

LEARNING BELONGING IN THE CLASSROOM: THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN THE INTERSECTION OF SCHOOL, HOME, AND SELF FOR MEXICAN-HERITAGE CHILDREN IN CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL VALLEY

Abstract

This paper is an excerpt of an anthropological research project that explores how a sample of Mexican-heritage students situated themselves in the dual language program at a California public elementary school. In this program, students received roughly half of their daily instruction in English and the other half in Spanish. These 48 students were part of a student body in which more than 95 percent of students were Latino and 100 percent of students were considered “socioeconomically disadvantaged” by the state. Close ethnographic study through classroom observation, interaction with students, and staff interviews illuminate how students gained a sense of belonging at school, with emphasis on language use. Spanish-speaking students generally formed relationships with peers who shared the same primary language. Although the school as an institution and the staff as representatives of the school vocalized support of Spanish as an academic or public language, day-to-day interactions did not necessarily guarantee that this message or standard of belonging was upheld. Rather, it was in connections with peers of similar backgrounds that students found acceptance. This belonging is situated in the context of a broader cultural citizenship.

Learning Belonging in the Classroom: The Role of Language in the Intersection of School, Home, and Self for Mexican-Heritage Children in California's Central Valley

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A drastic achievement gap exists between the academic performance of Latino students, especially English Language Learners, and of White “majority” students in California’s public education system (Measure, 2011). A contributing factor to this disparity is culture shock, where children do not feel connected to the majority high-achieving academic culture in which Latinos are strongly underrepresented (Freedberg, 2013). The state of California cannot truly claim equality of access to public education when the learning environment culturally excludes or rejects the cultural norms or values of populations of color. In the school setting, cultural elements brought from the home environment interact with those originating in the public or institutional realm, and the result is unlikely to be an “equal” distribution of elements originating from each culture.

Bilingual Education in California

In 1998, the passage of SB 227 prohibited California schools from holding classes in a language other than English unless the school met a number of requirements, including receiving explicit permission from students’ parents. The statute also eliminated most programs allowing Limited English Proficient (LEP) students to remain in special classes for more than one academic year. In November 2016, the California public will vote on SB 1174, which would remove some barriers to offering instruction in a language other than English. Much of the discussion around these two propositions surrounds when and how LEP students should transition to English-only classes and this uncertainty speaks to larger debates about the contexts in which English-only policies, whether or official or unofficial, should exist in California and the nation as a whole (Mongeau, 2014).

Cultural Citizenship

Conversations about the unequal access to public resources afforded to Mexican immigrants and Latinos often circle back to issues of legal status and citizenship. The most recent calculations from the Department of Homeland Security estimate there to be around 2.8 million unauthorized immigrants currently living in California, with 59 percent of the nation’s unauthorized population originating from Mexico (Hoefler et al., 2012).

Popular discourse and media question what entitlements these unauthorized immigrants have in terms of access to certain rights and privileges (Cisneros, 2008). Official citizenship ensures the protection of complete legal inclusion in the United States, but debate surrounds which elements this country keeps out of the reach of unauthorized residents and to what extent this exclusivity is desirable. This project explores how accessible the environment of public education is for the children of immigrants from Mexico.

The United States currently grants citizenship on two principles: *jus soli*, “right of soil,” and *jus sanguinis*, “right of blood.” The former automatically bestows American citizenship on anyone born within the borders of the United States and the latter confers citizenship based on the legal status of one’s parents (Leydet, 2011). In contrast to legal citizenship, Renato Rosaldo and William V. Flores (1997) present the idea of cultural citizenship, defined as “the right to be different (in terms of race, ethnicity, or native language) with respect to the norms of the dominant national community, without compromising one’s right to belong.” Although not all immigrants may be able to claim political citizenship in the United States, there are fewer barriers yet distinct benefits to claiming this less official form of citizenship. This integration does not necessitate assimilation but rather connotes acceptance of cultural difference in a way that does not disparage those who are different from the dominant community. In the context of this study, I investigate the “cultural citizenship” that the children of Mexican immigrants have at their school—how their “right to belong” is compromised or upheld. I explore how stakeholders negotiate, implement, and perceive elements of Mexican and Mexican-American culture, such as beliefs surrounding family roles and use of the Spanish language, in the school setting.

