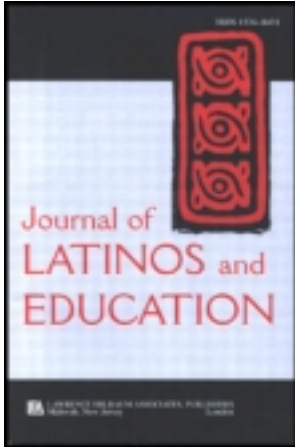


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### The Color of Language: The Racialized Educational Trajectory of an Emerging Bilingual Student

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# The Color of Language: The Racialized Educational Trajectory of an Emerging Bilingual Student

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This article examines how bilingual programs are often guided by larger social constructs of race and language ideologies that give rise to the often inconsistent, and even contradicting, perceptions of Latina/o, Spanish-speaking students' academic preparedness and abilities. I examine a number of language ideologies as they manifested in a case study of an emerging bilingual student who went from being labeled at risk in a pre-K remedial bilingual program to gifted in a kindergarten two-way dual-language program, as he naturally progressed through one of the school district's bilingual education trajectories.

**Key words:** bilingual education, race, language ideologies, Whiteness, two-way dual-language programs, remedial language programs

In an exaggerated English-accented Spanish, my son mimics the White, English-speaking students in his dual-language class who are eager to learn his native language—Spanish. “Ko-mo say deesay rock en español?” (*¿Cómo se dice rock en español?*). My son continues, “*Y luego después que les digo que es piedra, ellos dicen ‘el piedra,’ en vez de ‘la piedra,’ y tengo que ayudarles.*” Although my son, Quetzin, might poke fun at his classmates' rudimentary Spanish abilities, it is clear that Quetzin serves as a language model and is perceived as smart or even gifted in his two-way dual-language classroom as a result of his Spanish language

proficiency. This positive perception of Quetzin's academic abilities as a result of his proficiency in the Spanish language has not always been the case though. Just a year earlier, Quetzin was enrolled in a remedial bilingual program—a program that identified his language as a barrier and Quetzin as at-risk for academic achievement.

In this article, I discuss and analyze Quetzin's 2-year educational trajectory as an emerging bilingual student as he moved from a remedial pre-K program to an enriched two-way dual-language program in kindergarten. By drawing from Quetzin's initial schooling experiences, I examine how bilingual programs are often guided by larger social constructs of race and language ideologies that give rise to the often inconsistent, and even contradicting, perceptions of Latina/o, Spanish-speaking students' academic preparedness and abilities. Within this analysis, I argue that Quetzin's perceived academic preparedness and abilities in the contexts of these two bilingual programs are not a reflection of any inherent abilities or deficiencies Quetzin may or may not have but rather are social constructs that emerge out of the larger project of Whiteness—a project wherein students' languages become racialized.

What is most ironic about the classification of Quetzin as an at-risk pre-K student is that in actuality, Quetzin is anything but at risk. When Quetzin entered the pre-K program in his district, he already knew most of the pre-K curriculum: He knew all of the required shapes and colors, could count to 20, could recite the alphabet, and could recognize and name all of the letters and numbers. In addition to his academic preparedness, his home environment lacked all of the qualities that might signal a school to classify Quetzin as an at-risk student. He lived in a family with myself, my husband, and two other siblings; he lived in a middle-upper class neighborhood; and he had access to and regularly used literacy materials in our home, including books, newspapers, writing materials, and computers. In addition, Quetzin was consistently surrounded by family members who served as strong academic role models (my husband and I both hold PhDs and work as professors at a local university, and our extended family members occupy positions such as lawyers, social workers, doctors, and business owners).

Despite all of these indicators, which schools would normally interpret as indications of "academic readiness," Quetzin was nevertheless identified as at-risk. From the perspective of the pre-K program in which Quetzin was enrolled, he had a language problem: His language problem was that he speaks Spanish and Spanish only. Before I further elaborate on and examine Quetzin's contrasting schooling experiences in the context of two distinct bilingual programs, I provide an overview of the defining characteristics, goals, and outcomes of remedial and enrichment models of language learning as well as explain how these programs may influence key aspects of Latina/o students' education, including (a) bilingual/biliterate proficiency, (b) school achievement, and (c) English acquisition. I then conceptualize the diverging goals and practices of these language

programs, and in extension Quetzin's schooling experiences, as part of a larger social project of Whiteness.

