

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

“They Forgot About Us”: The Experiences of Dual Language Teachers
in Southern California

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A thesis submitted for partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in the
Social Sciences

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May 2, 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to give a special thanks to Karlyn and Max for all their support and guidance from the conception to the completion of this thesis. Thank you for your patience as I figured out what this project was going to be and for sharing your expertise with me.

To my mom and sister, thank you for all your support throughout this process. I truly could not have done it without you.

To Bubby, thank you for supporting me throughout this journey. From a listening ear to brain fuel, you were always ready to help.

ABSTRACT

This study explores how administrative practices shape the experiences of dual language teachers at two elementary schools in California, Grove and Orchard. Drawing from 12 teacher interviews, the findings reveal school administration to be the most salient factor influencing teacher satisfaction, resource accessibility, and the faithful implementation of dual language programs. While both schools operate under the same district mandates, administrative behavior mediates the impact of those policies in distinct ways. Orchard's administration demonstrated greater support for Spanish instruction and teacher collaboration while Grove's administration exhibited a preference for English and offered limited institutional support. These differences affected teacher autonomy, resource allocation, and coworker collaboration. Additionally, the study reveals how district-level decisions and inadequacies in bilingual assessment tools perpetuate inequities and undermine the legitimacy of dual programs. The findings underscore the need for administrators and districts to engage meaningfully with dual language programs and teachers to create equitable and effective bilingual learning environments.

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INTRODUCTION

The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s brought forth the popularity of two-way dual language programs (henceforth referred to as dual) which enroll roughly equal shares of native English speakers and native speakers of the program's non-English partner language (Flores & García, 2017). The stated goals of dual programs include for students to: 1. Become bilingual and biliterate, 2. Perform at or above grade level in both languages, and 3. Become bicultural (CPS, n.d.) (WOS, n.d.) (OSSE, n.d.). Instead of focusing on assimilation dual classrooms focus on the preservation and the diffusion of culture to their students, making them critical spaces for our country's diverse learners. In addition to their baseline teacher responsibilities, dual language teachers must ensure that their non-English speaking students are proficient in English to enhance their performance on standardized tests while ensuring that the whole class is growing proficiency in the partner language. Additionally, double the languages means double the needed resources (Knight et al., 2016)), and it is well documented that schools struggle with providing teachers resources in English alone (Hruza, 2023) (Bottani et al., 2019).

Evidently, dual classrooms demand more from their teachers than English-only classrooms. This project focused on developing a better understanding of the challenges English & Spanish dual language elementary teachers in Southern California encountered in fulfilling the goals of a dual language program. The question that drove this research was: What are the unique needs of dual language teachers and how can they be most effectively met to ensure these teachers' retention? Drawing on 12 semi-structured interviews from two elementary schools, my findings revealed that dual language teachers feel ignored, particularly when it comes to the Spanish component of their teaching. Limited traditional resources, the prioritization of standardized testing in English, lack of authority granted to teachers by their administrators and

district, and limited coworker collaboration restricted teachers' ability to honor their school's dual language system and challenged teachers' desires to remain in their roles. Teacher-focused research on the relationship between administration and teachers in dual language classrooms has been limited, with most pieces focusing on successful aspects of cooperation, or administration's expectations of teachers (Howard & López, 2019; DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2017; Lachance, 2017). This work explores the other side of the coin, detailing ways in which administrators and the district can fail to support teachers. My analysis of two schools illuminates how varying levels of support from different actors impact teachers' implementation of dual language programs.

Contextualizing the Issue

With the rise of immigration to the U.S. in the 1800s, bilingual schools became popularized to accommodate areas with high volumes of speakers of other languages (Gándara & Escamilla, 2016). However, the policies surrounding bilingual education were reliant on sentiments towards immigrants, resulting in constant change (Gándara & Escamilla, 2016). Anti-immigrant sentiment in the early 1900s led to segregation of Spanish-speaking students in border (Gándara & Escamilla, 2016). This segregation resulted in second-rate learning conditions for emergent bilinguals in border cities, depriving them of an adequate education. During the fight for civil rights in the 1960s, people became increasingly receptive to the struggles faced by emergent bilinguals in U.S. schools. As a result, the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 was passed and provided \$7.5 million to the development of bilingual programs. Like many other initiatives, this investment is speculated to have been driven by the desire to deflect criticism of discrimination, rather than address inequalities (Flores & García, 2017). The programs that emerged from this policy were largely unregulated and often occurred in extremely underfunded

contexts (Flores & García, 2017). In the 1980s, dual language programs continued to grow in popularity before being attacked by a resurfacing English-only rhetoric (Thomas & Collier, 2019) (Lindholm-Leary, 2015). This rhetoric resulted in the disinvestment of federal spending in training of bilingual teachers, multilingual curricular development, and doctoral studies in bilingual education. By the late 1990s, California, Arizona, and Massachusetts had passed English-only laws that limited the existence of dual language programs in public schools.

