Juntos effort to preserve children's bilingualism in English-dominated language landscape

Kiyomi Umezawa

Abstract

This paper presents a collaborative effort between a Head Start lead teacher and an educational scholar, focusing on a Head Start classroom in a non-traditional migration area in Pennsylvania. The joint initiative, called *Juntos*, was undertaken to support children's bilingualism in a context where English is the dominant language. The classroom is located in a semi-rural region, a historically White-dominated area that has undergone significant demographic changes in recent decades. These changes have led to cultural, economic, and linguistic tensions between original residents and new immigrants. Such tensions are evident in the Head Start classroom, where approximately 95% of the students come from Spanish-speaking households. English has historically dominated this region, shaping both the educational system and societal perceptions. Despite the growing Spanish-speaking population, these structures have not adapted to accommodate this shift, resulting in English remaining the primary language of instruction, with Spanish-speaking students often placed in ESL programs. Consequently, school readiness has become synonymous with English proficiency.

In this local context, a bilingual lead teacher strives to foster bilingualism among her students while ensuring they meet school readiness criteria, even though her classroom is not designated as bilingual. Her efforts, in collaboration with a researcher, have resulted in students becoming proficient in both English and Spanish. This ethnographic study documents her resistance to the hegemony of English as *the* language of education and seeks to amplify and advocate for the voices of bilingual early childhood educators in linguistically diverse regions where language dominance persists, with the goal of empowerment and representation.

1. Introduction

It's a sunny and chilly morning in late November. I am standing next to Ms. Ariel (pseudonym) at the entrance of a Head Start center in the northeastern town of Heinzburgh (pseudonym), Pennsylvania. Parents dropping off their children, ages 3 to 5, bundled in heavy winter clothing, chat with each other in Spanish while children are mostly excitedly approaching us, saying, "Hola!" I respond with my shy "Hola" since Spanish is not my first language, and I can't say anything but basic Spanish words.

After the morning routine, I sit with the children for the morning circle led by the lead teacher, Ms. Ariel. We review today's dates, weather, classroom rules, and pledges in the usual manner; in English and Spanish.

> Ms. Ariel: Everybody, now it's time for the classroom rules; say it with me. "Quiet Voices, Listening Ears, Gentle Hands and Walking Feet." Very good, y ahora en español, "Voces Silenciosas, Oídos Escuchando, Manos Suaves, Pies Para Caminar. Muy bien."

Then Ms. Ariel brings out a picture book about fall.

> Ms. Ariel: Do you remember we were talking about fall?
>
> Some children: Yes, yes.

Ms. Ariel: So, what happens in Fall? ¿Qué pasa en el otoño?

A boy: Se cayo con el frio.

Ms. Ariel: ¿Qué se cayó con el frio?

(Children seem to be thinking.)

Ms. Ariel: ¿Que sé cayó?¿Que se cayó?

The boy: eso

A girl: Leaves!!

Ms. Ariel: Yes, the leaves! ¿y Que pasa con las leaves? What happens to the leaves?

Some children: Green, yellow, red, and orange

Ms. Ariel: Very good, Muy Bien. Yes, the leaves change their color.

Over the past few decades, the study of Ms. Ariel and the children are seamlessly translanguaging between Spanish and English, which appeared natural given Ms. Ariel's and the children's Latine[1] appearance. However, their translanguaging practices are unique and not always positively accepted in this non-urban area of Pennsylvania, where English dominates society, including educational environments. English has been Pennsylvania's primary and standard language since its foundation as one of the first 13 British colonies. Except for the Philadelphia areas, the majority of school districts do not offer dual language education programs other than English as a Second Language (ESL) support, which pulls students from the academic subjects and is not ideal.

The demographic composition of Ms. Ariel's classroom is atypical compared to the state data, where 81.0% of Pennsylvanians are Caucasian (US Census Bureau, 2020), and non-Caucasian populations are concentrated in urban areas such as Philadelphia and Pittsburgh (Penn State Harrisburg, Pennsylvania State Data Center, 2020). The Head Start center to which Ms. Ariel's classroom belongs is located in a unique and dynamic area of the Commonwealth.