## ENRICHMENT VERSUS REMEDIAL MODELS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

Enrichment models of bilingual education place students in classrooms where they continue to develop their native languages in addition to English throughout their elementary years, and longer in some programs. Hill, Gómez, and Gómez (2008) explained, "*Enrichment models of bilingual education view the non-English language as a learning language, an asset that should be linguistically and cognitively developed and a strong resource for English acquisition*" (p. 155). The long-term outcomes of enrichment models of bilingual education are sustained bilingualism, biliteracy, multiculturalism, and high levels of academic achievement. Bilingual programs that meet these criteria include maintenance bilingual education and dual-language bilingual education (including both one-way and two-way programs).

Remedial language programs, in contrast, perceive students' native languages as deficiencies that must be overcome. These language-learning models include transitional bilingual education (TBE), ESL, and English immersion. Even though some remedial models (e.g., TBE) may utilize native language instruction, it is usually to facilitate only content comprehension, not long-term native language proficiency. The underlying goal of remedial language programs, then, is to mainstream language-minority students into English-instructed classrooms as quickly as possible (Hill et al., 2008). The long-term outcomes of remedial language programs are English monolingualism and academic underachievement.

In the sections that follow, I discuss how enrichment and remedial models of language learning commonly impact Latina/o students' education in the following areas: bilingual/biliterate proficiency, school achievement, and English acquisition.

### Bilingual/Biliterate Proficiency

The ultimate goal of bilingual education is to produce students who can operate long term in bilingual and biliterate contexts, whether those contexts be within their families, communities, or work sites. Research shows that only enrichment bilingual programs can meet this goal. Because it takes students a minimum of 5–7 years of schooling to develop an academic proficiency in both languages, remedial bilingual programs such as TBE that mainstream students in English-instructed classrooms by the third grade cannot meet this goal because they provide students with only 3–4 years of bilingual instruction (Collier, Thomas, & Tinajero, 2006).

When schools invest in students' long-term native language development, they are not only investing in the prospect of producing future bilinguals, but they are investing in students' identities. González (2001) made a strong case that students' identities, including their academic identities, are tied to the languages they speak. Students who are not schooled in their native languages and/or who perceive that there is no value in further developing their native language often feel they have a choice to make: Leave the native language behind in pursuit of academic success, or maintain strong ties to language and culture to the detriment of school achievement. In contrast, students who are in enrichment bilingual programs learn that the native language and academic achievement can coexist. In a study that compared two-way and TBE programs, López and Tashakkori (2006) found that students enrolled in two-way bilingual programs viewed bilingualism much more positively than those enrolled in transitional programs. From an enrichment approach to bilingualism, students learn that they do not have to compensate for or otherwise be ashamed of their native language as they go through the process of learning English.

### School Achievement

Students who participate in enrichment bilingual programs demonstrate school achievement on a variety of levels. Compared to language-minority students who either do not participate in bilingual education at all or are enrolled in remedial bilingual programs, language-minority students in enrichment bilingual programs can read at higher grade levels, score better on standardized tests, and remain in school longer (Christian, Howard, & Loeb, 2000; Collier et al., 2006).

There are a number of reasons for these findings, including the affirmation of students' cultural and linguistic identities as discussed previously. Probably the most obvious reason for these findings, however, is that language-minority students who are mainstreamed have to take time out from learning content areas while they are learning English. Whereas language-minority students who are in bilingual education can start learning content on Day 1 of their schooling because instruction is accessible to them in their native language, language-minority students who are mainstreamed in English-instructed classrooms and/or are in ESL classes may not fully understand the content of their lessons for several years, as the language of instruction is largely incomprehensible. Thus, mainstreamed language-minority students must try to catch up with peers who have not had to take time out from content instruction, including English monolingual students and language-minority students enrolled in bilingual education programs. Cummins and Schecter (2003) explained that "catching up" is nearly an impossible task, considering that the language-minority students peers (English monolingual students in their discussion) are moving targets. They explained,

“English as a first language speakers are not standing still, waiting for ESL students to catch up. Every year their literacy skills are expanding and, thus, ESL students must catch up with a moving target” (p. 8).

TBE programs try to counteract the effects of this delayed access to curriculum by schooling children in their native languages for 3–4 years while they are learning English. Although TBE students outperform ESL and mainstreamed, English-instructed students academically, Collier et al. (2006) reported that TBE programs close only half of the achievement gap. The fact is, TBE students are exited prematurely to English-instructed classrooms, and as a result, these students often struggle to function in an academic context in their second language. The premature placement of language-minority students in English mainstream classes gives them a disadvantage that is hard to overcome.

