

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF PERSPECTIVES: EDUCATIONAL  
IMPLICATIONS IN THE SPANISH BILINGUAL PROGRAMS IN  
PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE CENTRAL FLORIDA REGION

by

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## ABSTRACT

The proposed goal of this research was to take the data gathered and implement it in analyzing the potential reformation of programs in need of evaluation, assessing the potential benefits of further development in the field of bilingual education in the United States as a nation. Using data collected in the Central Florida region as a microcosmic example of how existing programs function in the modern elementary educational system, the purpose of this study was to demonstrate through the conduction of interviews with local teachers and currently available research that a more suitable standard for bilingual education is both necessary and valuable for our school systems and for the future of our students as productive and capable adults. As a survey of the current state of bilingual education in Central Florida elementary schools, this research sought to establish a clearer panoramic view of the ways in which our system is perceived as observed directly through those participating and facilitating it firsthand in local classrooms.

Classroom observations and data gathered from educational professionals within the participating elementary school system, inclusive solely of those implementing a bilingual program as a method of assimilation for a high population of Spanish-speaking students transitioning to a targeted language of English, were the primary basis of this research, supplemented by existing psychological and educational research in the field of language acquisition and development in young children. Results have suggested that current methods of bilingual instruction are based upon the integrated standards of three existing models: transitional bilingual education, immersion, and English as a Second Language. The three appeared to be

functioning in such a way that does not fully allow for a wide range of learning needs to be met, and that furthermore does not fully support a directed initiative toward a future in consistently dynamic and progressive research in the bilingual field, such that a standardized system flexible enough to encourage the needs of a diverse population might be realized. With further standardization and research, bilingual education might itself become a standard of American education for all students, native and non-native.

## DEDICATIONS

For my loving family and friends, whose unwavering support has made my educational journey a rich celebration in the joys of learning

For my professors, without whom much of my work might have seemed daunting, and whose polish and solid direction so generously augmented my college career

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATIONS.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	8
CHAPTER TWO: STATEMENT OF PROBLEM .....	11
Research Question.....	11
Structure of the Study.....	12
Limitations of the Study.....	13
CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT .....	17
Definition of Bilingual Education.....	17
Perceptions in Literature .....	18
Description of Educational Context: Classroom Observations.....	19
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS .....	24
Instrument of Research: Interviews.....	24
Setting and Participants.....	25
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION .....	30
Current State of Bilingual Education: Local Perspectives .....	30
Themes Observed.....	32

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION .....	35
Emphasis of Theory: The Need for Further Standardization and Research.....	35
REFERENCES .....	38

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As the number of Spanish-speaking immigrants steadily increases in the United States, the need for an understanding and appreciation of the Spanish language, culture, and literature is undeniably desirable in particular, apart from the beneficiary cultural and intellectual implications of possessing knowledge of any second language as a general skill in an internationally integrated modern world. Progress in the field of bilingual program development has had few recent contributions, with the most current major research and methods having been formed in the 1980s and early 1990s; in Central Florida in particular, I have had great difficulty finding existing research on the subject of bilingual education and feel that my own research will thus be part of a new frontier in the field.

The following research conducted in the Central region of the state of Florida investigates developmental and theoretical aspects of the existing Spanish bilingual educational programs within the local primary school system, while seeking to understand the strengths and possible limitations of the system as a whole. The proposed goal of this thesis was to take the data gathered and to implement it in analyzing the potential reformation of programs currently in need of evaluation and to assess the potential benefits of further development in the field of bilingual education through ongoing and progressive research in the future.

Universally, as Tracey Tokuhama-Espinosa suggests in her book, *The Multilingual Mind*, “the presence of multilingualism now accounts for a majority of the world's population,



with consistent growth in numbers as each year passes” (1). Thus in this modern age, any variation of bilingualism can be viewed as an advantage not only socially, economically, and intellectually, but has increasingly become a necessity on professional levels when taking into consideration the ever-rising levels of cultural diversity found throughout the United States particularly. In using Florida as an example of the need for well-established practices and standards in bilingual education, the significance that the role of strong language plays in education may be realized. In doing so, greater convergence between the large population of Spanish speakers and the contrasting native English speakers may be achieved through education at the elementary level.

