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# Investigating the linguistic identity development of dual language learners

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INVESTIGATING THE LINGUISTIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF DUAL  
LANGUAGE LEARNERS

A Thesis Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Designation  
University Honors

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University of Northern Iowa  
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### **Introduction**

Is it an asset or a burden to be culturally and linguistically diverse in American society? As the racial/ethnic makeup of the United States continues to rapidly change (Irizarry, 2011, p. 2), this is a question that needs to be considered because it affects how people are positioned in society. This is especially an issue in schools in the United States. Educators have the power to influence their students' identities because "the ways in which individuals describe themselves often resonate with the ways they have been described and named by others" (Tatum, 2007 as cited in Sluys & Rao, p. 282). Are students being told they are brilliant for learning more than one language? Are they being told their culture is something that makes them unique? If not, how does this affect their view on themselves and their academic success?

The purpose of this research study was to analyze ways in which dual language learners were impacted by their environment (school, home, and community) and explore how these environments impacted their cultural and linguistic identity. Specifically, the goal was to find ways in which educators could better support these students in the classroom to help them achieve academic success, as well as make students feel that their culture is acknowledged and appreciated in the classroom environment. Both of these goals point toward the need to consider the "role identity plays in children's demonstration and construction of knowledge" (Owocki & Goodman, 2002, p. 19) and what happens when students' identities are challenged or not celebrated in their family, community and educational setting.

## Literature Review

### Background

The United States is made up of many people from a plethora of cultures. However, some groups are larger than others. In fact, according to Irizarry (2011), “Latinos are the second largest racial/ethnic group in the country” (p. 2). Naturally, this means that there are many Spanish speakers in the U.S., more than 37 million according to Lopez and Gonzalez-Barrera (2013, p.1). Despite the evidence that the Latino population is large, and growing rapidly, the percentage of teachers that are White and have limited knowledge of cultural diversity is about 83.7% (Robinson & Clardy, 2011, p. 101). If this is the case, how can classrooms be set up so that the teacher can better support the linguistic and cultural identities of his or her students? There are some who argue that the U.S. has done a good job at implementing dual language programs, where classes are taught in two languages (predominantly English and Spanish), of which there are currently about 2,000 in operation (Wilson, 2011). However, 2,000 classrooms are not enough to reach the estimated 37 million Spanish speakers in the country. So, where do these students fit in within the monolingual classroom?

When educators do not take into account the importance of home language and culture and the role these aspects play in shaping children’s identities, they are implementing a subtractive model of English acquisition. According to Valenzuela (1999) as cited by Irizarry (2011), experiences that are “subtractive” can be considered those that “suppress important aspects of students’ cultures and force students to shed part of their identities for a chance at school success” (p. 2). This is not always done intentionally as

teachers who have not had various experiences with cultural diversity often do not possess the culturally relevant teaching skills required to support diverse students (Robinson & Clardy, 2011, p. 101). However, this means it is crucial that teachers educate themselves on matters of linguistic and cultural diversity so they are able to “ implement an *additive* model of English acquisition (where English and the home language are both supported) and not a subtractive model, where English is substituted for the home language” (Garcia, 2003 as cited in Owocki & Goodman, 2002, p. 74). There are many strategies that can help support this model in the classroom, but it is important to first understand some key concepts of linguistic identity development.

### **Linguistic Identity Development**

In order to assess how to better support diverse students culturally and linguistically in a monolingual classroom, it is important to understand what a language is and how it ties into culture. According to Hilliard (1983), as quoted by Robinson and Clardy (2011, p. 106), “A language is not simply a means of communicating in a narrow sense. Psychologically, it is a prime source of cultural identity. It is also a cognitive structuring of the world which is linked to one’s worldview, identity, self-concept and self-esteem” (p. 27). This definition clearly explains that language is not simply a mode of communication. Since language is always used within a cultural context, it cannot be separated from cultural identity. Therefore, when supporting a student linguistically, an educator is also supporting that student culturally. What happens when support is not occurring and students do not feel like their identity is important, or welcome in a school setting?