### English Acquisition

In contrast to the popular rhetoric that purports a time-on-task orientation to learning English—that is, the more time students are exposed to English, the quicker they will learn English—bilingual education research demonstrates the opposite: If educators want to facilitate and even accelerate Latino, Spanish-speaking students’ acquisition of the English language, they need to continue to develop students’ native languages (Collier et al., 2006; Cummins, 1980, 1981, 1996; Hill et al., 2008). Cummins’s (1980, 1981) theory of common underlying proficiency helps demonstrate this concept. According to Cummins, there is significant interdependence between languages—so much so—that most of what a child learns in his or her first language can be transferred over and serve as a foundation for the acquisition of second, third, or more languages. Cummins (1984) explained that it is only the surface features of languages (vocabulary and pronunciation), also referred to as *basic interpersonal communicative skills*, that are distinct in each language. Basic interpersonal communicative skills can be learned relatively quickly, usually within 1–2 years of being exposed to a language. The more cognitively demanding features of languages, what Cummins (1984) referred to as cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP; including the ability to analyze, synthesize, and understand grammatical rules, sentence structure, semantics, etc.), do not differ much from one language to another. In essence, a Latina/o, Spanish-speaking student who fully develops the foundation (CALP) of the Spanish language does not need to redevelop all of those skills in English. Rather, much of the underlying proficiency in Spanish transfers over to English. The student then only needs to develop the surface features of the English language.

Problems arise when Latino students are prohibited from fully developing an underlying proficiency in Spanish. Research has consistently shown that students need 5–7 years of schooling in their first language to develop CALP in their

first language (Collier et al., 2006; Cummins, 1980, 1981, 1984). Unfortunately, students who find themselves in remedial language programs (English immersion, TBE, ESL) are not provided the opportunity to fully develop CALP in their first language. Rather, CALP development is cut off prematurely, and students are expected to start learning English on a very weak foundation in Spanish. Because CALP is not fully developed in the first language, this approach to language learning does not allow for the transference of CALP from one language to another. It is quite possible then that Latina/o, Spanish-speaking students who participate in remedial language programs only have the opportunity to develop surface-level proficiencies in both languages, being negated the opportunity to develop an underlying proficiency in either language. Students who participate in enrichment bilingual programs, however, have the opportunity to fully develop a cognitive/academic proficiency in their first language, which successfully transfers over to English.

## RESEARCH VERSUS PRACTICE

In contrast to what the bilingual education research says about unconditionally using students' native languages as resources for learning, in practice language policies and programs often prioritize the acquisition of the English language to the detriment of other languages as well as students' academic achievement. Even though the bilingual education research clearly demonstrates the benefits of enrichment bilingual programs, these programs are implemented less frequently than remedial language programs are. Moreover, when they are implemented, they are commonly physically, as well as conceptually, marginalized within the larger school culture and context in which they are situated.

To examine the counterintuitive bilingual practices that are implemented in this country, one must understand that these practices are guided by larger social relations of power. In an effort to understand the seemingly irrational trends in bilingual education, and more specifically Quetzin's educational trajectory in both a remedial and an enrichment bilingual program, I now turn to a framework that examines bilingual education programs as part of a larger political struggle. In this framework I examine how specific language ideologies inform and operate within language programs to support the larger project of Whiteness.

## WHITENESS AND LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES

### Whiteness

The project of Whiteness or White privilege is one that seeks to maintain power (power over resources, land rights, borders, language rights, etc.) for a socially



constructed group of people who are referred to as *Whites* (Leonardo, 2009). In a racialized society like the United States, racial constructs such as Whiteness emerge and are sustained from a binary conceptualization of race (Thompson, 1999). Insofar as society produces Blackness and brownness as inferior, the myth of Whiteness as superior is sustained, and vice versa. Uniquely, however, Whiteness often maintains its power through silence and invisibility (Gordon, 2005). Whereas Blackness and brownness are often characterized in explicit deficit terms in the media, in schools, and in the larger society, Whiteness often assumes a sense of legitimacy by serving as an unstated norm to which racial “others” are compared.

### The Color of Language

Although the perpetuation of Whiteness and racism has traditionally been based on imagined phenotypical, color-based categories, this article, as well as the work of many others, extends the process of racialization to include language. That is, language serves as a proxy for race (Delpit, 2002; Gutiérrez & Jaramillo, 2006; Shuck, 2006; Stuart, 2006). Many Latinas/os then, in addition to being racialized because of physical features, are racialized because of the language they speak: Spanish. Stuart (2006) explained,