In this study, I (author/researcher) introduce a bilingual classroom located in a non-traditional immigrant destination (also known as New Immigrant Settlements [NIS]), with a particular focus on our (lead teacher, Ms. Ariel, and I) "*Juntos*" (Garcia, 2023) initiative to maintain bilingualism among children, while the classroom is officially categorized and funded as a regular (not bilingual) classroom. Despite the increasing number of NIS forming across Pennsylvania and the United States, and the urgency of providing equitable education for new immigrant children, the existence and conditions of multilingual children in these areas, who are compelled to assimilate to English as the dominant language, have rarely been studied.

Employing critical participatory action research as its methodology, this study delves into how collaborative work between a researcher and a classroom teacher, defined as "*Juntos* (together) effort," can effectively foster passive resilience against the dominant language of English in rural and non-urban areas of Pennsylvania. The study concludes with a call to fellow educators serving multilingual children to

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[1] Latine is a gender-neutral term that refers to two different but related groups: one is from and identifies themselves with the countries of what is today called

Latin America, and the other group is in the United States who are descended from the first group (Wallerstein, 2005).

advocate for their students' language rights, regardless of their location.

2. Background Contexts

Head Start and Language Policy of 2007

As the nation's unique federally funded ECE program, Head Start was authorized in 1965 as a component of President Johnson's "War on Poverty" to fill the achievement gap between White, middle/upper-class students and students of color with low socioeconomic status. Since its establishment, Head Start has survived for almost 60 years and has been reauthorized under multiple administrations.

In the 2006/2007 reauthorization, the new policy, *"The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act,"* was legislated to respond to the relatively rapid growth of Spanish-speaking children served by Head Start (Beltran & Goldwasser, 2008). The policy states,

> (2) For dual language learners, a program must recognize bilingualism and biliteracy as strengths and implement research-based teaching practices that support their development.

> (ii) For a preschool-age dual language learner, including teaching practices that focus on both English language acquisition and the continued development of the home language; or (iii) If staff does not speak the home language of all children in the learning environment, including steps to support the development of the home language for dual language learners such as having culturally and linguistically appropriate materials available and other evidence-based strategies.

> (Head Start Program Performance Standards 45 CFR, Office of Head Start)

A central component of the policy is focused on raising the educational outcomes of dual language learners (DLL). To support DLL, language policy mandated Head Start grantees nationwide to incorporate "research-based teaching practices" that focus on "bilingualism and biliteracy." Under this policy, all children served by Head Start were now entitled to classroom instruction that incorporated their home language(s) and cultures (Ballantyne et al., 2008; Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center [ECLKC], 2019; US Department of Health and Human Services [US DHHS], 2018).

This policy is innovative and provocative, reflecting the Euro-centered tradition the US ECE has held (Souto-Munning et al., 2019), and can be a great advocate for young multilingual children's language rights and equitable educational treatments if it is implemented in an expected manner. However, how it is implemented in classrooms has rarely been studied, let alone within the dynamic circumstances of NIS.

New Immigrant Settlements (NIS)

Ms. Ariel's classroom is located in one of the NIS in Pennsylvania, which has been resided overwhelmingly by White populations until a few decades ago, then experienced a rapid demographic shift.

Beginning around 1990, a new trend of immigration growth emerged in areas without a prior established history of migration, and these areas are called by various names, such as new settlements (Negi, 2019), boomtowns, new Latino diaspora (Hamman et al., 2002), or New Destination (Oropesa & Jensen, 2010). In this study, I call them New Immigrant Settlements (NIS) (Jensen, 2006; Negi et al., 2018).

NIS are the areas that have been experiencing the fastest increase in new immigrants (Lichter & Johnson, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2018), mainly in Latine populations (Lichter & Johnson, 2006; Negi, 2019). Specifically, these non-traditional immigrant settlement cities or new immigrant destination cities have seen an average increase of 100% versus 32% growth in the Latine population growth when compared to traditional immigrant destination cities (e.g., cities in California, Arizona, Texas) (Lichter & Johnson, 2006; Negi, 2019).