Environment plays a pivotal role in the development of one's linguistic identity. This impact can be positive, but negative effects are also prevalent, especially in an unsupportive school system. In the classroom, it is crucial that students feel like their background is being celebrated because "suppressing a student's desire to speak their native language marginalizes them and makes them feel unwelcome" (Irizarry, 2011, p. 4). This is not the way to help students learn or achieve academic success. In fact, what Irizarry describes could be considered "linguistic bullying," or, "the overcorrection of dialectic patterns of culturally and linguistically diverse students in an attempt to have them use Standard English" (Robinson & Clardy, 2011, p. 104). The idea of linguistic bullying affects students more than one may think by activating the student's affective filter. According to Robinson and Clardy (2012), "when the affective filter is activated, the speaker experiences feelings of anxiety which negatively affects verbal and academic performance" (p. 105). So, not only are these students afraid to speak in the classroom, but their grades are suffering because of it. What some educators fail to realize is that the only way a dual language learner will truly succeed academically is when his or her linguistic and cultural identity is acknowledged. According to Irizarry (2011), "In order to achieve academic success, Latinos are often pushed to drop their native language and ignore their cultural background, which results in an identity loss for these students" (p. 2). Therefore, identity and academic success go hand-in-hand, which is what educators need to consider when thinking of more appropriate approaches to teach these students effectively. The following quotation neatly sums up the importance of language and culture to the identities of dual language learners:

Erasing a child's language or cultural patterns of language use is a great loss for the child. Children's identities and senses of self are inextricably linked to the language they speak and the culture to which they have been socialized. They are, even at an early age, speakers of their languages and members of their cultures. Language and culture are essential to children's identities. All of the affectionate talk and interpersonal communication of their childhoods and family life are embedded in their languages and cultures. (Genesee et al., 2004, p. 33 as cited in Owocki & Goodman, 2002, p. 73)

By making changes in how Latino and other culturally diverse students are taught and treated in the classroom, teachers can help prevent students from feeling alienated and being stripped of both their linguistic and cultural identity.

### **Strategies to Support Dual Language Learners**

Given the impact of the school environment on a dual language learner, it is important to explore the ways that educators can best support these students. Irizarry (2011) asked a crucial question, "How can educators improve learning opportunities for these students and create an environment that welcomes and appreciates their cultural identity?" (p.2). One thing that can be done, and should be done regardless of students' cultural background, is to encourage family members to come into the classroom and share aspects of their culture (Owocki & Goodman, 2002, p. 85). "Ninety-five percent of Hispanic adults - including those born in the U.S. - said it is important that future generations of Hispanics speak Spanish" (Lopez and Gonzalez-Barrera, 2013, p. 1). If this is truly the case, it is probable that some of those parents and family members would appreciate the

opportunity to support their children's identity in the classroom by volunteering their time to introduce pieces of their culture or simply "funds of knowledge" (Moll & Greenberg, 1990 as cited in Owocki & Goodman, 2002, p. 22) to the classroom. Funds of knowledge are the "information, strategies, tools, and technologies they [family members] use to accomplish their daily tasks of living" (Owocki & Goodman, 2002, p. 22). Allowing family members to share these skills with the classroom creates a welcoming environment for all students, where their backgrounds are celebrated. Family and community members can also be drawn in through various assignments. Having students work on something that would allow them to talk with people about their culture and where they come from will only further support students' identities, even if the classroom is not especially diverse, since all children can find value in their roots and heritage (Szilágyi, Giambo, & Szecsi, 2013, p. 117). This would be an example of Sluys and Rao's (2012) explanation of learning:

Learning should not focus on listing facts, acting as if there's a finite set of understandings out there to be taken in, but rather on helping students become critical and capable of investigating, assessing, and using information for real and powerful purposes. (p. 288)

Sluys and Rao (2012) also discussed the importance of providing rich, authentic learning experiences for all students, especially dual language learners (2012, p. 288). Educators must realize that this is the most effective way to teach students and that dual language learners are no different. Robinson and Clardy (2011) nicely linked together the idea of powerful, engaging assignments and identity by saying, "Encouraging students to make connections to their culture and language in class helps give them a sense of belonging in

the classroom” (p. 108). Therefore, not only are students being supported linguistically and culturally, but they are engaging in a powerful learning process as well.