The intention of this study was to demonstrate through the conduction of interviews and classroom observations with the teachers and administrative staff of the selected county’s only existing elementary bilingual center, compiled with currently available research, that a more profound and multidimensional standard for bilingual education is both necessary and valuable for our school systems and for the future of our students as productive and capable adults.

As an undergraduate Spanish language major, my experience with bilingual learning and its advantages has been attained directly through my course studies here in Central Florida and abroad; conversely, I have experienced in an indirect manner through service learning the challenges associated with the allocation of resources and programs to bilingual students in our local primary schools. For example, Spanish-speaking fourth grade students that I volunteered with at the largest bilingual public elementary schools within the county struggled with language and reading skills in English, as shown by generally low trends in both their grades and FCAT scores. Though their teachers were well qualified and dedicated, the materials available to both

instructors and students were limited and not completely standardized in order to meet the majority of the students' needs. As the number of Spanish speakers continues to steadily increase in Florida specifically, the need for an understanding and appreciation of the Spanish language and culture is undeniably desirable, apart from the generally beneficiary cultural and intellectual implications of possessing knowledge of any second language brings to future generations. It is thus the hope of this research that an inspirational perspective on the progress of bilingual education here in Central Florida may be demonstrated and championed, furthered by more extensive projects to come in the pursuit of more advanced degrees within my own future.

## CHAPTER TWO: STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

### *Research Question*

As previously stated, the intention of this study was to demonstrate through the conduction of interviews and classroom observations with the teachers and administrative staff of the selected county's only existing elementary Spanish bilingual center, compiled with currently available research, that a more profound and multidimensional standard for bilingual education is both necessary and valuable for our school systems and for the future of our students as productive and capable adults.

The bilingual mind has been proven to have a greater capacity for language as a whole, which thus allows for a greater ability to communicate and express oneself (Tokuhama-Espinosa 21). Once a second language is introduced into the curriculum of children, especially in primary school, literacy and communication skills are enhanced with an augmented capacity for future learning. Though this may be a widely accepted theory, progress in the field of bilingual program development has had few recent contributions, with the most current major research and methods in this facet of education having been formed in the 1980s and early 1990s. Even currently, there are many myths and misinformation surrounding bilingualism and multilingualism in general, perhaps largely due, as the aforementioned statement suggests, to the fact that the most expansive research and technology for studying neuro-function and cognition has been developing only over the past three to four decades at the earliest (Tokuhama-Espinosa 1). This research has produced a limited number of resulting established programs and theories, stunted

largely by an ongoing debate with political dissent over the many varying levels of challenges involved with the uniformity and even the general existence of bilingual programs. In Central Florida in particular, I have had great difficulty finding existing research on the subject of bilingual education and thus assert that my own research will be part of a new frontier in the field, continued further through more advanced projects in my future educational career.

### *Structure of the Study*

In order to properly assess both the existing and the aspiring structures of Spanish bilingualism as an educational product, this research will traverse the theories and methods of multiple educational fields and explore how the use of Spanish language and literature as a regionally specific example may be best implemented in the progressivity of elementary language programs. In addition to the use of general theories and methods as supporting evidence, the practical application of this research will be observed through the comparison of current models of bilingual instruction to a qualitative analysis of the perspectives provided by local educational professionals in an informal interviewing and classroom observational process. In providing general impressions of the most current program available to students of this region, I would like to direct this research in such a way that supports the teachers and administrative staff involved, aiming only to enhance the quality of their educational environment. Impressions of bilingual education shared by this project and by these professionals seek to demonstrate a progressive spirit within the field, such that students of a second language within Central Florida may learn at their optimal level and with the full support of the elementary school system.

### *Limitations of the Study*

With limited sources of current research and theories available to support the development of standardized bilingual education, it is understandable that a considerable number of myths surrounding the nature of linguistic capacity and learning exist, creating a noticeable barrier to the success of any current attempts to transcend any finite aspects of the existing structure.