Most NIS in Pennsylvania have been developing in areas formerly dominated by the White population. Within a short time period, they were hit by massive immigration waves. In the case of Heinzburgh –where Ms. Ariel's classroom is– the percentage of Latines was 0.4 % in 2000, and then in 2020, it became 67.7% (US Census Bureau). These numbers illustrate how massive the wave was and how rapidly the town has been changing. The rapid demographic changes have created tensions between newcomers and local people in various facets of the affected communities (e.g., social service) (Negi, 2019). In the case of Pennsylvania, how to support linguistically diverse students has been an urgent issue that has not been solved, and sometimes, it is not recognized as an issue as English has traditionally been the dominant language in the area. The status of English is difficult to flip, even when Spanish speakers outnumber English speakers.

As the number of NIS is still growing all over the country, and it is crucial to study those tensions. This study features a Head Start classroom that exists in the middle of a dynamic societal shift, and the intersection of the federal language policy and English-dominated language landscape. The hopeful policy expects educators to implement bilingual practices in the classroom, which are believed to create positive learning experiences for DLLs. However, how this policy is actually enacted in NIS classrooms has rarely been studied.

3. Review of Related Literature

The Importance of Mother Tongue

Re-realizing the importance of the mother tongue is essential for our Juntos effort. Though its importance doesn't fade as we age, mother tongues play a significant role, especially in the early years of our lives and in early childhood educational settings (Wiley & Wright, 2004). Numerous research investigate the significant role mother tongues play in people's lives (Faridy & Syaodih, 2016; Ibrokhimvitch, 2022; Nishanthi, 2020); Mother tongue is central in framing the thinking and emotions of individuals, and people establish the core of themselves and recognize it through mother tongues. Namely, the mother tongue is an essential tool for the development of humans (Nishnthi, 2020). It is also children's fundamental right that their home culture and language are respected in educational settings (National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 2015). These two factors indicate how essential it is to prepare a learning environment where children's language repertoires are treated equally and equitably.

Recently, several policy reports in ECE, such as Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English, Promising Futures (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017), and Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 8 (Kelly & Allen, National Research Council, 2015), as well as the joint policy statement from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service and Education (2016)

entitled "Supporting the Development of Children who are Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood Programs" illustrated the importance of mother tongue and the benefit of bilingualism (Garrity et al., 2018). This policy statement was a foundation of the Language policy of Head Start.

Learning Environments for Young Immigrant Children

The positive effects of high-quality early childhood care and education on children's early development and learning are well-documented (Nores et al., 2005; Snow & Paez, 2004; Souto-Manning, 2009), and it is especially true for immigrant children because preschools can be the first setting in which children systematically face dominant socio-cultural values and are expected to abide by and embody them (Henward et al., 2019; Souto-Manning, 2009; Tobin et al., 2013).

Immigrant children construct their identities from messages present within their early environment (Gaias et al., 2021) while they negotiate with two or more different cultures. Multiple studies have found that culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse children are likely to be confronted with the challenges of assimilating into mainstream values that conflict with familial practices and values (Souto-Manning et al., 2019). Young children who experience cultural discontinuity between home and school may perceive themselves as poor learners and develop negative self-concepts (Tobin et al., 2013). Adair states, "Any experiences of discrimination at this vulnerable age can negatively affect personal development and academic trajectories" (Adair, 2014, p. 3). Despite the importance of equitable educational settings at ECE, immigrant children's conditions are often overlooked because of their young age

and limited linguistic skills (Buysse et al., 2005; Corsaro, 2006).

ECE consists of various facets in which children learn through active and multimodal engagement with relationships and experiences, and as they learn, their social and emotional development proceeds. Socioemotional development is integrally connected to cognitive development. This development is varied and is affected by children's sociocultural contexts (Souto-Manning, 2009). Teachers and peers are two of the most important influencers on young children because of the direct interactions they have with those two groups outside of home environments. Teachers especially can play a paramount role as young children move through fluid identities and start recognizing and navigating within and across spaces of cultural difference (Gort & Pontier, 2013; Souto-Manning, 2009; 2019; Tobin et al., 2013; Henward, 2018; Henward et al., 2019). Numerous studies express how teachers' beliefs, perspectives, and practices affect multicultural/multilingual children. (Hyland, 2010; Lopez, 2017; Sung & Akhtar, 2017; Pontier et al., 2020).