Other strategies that could be implemented in the classroom to better support diverse students, specifically dual language learners, include recruiting bilingual paraprofessionals or volunteers from the community to come in and read with students, incorporating children’s home language into daily classroom activity, and keeping reading time short (Owocki & Goodman, 2002, p. 96-97) so that emergent bilinguals (Sluys & Rao, 2012, p. 283) do not get overwhelmed. Szilágyi, Giambo, and Szecsi (2013) also suggested creating specific assignments that incorporate bilingual books as well as creating opportunities for authentic writing context in students’ heritage language because, “When students write in either language, their literacy skills are strengthened in both languages, especially if the writing systems are similar” (p. 118). All of these strategies listed revolve around people-centered teaching practices. This type of teaching is beneficial not only to dual language learners, but to all students in the classroom because, “Taking a people-centered perspective toward becoming literate means literacy teaching and learning involves people’s developing identities, resources, sense of self, and agency to act in classrooms and the world” (Sluys & Rao, 2012, p. 282). Given the benefits of a people-centered approach to teaching, the goal of the present study was to examine the experiences and perceptions of diverse learners in order to better inform educators about how to support students.

## Methods

### Overview and Research Questions

The purpose of this research study was to explore the ways in which dual language learners' linguistic and cultural identity development is impacted by their family, community and educational experiences in the United States. The primary interest of this study was to examine the ways in which dual language learners' linguistic and cultural diversity was supported or challenged in these settings. Furthermore, the perceptions and experiences of these dual language learners in K-16 educational settings can better educators, teacher education programs, and educational policy in regards to linguistic and cultural diversity practices. The main research questions for the study were:

- 1) How are dual language learners' linguistic and cultural identities shaped through their family, community, and educational experiences in the United States?
- 2) How might dual language learners' perceptions of their educational experiences in terms of linguistic and cultural diversity inform educational practice in K-16 settings?

The interview protocol, found in Appendix A, guided the interviews. This protocol helped to ensure that the aforementioned research questions were answered through the data collection. The research methods are outlined in detail in the following sections: setting and participants, research design, data collection, and data analysis.

### **Setting and Participants**

For this study, two college-age, female participants were interviewed. Both are enrolled at a University in the Midwestern United States studying to become educators. One of the participants is an English/Spanish dual language learner and the other is a heritage speaker, as she grew up learning some Spanish. While the analysis of only two experiences could be considered a limitation of this study, it also allowed for the juxtaposition of the participants' stories. The interviews took place on the participants' college campus, at locations specified by each individual participant.

### **Research Design**

The research design of this study was a semi-structured interview (Myers & Newman, 2007). As referenced above in the overview, Appendix A shows the interview protocol containing a list of questions that the participants were asked. However, the researcher wanted the freedom to be flexible if any responses required elaboration or clarification. That being said, both participants answered the questions in a fairly straightforward manner and not much elaboration was required. The purpose of conducting research interviews was to explore the experiences of the participants in regards to their linguistic and cultural diversity in family, community and educational settings so that this information could then be analyzed and used to inform educators about best practices for teaching diverse students. The qualitative nature of these interviews provided a deeper understanding of the participants experiences (Myers & Newman, 2007).

### **Data Collection**

This study received Human Subjects approval and interviews were the mode for data collection. The researcher met with each participant individually for 45 minutes to an hour to conduct the interview, following the protocol listed in the Appendix A. The participants had provided written consent prior to the interviews. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. After the data were analyzed, all audio recordings were deleted and pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' privacy.

### **Data Analysis**

After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, the analysis process began. Each transcript was carefully sifted through and salient points were drawn out. The constant comparative method was used to identify emerging thematic categories (Glesne, 2006). In this analysis, emerging themes included ways that the participants interacted with family, community members, peers, and educators and how they perceived these interactions. When this process had been completed for each interview, notes from the two were compared for similarities and differences regarding the participants' experiences in terms of linguistic and cultural diversity in family, community and K-16 educational settings. Finding the similarities and differences led to certain themes, such as background, linguistics, college experiences, and implications, which were then used to write about the findings from the study, as listed below.

