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## Learning from the History of Language Oppression: Educators as Agents of Language Justice

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# LEARNING FROM THE HISTORY OF LANGUAGE OPPRESSION: EDUCATORS AS AGENTS OF LANGUAGE JUSTICE

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*Abstract: There is a long history in this country of language oppression that has led to policies currently in place that affect the way educators are asked to teach. Therefore, educators must understand national and local language policy to know how it affects their students and how they can perform their duties as educators. Even though the U.S. does not have an official language, states have enacted language policies through court decisions and legislation. These policies have led to students being denied access to English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual education programs, resources, and accommodations, all of which lead to the silencing of entire communities from languages and backgrounds that are not “the norm.” However, with the help of policy makers and scholars, educators have reversed some of these decisions. Their examples show us that when communities work together, they can enact changes. In this paper, we explore the history of language oppression in the United States and how it affects educators, their students, and their communities. We also propose ways that educators can reverse the harmful effects of language oppression in their students’ lives in order to achieve “language justice.”*

A couple of years ago, the director of a non-profit organization serving a Latinx community in the Midwest received two visitors in her office. The visitors were two Latina sisters who needed her help for what they thought was a situation that did not feel right to them, but they lacked the resources to move forward and fight back. One of the sisters was worried as a rural school district had denied her enrollment for her 5-year-old son at the school that his cousins also attended. The mother had intentionally moved to this school district because her sister was her support system as she was going through cancer treatment. The little boy did not speak English, and she knew he would need an English as a Second Language (ESL) class. The school recommended that she go to another school district as they were an “All-American School” and did not have an ESL teacher in their staff to serve English Language Learners (ELLs). These mothers knew that these “excuses” were not right and sought help, finding in the process that what this school did was against federal regulations and that the school district’s denial of education services was against the law. With the non-profit organization’s support, the sisters advocated for their little boy, and the school changed its position. The school principal eventually found a teacher in the school who was endorsed to teach ESL, and they developed an instructional plan to provide the required services to this boy. The non-profit director eventually found out that other families had also gone through the same ordeal, and the school district had denied ESL services to their children. Consequently, the school district sent several of their teachers to receive ESL professional development to avoid an *Office of Civil Rights* (OCR) lawsuit.

This situation repeats in school districts around the nation every school year, and sadly, teachers, not their administrators, are blamed for not knowing how to serve ELLs in their classrooms. In the situation described above, when the little boy eventually started attending kindergarten, the classroom teacher felt powerless as the school district did not give her any professional development on ELLs’ instructional strategies or legal rights. However, the teacher knew that what the school district had done denying enrollment was not right. Even before her administration sent her to professional development opportunities, she had started seeking support from colleagues from other school districts with ELLs.

Often, educators like the one described above are asked to remain apolitical by educational leaders and the public. However, as Paulo Freire has stated, education is, and will always be political; even the act of remaining

neutral is a political choice (Freire, 1998). Therefore, educators must understand national and local language policy to know how it affects their students and how they can perform their duties as educators. Educators need to identify why denying services to ELLs is against federal law, and to understand that ELLs have a right to receive a quality education regardless of their race, language, national origin, and more (PD Café, 2017). There is a long history in this country of language oppression that has led to policies currently in place that affect how educators teach. Still, many are not aware of this history, nor do they know how to identify if their schools are not following policy requirements. Here, “language oppression” is defined as official and unofficial policies enacted to assimilate minoritized groups to the oppressors’ language. These language oppression policies are based not only on racism and xenophobia but also on classism and other bigotry forms.

To provide teachers with tools to name these essential policies, we will explore the following topics in this paper: 1) the history of language oppression in the United States, 2) the way language oppression affects educators, their students, and their communities, and 3) how educators can reverse the harmful effects of language oppression in their students’ lives.