4. Theoretical Frameworks

Translanguaging Theory

The translanguaging theory relies on a conceptualization of the usage of more than two languages as a dynamic semiotic system integrating various lexical, morphological, and grammatical linguistic features in addition to social practices and individual linguistic embodiment (Garcia & Kleyn, 2016). This is a theory that perceives bi/multilingualism positively (MacSwan, 2017), rejecting the deficit perspective toward people who speak the

dominant language as their second or third language.

The origin of translanguaging is Cen Williams' (1994) research work regarding the development of language skills across high schools in Wales. He used the term "trawysieithu" (Welsh), translated to translanguaging, to express how Welsh high school students used Welsh and English inseparably. According to him, the language phenomena of those students could not be understood by the previous concepts of languages, including bilingualism. Baker (2003) translated this Welsh term into translanguaging when he introduced Williams' work.

As Williams points out, multilingual people's linguistic actions are hard to understand or explain from the outside, especially what is going on within their brains and psyches when they linguistically communicate with others. The *trans*-prefix communicates the ways that multilingual people's language practices go beyond linguistic boundaries, such as standard language or named languages (Otheguy et al., 2015). By focusing on a speaker's perspective, translanguaging theory rejects the monolinguistic way of categorizing or labeling linguistic activities, including bilingualism or code-switching. It is a groundbreaking perspective toward multi-languaging (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Also, the "languag*ing*" part of translanguaging expresses that translanguaging takes language as dynamic and fluid, something that is deeply related to individuals as well as society, not a concrete grammatical system.

As the new perspective allows us to look at multilingualism as it is, the translanguaging theory also has leveraged language rights for minority people in society. The original work of Williams came with advocating movement for

the Welsh language, and this decolonizing flow has led to linguistic equity in education. Namely, speaking a non-standard language or utilizing all sorts of language resources has been re-valued (Canagarajah, 2018; Cioe-Pena, 2015).

Juntos: Beyond theory

As discussed, translanguaging theory sprouted from the attempt to efface boundaries between named languages and to respect and accept how multilingual people process and utilize languages. These attempts have led to resistance to the status quo of English as "the" language. As part of the resistance initiatives, Ofelia Garcia (2023) proposes a new stance by combining the translanguaging theory and the juntos stance. The juntos stance in translanguaging is defined as 'the teacher's mindset of joint collaboration among themselves and their students, and their families and communities, as well as the joint elaboration of students' language and cultural practices' (Garcia, 2023, xvii). Now, Garcia takes them a step further and effaces another boundary: the boundary between university researchers and teachers, to fulfill the original goal of translanguaging. In this essay, I refer to the juntos stance as 'juntos effort' because, for us, Ms. Ariel and I, the project and its outcomes are the result of our tireless efforts.

In the juntos effort, the research practice differs from the traditional one. Researchers from universities are no longer the authoritative figures of the field who are expected to know more than teachers or who are devoid of any subjectivities, let alone vulnerability. For example, Hamman-Ortiz (2024) illustrates how the researcher felt vulnerable when the teacher observed them, which tended to happen or be recorded only for teachers. In addition to being aware of their subjectivities, researchers learn the limitations of their idealized translanguaging

or imposing policies and curricula on teachers by observing the classroom realities closely.

For teachers, it is a great opportunity to observe their language practice objectively together with someone who understands the bigger picture, which rarely happens without the feeling of being judged. As a result of the non-hierarchical, juntos collaborative efforts, researchers and teachers co-design and generate together the pedagogical methods that reflect the local context of the classroom.

That is exactly what Ms. Ariel and I did for the project aiming to preserve her students' bilingualism. Namely, after we found that we both held the same linguistic beliefs and goals, we confirmed that we had equal status, that each other's comments were not meant for judgment, and that we were sharing those comments merely for the children's sake prior to the start of the project.

5. Current Project

This project is part of a larger study regarding Head Start's language policy and its implementation, which I conducted as a dissertation project. For the study, I obtained permission from the regional Head Start educational manager to visit Ms. Ariel's classroom to conduct ethnographic observations. I visited her classroom two to three times a week for seven months. During my visits, I observed a shift in Ms. Ariel's language practices. After a few weeks of observation, I noticed she started to use more English than Spanish, especially at the beginning of dialogues with the children. I became curious about what caused the change and asked her. She replied that it was for school readiness. She stated, "I know most students are going to public kindergarten after us, and they won't be allowed to speak Spanish, so I need to make sure they

can speak English by then. And to be honest, since you are here, I wanted to show that I am doing my job."