Belonging at School and Beyond

This study examines how negotiations either reject or implement certain components of home culture during these negotiations. There is a cultural disconnect; home and school environments are inherently distinct. The differences between the norms of home and school experienced by Mexican-heritage students are greater than those experienced by peers who come from a background more similar to that of the dominant community. This disconnect is not fixed, however, and through students themselves, the norms of home and school intersect. In particular, children encounter differing conventions concerning language. How students navigate these differences affects how they experience belonging in the school setting and ultimately how accessible the learning environment appears to them.

The transition to being a full-time student in public school is an early moment in children’s social lives, in which they may form connec-

tions to other people, an institution, and/or other public associations. They begin to situate themselves in a broader social setting, a situation that they will continue to negotiate navigate and that could change in the future. Any change that takes place will require some degree of work against prior situations. The way in which these individuals perceive themselves in elementary school will in part make up the conception of self from which they will experience future or contemporary relationships with other individuals and connections to other institutions, associations, or social contexts. Whether or not children feel they belong at school establishes a standard against which belonging in other contexts can be compared. For the children of immigrants of color whose primary language is different than that which dominates in the United States, affiliation with or acceptance within a public institution such as a school can be one way to feel connected to a broader American community. In contrast, not strongly identifying with this space can make it more difficult to feel like they belong in other public contexts.

Methodology

I conducted my research during the summer of 2014 at a public elementary school in a small town in California San Joaquin, or Central Valley. A number of crops and dairies surround the town, driving the area's economy and attracting a large number of Mexican immigrants with labor opportunities. My field research had two main components: participant observation and interviews. I observed two groups of 24 kindergarten students that received half their instruction in English and the other half in Spanish. They alternated between two different classrooms in which the teacher taught in only the target language, whether it was English or Spanish. In addition to these two teachers, I interviewed three others, the school principal, and a school secretary. According to the California-mandated School Accountability Report Card, 96 percent of enrolled students identify as Hispanic or Latino, and 100 percent are classified as "socioeconomically disadvantaged" because they qualify for free or reduced-price meals based on their parents' income.

My time in the classroom was mostly dedicated to observation. However, I was occasionally asked to work with or guide individual students or to help the teacher prepare paperwork or assignments. Over the weeks, I interacted with and had conversations of varying seriousness with all the students in these two classes. As most interactions were student-initiated, there were some individuals with whom I spoke much more frequently than others. These conversations mostly took place in English but I conducted a fair number in Spanish, as well. All but two of the 48 students came from families that identified as having a Mexican heritage. My position as a younger adult with a consistent presence in the classroom, on

the playground, and in the cafeteria allowed me the unique opportunity to cultivate informal relationships with these children, and many quickly and eagerly accepted me as a friend. In contrast, my interactions with teachers and other school staff were typically more formal and purposeful.

Please note that from this point forward when I reference a place or person by name I will use pseudonyms to protect the identities of my subjects.

Moments of (Not) Belonging

Observed Behavior

In order to better understand the kindergarteners' senses of personal belonging at school in the midst of these continuous, uneven dialogues, I will examine particular moments of their experience at Del Vista Elementary. Specifically, I will analyze times when students appeared to be engaging in or opting out of the activity around them, whether this took place in the classroom or in less structured environments like the cafeteria or playground. The previously discussed dialogues and negotiations between family and school, although not precisely referenced by students themselves, influenced how comfortable and accepted they felt at Del Vista Elementary. Even if they did not explicitly recognize or could not articulate that the conceptions they had of family roles were supported or contradicted, students could emotionally and affectively sense that their own roles at home and school were different, prompting them to act in new or altered ways.

These necessary changes in behavior took place in a number of social arenas. For instance, students now had a much larger pool of potential playmates to negotiate. If the students had not been part of some larger, organized activity before entering kindergarten, their prior choices for playmates close to them in age were most likely limited to siblings, other relatives, and a finite number of friends or family acquaintances. Now, when all the kindergarteners at Del Vista Elementary were on the playground together, which was the case twice daily, children had more than a hundred potential playmates. If they chose to be social during this time, they had to negotiate the much larger group of peers to create connections and situate themselves. The goal of these interactions was to find an enjoyable, or at least preferred, way to pass the time, or to comfortably situate themselves during these periods that were not intended for classroom instruction.