## Findings

### Background

Nicole is a female, English speaking college student. She is biracial as her mother is Latina and her father is White. She was born in the United States, and English is the main language spoken in her home. Nicole classifies herself as American, but she always “checks two boxes: Hispanic and Caucasian” (Interview, 11-19-14). Nicole’s mother was born in Mexico and she introduced a bit of Spanish into her children’s lives. Nicole distinctly remembers “vocab lessons during bath time,” (Interview, 11-19-14) and she was always encouraged to play around with Spanish words.

Maria is also a female college student, but she classifies herself as a fully bilingual Mexican. Although Maria was born in Mexico, she moved to the United States when she was two and both of her parents have been naturalized. However, Spanish is the only language spoken in their home, and Maria, along with her sister, served the role as translators for their parents throughout their childhood.

Both of these women grew up in hometowns with relatively large Latino populations, so there was support in terms of culture and, specifically for Maria, language. Where the two participants differ greatly is how they identify themselves. Nicole, as noted above, classifies herself American, although she acknowledges her Latino heritage. Maria identifies herself by saying, “I’m Mexican, I’m Chicana, I’m Latina, but I am not American because I was not born in the U.S.” (Interview, 11-17-14). At one point in her interview, she went even further by saying, “I’m Mexican, because if I go outside no one would see me as American. They see me as Mexican, and I’m not ashamed” (Interview, 11-17-14). The

perspectives that these women have of themselves play a big part in their identity, but it has also been shaped by other experiences.

### **Linguistics**

The linguistics of Nicole and Maria have been shaped and developed by their family, community and school experiences. As mentioned above, Nicole's mother introduced some Spanish vocabulary to her children, predominantly through nurturing settings such as bath time. Nicole remembers visiting her abuela and abuelo and the way they each shaped her linguistic development. In her interview, she describes her experience with her abuela in the following way:

With my abuela, we would speak to her in as much Spanish as we could because she, coming from Mexico, was your stereotypical housewife who stayed home and took care of the kids, so she didn't necessarily get to branch out and learn as much English as my abuelo. (Interview, 11-19-14)

This differed from her experience with her abuelo, who was very adamant that his whole family speak English because they were in an English speaking community, and he wanted his children and grandchildren to be successful. Nicole compared the different approaches her grandparents had to linguistics by saying, "He [her abuelo] would always be like, 'We're in America, you need to speak English,' but then my abuela would be like, 'You know some Spanish so we will practice it so you can learn'" (Interview, 11-19-14). While Nicole learned a lot from both of her grandparents, her abuelo was very forceful when it came to which language should be spoken. Nicole's abuela, like Nicole's mother, provided a nurturing environment where language development was accepted and encouraged.

Although Nicole lived in a community with a large Latino population, school seemed to have more of an impact on her identity. She mentioned going to school and having the Latino kids, figure out that she is “one of them” meaning that she is Latina and thus accepting her as part of the group. Although she said her heritage is something she is proud of, she said, “I never really projected myself as the girl that had the Mexican flag hanging in her car,” (Interview, 11-19-14) so she was a little surprised by this bond she shared with the Latino students. Nicole does not seem to have really any negative experiences tied to her Latina background. On the contrary, she fondly remembers her abuela being allowed to come into her elementary classroom and make tortillas with her class, which she referred to in the interview by saying, “In elementary school, we did a unit on Mexico. That was really exciting for me because my abuela got to come in and talk about Mexico and make tortillas. That was one of my favorite memories” (Interview, 11-19-14). So although Nicole is in the minority as a biracial citizen, this never appeared to be a concern during her time in the K-12 setting, it actually seems to have given her a flexibility to be accepted in multiple social groups.

Maria’s story is quite different. She was put in the ESL program at her kindergarten and, instead of the nurturing guidance Nicole had, in regards to learning another language, Maria was in a very forceful English immersion situation. Her ESL teacher did not want students to use English unless they were pronouncing words correctly. However, this was not a detriment to Maria, as she is a very driven individual. She said that the strict methods of her ESL teacher motivated her to be successful at learning the language quickly. Her drive shone through in certain comments such as when she said, “I didn’t want to be labeled as the ESL kid. It was a stigma. It was negative” (Interview, 11-17-14). She really

appreciated the teachers that pushed her to be the best student she could be. Maria also talked about her speech teacher in high school. She mentioned how this teacher was very difficult and challenged her but, once again, this is a quality that made this teacher stand out to her.

