BUILDING ON OUR TEACHING ASSETS:
The Unique Contributions of Bilingual Teachers

Megan Hopkins
Latina/o Education Summit
University of California, Los Angeles

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Fewer Teachers Pursuing Bilingual Credentials in California than in Texas

Sources: Arias, 2009; California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2009; Texas State Board for Educator Certification, 2009
Prior Research Suggests that Bilingual Teachers Bring Unique Assets

- Have most confidence in capacity to teach English learners (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005)
- Articulate a desire to affirm and employ students’ native language and culture in instruction (Monzo & Rueda, 2003; Rueda, Monzo, & Higareda, 2004; Weisman, 2001)
- Emphasize the importance of developing relationships with families (Galindo, 1996; Weisman & Hansen, 2008)
Research Questions

Is there any added benefit to being bilingual with respect to teacher practice?

RQ: How do the self-reported practices of bilingual (and credentialed) teachers differ from those of teachers who are not bilingual (or credentialed)?
Mixed Methodological Approach

Teacher surveys:
Broad examination of practice and policy

Follow-up interviews:
Rich descriptions of practice
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>English Learner Population</th>
<th>Language Policy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TX</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Bilingual education (K-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>English-only; varied implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>English-only; mandated ELD block</td>
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</table>

Source: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2008.
Sample Characteristics

- 474 survey respondents from 31 elementary schools in CA, AZ, and TX
  - 85% female
  - 53% Latina/o; 40% White
  - 52% English-Spanish bilingual

- 19 interview participants
  - Monolingual and bilingual teachers
  - New and experienced teachers
Bilingual Teachers Reported Significantly More Parent Communication

- 75% of bilingual teachers reported reaching out to parents of ELs informally at school, compared to 52% of monolingual teachers.

- 33% of bilingual teachers reported hearing from parents of ELs once a week or more, compared to just 14% of monolingual teachers.
Bilingual Teachers Take a Team Approach to Parent Engagement

“I’m not just the teacher, *la maestra*, ‘Te entrego mis niños.’ I said, ‘We’re a team. We are a team. If your child is successful, it’s not because of me, it’s because of us. We did it.’”

— Johana, 1st grade teacher in Arizona
“Those parents I really haven’t started dealing with quite honestly and we really don’t see ’em, and it’s probably because they know they can’t have a conversation with us.”

– Kathy, 1st grade teacher in Texas
Parent involvement is beneficial to student learning (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1991, 1994)

Invitations and opportunities for involvement increase parent support (Comer, 1980)

Parents of ELs often want to be involved, but lack the knowledge or confidence to find out what they can do to help (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010)
Bilingual Teachers Build on English Learners’ Language and Experiences Significantly More Often

Note: Coefficients shown are from models that include percent EL, gender, race, education, experience, grade level and state.

Bilingual Teachers Build on ELs’ Language and Experiences Significantly More Often

- Use Primary Language or Cross-Language
  - Bilingual: 0.58*
  - Bilingual + Bilingual Credential: 0.74

- Connect to Prior Knowledge or Experiences
  - Bilingual: 0.43*
“The students come with that knowledge [of living in two worlds], and I really need to bring it into the classroom so that they can make that connection with everyone else. Because all of a sudden they have a-ha moments and it's like, ‘Yeah I know what you're talking about, I've done that before.’ And so there's a lot of comparison going on, a lot of sharing, it really generates the conversation because we are doing everything in English and whenever we hit a bump the Spanish will start coming out. If it's not me, it's the kids. Then the self-expression takes place and the meaning is shared.”

– Sara, 5th grade teacher in Texas
Study Conclusions and Recommendations

- There is a benefit to being bilingual (and credentialed), with respect to teacher practice.
- We should acknowledge and build on teachers’ linguistic and cultural assets.
- Federal and state policies must provide incentives for bilingual individuals to become educators.
Megan Hopkins, UCLA
Research Associate,
Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civilies
mbhopkins@ucla.edu