Uniquely among American minorities, Latina[s]/os are racialized specifically through language or linguistic origin. While language is often portrayed as merely a proxy for culture, it must be reiterated that the group labeled Hispanic or Latina/o is characterized by enormous cultural diversity. Furthermore, it comprises people of European, African, indigenous, Asian and biracial, or *mestizo*, descent. Therefore, the act of painting Hispanic people with a broad cultural brush can be understood as a way of placing them in a single, essentialized category, and one that is presumably at odds with white, anglophone mainstream. In other words, language functions as a tool of racialization. (p. 242)

In a Whitestream society (Urrieta, 2009) that is partly maintained by a colorblind logic, the use of a minority language such as Spanish may supersede phenotypical constructions of race. In an attempt to abide by a colorblind perspective, White mainstream people often claim that they can look past color and judge on merit alone (merit that is embodied in White, monolithic, and monolingual values). Thus, in a supposed colorblind society, Latinas/os can potentially integrate and effectively function in mainstream society until they actually open their mouths and speak either Spanish or English with a Spanish accent. As Delpit (2002) explained,

Perhaps we have in our country’s development reached a stage in which some of the American populace is willing to see beyond skin color to access intellectual

competence, but there are as yet few pockets which can “listen beyond” language form. (p. 38)

This point is especially relevant to Quetzin’s experiences in schools. Quetzin, the product of a biracial marriage (a White mother and a Mexican father), is physically perceived as White in mainstream institutions. He has pale skin, dirty-blond hair, and green eyes. Thus, the erratic perceptions of Quetzin’s academic readiness and abilities that are highlighted in this article are largely the result of the racialization of his native language and not his physical appearance.

### LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES

The racialization of language is supported by a number of language ideologies—those “networks or beliefs about language that position human subjects within a social order” (Shuck, 2006, p. 259). In an effort to conceptualize Quetzin’s educational trajectory as an emerging bilingual student, I discuss some of the language ideologies that likely informed the two language programs Quetzin attended.

*Linguistic Conformity.* This ideology disseminates the idea that this nation must conform to one linguistic code in order to ensure national unity, social stability, and the preservation of democratic values (Stuart, 2006). Within this ideology, someone who speaks a non-English language is perceived as threatening the unity or “social glue” that is perceived to hold this country together.

*Language as a Liability.* Drawing from Ruíz’s (1984) conception of language as a problem, language as a liability is an ideology that constructs non-English languages as social impediments that prohibit students from learning the English language, which stands in the way of language-minority students being able to fully participate in academic, employment, and other social avenues of integration and advancement.

*The Fear of Language.* This ideology emerges out of xenophobic sentiments that imagine Latinas/os taking over U.S. cities and resisting assimilation, thereby posing a direct challenge to existing power relations in this country that privilege Whites (Santa Ana, 2002; Stuart, 2006). This fear is exacerbated in a post-9/11 society, wherein racial and linguistic “others” are increasingly under surveillance (Gutiérrez & Jaramillo, 2006). In this case, non-English languages are cause for alarm because White, monolingual, English-speaking individuals cannot understand what is being said, which prohibits them from performing their self-sanctioned surveillance duties in the name of homeland security and anti-terrorism.

*Language Elitism.* This language ideology is closely tied to “linguistic imperialism” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 254), in which the English language has been used as a tool for colonialism. Within this ideology, the English language is perceived as being superior, a language of intellect and enlightenment. This elite perception of the English language has fueled a number of English-only movements and legislation across the country as well as led to the perception that the English language is “the language of business” and a “global language.” Within this ideology, non-English languages are imagined as—at best—peripheral (nonessential languages that can be spoken in private contexts) or—at worse—expendable.

*Language as a Commodity.* Although still giving prestige to the English language, this ideology perceives non-English languages as commodities—assets that can create job opportunities, career advancements, and participation in an increasingly interconnected, multicultural, and multilingual global community (Varghese & Park, 2010). To take advantage of these commodities, students who are already fluent in English are encouraged to learn a “foreign” language, either in dual-language programs in elementary schools or in “foreign” language programs in secondary schools and institutions of higher education.

These language ideologies, operating as part of the larger project of Whiteness, are often embedded in the language programs that are implemented in schools and thus shape how Latina/o students are perceived within these programs. I use Whiteness theory and language ideologies to examine how Quetzin, as the result of attending both a remedial and an enrichment bilingual program, from one moment to the next, is identified as not prepared and then prepared, at-risk and then not at-risk, and alternatively deficient and then gifted. In an effort to shed some light on how language ideologies can function in bilingual programs to construct and ascribe a sense of academic ability and readiness to Latina/o students, I now turn to Quetzin’s educational experiences as he moves from a remedial to an enrichment bilingual program.