Although Maria felt support from some teachers and from the high percentage of Latino students at her school, there were still situations where her language, culture and identity were greatly challenged. In Kindergarten, she had a substitute teacher who did not understand, or make any effort to understand, Maria's request to use the bathroom. The struggle of trying to ask permission ended up taking so long that she did not make it in time and the substitute teacher had to clean her up, something that the teacher was outwardly disgusted by. Maria distinctly remembers this horrific experience and the way it was handled impacted her language development. She understood more than the substitute teacher thought she could, as she mentions in the following:

I understood more English than I could speak, remember my ESL teacher was very strict about speaking, and she [the substitute teacher] was like, "I hate these Mexicans coming here and they can't even speak English," and I understood. Her nonverbals were very clear and her tone. (Interview, 11-17-14)

She recalled wanting to learn English even more quickly after this scenario happened because she never wanted to go through another ordeal such as this one. Another negative experience occurred in high school with an obstinate history teacher. He refused to accept Latino culture in his classroom and, according to Maria, argued just for argument's sake with his Latino students. Maria explained how he pushed the idea that they were American by saying, "If Mexico and the U.S. got into a war, you would be on the United States side,

that means you're American," (Interview, 11-17-14) but many of these students, although they would technically be classified as American, did not see themselves that way and would instead classify themselves as Mexican or Latino.

Maria definitely faced more barriers in regards to her linguistic and cultural diversity, but there were times she felt her culture was celebrated as well. She fondly remembers the community celebrating Cinco de Mayo at the school. Everyone would bring special dishes and they would play soccer and learn about different Latin American countries. She felt very strongly about this event and how powerful it was because it celebrated Latin culture. She illustrated it by saying:

It was such a wonderful day. They had speakers come in and you'd do coloring and you would have a passport and you'd go around Latin American countries and it was such an amazing experience because our culture was celebrated. (Interview, 11-19-14)

However, the Cinco de Mayo celebration soon moved downtown and sort of became a business, where you had to pay to get in. Maria said a lot of the families stopped going when this happened, and it felt like it was taken away along with a part of their culture. As Maria described, "It was such a beautiful experience and I don't know why they took it away" (Interview, 11-19-14).

A lot of things go into making an individual feel their identity is validated; language and culture are just a piece of the puzzle. Owocki and Goodman (2002) pointed out that, "Children's identities develop under the influence of language, culture, race, class, gender, family values, patterns of domestic organization, and political, social, and religious ideology. Each of these becomes a characteristic of each child's identity" (p. 18). Howard

(2000) also discussed the vast number of ever changing identities, but she emphasized how social identities such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, class and age are often pushed to the forefront when examining what qualities make a person unique. For Nicole and Maria, however, language and culture are the two identities that have played a significant role in shaping their view of the world because of the negative or positive experiences they have had. In the K-12 environment, Nicole flexibly moved among social groups and does not seem very reflective about her Latina heritage, while Maria mostly felt supported by her community and school in terms of her linguistic and cultural diversity. Moving into their college experiences, Nicole had her identity affirmed as she began to take on the role of a dual language learner and Maria's identity was challenged by an environment that is very limited in its diversity.

### **College**

Both participants came to the same midwestern comprehensive university to pursue education degrees. While in college, Nicole has begun to take on the role of Spanish speaker as a huge part of who she is. She said, "I've definitely taken on Spanish as a second language more than I ever have before" (Interview, 11-19-14). This fuels her identity as she strives to integrate Spanish into her life. However, this is not all she wants people to see when they look at her saying, "It's a good chunk of who I am, but it's just a piece of my story" (Interview, 11-19-14). Nicole has received an education that has begun to give her a critical eye in regards to world around her. She is beginning to see how crucial it is to challenge the mindset that "English is best" and that learning multiple languages is detrimental. This shift to thinking more critically is causing her to take a second look at the

ESL program. She noted, “ESL is a phenomenal resource, but it doesn’t necessarily cater to every individual student as it needs to” (Interview, 11-19-14). This critical stance is key to her development as a future bilingual teacher and as an educated individual. Nicole will be able to take this information into future schools and perhaps get more teachers to think critically about programs geared towards dual language learners.