Language Facilitates Peer-to-Peer Relationships

Language is a significant element for human interactions in general and for the formation of social connections in particular. Although Mrs. Garcia and Mrs. Rodriguez were each assigned a language in which they

spoke to their students and in which all activity within the classroom was supposed to be conducted, the children themselves, even in the classroom, exercised some freedom in varying the language they spoke. Especially in their interactions with peers, most children did not strictly limit themselves to speaking the assigned language. Some students preferred to always speak in either English or Spanish, and often, those who preferred the same language were more likely to interact with one another.

One girl who spoke almost exclusively in Spanish, Dulce, seemed to form fairly close relationships with a number of other students who also heavily preferred Spanish. Although she did not have a loud presence in the classroom, Dulce was quite open to making friends, and in fact was one of two students who exclusively spoke Spanish with whom I felt I formed a relationship. This was at least partially because she consistently took the initiative to interact with me one on one.

During the last week of my observation, I witnessed one of the most affectively powerful moments for me at Del Vista Elementary. After lunch and in the few minutes before the whistle for them to line up for class, Dulce, Nathan, and another girl and boy were playing soccer on the blacktop. Even though there was no opposing team, the four huddled together and the second boy, acting as their leader, explained what the plan or strategy for the following play would be. This boy spoke in English a vast majority of the time, but in this instance he was speaking Spanish, the dominant language of Dulce and the other girl. The group scattered and successfully maneuvered the soccer ball to “score a goal” by passing it across the edge of the blacktop. All four rushed together and celebrated by jumping up and down and hugging. The genuine smile on Dulce’s face as she ran toward the others left a powerful impression on me because the four appeared to share such a strong feeling of simple happiness and camaraderie. This joint experience that brought such joy was not heavily verbal, but all oral communication that did take place was in Spanish.

English as a Language of Power in the Classroom

The above moment was also striking because it contrasted so starkly with the times I had observed Dulce when her facial expressions suggested feelings of shyness, confusion, or helplessness. One particular instance in which Dulce’s discomfort was on display was when Mrs. Garcia had students stand in front of the class, orally list members of their family, and name something that they liked to do with these relatives. This chance to complete the activity was specifically intended for students who did not “pass” the first time. During the second assessment, she called pairs of students to the back table and had them tell their partner about the same two components.

For this second opportunity to perform the task, Mrs. Garcia

explicitly announced, “Even though this is English class, you can do it in Spanish if you don’t feel comfortable, Dulce, Roberto, Ivan.” She identified by name half of the six students who needed to redo the task, and they were arguably the three who had the most difficulty with communicating in English, in comparison with Spanish. When it was Dulce’s turn, Mrs. Garcia prompted her, “What do you like to do with your family? ¿Qué te gusta hacer con tu familia? Puedes decirlo en español.” This was the second of only a few times when I heard Mrs. Garcia address a student in Spanish. Yet, despite Mrs. Garcia’s attempts to make Dulce more comfortable or to even make the task easier for her, Dulce only stood in front of the class and shook her head. She hid the bottom half of her face behind the sheet of paper on which she had drawn with crayon her family members. In fact, only one of the six students successfully completed the task during this second opportunity to do so, and he was the only one out of this subgroup whom I would not identify as predominately Spanish-speaking.

Admittedly, it is not abnormal for a five-year-old to feel nervous, even to the point of not being able to do what is asked of her, especially standing in front of her peers and addressing a group of more than twenty people. However, this reality does not invalidate the fact that Dulce and the other four students who did not successfully present in front of the class were individuals who did not prefer to, or could not adequately, communicate in the official language of the classroom.

When given the opportunity, these students did not present in Spanish, and over the course of the event, out of the two languages, English was the more powerful. In fact, Ivan, like Dulce, did not orally convey even his discomfort or his disinclination to speak in front of the class. He only shrugged, including when Mrs. Garcia had Mateo stand with him, supposedly as a way to provide support and put Ivan at ease. Her response was to insist that he needed to say at least one word, “Yes, you need to try. Lo puedes decir en español pero tienes que decir algo,” to which Ivan silently began to cry. “You don’t want to try? Okay, put [your drawing] in your cubby.”