As a bilingual myself, I had been admiring and appreciating her bilingual practices. Therefore, it was shocking for me to learn her intention, and I regretted that my presence had forced her to change her language practices. I explained that I was observing her not to judge her practices, and I believed bilingualism among children should be preserved. This conversation led us to realize that we had similar ideas about children's bilingualism and language practices in classrooms. Namely, both of us believe bilingualism is a great asset in various ways for children, and educators need to preserve it as much as possible while preparing children for English-dominant public education in Pennsylvania. After this acknowledgment, we launched the project to find a way to maintain children's bilingualism in English-dominated local landscape.

Methodology

In this study, we rely on Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) and the notion of juntos stance (Garcia, 2023) as a data collection and analysis, and the comparative case study method (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017) as a data analysis tool. Originating with Kurt Lewin, an American psychologist, action research has been applied in various fields (Holter & Schwartz-Barcott, 1993), and it is defined as "a form of collective self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out" (Kemmis & McTaggert, 1990, p. 5). Critical participatory action research focuses especially

on the demographic participation of all participants within all research processes, such as problem recognition, designing and conducting the research, and analyzing the data (Torre et al., 2012). McTaggart et al. (2017) state, "By participating in *public spheres*, participants create *communicative action* and *communicative space*—clarifying their concerns, informing changes in their practices, and creating *communicative power* and *solidarity*" (p. 21).

Borrowing this approach and combining it with *juntos* stance, Ms. Ariel and I corroborated in each research process while we fulfilled different roles as a classroom lead teacher and a visiting researcher. The research process includes generating research questions, research design, data collection, and data analysis.

Roles of Ms. Ariel and the Author

Ms. Ariel's classroom is located in a northeastern rural town in Pennsylvania, which is categorized as an NIS. The Head Start program rents an old school building that used to be a religious school. The center runs five classrooms, and two of them have bilingual lead teachers, while all classrooms have bilingual assistant teachers. This center is unique in having a non-White, bilingual center manager who encourages bilingualism throughout the center, even though all five classrooms are categorized as regular (non-bilingual) classrooms. However, more than 95% of the children they serve are immigrants or second-generation immigrants from the Dominican Republic or Puerto Rico.

Ms. Ariel is a newly hired bilingual lead teacher. Her family originates from the Dominican Republic, but Ms. Ariel was born and raised in New York City. Bilingualism was a natural status for her as she grew up. All her family members spoke mainly Spanish at home, and her grandparents spoke only Spanish. She attended a bilingual school where education was conducted in both Spanish and English. Thus, she did not reflect on her language practices and their associations until she moved to Pennsylvania to teach at the Head Start center. She stated, "As I learned about the schooling system here and the fact that public schools don't offer bilingual programs, the pressure my colleagues talk about, 'we need to prepare kids for English-only classrooms,' made more sense to me. We (Spanish-speaking Latine) are now a majority in this town in number, but we are still a minority in many senses." As mentioned, she succumbed to the pressure until we launched the project.

When we found that we shared similar linguistic beliefs and goals, we conceived the idea for this project together. Our goal was to maintain Ms. Ariel's students' bilingual skills while preparing them to learn in English-only classrooms. To fulfill that goal, we planned to:

1. Intentionally modify the use of languages.

2. Learn from other bilingual classrooms.

3. Collect comparative data from other Head Start classrooms to evaluate our method.

Over the next five months, we fulfilled our roles as a classroom lead teacher and a visiting researcher as described below:

Ms. Ariel: As the lead teacher, Ms. Ariel modified her language usage in formal conversations (such as circle time) and informal communications (such as chatting during mealtime) based on our observations and discussions. Initially, she started the school year mainly using Spanish since most of her children came from Spanish-speaking households (which

she found out about through home visits). She began most conversations in Spanish, then repeated the same thing in English. Sometimes, if an English term was new to the children, she asked them to repeat the word she modeled in English. As the children got used to the daily routines, she reversed the order, using a word first in English and then pairing it with the same term in Spanish. After observing the language practices of individual children, we modified her language practices to respond to each child's needs. For example, if a child primarily spoke in Spanish, she emphasized English to them by speaking to them in English and asking them to say or repeat words in English. She did the opposite for children who primarily used English. This practice was something the author previously learned while visiting a bilingual Head Start classroom, where most students maintained their 50/50 language skills when they finished the program.