In addition to preexisting myths surrounding bilingual education, other limitations of this study lie in certain identifiable matters of disagreement within the field. With this knowledge combined, one might assume that the process of language acquisition, especially at the level of primary education, is a complicated and sensitive one with multiple facets of understanding required in order to support a majority of learners found within the broad spectrum such as that which exists within the school system, to an even more profound degree in the United States as a particularly diverse nation. As mentioned, this research will focus primarily on the challenges faced in Florida's central region as a prime example associated with a particularly high percentage of immigrant students who are native speakers of Spanish.

As discussed in the book *The Multilingual Mind*, Tracey Tokuhama-Espinosa specifically mentions ten reoccurring myths that concern her research; in the composition of this research itself I will address the most pertinent of these in order to establish a more comprehensive perspective on the current state of bilingual education as it pertains to education as a standardized entity within the Central Florida region.

The first myth to be addressed concerns the theory that the ability to speak many languages is a type of intelligence. According to research done by Howard Gardner of Harvard University, foreign language ability, as a more specific level of linguistic intelligence, is indeed one of seven types of intelligence. With regard to this theory, such specific types of intelligence are located in separate areas of the brain and can be developed, with the majority of people using the same "main" area of their brain to speak different languages. If a person learns a foreign language after nine months of age however, a cross-lateralization of greater proportion occurs between both hemispheres of the brain, as opposed to one primary region within one hemisphere (8-9).

A second myth concerns the ways in which the learning of languages occurs with adults compared to children of primary school age; although a nine-year old child possesses roughly the same brain size as an adult, the number of neural connections occurring within the brain differs considerably between the two. Tokuhama-Espinosa's research implies that language learning in this case has little to do with physical aspects of the brain and more to do with psychological ones, particularly when accounting for the influence of social circumstances. Obviously, children and adults are motivated differently as they encounter determinants of varying social influence, with children being more impressionable and flexible in their learning capacity; as the cultural and social norms of this modern age continue to evolve and change at a rapid pace, the learning process of today's youth is thus particularly complicated and delicate (9). As language often has close ties to culture and social interaction as the primary implement of communication, understanding the face of today's learners is crucial to the development of a future fulfillment of these unique needs.

Further exploring limitations within this research, as Judith Harlan states in her book *Bilingualism in the United States: Conflict and Controversy*, bilingual education has become not only a complicated issue within the educational field, but a fiercely debated source of political dissent as well. Perhaps the largest and most primary issue remains the divide between supporters of assimilation versus those of acculturation, in which disagreement continues as to whether or not children who are non-native speakers of English should transition to English solely, or continue to progress in their education of both their native language and the new target language; as is explicit in the purpose of this research, acculturation is the preferred position of this thesis. As Harlan asks, "shouldn't bilingual-education programs encourage true bilingualism instead of expecting students to forfeit their first language?" (76).

As Margot Kinberg and Peter Serdyukov state in their book *Bilingualism and American National Unity: The Pros and Cons of Immersion Education*, "knowledge America's past is critical to understanding what has worked and what has not in terms of language acquisition" (iii). From our birth as nation through the modern era, the United States has continued to remain a multicultural and largely multilingual nation, though as our educational system has evolved, a consistent and multi-layered perspective on language learning has yet to catch up with the rapid diversification of the demographical identity of the country, as evidenced by the many issues surrounding bilingual education. To achieve the greatest level of success, bilingual education in America must not only focus on transitioning from one language to another (most often from a foreign language to the targeted language of English), but also the careful preservation of the maternal tongue, such that the learner expands their level of knowledge and capacity for communication, in place of assimilation alone.

This significant matter of contention continues over what kinds specifically of bilingual programs should be allowed within the American school system, having not even reached the level of determining preferred methods and those which are the most successful according to current research. If any agreement presently exists, it is that there is too great a diversity amongst American students, especially within its youngest generation, to mandate any one program as a sole solution. The paramount importance of the role of educators within this controversy is thus in the seeking of multiple solutions, or in the customization of multiple techniques that might serve the majority of needs from multiple student varieties.



## CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

As established in previous chapters, the intention of this study was to demonstrate through the conduction of informal interviews and classroom observations with the teachers and administrative staff of the selected county's only existing elementary Spanish bilingual center, compiled with currently available research, that a more profound and multidimensional standard for bilingual education is both necessary and valuable for our school systems and for the future of our students as productive and capable adults. After presenting the central problem around which this research builds, the importance and effectiveness of existing models in place must be established while properly defining what bilingual education is, both as it is perceived to be through observations and interviews as well as how established models have come to define it in most recent theory.