#### FROM AT-RISK TO GIFTED WITHOUT INTERVENTION: QUETZIN’S EDUCATIONAL TRAJECTORY

Quetzin’s academic experiences and progress are of interest to me professionally, in terms of what his schooling experiences both reveal about and contribute to the field of bilingual education, but also personally. He is my son. Even before Quetzin was born, my husband and I agreed that our children would grow up bilingually. With this goal in mind, we decided to teach Quetzin Spanish as his first language. Well aware that public places are saturated with the English language,

we decided to immerse Quetzin in a completely Spanish-language home environment. We speak to Quetzin exclusively in Spanish. All of his toys, books, DVDs, computer games, and so on are in Spanish, and his playmates are Spanish monolinguals. By the time he was 4 years old, Quetzin was completely fluent in Spanish, knowing only a few words in English.

As professors with doctoral degrees in education, my husband and I were keenly aware of the body of literature that emphasizes native language development in students' academic programs. Based on this formal knowledge, as well as our practical experiences, we agreed that bilingual education was a must for Quetzin. Our commitment to enroll Quetzin in a bilingual program was such a high priority for us that it was the most important factor in determining which universities we would accept faculty positions at and which neighborhoods we would live in. In essence, we would not live in a state where bilingual education was outlawed (e.g., Arizona, California, or Massachusetts) or in a city where bilingual education was not offered as part of the school district's programs. With these expectations in place, we decided to live in a city in central Texas whose school district had a well-established dual-language program in Spanish and English at one of its elementary schools and offered a bilingual pre-K program at another elementary school.

### Pre-K

When it was time to enroll Quetzin in the district's pre-K program at Rosemont Elementary,<sup>1</sup> we learned that Quetzin had to qualify for admittance into the program. He could qualify in one of two ways. He needed to be a child from a low-income household or a language-minority student. Needless to say, Quetzin qualified for the program by being a language-minority student. This pre-K program, we later learned, was a state-funded program that targeted "at-risk" students and attempted to address their perceived deficits by giving them an extra year of schooling prior to their entry into kindergarten (similar to the goals of the nationally implemented Head Start program).

Apart from the many assumptions this program made based on students' socioeconomic status and potential academic achievement, the bilingual pre-K program assumed that Latina/o, Spanish-speaking students were academically behind and unequipped to achieve in kindergarten because of the language they spoke. This construction of Latina/o, Spanish-speaking students' academic readiness in this program can be understood as emerging from a larger framework of Whiteness that privileges White, English-speaking students by constructing them as academically prepared to achieve. Within the Whiteness framework, one can see how White, middle-upper class, English-speaking students serve as the

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<sup>1</sup>School names are pseudonyms.

unspoken and invisible norm to which the mostly low-income, Spanish-speaking, Latina/o pre-K population was being compared. That is, the very absence of White, middle-upper class, English-speaking students from this program signified that these students were not at-risk or academically unprepared and thus did not need remediation prior to entering kindergarten. Within this binary construction of academic readiness along socioeconomic, linguistic, and racial lines, a number of language ideologies consolidated to construct the Latina/o, Spanish-speaking student as academically at-risk.

In this program, Spanish was perceived as a deficit language. The myth that the English language is the only academic language and is a prerequisite for academic readiness is supported by a number of language ideologies, including language as a liability, the fear of language, and language elitism. Because of the binary logic of racism and Whiteness, which ascribes a remedial academic identity to Latina/o, Spanish-speaking students, one can see that the perception of the Latina/o pre-K students' deficiency did not stay compartmentalized in the students' language but rather came to envelop the students' entire beings. For example, aside from having a perceived language deficiency, the pre-K Latina/o, Spanish-speaking students were also perceived as lacking the content knowledge they would need for kindergarten. As a result of this perception, the pre-K curriculum was not taught in English—a strategy that is commonly used in remedial language programs. Rather, the pre-K curriculum was taught almost entirely in Spanish, so the Latina/o, Spanish-speaking students could easily catch up in content knowledge in the language they already knew. Given that the curriculum was being taught in Spanish, Quetzin, as well as most other students in his class, progressed rapidly through the pre-K curriculum.

Even despite the evidence that Quetzin was achieving academically in his pre-K program, which worked in contrast to the deficit identity that had been ascribed to him, his “deficit” identity nonetheless persisted in the larger context of his school. Essentially, the language ideologies that were in place, as well as the resulting structural practices at Rosemont Elementary, served to marginalize the pre-K students regardless of their actual academic readiness and performance.