Author: While Ms. Ariel led the class, the author visited Head Start classrooms in other NIS to learn about the language practices occurring there and to collect data for comparison with Ms. Ariel's students. During these visits, the author focused on circle time, particularly on 1) which language lead teachers used to start conversations, 2) which language they used most frequently during circle time, and 3) which language children chose when responding to the teacher. The author also observed free time to determine which language children used to communicate with each other and interviewed teachers.

Both of Us: Ms. Ariel and the author frequently held meetings and informal discussions to exchange observations and decide on modification plans for each child.

At the end of the project, just before the winter break of 2022, we evaluated Ms. Ariel's

students' language practices and compared the assessment with the data collected from other classrooms to see whether our language strategy made a difference.

6. Findings

Observations of children's language choice

It's lunchtime, and five to seven children are sitting at each table. I sit next to Lillian (pseudonym), a Latine girl with bouncy pigtails adorned with big ribbons. We converse in English about Lillian's favorite birthday party themes.

> The Author: Did you have a Belle-themed party this year?
>
> Lillian: Yes! I wore a yellow dress like Belle and had a cake with a castle.
>
> The Author: Is Belle your favorite princess?
>
> Lillian: No, I have another favorite, but next birthday, I want to have a Barbie party!

Then, Ms. Ariel approaches to encourage Lillian to eat a tangerine in English. Suddenly, Lillian hits the table with her fists and exclaims,

> Lillian: No me gustan!! (I don't like them).

As the conversation with the author indicates, Lillian has good English skills, while her instant response to Ms. Ariel's suggestion is Spanish. Lillian knows Ms. Ariel speaks Spanish and she is allowed to express her feelings in the most comfortable manner. This is the examples how the children in Ms. Ariel's classroom utilize

both Spanish and English without hierarchical orders. Similarly, Beto (pseudonym) demonstrates his translanguaging in the following example.

One morning, during free time, the sandbox was opened for the first time. Everyone was excited, but it was not as large a sandbox as is typically available in playgrounds. Therefore, Ms. Margarita (an assistant teacher, pseudonym) announced that to the children that they all had to take turns and that there could be only four friends sharing the space at a time. As an outsider, I was curious about how they would manage turn taking after Ms. Margarita randomly assigned four children to the sandbox. I wondered, "What will happen if they want to play with their best friends in the sandbox?" and I was right. Nick (pseudonym) wanted to play with his best friend, Beto, in the sandbox and he invited Beto to join him in Spanish. Beto approached me about his dilemma:

Beto: Can I join the sandbox?

Me: Hmmm, I think Ms. Margarita said only four friends, and there are... how many?

Beto: Four.

Nick: Beto, ¿Quieres jugar conmigo?

Beto: No puedo porque ustedes ya son 4.

I was amazed at how quickly children tailoring their words to use the appropriate language for a particular person. Like Beto, many children spoke to me in English without hesitation; they knew that from my Asian appearance, that I was not a Spanish speaker. In this conversation, Beto replied to me in English, and then the next moment, he responded to his peer who had invited him to join the sandbox in

Spanish. In his (and many children in the classrooms) brain, the two languages co-exist.

The next example displays children's English skill development.

One day, during lunch time: It's been a cloudy, rainy day, but at that moment, the sun breaks through and illuminates the classroom. Ms. Ariel looks up from her plate and says, "Wow, the sun is coming out, how nice." With that remark, Roddy(pseudonym) looks up and smiles, then excitedly exclaims, "The sun is coming out; it is dunny now!!" Then, Ryan (pseudonym), seated next to Roddy, corrects, "It's not 'dunny,' it's 'sunny. '" Roddy responds, "Yes, it's 'dunny,' not 'dunny,'" indicating she may not recognize the difference between the 'd' and 's' sounds.