### *Definition of Bilingual Education*

Defined broadly according to the National Association for Bilingual Education's website, bilingual education "can mean any use of two languages in school – by teachers or students or both – for a variety of social and pedagogical purposes" (The National Association for Bilingual Education). Furthermore, the association's official website continues with the statement of the following:

In today's context, a period of demographic transformation in United States, bilingual education means something more specific. It refers to approaches in the classroom that use the native languages of English language learners (ELLs) for instruction. Goals include: teaching English, fostering academic achievement, acculturating immigrants to a new society, preserving a minority group's linguistic and cultural heritage, enabling English speakers to learn a second language, developing national language resources, or any combination of the above.

### *Perceptions in Literature*

As Judith Harlan's research provides in her book *Bilingualism in the United States: Conflict and Controversy*, most programs that currently exist within our school systems are derived from three basic types: transitional bilingual education; immersion; and English as a Second Language (ESL) (78). While English as a Second Language seeks to gradually assimilate the student into a learning environment targeted specifically toward the sole acquisition of the second language, in this case English, the transitional model has a stronger focus in the use of fluency in the native language so as to maintain dual language capacity in both the target and native languages. Immersion may be more generally considered to include any method or model of teaching in which the student is "immersed" into the target language, learning in an environment in which instruction in that language is used to ensure its acquisition directly and immediately. Referring to these three basic types of bilingual education programs mentioned in Harlan's research, my own experiences in the primary school classrooms in the Central Florida

region may be classified primarily as a mixture of immersion and English as a Second Language and will be described accordingly, such that a vision of current methods might be constructed.

### *Description of Educational Context: Classroom Observations*

Through the use of informal classroom observations at the selected elementary school over a period of multiple semesters, a triangulation of data was achieved, supplementing the perceptions included within the interviews described later in this study. Of the participants directly observed, all teachers were multilingual speakers themselves (of Spanish and English and of Arabic, Spanish and English), followed county mandates to conduct their classes in English, and allowed only for some questions and clarifications to be asked in the children's first language of Spanish. According to data collected in the elementary school used in this study, which currently stands as the sole bilingual center for the county observed, the average student population includes an extremely high percentage of minority students (over seventy-five percent), the large majority of which are native speakers of Spanish, either as the first generation of immigrant parents and/or immigrants themselves.

It must also be noted that although all classrooms observed contained students whose language assimilation was targeted from Spanish to English, a demographic diversity existed in each that presented challenges within areas of varying lexicon, dialect, and culture. Based upon the classroom observations, these challenges were dealt with in a sensitive manner, but again augmented the pre-existing disparities among the students' varying levels of performance and range of successful assimilation.

In cases of special needs or particularly low levels of performance, teachers and teacher's assistants created separate instruction time during which those students participated in intensified learning activities that more closely targeted the specific skills (most often in spoken and written language) in need of improvement, while the rest of the class continued on the planned track of instruction separately. This separation of instruction time most closely resembles the standards used in the English as a Second Language Program, in which students with special needs, specifically concerning the acquisition of the target language, are taught apart from the mean of students performing at a standard level of reading and writing.

Following general ESL models, the children at the primary levels of kindergarten and first grade relied heavily on the use of interactive educational games, literature (reading aloud and being read to as class), and specialized "centers" in which multi-sensory activities were explored on a rotational basis, targeting the development of English skills as a primary learning goal. In this way, the use of standards following a program of immersion were implemented in the learning process, exposing the youngest students to a social and educational environment that encouraged a multi-faceted transition to a mental state of bilingual capacity. This method of immersion, based upon the previously-mentioned educational program in which children are placed directly in an environment which functions entirely in the target language, was effective at primary grade levels, especially as demonstrated in the kindergarten and first grade, where the flexibility of the learners as a result of younger age was much higher and a greater level of speaking and writing ability was thus achieved at a more consistently progressive pace.