Mateo, a vocal boy who spoke English almost exclusively, had not been the best choice to truly support Ivan. The former had been calling out scores (where a score of one was the worst and five was the best) for everyone presenting and had not shied away from identifying those whose work he deemed subpar. In fact, when Ivan continued refusing to speak and began to cry, Mateo suggested in front of everyone, “Give him a one.” The pairing of Mateo with Ivan in order to provide Ivan with emotional support was ineffective at best and added more stress at worst because this peer was someone with whom Ivan minimally interacted and who represented the judgment that his peers could pass on him for not speaking in front of the class as directed. While Mateo was at his side, Ivan became so troubled

that he began to cry. In this case, both people actively reminding Ivan of his lack of fluency in English were predominantly English speakers themselves, whereas those brought to points of emotional distress, Ivan and Dulce, were predominantly Spanish speakers. This infliction of emotional suffering, whether or not it was intended to be hurtful or upsetting, signaled an uneven power dynamic in which those speaking English had the upper hand. Although Mrs. Garcia, the most powerful individual in the room, stated that those speaking Spanish could participate in their language of choice, they still did not feel comfortable enough to actually do so.

A parallel power dynamic or exclusion of those not speaking the classroom's official language did not necessarily exist in Mrs. Rodriguez's class, however. Likely, the fact that the entire school's official language was English influenced the reality that speaking Spanish in Spanish class had less power to exclude than did speaking English in English class. English was more generally accepted as a language for conducting the educational environment. Again, the school, represented by its teachers, used affective means, as demonstrated through Ivan's emotive reaction, in order to perpetuate its project of employing English as an academic language. This project was not explicitly intended to be at the expense of students using Spanish as an academic language. Nonetheless, students' demonstrations of discomfort, as connected to language use, suggested that the context of Del Vista Elementary was not equally accessible in Spanish as it was in English.

Attitudes on Campus Toward Spanish

Yet simultaneously, statements and practices by school staff expressed efforts to use Spanish. All school-wide flyers and documents sent home with students were printed in both languages, and as mentioned earlier many of the parent-teacher interactions I witnessed were in Spanish. Besides teachers of the dual language program that I observed, even white teachers who did not grow up speaking Spanish or had never formally studied the language made efforts to use what basic Spanish they could when communicating with students or with parents who spoke little or no English.

One white third grade teacher who grew up near Del Vista Elementary and had more than 20 years of teaching experience in the area commented on her interactions with students who primarily spoke Spanish. She noted:

...over time it doesn't make you feel uncomfortable. It's, it's natural, you know. I, in fact, I might even have better relationships with them. I don't know if I do, like you know, with Dolores, I was talking about her. I try to, you know, talk with her a little bit more. I try to get her to speak and get her to use her language as much as

she can and just make sure that she understands. Yeah, I, there's no barriers or anything, so... And that comes with experience, you know. [For] people probably that aren't from here or start out teaching their first year here, it might be a barrier, but not us oldies. And I speak a little, so that helps."

This teacher implied that she initially felt uncomfortable about communicating with students who did not have the same English proficiency as peers who were raised in English-speaking households. At the same time, this teacher stated that she did not perceive the inability to proficiently speak the same language as a barrier. Yet, it is hard to believe that someone like Dulce or Ivan would not see language as a complicating issue for their school experience, or as a factor that made it more difficult for them to participate in the classroom.

Language in the Development of Teacher-Student Relationships

Other teachers similarly asserted that not sharing a common language did not affect their relationships with English Language Learners. However, these declarations did not express the practical challenges to acquiring social capital that arise when two parties do not share a common language. The kindergarteners I observed at Del Vista Elementary played or interacted with their peers without heavily relying on conversation. In contrast, given that a student would rarely have a teacher's full attention, it was considerably more difficult to engage a teacher without speaking. Returning to Ramsey as an example again, one notices how, even though his behavior was arguably the most troubling out of all the students in the class, when he was silent he was allowed to stand alone for hours at a time with very little face-to-face attention with anyone, least of all his teacher.

In contrast, one of the most effective ways for a teacher to notice an individual student was through an audible disruption. To hold this attention, the child would engage the teacher in conversation. Even if the student only made a statement rather than posing a question, it was rare for the teacher not to make at least a one-word response if she was being addressed directly. Whatever barrier there was to initiating or sustaining this conversation was consequently also a barrier to any relationship that this conversation could foster. One cannot speculate with great certainty how much more interaction Ramsey would have with Mrs. Garcia if he had articulated his discontent with words. Nonetheless, it is fair to assume that she would have at least had greater direct opportunities to address Ramsey's concerns, and based on her interactions with other students who addressed her verbally, she most likely would have taken these opportunities to respond.

