time Teachers and Students Used Only English, by Grade Level (%)**

Grade level	Teachers	Students
Elementary school	87	66
Middle school	87	58
High school	97	50
All grades	90	58

*Note.* Based on IEP observations conducted at 2-min intervals for a class period or its equivalent.

Thus, for 60% of the time we observed, students worked either by themselves or in a small group, giving them opportunities to use their native languages in the classroom. Group work was a key teaching strategy used across sites by the teachers we observed. When they were part of a group, students were required to collaborate with one another to complete tasks. At these times, as the vignettes suggest, students were more likely to be using their native languages, particularly in the higher grades, as they negotiated meaning, solved problems, or created texts. Whether they were working as a small group, as a whole class, or alone, tasks demanded responses consisting of more than a single word or phrase and requiring multiple steps, as Table 3 shows. Given the range of uses of native languages and many teachers' encouragement of the use of a common native language to complete tasks, it is not surprising to find task structures that permit this kind of interaction. Students were engaged for the majority of classroom time in complex tasks that encouraged the use of language—both English and their native languages—to develop their academic competence.

**TABLE 3**  
**Features of Student Tasks, by Time Observed (%)**

Feature	Time observed (%)
Length of written or oral response	
No words	17
Few words	41
Many words	42
Number of steps for completion	
One step	24
Many steps	76

## CONCLUSION

These brief portraits of exemplary programs in which English is the primary language of instruction illustrate a range of uses of students' native languages. Our results show that alternatives to bilingual education need not be English-only programs. There is no reason to assume that programs for students who speak many languages must use only English in ESL classes and content classes. We observed the use of students' native languages in English language development classes (e.g., through journal writing and oral interactions) and in content classes. Indeed, Auerbach (1993) argues that teachers should incorporate students' native languages into ESL classes in ways that help stu-

dents develop English abilities and consider the implications of and motivations for not doing so.

In the situations we observed, students, teachers, and instructional aides used English and languages other than English for a variety of purposes, depending on various features of the contexts within which the programs and individual classes operated. Some of these programs (e.g., Site 1) might more appropriately be called *partial bilingual programs* (Dolson & Mayer, 1992) in that they use students' native languages as much as resources allow. Indeed, our findings suggest that the use of the native language is so compelling that it emerges even when policies and assumptions mitigate against it.

Research indicates that it is most appropriate for teachers to speak the languages of their students, but our findings show that monolingual English speakers or teachers who do not speak the languages of all of their students can incorporate students' native languages into instruction in many ways to serve a variety of educationally desirable functions. For example, teachers can have students work in groups or pairs of students with the same native language. They can utilize LM students as linguistic resources for the class or involve LM community members in classroom activities. These creative ways of tapping native language resources are important given the shortage of bilingual teachers. They allow teachers to draw on a variety of linguistic resources for ensuring that students master academic content as well as develop English proficiency.

Because the study did not compare SAIPs to any other type of program, we cannot address the question of whether SAIPs are as effective for language and content learning as programs in which students' native languages are an integral part of instruction. As we discussed in the introduction, other research indicates that native language development and instruction constitute the best approach to teaching LEP students. These findings should not, therefore, be interpreted as giving policy makers free reign to abolish or discount bilingual programs. On the contrary, they should lend support to the necessity of including students' native languages in programs for students learning English. In contexts in which it is impossible to provide bilingual classes and programs, educators can establish policies and institute practices that incorporate a variety of uses of students' native languages even when teachers use primarily or exclusively English. In contexts in which it is possible to provide bilingual instruction to some or to all students, educators should do just that.

We believe these findings suggest a need to reconceptualize programs for LM students. It would be productive to focus less attention on language and more attention on "more fundamental questions" (Pease-Alvarez & Hakuta, 1992, p. 4) about "academic development

[and] broader social and instructional dynamics” (Moll, 1992, p. 20). If that is to be accomplished, the perception that bilingual programs and other types of programs for LEP students are diametrically opposed to one another must change.

The SAIPs we have described show that language choice in and of itself does not have to be the key educational issue. The question should be: What circumstances and strategies will provide the best opportunities for particular students to learn in a particular context? When students are not proficient in English, educators must consider those students’ native languages as a key resource for teaching both content and English. Beyond that, when students see that their languages are valued for their communicative power and when they have the opportunity to develop their native language abilities, their self-esteem and identity are strengthened. The decisions about when, how, and how much to incorporate students’ native languages into schooling, however, must be made within particular contexts, taking into account such factors as the language abilities of educators and students, the number and variety of languages represented in districts, schools, and classes, and the community resources available.

If educators and educational policy makers take up the challenge of educating LEP students in good faith, giving serious and informed consideration to all strategies and resources that can contribute to meaningful educational experiences, perhaps they can move beyond the emotional and politically heated debate that opposes English-only instruction to native language instruction. Multilingual programs like the exemplary SAIPs, which foster communication and interaction, provide one set of examples of partial bilingual programs that can meet students’ and educators’ needs in some contexts when designed and implemented thoughtfully.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This article reports findings from a study produced under Contract No. T288001001 from the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA), competitively awarded to the Southwest Regional Educational Laboratory (SWRL). The views expressed herein do not reflect those of USDE, OBEMLA, or SWRL.

We acknowledge the contributions of William Tikunoff, Principal Investigator of the study, and the other project staff, who provided us with helpful insights along the way: David van Broekhuizen, Lillian Vega Castaneda, Migdalia Romero, and Beatrice Ward. We also thank the many people at the nine SAIP sites who invited us into their schools and classrooms. For helpful comments on the article itself, we thank our colleague, Rosemary Henze, and anonymous reviewers.



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