## **A Historical Perspective: False Assumptions**

Several myths abound in society surrounding the issue of linguistic diversity and privilege in this country’s history. Some of these myths include that immigrants in the past quickly gave up their native languages and cultures to assimilate and become Americans, that English is the official and only language of the United States, and that Bilingual Education is an experiment that began with the 1968 Bilingual Education Act. However, the truth is that the United States is now, always has been, and will continue to be a multicultural and multilingual country (de Jong, 2013; Wright, 2019).

Since the beginning, the U.S. has faced issues related to language, particularly in education. The founders of the United States never declared an official language because English was already well established as the dominant language, and therefore it was unnecessary. They also respected the diversity among the individuals who had fought for independence. Bilingual education has been in the U.S. since the 17<sup>th</sup> century and has existed for over a dozen different languages (Ovando & Combs, 2018). For many years, the message around language diversity in the United States followed a *pluralistic discourse* that emphasized the “cognitive, cultural, educational, and sociopolitical benefits of bi- and multilingualism,” but myths and assumptions, combined with intolerance, eventually led to the suppression of native languages by dominant groups that continues to this day and has had lasting, devastating impacts on communities (de Jong, 2013, p. 100). As de Jong explains, this *assimilationist discourse* stresses “the importance of having one (official) language to maintain sociopolitical unity and prosperity.... and assimilationist language in education policies and programs focus on teaching English” (p. 101). For the past 500 years, people in power have restricted the use of languages other than English for an array of people of minoritized identities, including enslaved Africans, Indigenous nations, Germans during World War I, and even people from Central and South America (Wright, 2019). Without a doubt, these policies follow assimilationist discourses, and this intolerance stems from ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and racism, and such policies have always been a deliberate ploy to take power from vulnerable people to exploit them.

## **A Colonized Nation: Oppressors and the Oppressed**

Throughout United States history, the federal government has taken it upon itself to implement assimilationist policies upon several communities, including enslaved people, indigenous groups, and colonies such as Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the Philippines. According to John Rickford, a linguistics professor at Stanford University, when enslaved people spoke African languages, it often instilled fear in Southern plantation owners (Erickson, 1997). Plantation owners worried that the people were plotting against them. Erickson explains that enslaved Africans were forced to speak English exclusively because of this fear, and slave owners prohibited them from speaking their native languages. Through “compulsory ignorance” laws, the government banned slaves from learning to read and write English, thereby stripping them of pride, history, and purpose. Plantation owners were not the only ones to engage in these harmful practices; they were also perpetrated against other groups. For example, boarding schools for Indigenous Nations also practiced language assimilation.

On October 6, 1879, Civil War veteran Richard Henry Pratt opened *Carlisle Indian Industrial School* in Pennsylvania, the first school of its nature whose goal was to assimilate Native American students. Pratt’s

educational philosophy is best described through his motto: “Kill the Indian, save the man” (Little, 2018). Children were ripped from their families, forbidden to speak their native tongues, and were not allowed to practice their spiritual traditions and cultural practices at the schools. They also were not permitted to use their indigenous names. It was only in 1978, after the passing of the *Indian Child Welfare Act*, that Native American parents gained the legal right to deny their children’s placement in these boarding schools (Northern Plains Reservation Aid, n.d.).

Around this same time, the United States acquired several colonies as part of the Spanish American War. These colonies included Cuba, Guam, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Hawaii. Even though Cuba and the Philippines eventually gained independence, the military-imposed education system’s lasting effects are still noticeable. There is an image available on the *Library of Congress* website named *School Begins* that shows Uncle Sam inside a classroom with several children (Dalrymple, 1899). On the front seats are children with his colonies labeled as Cuba, Porto (sic) Rico, Hawaii, and the Philippines. The other children depicted are indigenous, Chinese, African American, and well-dressed boys and girls from particular U.S. states (California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Alaska.). The children are represented with different colors and facial expressions. Uncle Sam shows a menacing attitude towards the colonies, and they do not look happy. The indigenous child has his book upside down, depicting him as “dumb,” and he is alone in a corner closer to the door. The Chinese boy is not even allowed inside the classroom, and the African American child is listening in as he continues to clean a window. Other elements on this image that merit attention include a book on Uncle Sam’s desk titled “U.S. First Lessons in Self-Government” and the message on the blackboard that says:

The consent of the governed is a good thing in theory, but very rare in fact.