The relentless perception of Latina/o, Spanish-speaking students as deficient was exacerbated by a physical and conceptual marginalization of the pre-K program within the larger school. All 15 pre-K classrooms were located in portable buildings to the west of the main school building and had a separate entrance and parking lot from the main school. Also, in an attempt to work within a constrained budget, the program only met 3 hours a day and included no recess time. As a result of the physical isolation of the pre-K program from the main school building, as well as the lack of opportunity for pre-K students to utilize the campus's common areas, such as the playground, pre-K students had very limited access to the main school building as well as little to no contact with the teachers and students who occupied spaces within the main building. Needless to say,

the separation of the pre-K program from the main school building reinforced the program's already constructed remedial-oriented status and thus reinforced the language as a liability ideology. When bilingual programs are physically separated from the main school, as they often are, they can become considered marginal to the larger school culture. Essentially, students and teachers who occupy spaces outside of the bilingual program may know very little about the bilingual program and the students it encompasses. The isolation (physical separation from mainstream classrooms) as well as segregation (the enrollment of only one language and ethnic group) in bilingual programs "has led to the perception that they are remedial classes for students who are not doing well in school and both staff and students sense this social 'stigma'" (Collier et al., 2006, p. 27). Thus, regardless of the students' academic performance in this program, because the central feature of this pre-K program is to serve "at-risk" students, the remedial status may be the only feature about the program that stands out in the minds of other students and teachers within the school.

When the program is seen in this narrow capacity, it may be difficult for educators and students who do not participate in the program to perceive the pre-K students outside of a deficit framework. That is, instead of the pre-K students being understood in terms of the resources they may have for learning or what they can contribute to the larger school culture, their entire beings can become defined by so-called deficits. This was never more obvious to me than when Quetzin came home from school for winter break with a grocery bag full of Christmas gifts. This bag was full of various items, including used toys, used books (in English), a photocopied writing notebook containing the English alphabet, bars of soap, toothpaste, and a brand new checkerboard game. When I asked Quetzin's teacher about the gifts, she explained to me that Quetzin, as well as all of the other students in Quetzin's class, had been adopted for Christmas by a fifth-grade class within the larger school. The fifth-grade class was participating in a Gifts for Giving project in which the fifth graders were to learn from the experience of giving to someone within the school who was less fortunate. Each student in the fifth-grade class picked a student within Quetzin's class to adopt, and then the fifth-grade class worked on this project for several months prior to the Christmas holiday. In preparation for this project, the fifth-grade class discussed what the pre-K students would need most, organized and held fundraisers to buy new and used toys and hygiene items, and collected donations in the form of used toys and books. Before the school let out for winter break, the fifth-grade class visited Quetzin's class, where they presented their gifts to their designated pre-K adoptees.

What is most telling about this Gifts for Giving project are the gifts contained in the grocery bag. Apparently, as these gifts revealed, Quetzin's ascribed at-risk status within the pre-K program was no longer localized in a perceived language deficit. According to this fifth-grade class, and presumably the entire school, Quetzin's entire being was consumed by deficiencies. That is, in addition to his

perceived language deficit, he also embodied an economic deficiency (as evidenced by the giving of the various new and used items), a hygienic deficiency (as evidenced by the bars of soap and toothpaste), and lastly a literacy deficiency (as evidenced by the used books in English and photocopied writing notebook containing the English language alphabet). The fact that the literacy materials were in English was consistent with the language elitism and language as a liability ideologies. Informed by these ideologies, the fifth graders assumed that academic literacy—the type of literacy that is going to lead to academic achievement and employment opportunities in the future—can only be achieved in the English language (language elitism). Consistent with the pre-K bilingual program, the fifth graders also assumed that the pre-K students' native language (Spanish) stands in the way of these opportunities (language as a liability), and thus in their fashioning of what would be most helpful to Quetzin and his pre-K peers, they came up with literacy materials that would ideally help them overcome their language barrier by providing them literacy materials in the English language. This assumption created a serious disjuncture between what Quetzin was learning at home and in the classroom and what was presumably expected of him outside of these contexts. The fact is, Quetzin was literate—in Spanish. However, Quetzin's abilities in the larger school context were read as illiterate because he was not literate in English. Following this logic, the literacy gifts (the book and photocopied writing notebook) did not in any way attempt to build upon the literacy skills that Quetzin had already started developing but instead attempted to overcome or replace those literacy skills.

The lessons the pre-K and fifth-grade students take away from this Gifts for Giving project likely reinforce the language ideologies from which this project emerged in the first place. This project teaches pre-K students that they lack the resources necessary for learning, resources that other students in the school not only possess but can attempt to package up and give away in a grocery bag. Unfortunately, language-minority students like Quetzin become aware of their “deficit status” within the school and consequently commonly decide to do away with the one characteristic that grants them this status: their language. Thus, despite the incredible learning that took place in Quetzin's class in Spanish, the message that students likely take with them is that their language serves as a stigma and that it holds no value in the larger school and social settings they participate in.