Maria’s experience in college was, as she put it, “a culture shock” (Interview, 11-17-14). She said coming to the university has made her feel isolated and put down at times. These barriers have challenged her identity and, at times, her desire to teach. Maria had a roommate that bought her headphones because she could not stand to listen to the Spanish music Maria was playing. Her Spanish professors have told her not to answer because “she already knows” (Interview, 11-17-14). She even experienced micro aggression, which can be defined as “daily verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicates hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards people of color,” (Sue et al, 2007, p. 271) from a highly educated TESOL professor. The following is an excerpt from her interview about this experience:

One of the things she did that made me want to drop her class was that she was talking about the different dialects and varieties of the English language and of other languages and stuff and she was like, “Well, for example, in Spanish, the upper class Spanish is from Spain and the peasant Spanish is from Mexico,” and she looked right at me when she said this. Now, this is micro aggression, and you mention it to someone and they’ll be like, “Oh, she wasn’t looking at you,” or “You’re just thinking that,” but as a Latina and as a Mexican, that was offensive. (Interview, 11-17-14)

Maria felt singled out in this example, and it would not be the first time it happened while she was at college. She mentioned in general how whenever Mexico, immigrants, or Spanish speakers come up in a classroom conversation, everyone looks at her. She also said how she has never had to explain herself until college. Although she said that she feels it is important for people to share their stories, she also made a point to say that, “if you really want to get to know me, my ethnicity does not matter” (Interview, 11-17-14).

Unfortunately, her ethnicity has proven a difficult thing for her classmates to overlook during her time at college and many ignorant comments have been directed towards her.

### **Implications**

So now that the experiences and perceptions of both Nicole and Maria have been examined, how can educators create welcoming environments for linguistically and culturally diverse students? Both participants, with the intention to become teachers themselves, had comments and suggestions. Nicole is focused on Bilingual classrooms and is adamant about the idea that, “we have to start helping them [Dual Language Learners] in Kindergarten/Pre-K” (Interview, 11-19-14). She said she believes that teaching vocabulary is a good first step, but we need to push beyond that to create truly successful students. She really wants to see more of a push to support these students and wishes that Iowa had more bilingual options for students because, “if they are increasing their understanding of two languages, then that’s pretty incredible” (Interview, 11-19-14). However, promoting dual language learning is often not a high priority in some schools, “many schools require English academic testing at kindergarten entry to assess the effectiveness of their prekindergarten programs” (Owocki & Goodman, 2002, p. 63). Owocki and Goodman

(2002) went on to say that because of this, “many preschool programs feel pressure to promote rapid English acquisition without any clear guidance on the methods to achieve English fluency or how to deal with the child’s home language” (p. 64). This mentality does nothing to support children’s linguistic identities and, as Nicole says, “that really just shows that we want English to be the only language” (Interview, 11-19-14).

Maria’s responses were more shaped by her negative experiences and revolve around making students feel their culture is accepted in the classroom environment. Maria, and many of her Latino classmates, have been subjected to “instances when the words and actions of many of the adults entrusted with the responsibility to educate them in reality marginalized, silenced, and alienated them from school” (Irizarry, 2011, p. 4). Luckily, Maria was able to foster a love for reading, despite lack of support from many of her teachers, which has led to her now having a strong advocacy for literacy. She recommended culturally relevant books in classroom libraries, but to be careful that they are not stereotypical since those are offensive and not an accurate depiction of the culture. She also suggested, “Give us a chance to talk about our culture,” (Interview, 11-17-14) and not to put students’ cultures down. This sentiment is supported by Robinson and Clardy’s (2011) suggestion of how to effectively teach culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in the following:

We build background (Echevarria, 2007) by asking these students about cultural events and/or practices, including how to say various expressions in their heritage languages or dialects; encouraging them to use their heritage languages as a resource in class. Not only does this give students comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982) and help them make connections, but it also gives them a sense of belonging

and entitlement, something that many of our CLD students have expressed that they never feel in most of their classes or the university community. (p. 108)

Robinson and Clardy's (2011) article focused on preparing future educators to "teach diverse student populations" (p. 101), but this falls right in line with Maria's own advice to teachers when she said, "They have to understand" (Interview, 11-17-14). She made note several times in the interview that linguistically diverse families know when teachers try, and that is something that they [the families] respect. She was also very resolute about not adding to the stereotypes and said, "Do not think your kids are going to be statistics, because when you think like that and you think about statistics, you enable them" (Interview, 11-17-14). Maria emphasized the importance of attempting to understand your students and where they come from and to be sensitive to their cultural differences. As she became more impassioned toward the end of the interview she stated, "All of your students are human. They are your future and you have that power to change them. You have the power to inspire them" (Interview, 11-17-14).

### **Discussion**

Hopefully the presented data has brought up the question, "What can I do as an educator to better support students in terms of their linguistic and cultural diversity?" This is not always an easy question to answer, yet, it is a crucial one to ask in order to support all students' identities. The following reiterates the importance of this support in terms of home language and early literacy:

Children from linguistic minority households also require language instruction which is sensitive to their unique backgrounds. Instruction in oral language

proficiency, vocabulary, and pre literacy skills provides a strong foundation for later success. In particular, it is crucial that educators understand how best to effectively support the home language so that early literacy can be fostered in the home as well as school. (Ballantyne, Sandeerman, D'Emilio, & McLaughlin, 2008, p. 35 as cited in Owocki & Goodman, 2002, p. 89)

During her interview, Maria discussed how the Latino students were automatically put into English 9, even if, like her, they actually excelled in the subject (Interview, 11-17-11). She even went on to say the following at the end of her interview, "If more teachers would have cared, I think my other Latino classmates wouldn't have failed" (Interview, 11-17-11). This is a problem that needs to be resolved. Educators need to "disrupt the cycle of failure imposed on culturally and linguistically diverse students" (Haddix, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nasir, McLaughlin, & Jones 2009 as cited in Souto-Manning, 2013, p. 306). Students should not feel like they have failed because they did not receive the academic, cultural, and linguistic support that they needed. The context of the curriculum needs to be accessible to *all* students based on the comment from Murphy and Dudley-Marling (2000), as cited in Owocki and Goodman (2002, p. 25), that "Arguably, one of the principal reasons poor and minority children fail more often [than White, middle-class children] in school is that they face the challenge of mastering the *unfamiliar*, while their more successful peers practice the *familiar*" (p. 381).

This cycle of failure (Haddix, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nasir, McLaughlin, & Jones 2009 as cited in Souto-Manning, 2013, p. 306) could also be contributed to how educators position students with diverse backgrounds. Since society has established that, in the United States, English is necessary to be successful, a code of power or culture of

power has been introduced (Souto-Manning, 2013, p. 313). Robinson and Clardy (2011) described this issue by saying, “we operate in a system that is run by the dominant culture which decides the content of the curriculum, the pedagogical delivery and what is acceptable as appropriate language for the classroom” (p. 102). Because of this mindset, “many children’s literacies are threatened, rather than valued and expanded, in school settings” (Owocki & Goodman, 2002, p. 25). Souto-Manning (2013) tied this back into the importance of breaking away from the subtractive model of teaching in the following:

This does not mean ignoring the fact that Mainstream American English remains the language of power, but points toward the necessity of inviting educators to regard children’s communicative practices as worthy and not as broken. Educators still have the responsibility to socialize all children into the discourse of power, but do not need to take a subtractive stance to do so. (p. 313)