England has governed her colonies whether they consented or not. By not waiting for their consent she has greatly advanced the world's civilization. The U.S. must govern its new territories with or without their consent until they can govern themselves. (Dalrymple, 1899)

The message on the board, along with the image, is an example of assimilationist discourse. Local politics dictated this discourse. President Theodore Roosevelt expressed his views through this quote: “We have room for but one language here and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, and American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house; and we have room for but one soul [sic] loyalty, and that is loyalty to the American people” (Bishop, 1920). Roosevelt’s assimilationist discourse led to heavy restrictions on German language instruction, and English proficiency became a requirement for Germans to become citizens. Throughout the nation, states enacted laws that prohibited teaching in any language other than English. As an example, the *Siman Act* was implemented in Nebraska in 1919 and stated that “no person, individually or as a teacher, shall, in any private, denominational, parochial or public school, teach any subject to any person in any language other than the English language” (Adelson, 2017).

In 1923, Robert T. Meyer, a Lutheran school teacher, was arrested at *Zion Parochial School* in Hampton, Nebraska, for teaching religious education in German during recess to his group of German immigrant students. He was convicted under the *Siman Act* (Karunaratne, 2018) and could have faced jail time and a fine.

## The Beginning of the Fight Against Language Oppression

Robert T. Meyer refused to pay the \$25.00 fine and fought his conviction in the Nebraska Supreme Court, but they upheld the *Siman Act*’s legality. Meyer did not stop there and fought his case, *Meyer v. Nebraska*, all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Meyer won his case, and the decision was instrumental in eliminating Nebraska’s *Siman Act*, asserting that it violated the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (Adelson, 2017). Justice James Clark McReynolds stated that “the protection of the [U.S.] Constitution extends to all, to those who speak other languages as well as to those born with English on the tongue” (Karunaratne, 2018, pp). This decision has protected the right of language minority communities to offer private language instruction outside class time.

Another legal battle started in 1944 as Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez, along with four other parents, sued *Westminster School District* in California when their children could not attend the local public school due to their Mexican ethnicity. In their lawsuit, they demanded an end to the segregation of Hispanic students. In February 1946, the U.S. District Court in Los Angeles, California, ruled in *Mendez v. Westminster* that it was unconstitutional to educate children of Mexican descent in separate facilities (Morris, 2020). In this case, the decision prohibited ethnic segregation in California schools, and it set a precedent for *Brown vs. Board of Education* in Topeka (Sass, 2020).

Consequently, in 1964, *Title VI of the Civil Rights Act* established that any organization is prohibited from discriminating based on “race, color, or national origin” (Sass, 2020). Title VI was and continues to be a constant reminder to avoid discriminatory practices on any organization that receives federal funding. It has been used in

cases such as *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) to reinforce the necessity of fighting language oppression in schools. Before 1974, the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) denied access to fair and appropriate school instruction to over 1,800 “non-English-speaking” Chinese students (Office of Civil Rights, 2020). They were placed in Special Education classes and retained in grade-level for years because schools did not provide supplemental English instruction. The schools did not include any extra services or resources to Chinese students, leaving them “sink or swim.” *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) was argued and appealed up to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ultimately agreed that the schools were violating the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*. Their decision stated that public schools must provide students instruction in their native language, arguing that failure to do so “denies them a meaningful opportunity to participate in the public educational program, and thus violates the Civil Rights Act of 1964” (Office of Civil Rights, 2020). Also in 1974, the *Equal Educational Opportunities Act* (EEOA) ruled that “No state shall deny educational opportunities to an individual on account of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin by... the failure of an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome the language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs” (Sass, 2020). The fight for quality and equitable practices did not stop there, and in the 1981 court case *Castañeda v. Pickard*, the *Fifth Circuit Court* ruled that regardless of the program model, the ESL or bilingual education program must be:

1. Based on a sound educational theory
2. Implemented effectively with sufficient resources and personnel
3. Evaluated to determine if effective in helping students overcome language barriers

Today, programs in all states should use this “3-prong test to ensure that they are not just providing a program to serve English learners, but ensuring its quality” (Wright, 2019).