Four weeks later, on another cloudy day, when it's time for the children to go home, the sun emerges. Roddy exclaims with improved English pronunciation, "It's sunny now, it's sunny!!" jumping up and down. It's mid-November, and Roddy's English has shown improvement over the past four weeks, though she still primarily uses Spanish. (All examples are from the author's field notes).

These are just three of the countless bilingual/translanguaging moments among the children in Ms. Ariel's classroom. Additionally, as mentioned at the beginning of the essay, Ms. Ariel and the children were translanguaging during circle time. The author also recorded the ratio of Spanish and English in their interactions, indicating that they use English slightly more than Spanish, but overall, most children utilize both languages flawlessly during the observation period.

Comparative results

To evaluate how much our intentional language modifications affect children, I visited three additional Head Start classrooms located in NIS around Pennsylvania to observe their language practices. Surprisingly, most classrooms conducted English-only practices when the classrooms were not categorized and run as bilingual programs (see Table 1).

Table 1: Comparative Sites

Town	Percentage of Multilingual Children	Classroom Language	Teachers
Springstown	99%	English only	English-speaking Spanish-speaking
Heinzburgh	98%	Close to 50/50	Ms. Ariel's Classroom
Pocono Valley	95%	50/50	Bilingual Program
Clanton	25%	English only	English-speaking

The classroom in Pocono Valley is operated as a bilingual classroom, staffed with three bilingual teachers and equipped with linguistic resources. It operates as a 12-month program, and therefore, a 50/50 bilingual practice is expected. On the other hand, regular classrooms operate as nine-month programs, with fewer resources available for bilingual practices. Whether they implement bilingual practices depends on the intentions of the center manager and lead teachers.

During the interviews, most lead teachers expressed school readiness pressure, with the preservation of children's bilingualism appearing to be of minor concern to them. Based on the comparative analysis and observation of the students' linguistic interactions, we concluded that our intentional effort to maintain the children's bilingualism was effective and had an impact on their language practices.

7. Discussion

We concluded that our efforts successfully supported the children in using both Spanish and English in the classroom based on the data we collected. At the surface level, it is merely a language skill, but it means more than that when we look at the children and their languaging through translanguaging theory as discussed in the following.

Power of English in NIS in Pennsylvania

In summary, it appears that in Islamic Sharia laws, someone below puberty age is generally known as a child but other factors such as manners, the way a person behaves in the face of difficulties, including demonstrating maturity in one's choices as well as physique have a significant impact in real situational contexts on describing someone as a child or an adult. In other words, childhood is socially constructed and situationally negotiated. In Persian, this is more true of *bache*, which is the more common one in everyday discourse, and less of *kudak*,

which is more about chronological age and is more, but not exclusively, used in academic and bureaucratic discourse on children and childhood. This non-chronological definition of 'child' in the Iranian culture and the emphasis on intellectual maturity challenges the universalist definitions of childhood based solely on chronological age and lends support to perspectives that advocate a social constructionist view that focuses on historical and cultural variations (e.g., James and Prout, 1997; Gittins, 1998; Montgomery, 2009). The confusion over the non-age-based, traditional and the age-based, universalist definitions is reflected in, and is the locus of, an ongoing discursive and political conflict in the Iranian culture between tradition and Western style modernity (see Adelkhah, 1999 for the complexities of modernity in Iran). As the comparative analysis indicates, despite the fact that the school is located in NIS and serves a high number of children from Spanish-speaking households, two classrooms out of four conducted English-only practice. Behind their monolingual practice is the status quo of English as a standard educational language in Pennsylvania. Like other states originating from 13 colonies, Pennsylvania was established by the British and has been inhabited mostly by White, English speakers. Namely, English is the only language, and its status has not been doubted or challenged significantly. In those circumstances, educators tend to believe that "they (students) have to speak American because now they live in America" (Tobin et al., 2013). Similarly, most school districts, except for the ones in the Philadelphia area, don't offer bilingual programs (Pennsylvania Department of Education). The common belief and school readiness pressure reinforce English-only practices, which need to change as NIS has been established throughout the states.

One of the ways to change is demographic alignment between stakeholders and served children (Joseph, 2021). One of the reasons Ms. Ariel could conduct bilingual practice was the support from the Latine bilingual center manager, who stood between the headquarters and the teachers. When we proceeded with the project, there was only one bilingual center manager (none in the headquarters), and it is quite important to bring the personnel who advocate for the served children into high-stake positions.

