Language Policies

A Study of Language Ideologies in Connecticut State Policies for English Language Learners

By: Karina Torres
Introduction

- Connecticut has a growing population of students identified as ELL. In 2001, the state identified 3.7% of its total school population as ELLs, and in 2010, there were 5.3% identified ELL students.

- 12.8% of students in Connecticut spoke a language other than English at home.
Significance

- English Language Learners (ELLs) are not performing as well on high stakes testing as non-ELL students.
# 2011 Connecticut Mastery Test: ELL and Non ELL Students in State Scoring At/Above Proficiency

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<th>% of 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; grade ELLs</th>
<th>% of 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; grade Non ELLs</th>
<th>% of 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade ELLs</th>
<th>% of 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade Non ELLs</th>
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<td>76.7</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>85.6</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>83.0</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>83.6</td>
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Significance Continued...

- Need to evaluate the state’s policies regarding the education of English Language Learners.
Research Question

• What language ideologies are reflected in Connecticut’s policies for English Language Learners?
Thesis

• I argue that Connecticut’s policies regarding the education of English Language Learners reflect a power structure that has worked to rid students of their native language and culture in order to maintain both the supremacy of the English language and the existing power structure.
Literature

• Gonzalez (2005)
  - defines language ideology as “a set of beliefs that are tied to our social category” which “implicates power, the exercise of power, and the reproduction of dominant-subordinate relations”
  - Researched language ideologies and how they influence the implementation of a dual language program in Arizona. Found that teachers use native language instruction as a way of fighting back beliefs of what it means to be bilingual or Latino.
Methodology

- Combination of interviews and document analysis

- A total of 3 in-depth interviews were conducted with 2 members of the Connecticut Board of Education and the ELL/Bilingual Coordinator from the State Department of Education.
  - Interviews were recorded and transcribed.
Methodology Continued

• Analyzed policy documents about bilingual education, the role of native language instruction and goals of language policies.

• The following documents were analyzed:
  ▫ The Bilingual Education Statute of the General Statutes of Connecticut
  ▫ “Position Statement on the Education of Students who are English Language Learners.”
Connecticut’s Language Policies

- English is the medium of instruction
- Bilingual education is a program that makes use of both English and the student’s native language but with the purpose of becoming proficient in English.
- Students are limited to 30 months of bilingual education.
- If the student is not proficient after 30 months, the school provides Language Transition Support Services (includes English as a Second Language program, Sheltered English program, English Immersion Program, and tutoring).
Analysis and Interpretation

* A Better Language*

- Goal of bilingual programs to achieve English proficiency, not native language proficiency.

  “Any local or regional board of education may establish at any level of instruction a bilingual and bicultural program of study. . . .provided the purpose of such program shall be to enable children to become proficient in English” (Connecticut General Statutes, Sec 10-17a)
A Better Language Continued...

• Push to replace the student’s native language.
  “You know in ESL classes they are not made to feel that they are smarter. They are made to feel, well you take off whatever language you have and give it up because we're going to give you a better language” (Interview with Elicia Rodriguez-Board of Ed. Member)

• Language Transition Support Services emphasizes the transition from one language to the next.
A Better Language Continued….

• Valenzuela (1999)
  ▫ Subtractive Schooling: “divests these youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure” (3).
Deficit Views of ELLs

• Students are recipients of services.
  ▫ If a student is not making sufficient progress toward meeting the state standard based on the assessment, the local or regional board of education shall provide language support services to the student. . . Such services may include, but need not be limited to, summer school, after-school assistance and tutoring” (Bilingual Education Statute, Sec 10-17f)
Deficit Views of ELLs Continued...

  - “Deficit thinking strategically blames the culture and environment of the home and family for these students’ so called educability deficit....deficit thinking divert[s] attention away from the institutional factors contributing to marginalized student’s predicament” (125).
"So when I started school, I started with full immersion without one word in English. It was overwhelming and for many, many years, I was quiet. I couldn't communicate, but I was also seen as a slow learner, no sense of humor, no social skills, and really it was that silent period that lasted for a very long time for me because I really didn't have an opportunity to develop my second language" 

(Interview with Marisol Sanchez)
Conclusion

• Bilingual education in Connecticut has served to rid students of their native language as quickly as possible in an attempt to maintain the superiority of the English language
References