Two other changes, one a Court ruling and the other a law, that educators should be knowledgeable about are *Plyer v. Doe* and the *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act*. The 1982 U.S. Supreme Court case, *Plyer v. Doe*, ruled that undocumented children have a constitutional right to receive a free public K-12 education (United States Courts, n.d). Therefore, school districts around the nation are required to serve students regardless of their immigration status. In 1987, the *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act* established that students experiencing homelessness are to be enrolled immediately (National Center for Homeless Education, 2017). Therefore, districts cannot require students experiencing homelessness to provide proof of residency, immunizations, birth certificates, guardianship documents, or any other sort of paperwork needed before enrolling. Requiring missing paperwork or any further delay to enrollment is a violation of the *McKinney-Vento Act* (National Center for Homeless Education, 2017). While these two changes do not directly affect language instruction, they directly affect English Language Learners’ lives.

## A Backwards Slide

While many actions advanced ELLs’ legal rights, some people were against linguistic diversity. Ron Unz, the wealthy sponsor of *English for the Children* initiatives, claimed bilingual education was a violation of ELLs’ rights to learn English (Wright, 2019). On his first initiative in California, Proposition 227 (1998), Unz used misleading statistics and data to support his claim that bilingual programs in the state had a 95% failure rate (i.e., only 5% of ELLs became fluent in English each year). That statistic was for all ELLs in the state, 70% of whom were in non-bilingual programs. There were other *English for the Children* initiatives in other states as well, including Arizona/Proposition 203 (2000), Massachusetts/Question 2 (2002), Colorado/Amendment 31 (2002), and Oregon/Measure 58 (2008). The last two on this list did not pass (Wright, 2019).

The state of Colorado is an illuminating example of the complex nature of both assimilationist and pluralist discourses. Quillen (2006) explains that before 1890, Colorado’s Constitution was printed in English, Spanish, and German, and it required state laws to be published in those three “official languages.” This pluralistic discourse changed in 1988 when the State Constitution: Section 30a established English as the official language of the State of Colorado (approved by voters in 1988). By 1992, Denver Public Schools was found guilty of “discrimination based on race in bilingual education” (Padres Unidos, 2003). This decision resulted from a complaint filed by *Padres Unidos* with the Office of Civil Rights. In this context, Ron Unz chose to target Colorado for his anti-bilingual English for the Children campaign. The initiative called Amendment 31 did not pass in Colorado “because of the OCR findings and the creation of dual-language schools across the state, Colorado received national attention and became a target for local and national anti-bilingual proponents” (Padres Unidos, 2003). This measure would have required that all public-school students be taught in English unless they received a waiver. These waivers would have been very difficult to obtain and given only in very restrictive circumstances. The defeat of the measure was

possible due to grassroots efforts that came together under “English Plus,” a Denver-based coalition that emerged to defeat Unz’s English for the Children (Escamilla, et al., 2003).

After almost two decades, leaders in California and Massachusetts have also taken steps to replace Proposition 227 and Question 2. In 2016, California’s *Non-English Languages Allowed in Public Education Act* (Senate Bill 1174), also known as *Proposition 58*, was on the November 8 ballot as a legislatively referred state statute. Voters approved the ballot initiative and ended Proposition 227 with its prohibition on bilingual education programs. In 2017, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker signed a bill into law to allow school systems to teach students academic subjects in their native language while gaining English fluency. Even though this bill overturned part of Question 2, (which banned bilingual education programs), schools still retained the right to provide English-only instruction. Arizona is the only state that has not taken significant steps towards replacing Proposition 203. Yet, there has been one change when in 2019, lawmakers in Arizona cut the number of hours ELLs have to spend in mandatory English-only immersion classes from four hours a day to two (Mitchell, 2019). This change might not be significant, but it moves in the right direction for a state like Arizona. The current *Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction*, Kathy Hoffman, is adamant about pushing for a full repeal of Proposition 203 and believes she can count on both Democratic and Republican legislators’ support (Mitchell, 2019).