Children's Language Rights

Makoni (2012) states language rights (LR) is perforce a part of human rights (HR), echoing NCTE's statement mentioned above. Despite those statements, in reality, the LR of the speakers of minority languages is not recognized enough, especially in early childhood education (ECE). Due to the widely spread unfortunate language myth; young children learn new languages effortlessly and quickly (Beardsmore, 2003; Genesee, 2009), young children's language rights are too often overlooked. Their LR is actually as important as, or more important than, older children's or adults' LR. Lillian's most comfortable way to express her dislikeness of tangerines was, "No me gustan!!" not "I don't like them." Then, her ways of expression need to be accepted and respected, and they should not be corrected. This simple logic does not work in many environments, as the comparative results indicate.

Feeling of Belonging

Respecting young children's LR assures them that they belong to the classroom community. I observed one Spanish-speaking girl who could not join anybody due to the language barrier in one of the comparative sites

where English was the classroom language. She talked to her English-speaking peers, and none of them accepted her invitation to play with her. She also talked to her English-speaking teacher. The teacher responded, "Yeah, OK." However, when I asked the teacher what the girl wanted to say to her, the teacher said, "I have no idea." Those observations were painful for me because they reminded me of the days I could not be a part of any local social groups due to the language barrier and the strongly negative feelings I had toward myself, which is shared by numerous multilingual people (e.g., Anzaldua, 1987). As the feeling of belonging is one of the basic needs of humans (Behore, 2017), I was concerned about how the little girl would feel about herself in the environment, being rejected on a daily basis. Would she be OK since "she will get English soon," as her English-speaking lead teacher stated? Even if that is true, it is quite unfair for her to endure that hardship and to be mended who she is (Anzaldua, 1987).

Life-long Effect

When I visited Ms. Ariel's classroom, the children spoke to me in English from the beginning. One time, I asked one child, "Why do you use English with me?" Then he answered, "Because you don't look like us." I am Japanese, and his answer completely made sense and amazed me. They instantly chose a language to use reflecting the contexts, which not many people are capable of regardless of age. They do so unconsciously, but actually, those translanguaging activities stimulate a certain part of their brain and assist in their development (White & Greenfield, 2017). On top of providing safe environments and positive self-awareness, respecting young children's mother language and preserving their bilingualism are expected to contribute to the firm academic foundation, which affects them throughout their lives.

8. Conclusion

Ms. Ariel and I were quite pleased when we concluded our project. As the comparative data indicated, the status of English as a standard educational language in Pennsylvania is quite firm, and it pressures preschool educators through the notion of school readiness, which the educators locally understand as one of their responsibilities to ensure all students are capable of attending English-only kindergarten programs. For that purpose, preserving students' bilingualism can be sacrificed. Ms. Ariel and I desired to resist this pressure, and instead of actively critiquing the pressure or other educators' language practices, we passively protested by achieving our goal of preserving 50/50 bilingualism among the students, showing that bilingualism can be maintained while preparing children for Kindergarten.

Due to the nature of my position, I could not continue to visit her classroom regularly after my permitted observation period ended, but Ms. Ariel periodically shared her students' bilingual progress. According to her records, her students achieved the same level of bilingualism as those in the bilingual program. This achievement was possible because Ms. Ariel, the lead teacher, is 50/50 bilingual, and the classroom languages were limited to English and Spanish. Namely, our conditions could merely be uniquely fortunate.

One day, I asked Ms. Ariel what she would do if the school added a Russian-speaking child to her class, and she answered, "I would do the same. I might not be fluent in Russian, but I can at least learn the basics, and I will tell them it is totally okay to speak Russian in my classroom." Her response illustrates that what we

accomplished was not merely due to luck, and it is worth sharing.

I admit, and Ms. Ariel would agree, that it is not an easy process. It requires constant awareness of children's language practices. Each conversation counts, including greetings, such as "Hello" and "Hola." Additionally, we modified language practices for individual students, reflecting their linguistic development, which might be able to be replaced with a group approach. We hope our research story encourages our fellow early childhood educators to advocate for their students' language rights in English-dominant language landscape.

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