The students outside of the pre-K bilingual program (e.g., the fifth graders) learn similar lessons from the Gifts for Giving project. As stated previously, the “mainstream” students in this school have very limited access to the pre-K students attending their school. When they do have direct contact with them, such as in the Gifts for Giving project, messages of student deficiency are reinforced. Thus, the monolingual, English-speaking students within the school

learn they are more fortunate, more academically equipped, and in a position to help their language-minority peers. Consequently, the organization and school practices within this school create a dichotomy of haves and have-nots in terms of the students who have the academic and social capital for success and those who do not. Much like the pre-K students themselves, the “mainstream” students learn that there is no value in bilingualism in an academic setting and that their English language proficiency has elevated their social and academic status within the school, thereby reinforcing the language elitism ideology.

### Kindergarten

Upon completion of the pre-K program at Rosemont Elementary, the students then moved to their home schools within the district for kindergarten. Remaining committed to bilingual education, my husband and I enrolled Quetzin at Rosalinda International School (not his designated home school but within the district), where he attended a well-known and established two-way dual-language program in Spanish and English. The value placed on bilingualism at this school took on a different meaning than it did at Rosemont Elementary but nonetheless can be understood as working within the same larger project of Whiteness that was operating at Rosemont Elementary.

The positive significance of bilingualism at Rosalinda International School can largely be attributed to the monolingual, English-speaking students and their parents who have elected to enroll their children in this program. Within the larger framework of Whiteness wherein White, English-speaking students are privileged in the school system, one can see that the positive perception of Latinas/os speaking Spanish is largely guided by the presence of the White, English-speaking students in these classes. In order to understand the shifting perceptions of Latina/o students' Spanish fluency, it is important to note that English-dominant and Spanish-dominant parents often perceive the goal of bilingualism in contrasting ways. Whereas native English-speaking parents often identify an instrumental motivation for bilingualism (language as a commodity), such as a better career, more job opportunities, and increased salary, language-minority parents often identify integrative attitudes, including maintaining their native language and cultural identity and being able to communicate to others in their native language (Craig, 1996; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Peña, 1998). Thus, the presence of language-majority students in a dual-language program, students who likely see Spanish as a commodity, transforms the outlook of bilingualism within the larger school setting.

Consistent with the language as a commodity ideology, bilingualism at Rosalinda International School often signified educational and professional opportunities and upward economic mobility. As a result of this “social



advancement” perception of bilingualism, the program has a long list of English-dominant applicants for the limited spaces in the program, making the program competitive to get into for English-dominant students. The resulting set of students who are selected for admittance into the program are those who have outperformed other applicants on a preliteracy exam. These students are considered gifted within the larger school as a result of their ability to outscore other applicants on entrance examinations as well as their ability to learn the school curriculum in two languages.

Even though there is not an equivalent competitiveness for the Spanish-dominant spaces in the program, Spanish-speaking students are nonetheless perceived as participating in the designated “gifted” program within the school and consequently are perceived as gifted. Within the larger frame of Whiteness, the presence of “gifted” White, English-speaking students who envision Spanish as a commodity changes the perception of Latina/o students’ Spanish-speaking abilities. Within the dual-language classroom, Latina/o, Spanish-speaking students are often positioned favorably because they serve as language models and language brokers and are thus resources to English-dominant students who are learning their native language. Because the Spanish language in this context is seen as a commodity—an asset that White, English-speaking students are trying to gain—it no longer takes on the deficit values that are embodied in language ideologies such as language as a liability and language elitism.

Because this program does not envision the Spanish language and bilingualism in deficit terms, this alters the physical and conceptual location of the bilingual program. Whereas the pre-K program that Quetzin attended was segregated from the larger school, which likely perpetuated the fear of language as well as other language ideologies, the bilingual classrooms at Rosalinda International School are integrated within the same spaces as English-instructed classrooms. Quetzin’s kindergarten classroom, for example, is located in one of the main hallways of the school building among the other English-instructed kindergarten classrooms in the school. This integration of classrooms means that other students, teachers, and parents can see and hear the bilingual work the dual-language students produce. The dual-language students’ work is displayed on several bulletin boards in the main hallways of the school for the entire school community to see.