This hypothetical situation resembles how another student, a boy

named Fernando who only spoke Spanish, interacted with Mrs. Rodriguez for the first several weeks of the school year. Fernando was one of the students who consistently cried in the mornings, and his tears were the most frequent and the biggest spectacle out of those created by students who came to Mrs. Rodriguez's homeroom visibly upset (whereas Ramsey had the greatest observable struggle out of those in Mrs. Garcia's homeroom). As Fernando cried, he would often comment that he wanted to go home or that his stomach hurt, sometimes raising his hand in the middle of class to tell Mrs. Ramirez so. The majority of crying took place in the first fifteen to thirty minutes of the school day, but sometimes, the two groups of students rotated to the other classroom within the first five minutes. It was much less common for Fernando to verbally announce his distress on the days he started in Mrs. Garcia's class, where the teacher's response was always in English.

Mrs. Ramirez reflected on her approach to dealing with kindergarteners who had trouble adjusting to being at school all day, noting how she preferred to address the issue in a light-hearted manner and providing her interactions with Fernando as an example:

I kinda joke with them. Like if they tell me, 'Ohh, I want my mom,' I tell them 'Oh I want my mom too, but I can't because she's at work.' Or, like, just like, little things like that, I try to like, shake it off, or I tell them, 'Oh you're going to be okay. Like, you have to come to school. You know, you have to come and learn. You're going to be fine,' like with Fernando. Otherwise, he wants to go home every day...Like today he was going to start crying. 'Ohh, my cheek hurts.' And I'm like, 'Fernando,' I'm like, '26 days in school Fernando.' I'm like, 'Come on, we're done.' He's like, 'Ohh but this hurts,' or 'Oh I don't want to be here anymore.' I'm like, 'You've been in school all these days. Like, you've had time.' The same thing over again. I say, 'You're gonna go home later.' He's like, 'Okay teacher.' And I think he's, he hasn't cried, like he hasn't cried, like this week, just today he was gonna start, yesterday and today, but he's been fine.

Mrs. Ramirez rather thoroughly recounted how she responded to Fernando's uneasiness, demonstrating how the way that she spoke with him was a unique dialogue rather than a single generic or blanket response. She portrayed their interactions as a back-and-forth with each party contributing, rather than one side being completely dominant or prematurely cutting off the communication. If Fernando were to simply cry without conveying a reason, then Mrs. Ramirez's response would be more generic, less personalized, and ultimately less conducive to building a relationship between

student and teacher.

This personalization was possible because both Fernando and Mrs. Ramirez shared a language, Spanish, in which they could communicate with one another. In contrast, when Mrs. Garcia responded to Fernando's comments in English, he did not understand the language of her reply, inhibiting an exchange that could facilitate building a two-way relationship. Mrs. Ramirez, however, expressed care for Fernando in a more personalized way, and this personalization helped Fernando feel comfortable in the classroom. In teacher-student interactions, language was not only a mode of instruction but also, when the instructor was also called upon to play the role of emotional caretaker, a way for the adult to more precisely address the child's expressed needs.

Language, Relationship, and Belonging

Having a shared or distinct primary language in which to communicate significantly influenced the nature of interpersonal relationships at Del Vista Elementary. On the playground, students had the freedom to interact in whichever language they felt most comfortable and so often chose to interact more with peers who shared their primary language. In the classroom setting, students formally interfaced with both languages, but on the campus as a whole, English was still dominant, complicating participation for students not proficient in English. Still, having a teacher who conducted her class in Spanish provided those students the opportunity to communicate more precisely and use their home language to develop a relationship with an adult at Del Vista Elementary, a unique opportunity considering that only these two classes participated in the dual language program.

The relationships that students were able to form in their primary language provided them with a stake in the lives of members of their school community. This investment provided some reason to concern oneself with activities occurring on campus, even if the activity was something as non-academic or casual as what game a group of friends would decide to play at recess. Regardless, this concern is a connection between the student and the setting of these activities, which is the public school.

Conclusion

Acceptance Through Relationship

Though it is not the goal of this paper to quantify to what extent a child felt like they belonged at Del Vista Elementary, relationships suggest circumstances in which someone feels connected or accepted in a setting. Accepting an individual implies accepting or recognizing their practices and beliefs with or without having them one's self, though sharing practices

and beliefs can make this acceptance easier. In general, students more commonly aligned with each other in these two regards than they did with their teachers or principal, as illustrated earlier in the role language played in interactions and perceptions.¹ These shared values contributed to feelings of connection among peers when adults in the school setting less commonly possessed or displayed the views. Connections and similarities such as these played a part in one ultimately being accepted, rather than rejected, by at least some portion of the school population and in one having the sense that they were rightly in the physical space of the campus.