Upon observing higher grade levels, English as a Second Language was used to provide separate English instruction to students with learning disabilities and other special

challenges in place of an environment that relied primarily on immersion. This was due not only to the delay in developmental capacity as a result of acquisition at a later age, but also due to the fact that a large majority (as much as seventy percent) of the eighteen students had some form of special learning or behavioral need and required additional specialized instruction.

Specifics within this research indicating the success of these programs in areas of reading and writing skills suggest that the staggering numbers of non-native English speakers, in conjunction with an average student to teacher ratio of fifteen or greater to one and a limited number of available standardized materials outside of FCAT preparation, have created a learning system that could apply further development in solution-oriented research toward the achievement of higher scores and more effective rates of performance in oral and written language skills.

Using material gathered in classroom observations, data publicly available from the Florida Department of Education, and interviews conducted with teaching professionals concerning the primary bilingual center in Central Florida's Orange County elementary school system, it may be inferred that though the constant tailoring of such programs may be directed toward the achievement of an improved and consistent method of teaching primary school aged children a second language, scores in testing, teacher evaluations and other measures of success in these areas suggest that the performance of students within these programs continue to be found at lower averages than both the state and national statistics. With the impending challenges of budget cuts and the discontinuation of the bilingual programs past the primary level, a growing concern exists for a consistent and lasting solution to the problem these young students

face in language capabilities, which also indicate long-term challenges in their future success at higher levels of education.

As *The Multilingual Mind* explores, Gardner followed up groundbreaking research on his widely-renowned plural intelligences theory with literature that applied his theories to the learning environment of the classroom; the resulting methods call for teaching a new language through not only theory that multiple types of intelligence must be acknowledged, but the additional incorporation of stimulation of the five senses as well. Cross-referencing these two bodies of input produces a nearly infinite number of possible activities, methods and styles of teaching language, but which overall strongly emphasizes the need for a creative and diverse field of multi-dimensional proportions (16-17). Above all, such a task requires a level of passion, patience and fortitude that can only come from a true appreciation for the many profound benefits of the multilingual mind. Ideally speaking from the perspective of this project based upon the given information and the overall direction of this research, a well-developed bilingual education program would theoretically offer its learners the opportunity to develop levels of dual literacy, maintaining both their native tongue and a new target language, instead of simply transitioning from one to the other.

As this project now progresses into the general impressions gathered through interviews with local educational professionals within the selected county, each individual perspective will be used to achieve a multi-faceted but ultimately unified view of what it means to be bilingual in the United States today, allowing for educated speculation on how the face of bilingualism in children and adolescents should appear for a brighter and more productive tomorrow. Through this research, I aspire to bring to the field of education, especially in Central

Florida, a greater understanding of the needs of bilingual children as a whole; through data and observation directly in the classroom, as well as through the information provided by local school administrations, this research will offer a review of existing programs and suggest possible future directives to create a more efficient and standardized method of teaching students in a bilingual setting, both with a targeted language and as a universal standard of education in Florida and beyond.

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS

Based upon general questions and conversations with the participants of this study concerning their perception of the current state of bilingual education generally in their county, the selected four teaching professionals were able to demonstrate clear impressions of their field in such a way that addresses the research question of this project; and namely, how do current models of bilingual instruction available in pre-existing research compare to a qualitative analysis of teachers' perspectives on the subject?

### *Instrument of Research: Interviews*

Taking into account that there are few, if any, standardized models for research available in this particular region of Central Florida, the observational data provided in this particular chapter, and generally throughout this body of work, has been derived directly from interviews with teachers and administrative staff employed by the county's public school system in Central Florida. These interviews were designed around generally informal questions that sought to gather the overall impressions and perceptions that the participatory educational professionals hold about the current state of the bilingual program within their schools. These questions were loosely structured through extensive conversations with participants and may be described by the following probes:



1. How do resources available to you as educators reflect what you believe to be the current state of bilingual education within the county?
2. How would you describe your own personal philosophy on bilingual education and its current state within the county?
3. How do you feel that your perception of the current state of bilingual education reflects your mission as an ELL educator at the elementary level within the county?
4. How do you feel that the implementation of specific ESL strategies and models affects the educational progress experienced by ELLs at this particular elementary school? Which have you found to be most/least effective and why?
5. Do your own impressions seem to reflect general trends within the county, according to your experiences with other schools?