Part of the integrated design of two-way dual-language programs is the potential for students to gain cross-cultural competencies. However, within the larger framework of Whiteness, the learning of cultural knowledge can often be interpreted as a one-way process in which Latina/o students’ cultural practices become commodified. In Quetzin’s dual-language program, the learning of cultural knowledge often meant the celebration of Latinas/os’ cultural practices and language in the form of school performances for White students’ learning consumption. This commodification and consumption of the Spanish language and Latina/o cultural practices becomes evident in an award-winning student essay written by

a White fourth-grade, dual-language student at Rosalinda International School. Ben, who won the 2010 “Being Bilingual” national essay contest sponsored by the National Association of Bilingual Education, stated in his translated winning essay,

In the Dual Language Program, we have learned many amazing things about the Hispanic culture. For example, we performed songs in Spanish each year for all the Hispanic Holidays. We have also learned about a variety of Hispanic food. One of the popular meals is enchiladas which is a tortilla drenched in cheese with meat inside. I love enchiladas! (Cullen, 2010)

Ben’s experiences in regard to learning Latina/o cultural knowledge and practices can be thought of as representative to many of the White, English-dominant students participating in the program. In all, the students in the two-way dual-language program produce three school performances a year that center on traditionally Mexican celebrations in which all dual-language students participate: *El Día De Los Muertos*, *Las Posadas*, and *Cinco De Mayo*. Although these cultural celebrations highlight Mexican culture, there are no equivalent programs for the one-way bilingual program within Rosalinda International School, nor any productions that clearly identify and commodify White students’ Euro-centric cultural celebrations and practices. No doubt, Euro-centric cultural practices are being taught and learned in this dual-language program; however, the neglect to name them as such, as well as the neglect to create particular venues for their display, reinforces Whiteness and Euro-centric cultural practices as the unstated, invisible norm, which works to exoticize the Latina/o students’ cultural practices. The one-sidedness of these cultural learning experiences, and the fact that these same productions were not performed by Latina/o, Spanish-speaking students in the one-way bilingual program, demonstrates that these events were not merely produced to affirm Latina/o students’ identity and cultural practices but were cultural events that were to be consumed by the White students and their parents (as audience members).

## CONCLUSION

This article calls attention to the social construction of academic ability in bilingual programs. What initially may seem as arbitrary, incoherent label constructions in the context of the two language programs Quetzin attended suddenly gain coherence when one thinks of these two language programs working within the parameters of Whiteness and a number of language ideologies that serve to racialize students’ native languages.

In the contexts of the two bilingual programs Quetzin attended, the racialization of the Spanish language signifies Spanish as a deficiency in one context and then as a commodity in another context. The racialization of the English language signifies English as an elite and academic language as well as a prerequisite for academic achievement. Both of these academic trajectories, remedial bilingual and two-way dual-language, can be understood as keeping White, English-speaking students' experiences and achievement at the center of school practices and consequently as shaping Latina/o, emerging bilingual students' schooling experiences.

Unfortunately, the racialized social constructions of students' academic abilities can affect students' long-term academic outcomes—outcomes that become reflected in a large achievement gap. Quetzin went from being labeled at-risk to gifted in one year as he naturally progressed through one of several bilingual education trajectories the district offered. Fortunately for Quetzin, his deficit status diminished when he entered the dual-language bilingual program. Other students are not as lucky as Quetzin. Of the students in Quetzin's pre-K class, for example, only two others entered the dual-language program with him. The other students remained in deficit-oriented, remedial bilingual programs or left bilingual education altogether to enroll in mainstream English-instructed classrooms. Unfortunately, these students risk never learning that their language is a valuable asset worthy of further development, that their language serves as a foundation for learning other material (e.g., school curriculum and the English language), and that they do have strong academic abilities. Many of these students eventually take ownership of and internalize the deficit messages ascribed to them. Collier et al. (2006) explained that the social stigma language-minority students experience in remedial language programs is hard to overcome: "Students soon sense [the] 'distance' present in their social settings in school. Some begin to perform like slow learners—a self-fulfilling prophecy created by their isolation" (pp. 29–30). That is, language-minority students effectively learn, as the school has intended them to, that their native language is a barrier to learning and that they do lack academic proficiency. Many students, as a result of these school practices, avoid speaking or further developing their native language, and even more, may never reach their academic potential.

The newly ascribed "gifted" status Quetzin gained within the context of the two-way dual-language program is also in need of critical examination. That is, it is essential that educators be critical of the way in which two-way dual-language programs may operate from a Whiteness frame of reference, wherein Latina/o students' language and cultural practices come to be perceived in positive terms only because they serve as commodities that can be consumed by White, English-speaking students. Educators must take special care to ensure that students' minority languages are perceived as valuable academic resources and important

cultural reflections of students' identities regardless of White, English-speaking students' (non)involvement in bilingual programs.

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