As stated at the beginning of this paper, the vast majority of teachers in the United States are White and monolingual (Robinson & Clardy, 2011, p. 101). To some of these teachers, supporting students’ linguistic diversity may still seem overwhelming and therefore, little effort is put into figuring out best practices for teaching diverse students. At times, “Monolingual teachers’ lack of knowledge regarding different linguistic structures and communicative practices may lead to constant correction and make linguistically diverse students feel ‘linguistically inadequate, insecure, and confused’” (Fogel & Ehri, 2006, p. 466 as cited in Souto-Manning, 2013, p. 306). However, Watts-Taffe and Truscott (2000) listed some less intimidating ways to effectively teach dual language learners such as, “giving second language learners adequate time to compose with a focus on the content of a writing piece rather than on writing conventions such as spelling and grammar” (Little

& Sanders, 1989 as cited in Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000, p. 260), initiating peer discussion groups, and scaffolding instruction via background knowledge, vocabulary development, and communication (p. 261-262). It has been noted in various studies that provided context-embedded problems and material, or those with other communication cues (i.e. body language) are more effective for dual language learners than context-reduced experiences that focus on academic language devoid of other aspects that could facilitate communication (Watts-Taffe & Truscott, 2000, p. 259; Martin-Beltrán, 2010, p. 268).

Educators are in the position to truly affect their students. This means that they need to look back and reflect on what they are teaching and how they are teaching it. By advocating for linguistically and culturally diverse students, educators can “create spaces where learners not only develop as bi- or multilingual people, but also as agentic learners who use their many varied literacies to read, write, speak, listen, design, act, and be in our diverse, ever-changing world” (Sluys & Rao, 2012, p. 288). Identity is the key to what makes us unique and no child should feel that theirs is being stripped away from them.

### **Conclusion**

To summarize, this research study sought to analyze ways in which dual language learners were impacted by their environment (school, home, and community) and explore how these environments impacted their cultural and linguistic identity. In order to do this, interviews were conducted with two linguistically and culturally diverse female college students who are studying to become teachers with the aim to identify implications for educators based on their experiences. Seeking out ways educators can better support these students in order to help them achieve academic success and feel that their culture is

acknowledged and appreciated is crucial because when diversity it is not celebrated, students may be forced to assimilate, resulting in a loss of their identity. By implementing strategies discussed in this paper, all students can have a better chance of achieving academic success while also being able to express themselves and embrace the differences that make them unique.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your cultural and linguistic background.

-Have you spoken or do you speak a language other than English at home?

-Describe the cultural and linguistic makeup of your local community as you were growing up.

-What do you consider to be your “first language”?

2. Describe your experiences as a dual language learner with your family.

-What were your experiences growing up in terms of linguistic diversity?

-What were your family members’ experiences in terms of linguistic diversity?

-Were your family members bilingual? Bi-literate?

-How did your family approach dual language learning?

-Which language was more dominant in your household? Why do you think that was?

-Can you give an example of how your family explicitly or implicitly supported or did not support dual language learning in your home?

3. Describe your experiences as a dual language learner in your community.

-How has your linguistic and cultural identity been shaped by your hometown community?

-How has your hometown community supported or challenged your linguistic and cultural identity?

-How does your current community support or challenge your linguistic and cultural identity?

-Can you give an example of how you have felt supported or challenged in terms of your linguistic and cultural identity in your hometown? In your current community?

4. Describe your experiences as a dual language learner in school.

-What were your experiences in K-12 classrooms in terms of linguistic diversity?

-How has your linguistic and cultural identity been shaped by your schooling experiences?

-How did your schooling experiences support or challenge your linguistic and cultural identity?

-Describe any differences you experienced between elementary school, middle school, and/or high school in terms of feeling supported or challenged.

-Are there particular educators who stand out to you as especially supportive or challenging in terms of your linguistic and cultural identity development? Can you give an example?

-What was the relationship between your family and teachers at the school? How did your family and educators communicate or not communicate about issues of linguistic diversity? How did this relationship affect you?

5. Describe your experiences as a dual language learner in college.

-How has your linguistic and cultural identity been shaped through your experiences in college?

-How have you felt supported or challenged in college in regards to your linguistic and cultural identity?

-Can you describe how you have approached your linguistic or cultural identity in college? Have you made particular choices socially or academically that reflect your linguistic and cultural identity?

6. What would you want educators to know about how to best support dual language learners in terms of their linguistic and cultural diversity?

7. What else would you like to share about this topic or related to this topic?