Students felt like they belonged with those who accepted them and their experiences. However, sometimes school staff and even other students denied or attempted to devalue cultural understanding derived from the home environment. Staff members' repudiation of these values was prominent due to their position of authority and power over students. Meanwhile, frequent encounters between children who came from similar backgrounds were more egalitarian in nature. There were a greater number of students than teachers with whom to interact. Furthermore, for the typical Mexican-heritage, Spanish-speaking child, a greater proportion of these peers identified with and accepted their values, when compared to the proportion of adults at Del Vista Elementary.

Of course, not all peer-to-peer interactions or relationships were without conflict, but students were generally able to find a sense of belonging in those associations, especially relative to dealings with school staff. Interestingly, when teachers demonstrated an acceptance of children's backgrounds, for example by conversing with a student in his primary language, students were likely to perceive something of familiarity or normalcy, rather than a disruption of the beliefs or practices to which they were accustomed. Nonetheless, this type of connection was easier to access among peers than when interacting with school staff.

Implications and Final Comments

Returning to the issue of cultural citizenship, conventions at Del Vista Elementary were distinct from those of the dominant public. Practices, such as the dual language program and rhetoric about the merits of both parent involvement and Spanish use, did not explicitly disparage the right of students to differ from the norms of the national community. In fact, on the surface they appeared to work to protect this right. However, these highly visible school policies or individual declarations did not ensure that day-to-day interactions promoted students' "right to belong" as part of the school, an institution that represented the American public more generally. Rather, children commonly found association and relationship in their

1 In addition to primary language, many of the students also had other aspects of their background in common, such as socio-economic status, race, and age, contributing to shared experiences.

interactions with one another.

Because students more often experienced a sense belonging with peers of similar backgrounds, they continued to largely engage with the same sort of cultural norms and social networks that they did before entering the school environment. Although they were consistently around individuals who could potentially expose or connect them to the ways of the dominant community, students' relationships with those adults were subject to various types of separation, including age, position, and authority. Even among peers, students tended to form closer connections with those who already shared many of their same life experiences. Consequently, relationships with these people who arguably experienced greater belonging in the dominant public or national community were not generally a gateway for securing one's own acceptance in broader society, either through social connection or by adopting certain views and practices.

Belonging and cultural familiarity were connected more to relationships with peers than the institution of the school as a whole. At Del Vista Elementary School, the dialogue and negotiation between cultural elements brought from home and those produced by the school and its staff resulted in an environment in which kindergarten students in the dual language program displayed comfort most often in interactions with those who shared certain components of their background, such as primarily (or only) speaking Spanish proficiently. These relationships did not do much to meaningfully connect students to white culture, the "majority" high-achieving academic culture. This disconnect is significant because familiarity and performance of these norms are often requisite for later success in public professional culture.

In the context of how Mexican-heritage populations within California and the United States do and do not encounter belonging and citizenship, the case of Del Vista Elementary students calls attention to the sometimes unspoken resistance these populations can meet in regards to their affiliation and integration into the dominant public community. Both gaining legal citizenship and acquiring cultural citizenship are processes to verify association with a country. However, while legal citizenship has well-defined results as to whether one possesses it or not, in this investigation, statuses of cultural belonging were less clear-cut, partially due to disconnect between overhead school policy and ground-level action.

This study illuminates how simply stating that one is accepted is not a guarantee of genuine feels of belonging. Nonetheless, these emotions are often the result of shared experience, but not having beliefs or demographic characteristics in common does not have to preclude meaningful or productive relationships. In the case of the kindergarten dual language program at Del Vista Elementary School in California's Central Valley, relationships with peers from the same cultural and linguistic background were

more accessible and fostered a greater sense of belonging than connections with more powerful individuals on campus with whom it was more difficult to relate linguistically. If dual language schools such as Del Vista Elementary truly desire to promote and protect the acceptance of students and their backgrounds, inclusion which is indispensable for students' subsequent academic achievement or more general success in society, then they must avoid the seemingly minor ways in which they devalue the home language on their campuses.

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