## Today’s Realities: A Continued Struggle

### *Immigrants*

Immigrants are consistently stripped of their home languages when they come to the United States. Wiley and Lukes (1996) explain this assimilationist discourse as follows:

English Only, as a specific example of monolingualism, equates the acquisition of English and Americanization (i.e., with what it means to become an “American”). ...

In the immigrant view of language diversity, language—much like an alien form of dress—is something to be changed and not worn again, except perhaps on special ethnic holidays when it is considered appropriate to celebrate diversity. (p. 519-520)

Even though English is not the country’s official language, as a result of this “Americanization” process, immigrants feel the pressure to speak “Standard English” or how White, educated middle-class Americans communicate with each other. This “subtractive bilingualism” ideology (Lambert, 1975) in conjunction with “subtractive schooling” (Valenzuela, 1999), result in practices that affect immigrant children when they enter an education system that does not have a bilingual education program or curriculum (Cummins, 2017). A non-bilingual education system serves as a border for predominantly non-European, non-White, non-middle-class youth and forces immigrant children to participate in hegemonic and xenophobic education (Nieto, 2018). For example, most standardized tests are only offered in English and a handful of other languages, and classrooms are usually English Only classrooms (Hopkins, et al., 2013). Additionally, not all schools offer ESL classes, and a small minority offer dual language or any type of bilingual education program (Wright, 2019). Many immigrants face ridicule for not having an accent like white American middle-class people in their region, or are told to go back to their countries when speaking their language. Certain immigrants are even faced with violence, like Asma Mohamed Jama, who was beaten for speaking Swahili at an *Applebee’s* in Minnesota in 2015 (Crimesider Staff, 2015). Many immigrants of color are made to feel ashamed of their languages because their languages remind them that they are not white and that who they are and where they come from will always paint them as “other” and “not normal” in the eyes of America (Flores & Rosa, 2015). There is a double standard here: Americans love it when a French person can speak both French and English, even with a French accent, and they find it cultured. However, they do not show the same deference to Vietnamese people who speak Vietnamese and English or Guatemalans who speak Spanish and English (Pham, 2016).

### *U.S. English and Standard English*

Even though the United States does not have an official language, the states can vote to have English as their official language. There are currently 32 states that have voted to have English as their official language (U.S. English, 2020). Many of these initiatives have been led by the U.S. ENGLISH, Inc. organization, who in their own words describe themselves as “the nation’s oldest, largest citizens’ action group dedicated to preserving the unifying role of the English language in the United States” (U.S. English, 2020). Their main goal is to work towards federal legislation to make English the United States’ official language. In 2017, the organization worked with Congressman Steven King from Iowa towards introducing *H.R.997 - English Language Unity Act of 2017*. Even

though the legislation has not gone beyond the 1st step, U.S. English continues to use its assimilationist discourse to work towards other state and national laws to further their goals.

Language oppression is not just based on racism and xenophobia; it is also guided by dominant language ideologies, in that those in power define that there is only one “proper” or “correct” form of English or “Standard English” (Wiley & Lukes, 1996). This standardized form of English includes “expected linguistic behavior” that becomes “a kind of social capital facilitating access to education, good grades, competitive test scores, employment, public office, and economic advantages for those who have mastered the standard language” (Wiley & Lukes, p. 514). Language—including acquisition, word choice, and accent—is classed behavior and is considered a form of capital that we possess as part of our social class identity. Wiley and Lukes assert that “language, like race and ethnicity, can be used as a marker of social and political status” (p. 518). These classist and purist language ideologies perpetuate the myth that English has a standard form and promote monolingual English-only classrooms that “are explicitly embodied in restrictive language policies and their attendant instructional practices” (Palmer & Martinez, 2013, p. 281).

