

The Design of Parent Engagement at a One-Way Spanish Immersion School: Unintended Consequences for Spanish-Speaking Families



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Spanish Immersion Elementary School (“SIES”)



- ✦ One-way language immersion K-5
- ✦ Urban charter school in 5th year
- ✦ Midwestern monolingual state
- ✦ Designed for monolingual English speakers
 - ✦ ~55% African American
 - ✦ ~35% White
 - ✦ ~60% free/reduced lunch
- ✦ But also enrolled emerging bilingual Spanish speakers! ~15%



SIES Charter



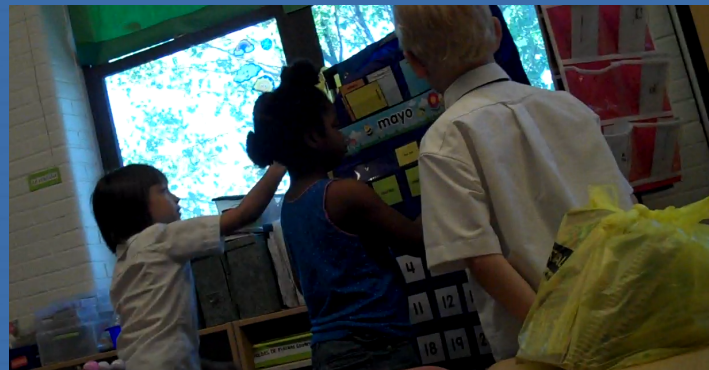
- ✦ “One of the unique benefits of language immersion elementary programs is that they provide a level playing field for all kindergarten students. Although only 8% of [this city’s] families speak another language in their homes, we anticipate that as many as 10% or more of families who enroll in [SIES] will have some multilingual heritage. Immersion instruction will allow all of the students to have common learning experiences and progress towards a new goal regardless of their home language or parents’ level of education.”

SIES Core Value:



- ✦ “Leadership starts with you:
- ✦ *Each person is encouraged to communicate their vision, engage in honest discourse and listen to others with the goal of understanding new points of view.*

How will you lead our community today?”



SIES Charter



- ✦ “At the heart of every vibrant school are involved parents, extended families and their communities, outstanding teachers and board members who are committed to excellence and the individual needs of each child. Through the curriculum all students will be encouraged to take an active part in service projects that will benefit the communities in which they live. Additionally, [SIES] will build strong relationships with the neighboring community and parent community through the School Advisory Council (SAC) and the School Enrichment Program (SEP).”

SIES Charter

- ✦ “Ideally the School Advisory Council meetings will be conducted in English and the language of instruction with informal translations by bilingual/multilingual Council members. [SIES] will cultivate a partnership with the [nearby global refugee center] to provide translators for families who speak a third language in their home.”



Research Questions



- ✦ What is family engagement like in immersion schools, where one of the languages of instruction is the native language for a small number of families?
- ✦ Specifically, how did Spanish-speaking parents view the school climate at SIES?
 - ✦ How did they navigate this climate?
 - ✦ How did they engage at school?


Guiding Frameworks:

From Parent Involvement to Engagement



- ✦ Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) = a system-wide and culturally-affirming framework that highlights how parents' networks, spaces, and capitals permit them to navigate and understand schooling (Calabrese Barton, et al., 2004).
- ✦ Guided by social capital theory (Bourdieu, 2001), scholars have reframed family-school engagement as reciprocal relationships (Lareau, 2003; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Warren, 2001; Warren, 2005; Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009).

Guiding Frameworks: School Climate Matters for Engagement



- ✦ School climate “reflects students’, school personnel’s, and parents’ experiences of school life socially, emotionally, civically, and ethically as well as academically” (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 369).
- ✦ There is an overall consensus that opportunities to build trusting relationships and perceptions of institutional environments as safe play a critical role in providing strong and positive school cultures (Astor, Guerra, & Van Acker, 2010; Bradshaw, et al., 2014; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Thapa et al., 2013).

Guiding Frameworks: A “Cautionary Note”!



- ✦ Research on the climate of language immersion programs has found that language immersion programs often benefit English-speaking students, rather than speakers of other languages (Cervantes-Soon, et al., forthcoming; Flores, 2010; Valdés, 1997).
- ✦ Language schools continue to operate in a larger political climate that values one language (English) and one identity (“American”) (López, 2013; Muro, 2016) – and this may shape how/whether their climates are welcoming to families who speak languages others than English.