Without the use of direct quotations or specific names, the results of the interviews have been able to generally address the research question of this project, while maintaining an unbiased account of the effectiveness of existing models.

### *Setting and Participants*

All four of the interview participants in this study have had, or are currently holding, positions directly involved in the development of the Second Language Learning Services at the participatory elementary school, which is the sole bilingual center for speakers of Spanish in the

county as of 2010. These positions included not only classroom teaching in second language programs within multiple elementary schools within the county, but also administrative work directly related to those programs through the Multilingual Services department at the school, which handles many aspects of the educational process which ELLs (English Language Learners) experience, such as registration, program development, placement, etc. All interview participants were nationally certified according to ESL standards, allowing them the professional qualifications to teach according to the national standards of the English as a Second Language program in the public school systems. In addition to being certified to teach as ESL instructors, two interview participants had obtained supplementary certifications as Curriculum Compliance Teachers (CCT), in which professional responsibilities extended to the enforcement of the school's compliance with all applicable laws both at the state and federal level of bilingual educational standards.

The school itself is located within Central Florida, and is currently the only elementary school in the county that provides second language learning services in Spanish, thus considered the Spanish “bilingual center” for the participating county's public school system. According to the participants of the interviews, bilingual centers exist throughout the county, supporting a total of six foreign languages, although the county has residents who speak more than 150 languages other than English. If a student is categorized as an ELL (English Language Learner), he or she will be placed in the appropriate bilingual center corresponding to their first language, regardless of the physical school zoning placement, providing, of course, that the language is spoken predominantly enough to have required the need for a center in the first place. Without an established center for every language, ELLs of languages not supported by this system are

subject to special attention outside of the formal bilingual programs such as the one seen for Spanish at observed elementary school. Of the nearly 800 students in attendance, close to 500 of them are Spanish-speaking ELLs, the seemingly high percentage a direct result of this placement of Spanish-speaking ELLs to their “center”, also reflective of the equally high percentage of Spanish speakers demographically present throughout the county itself.

As the Spanish bilingual center for the county, the school offers multiple specialized programs for ELLs at various levels of English proficiency, as outlined by their Second Language Learning Services. Amongst these are three primary programs: Bilingual Education, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), and Sheltered Instruction, all of which meet Florida Sunshine State Standards for education, and seek to uphold the commitment of the county to provide quality educational opportunities to its diverse student body.

Beginning with the registration process, a student is first determined to be qualified as an ELL through a survey as per the Florida Consent Decree, in which the following questions are asked:

1. Is a language other than English used in the home?
2. Did the student have a first language other than English?
3. Does the student most frequently speak a language other than English?

If a student answers “yes” to any of these questions found on the Home Language Survey given upon registration, they are subsequently assessed for their language proficiency in English and then placed in the most appropriate program model. Parents have the ultimate say in the placement of their child, but are advised strongly by the school throughout the registration and

placement process, in order that the optimal program is chosen in each case. As revealed in the interview process, the concerns of the teaching professionals involved, coupled with the staggering possibilities of student variables (class size, background history, etc.) create the need for a delicate and sensitive placement process in which the best interest of the student must be considered foremost.

*Bilingual Education*, when referred to as a specialized program at the participating school, is described by the county's school system and by the interview participants as a teaching model most closely tied to the ESOL standard, in which the opportunity to learn studies of general subjects in the student's first language coexists with curriculum directed at learning English. As previously described in the study, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) describes a general model for instructing English to non-native speakers which includes hundreds of teaching strategies that seek to accomplish the following goals that reflect the National ESL Standards: using English to communicate in social settings; using English to achieve academically in all content areas; using English in culturally appropriate ways; and ultimately maintaining proficiency in the first language while transitioning into an appropriate level of English proficiency.