### *Indigenous People*

As previously mentioned, Indigenous people from many nations in America have been forced to learn English through violence, including at boarding schools where they experienced abuse and sexual violence, were punished for speaking their home languages, and were cut off from their families. As a result, today many nations have lost their native tongues. For example, before Europeans colonized this land, thousands of Wukchumni people were a part of the Yokuts nation, which had 60 tribes with many languages (Vaughan-Lee, 2014). Today, only about 200 Wukchumni people are left, and only one person, Marie Wilcox, can speak the Wukchumni language.

Unlike many immigrants who have some type of access to family connections and networks to keep up their knowledge of their home languages, Indigenous people do not have as many resources to preserve their languages and heritages. Their languages are not taught in most schools in the United States. According to Pteska Poorbear, who comes from the Pine Ridge Reservation, the descendants of Lakota interpreters who worked with the European colonizers are shunned on the Reservation and are not trusted, just as their ancestors were (personal communication, 2018). The effects of language oppression are apparent here: fractured and traumatized communities.

Nevertheless, various indigenous groups are fighting back, and in 2018 Alaska declared an emergency for Native American languages (Associated Press, 2018). The order follows a report presented by the *Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council* that warned that indigenous language could become extinct at the end of this century. With this in mind, the purpose of this emergency declaration was to promote and preserve all 20 recognized indigenous tongues in the state before they disappear. The order also instructed the Education Commissioner to work with partners to promote indigenous languages in public education. This order is only one of many steps that need to happen nationally towards overcoming language oppressive language education practices used to assimilate indigenous groups.

### *African American Vernacular English (AAVE)*

American society makes very problematic associations between African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and the idea that people who speak it are uneducated, violent, or gang-affiliated. People who speak it are forced to code-switch and mute a part of themselves when at work or during an interview. Even though AAVE is a real language, with its own rules and grammar, it is considered to be “improper” English (MacSwan, 2017). Rather than being celebrated for speaking more than one language, speakers are told that the way they speak at home is not correct or is not an educated way to communicate. However, if they reject AAVE, they are told by their communities that they “sound white” (Pepinster Greene, 2005). Non-Black people often appropriate the different languages of Black communities without any thought to how this may harm Black people; for example, using the “n” word casually or using AAVE without having to suffer the brunt of anti-Black racism that native speakers of AAVE face (e.g., the son of Tom Hanks using the N-word). Black people are then forced to face anti-Blackness violence while also witnessing their culture being mocked or stolen (Brennan, 2018).

### *Attacks on Ethnic Studies*

In 2012 the documentary *Precious Knowledge* presented the fight that students, teachers, parents, and the community in Tucson went through to try to save their Mexican American Studies programs (Palos, 2012). Right after the fight presented in the documentary, a 2010 state law banned the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) program. This decision motivated a group of Chicano writers, poets, artists, and activists in Houston, Texas, to get

together, pack a bus with the banned books, and go on a tour into Tucson to distribute the books. The group has become the *Librotraficantes* (book smugglers) and has spearheaded a national movement (Phippen & National Journal, 2015).

It took years, but in 2017 a federal judge in Arizona ruled that the state violated the constitutional rights of Mexican American students by eliminating a successful Mexican American studies program, saying officials “were motivated by racial animus” and were pushing “discriminatory ends in order to make political gains” (Strauss, 2017). Even though the ethnic studies program has not been reinstated in high schools in Arizona, other states have made progress in this area. In 2018, Texas became the first state to endorse *Mexican American Studies* (MAS), and state education officials gave final approval to adopt a curriculum that was implemented in 2019.

## The Responsibility and Duty of Educators

The Highlander Research and Education Center developed the term “language justice,” which means building and sustaining multilingual spaces in our organizations and social movements so that everyone’s voice can be heard both as an individual and as part of a diversity of communities and cultures. Valuing language justice means recognizing the social and political dimensions of language and language access, while working to dismantle language barriers, equalize power dynamics, and build strong communities for social and racial justice (CCHE Language Justice Toolkit, 2012, p. 2).