Research Methods



- ✦ “School Improvement” Survey (situated in partnership research over 5 years)
 - ✦ Initially in English and online only
 - ✦ Translated and back-translated into Spanish
- ✦ Distributed to parents of 27 “EL” students
 - ✦ Supported by “ESL” teacher
 - ✦ 76% response rate (n=19)

Survey – Sample Questions



- ✦ “I feel welcomed and comfortable in this school.” (with answer choices: Yes, No, or I don’t know—please explain).
- ✦ “In case of a question or concern, I normally contact...” (with 13 options to circle, including “my child’s teacher, the director of the school, another parent,” etc.).
- ✦ “Do you believe the leadership and administrators of the school are responsive to the school’s community needs?” (with answer choices: Yes, No, or I don’t know—please explain).
- ✦ “What do you value about SIES?”

The survey was 27 pages long.

Analysis Process



- ✦ “Thinking with Theory” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012)
 - ✦ (a) putting philosophical concepts to work via disrupting the theory/practice binary by decentering each and instead showing how they *constitute or make one another*;
 - ✦ (b) being deliberate and transparent in what analytical questions are made possible by a specific theoretical concept ... and how the questions that are used to think with *emerged in the middle* of plugging in; and
 - ✦ (c) working the same data chunks repeatedly to ‘deform [them], to make [them] groan and protest’ with an overabundance of meaning, which in turn not only creates new knowledge but also shows the *suppleness of each when plugged in* (p. 5)

Findings



- ✦ SIES had a strong focus on parent *engagement* and a desire to attend to various parents' circumstances. Teachers were native, fluent speakers of Spanish from many different countries.
- ✦ In turn, SIES Spanish-speaking parents developed trusting relationships with/within the school.
- ✦ However, there existed a variety of challenges with policymaking partnerships and bi-directional engagement.

SIES, Trust and Respect



- ✦ 17/19: “When I have a concern or question about the school, I contact . . .” my teacher.
- ✦ 14/19: “When my child has a problem, there is an adult to help him/her.”
- ✦ 14/17: “I feel welcomed in the school.”
- ✦ 16/19: “Adults in this school treat children with respect.”

SIES, A Place for Engagement



- ✦ The majority marked either “regularly” or “sometimes” to ...
- ✦ Participating in activities or field trips (16/19)
- ✦ Committing money/resources to class (17/19)
- ✦ Speaking to child about experiences at school (17/19)
- ✦ Attending school celebrations (16/19)

SIES, Engagement Challenges



- ✦ Little attendance at PTO and Board meetings, with most marking that they had attended only 1 or 2 times.
- ✦ 11/19 parents did not agree, were dissatisfied, or did not answer the question regarding school safety.
- ✦ The school had fewer and fewer resources to follow through on promises; over time, the original intentions of attending to multilingual families disappeared.
- ✦ Meetings never had translators; third languages were never valued.

SIES, Focus on Involvement



	regularly	sometimes	never	?
I participate in activities or field trips with my child's class.	5	11	2	1
I commit money/resources to my child's class/school.	4	13	-	2
I participate in SAC (School Advisory Council) sponsored activities or meetings.	3	9	4	3
I talk to my child about his/her experiences in school.	14	3	-	2
I attend school-wide celebrations (such as literacy/movie nights, La Posada, Back to School activities).	14	3	-	2

SIES, Survey on Involvement

<i>Fewer involved on traditional measures – at SCHOOL.</i>	never/no answer	1-2	3-5	6-10	more than 10 times
Talked to your child's teacher. (42% never or 1-2 times)	3	5	7	0	4
Attended parent/teacher meetings . (50% never or 1-2 times)	2	7	5	3	2
Visited the school on your own. (53% never or 1-2 times)	6	4	3	1	5
Gone to an open house at school . (74% never or 1-2 times)	6	8	3	2	0
Helped with school activities. (74% never or 1-2 times)	10	4	2	2	1
Attended a SAC meeting. (79% never or 1-2 times)	12	3	3	0	1
Attended a Board meeting. (100% never or 1-2 times)	16	3	0	0	0

SIES, Concern re: *Language*



I haven't been involved in school because ...	n
I don't have time.	3
Don't know how to go about it.	2
My English is weak.	3
Other	5
No answer	6

Discussion



- ✦ *Trust was developed, especially with teachers and in school-wide celebrations – but not with policymakers/leaders.*
- ✦ *Promises and core values were lost in implementation .*
- ✦ *Language was named as a core barrier.*
- ✦ *Surveys were ill-developed.*
- ✦ *Policy construction – words and sense-making – matter.*

Gracias!



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- ✦ www.lisamdorner.com
- ✦ Cervantes-Soon, C., Dorner, L., Palmer, D., Heiman, D.*, Schwerdtfeger, R.*, & Choi, J.* (2017). Combating inequalities in two-way language immersion programs: Toward critical consciousness in bilingual education spaces. *Review of Research in Education*.