Structured very similarly to Bilingual Education up until the third grade level, *Sheltered Instruction* was described by the participants of the study as the next level of instruction following the Bilingual program, in which many of the same ESOL strategies used in the Bilingual program are implemented in conjunction with an adjusted presentation of subject material tailored to meet the needs of ELLs with a progressing proficiency in English. As the students leave the Bilingual program and move on to Sheltered Instruction, teachers begin to

instruct in English alone, while periodically monitoring proficiency in the first language through various assessments, including the IDEL test in Spanish, which assesses general aspects of language fluency up to three times a year. Once the student has successfully demonstrated sufficient scores and proficiency through assessments in both languages, they may be eligible to leave the Sheltered Program and move on to mainstream classes, where less ESOL strategies are applied, but language proficiency monitoring continues, though less frequently than in the previously described programs. In grade levels above the third grade, the use of the Bilingual and Sheltered Instruction Programs is slower-paced, and more exclusively tailored, as many of the new students at those levels speak little to no English prior to their admittance into the school.

As demonstrated thus far throughout this body of work, the many variables involved in any type of bilingual program or model leaves a multitude of aspects involving the standardization of bilingual instruction in question. The amount of careful analysis required for the monumental work necessary for continual progression in the field of bilingual education can perhaps be best assessed by the direct observations and impressions of the professionals working within it; in this case, a set of interview participants who contributed their own perceptions to better allow for a greater understanding of the current state of bilingual education.

## CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

I began the interviewing process with general questions regarding information about the school itself and about the background of each participant in order to establish setting, followed by the general probes outlined in the previous chapter. An even simpler introductory question inquired as to how each participant would describe their own philosophy on bilingual education and its current state as educators within the county. Though each answer was unique, all were in agreement as to how the programs available at the school came together in a synergized way that was well-supported by both funding and staff. The level of involvement of the participants varied in that two were administratively active in addition to teaching, offering a perspective that seemed to greater emphasize an ever-increasing harmony between the needs of the school and the success of the program. Teaching philosophies across the board were kindred to ESL standards, stressing the importance of maintaining fluency in the first language while in the process of acquiring proficiency in English. As expressed by all interview participants, overall growth across all levels of instruction is the most important aspect of assessing and instructing ELLs, indicating that a consistent system of monitoring student data is key to most appropriately evaluating the individual's progression of language proficiency.

### *Current State of Bilingual Education: Local Perspectives*

The next question asked how resources available to the participants as educators reflected

what they believed to be the current state of bilingual education within the county generally. In response, various specific aspects of resource allocation were discussed. As a federally-funded school, the participating establishment not only receives appropriated financial aid based on school scoring and performance within the state of Florida (in which it scores relatively highly), it also receives the support of the federal government in such a way that offers separate grants of financial resources to be allocated for the specific needs of administration, most notably for large-scale bilingual instruction through a Multilingual Services department. The language service programs are thus, by average standards, well-funded, nearly to the point of surplus through the presence of federal aid.

When the question "How do you feel that your perception of the current state of bilingual education reflects your mission as an ELL educator at the elementary level within the county?" was discussed, the participants again referred back to ESL strategies as successful tools in reflecting their desire for growth and progression in both their students and the programs generally. Many of the teachers and some administrative staff currently at the school had worked previously with other schools in the county, and had a much broader understanding of the state of the program as a whole.

When asked about how they feel that the implementation of specific ESL strategies and models affects the educational progress experienced by ELLs at their school, the participants expressed a firm loyalty to the success of ESL strategies, and combined with appropriate resources, described the progress of their language services as having greatly improved in organization and harmony since the county shifted the bilingual center to the school in 2010. Though hundreds of strategies exist under the umbrella model of ESL, the following examples

were provided to better describe the various levels of instruction.

It was specifically noted that although the selected school does offer Special Education Services to mainstream classrooms, those ELLs within the Spanish programs are not provided with these services, opting instead to participate in "intervention" when necessary. This intervention can be any model of additional instructional support, including tutoring, but in cases of special needs or particularly low levels of performance, teachers and teacher's assistants create separate instruction time during which those students participated in intensified learning activities that more closely targeted the specific skills (most often in spoken and written language) in need of improvement, while the rest of the class continued on the planned track of instruction separately. This separation of instruction time most closely resembles the standards used in ESL, in which students with special needs, specifically concerning the acquisition of the target language, are taught additionally in a sheltered environment apart from the mean of students performing at a standard level of reading and writing.