This definition of language justice perfectly describes the responsibility and duty of educators. Many first-generation people have experienced so much unaddressed trauma around their family’s languages that they have gone so far as to shame their family members for not speaking English or assimilating as well as they do (Christensen, 2017). In this way, we can see that the “internalized oppression” that comes from language injustice leads people to harm one another. The educators’ responsibility is to help mitigate that harm and guide students and their families to heal from it using language justice.

de Jong (2013) developed a pluralistic discourses approach that can be used to guide educational decisions. This pluralistic approach included four core principles to serve as an alternative to assimilationist discourses. These principles are “a frame for a broad audience that includes policy makers, administrators, teachers, the individual level, and working up to an institutional level” (de Jong, p. 107). The core principle guiding the other three principles is *educational equity*. It calls for educators to pay attention to “the values of respect and fairness as well as how school policies and practices treat bilingual learners as bilingual and bicultural individuals” (p. 107). For example, ESL classes are counted as electives across the nation and not even as a foreign language credit. ELLs are still required to take several foreign language credits for graduation and college requirements. This system puts high school ELLs behind their peers and sometimes denies them opportunities to graduate high school if they age out and turn 21 before finishing their high school graduation requirements. If schools did something as simple as counting ESL classes as foreign language credits, it would be another step towards equity.

The next principle is *affirming identities*, and acknowledge that educators need to know the basics of understanding how people learn, paying attention to how students’ engagement and motivation for learning grow when their experiences are validated and built upon each other. As we have seen, legislation around the country has banned Ethnic Studies programs, leaving students from minoritized backgrounds without any idea of the power and history of their linguistic and cultural legacies. When students see themselves, their cultures, and their languages in the curriculum or literature used in the classroom, they believe their perspective and culture to be both important and valued by other members of the learning community and society (Holland & Mongillo, 2016; López-Robertson & Haney, 2017). The third principle of *promoting additive bi/multilingualism* examines school policies and practices from an additive bilingual and multilingual perspective (p. 107). The individual efforts of educators could make this principle an easy one to implement. A valuable strategy that teachers can use is to allow students the autonomy and agency to communicate in their native language or the English language variety (ex. AAVE) that they are most comfortable in the classroom instead of demanding that they speak academic English. Without the ability to communicate comfortably, we deny students any modicum of control over how they navigate the people around them and how they make sense of their contexts.

The last principle, the *principle of structuring for integration*, looks at how a school’s various components—students, parents, and teachers, as well as programs and activities—connect, relate, and interact with each other and how these relations reflect equal status among those involved (de Jong, p. 108). Educators need to make sure that schools and classrooms are accessible and inviting to ELLs and their families. Accessibility consists of having materials and resources available in multiple languages representing the student body and the community,



and having enough teachers - including content area teachers - trained and certified in teaching ELLs (Umansky & Porter, 2020). If staff are available, it is vital to ensure that school systems are allowed to teach students academic subjects in their native language while gaining English fluency. Educators should advocate that bilingual and dual language programming or language support services exist in schools and include significant funding. The education system, as an institution, needs to redistribute resources and reduce disparities. For example, many interpreters are underpaid or not paid, such as when we ask students to interpret for their families or their classmates (Soltero, 2011). This unpaid emotional labor not only puts stress on the students, but it strains their relationships with their friends and family, while also compounding historical trauma they have experienced as a result of generations of language oppression.

## Conclusion

School should not be a place that perpetuates trauma; rather, it should be a place that helps heal students from trauma and guides them to thrive and grow. There are many ways that schools can contribute to the whole picture of healing and creating spaces for learning. Whenever possible, educators should also become involved in the policy-making process. As Edmondson (2004) argues, there are three areas in which teachers could get involved: “1) engaging in critical policy study, 2) educating the public, and 3) imagining new possibilities” (p. 87). We hope this paper has provided some tools and motivation for educators to become powerful agents of change in their classrooms and schools, and on the community’s larger stages, to influence the policies that affect them.

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