### *Themes Observed*

The children at the primary levels were described as heavily reliant on the use of interactive educational games, literature (reading aloud and being read to as class), and specialized "centers" in which multi-sensory activities are explored on a rotational basis, targeting the development of English skills as a primary learning goal. In this way, the use of standards following a program of immersion were implemented in the learning process in conjunction with more socially interactive ESL techniques such as music and conversational



games, exposing the youngest students to a social and educational environment that encouraged a multi-faceted transition to a mental state of bilingual capacity. This method of immersion, based upon ESL standards in which children are placed directly in an environment which functions largely in the target language while fostering the diversity of the first language, is particularly effective at primary grade levels, especially as demonstrated in the kindergarten and first grade, where the flexibility of the learners as a result of younger age is much higher and a greater level of speaking and writing ability is thus possible at a more consistently progressive pace. The discussion of the success of the primary models mentioned up until the third grade remained much the same, producing the same similar impressions from multiple sources.

The contrasting higher-grade levels of fourth and fifth grade became a different discussion, as ESL techniques were described as specially tailored to provide separate English instruction to students with learning disabilities and other special challenges associated with late acquisition, using an environment that relied primarily on immersion and Sheltered Instruction. This was due not only to the delay in developmental capacity as a result of acquisition at a later age, but also due to the fact that many students had been overqualified in the past for learning disabilities, as many of the markers of ELLs resemble the markers of those students with learning disabilities.

Specifics within this research indicating the success of these programs in areas of reading and writing skills suggest that the staggering numbers of non-native English speakers, in conjunction with high average student to teacher ratio have created a learning system that could apply further development in solution-oriented research toward the achievement of higher scores and more effective rates of performance in oral and written language skills at the fourth and fifth

grade levels.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

### *Emphasis of Theory: The Need for Further Standardization and Research*

It has been my assertion through this project that embarking in further research and development in bilingual education as a priority at the state level would not only facilitate the immediate educational success of children entering our Central Florida elementary school systems with a need to assimilate, but would also pave the way for ground-breaking progress in bilingual education at the national level, ultimately achieving a bilingual standard for all students of primary and secondary ages, native and non-native. In this way, the United States, as a nation rich in many cultures, might use its educational resources in such a way that multilingualism may become a unifying skill for all citizens. As this research and review of literature show, the ability to communicate in more than one language has countless benefits and offers an enhanced level of mental capacity that allows for a multitude of cross-cultural opportunities and greater development on intrapersonal and interpersonal levels.

Recalling the research question of this project, the intention of this study was to demonstrate through the conduction of interviews and observations with the teachers and administrative staff of the participating county's only existing elementary Spanish bilingual center, compiled with currently available research, that a more profound and multidimensional standard for bilingual education is both necessary and valuable for our school systems and for the future of its students.

Assimilation into American culture and the challenge of acquiring English as a second

language is a delicate subject to which we must respond with sensitivity and enthusiasm; though it is not the sole challenge existing within the United States concerning the political and social ramifications of cultural diversity in a large and ever-expanding nation, the level at which communication can be practiced is an undeniably invaluable factor which contributes volumes to the success of an individual, and thus to the unified whole.

The use of literatures as a method of success in language acquisition is of surmount importance; skills in reading and writing are not only a tangible indication of knowledge in the learning of a language, but also provide an outlet of creativity that is necessary to inspire interest and thus progress within the learning process, especially in young children. “Literatures” can be defined by their ability to provide further depth in the level of knowledge acquired through not merely the study of standard written works, but the overall creative expression and appreciation of a language found in one’s connection with the many forms of the written word.

The development of the Spanish language specifically as a model for bilingualism in education is indeed the ideal starting point and inspiration for continuing research based upon its immense popularity, but simply the pursuit of educational evolution as a dynamic concept within our systems should be a goal profoundly present in the progress of program development in the United States. With so many resources available, the progression toward a stratified and uniformly standard educational system that places strong emphasis on communicative abilities can only bring us closer to greater potential and success in the international realm, possibly enabling for a future of standard dual language programs such as is seen elsewhere in other developed nations.

With careful review of unique educational perspectives through the provided interview

material, in union with existing research and resources, it is my sincere hope that this body of work might become part of a more fervent initiative to not only enhance and standardize current bilingual programs in Central Florida, but also within the entire United States, such that bilingualism might become a universally treasured standard of expression and communication.

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