In California, voters passed Proposition 227 in 1998, requiring English-only instruction. This forced schools to shut down any existing dual language programs unless they obtained written consent from parents to keep their children in bilingual classes. The passage of Prop. 227 had detrimental impacts on emergent bilinguals, with the percentage of EBs receiving bilingual instruction dropping from 30% to 8% (Sellery, n.d.). Naturally, the passage of this proposition limited how many teachers were trained bilingually and how many teachers received their Bilingual, Cross-Cultural, Language and Academic Development (BCLAD) credential. In 2009, California modified their credentialing system so that instead of teachers having to receive a separate certification (BCLAD) for bilingual instruction, they obtained a bilingual authorization on their traditional credentials (CTC, 2025).

In 2018, following the repeal of Prop. 227, California pivoted towards becoming a language instruction-friendly state, presenting their mission of Global California 2030, which aimed to get half of all K-12 students to participate in programs leading to “proficiency in two or more languages, either through a class, a program, or an experience” (Singleton et al., 2018). This shift marked California’s commitment to popularizing and supporting dual language programs.

Currently, there are 48 institutions in California that offer bilingual authorizations in at least one language (including Spanish). Data on the frequency of bilingual authorization reveals a strong uptake following the 2016 repeal of Proposition 227. Except for AY 2021-22 and AY 2023-24 (likely affected by COVID), bilingual authorizations have consistently increased since AY 2015-16 (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2025). Though there has been an uptick in the number of authorizations awarded, the numbers still fall short of meeting the needs of California students. As of 2023 there were roughly 2.3 million students in California who spoke a language other than English home (California Department of Education, 2025), indicating a high need for bilingual teachers. An in-depth analysis into students' needs by the California Budget and Policy Center revealed that the student-to-Bilingual Authorization ratio for Spanish speaking students was around 240:1 (Kaplan, 2023). The inconsistencies between student needs and teacher availability highlight the importance of bilingual teacher retention and interest in being a bilingual teacher.

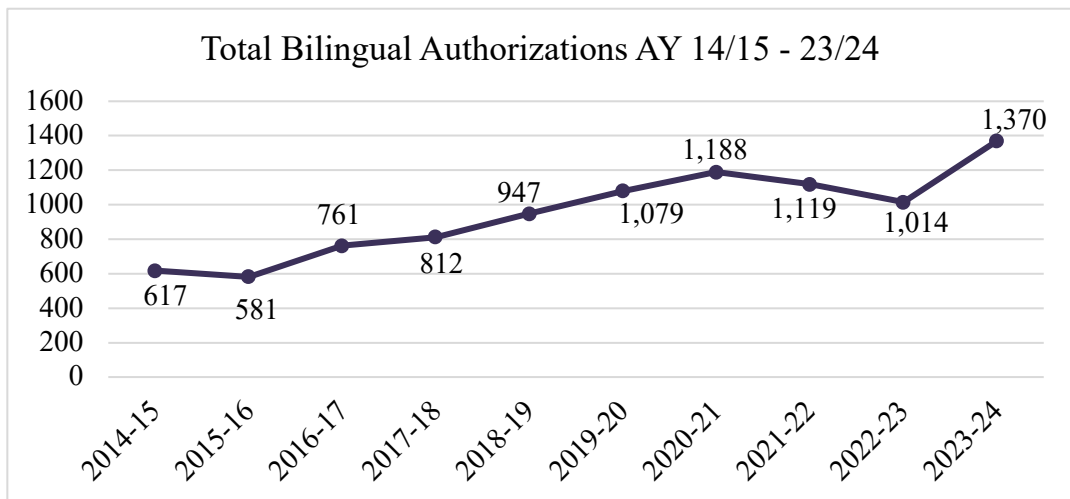


Figure 1: Bilingual Authorizations in California AY 14/15-23/24. Data retrieved from the Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

Conditions under the current Trump administration echo historical happenings with the current economic turmoil, declaring of English as a second language, and disregard for education, endangering the future of dual language programs. With the threats made against

federal Title funds for schools, there is ambiguity surrounding what will happen to the Title III, Part A funds which are intended to promote language acquisition and support immigrant students (Dept. of Ed., 2025). The ambiguity raises concerns for the future of bilingual education programs and the support they provide emergent bilinguals and immigrant students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Why two-way dual language?

There are many academic interventions for emergent bilinguals, but dual language programs stand out for their impacts on student achievement. The balanced language instruction in these classrooms is often credited with strengthening the executive function of students which in turn positively impacts their math performance (Marian et al., 2014) (Park et al., 2023). Additionally, students in dual classrooms are enrolled for longer periods of time, and this longevity makes it possible to see tangible progress. After around 4 years of enrollment in dual programs, emergent bilinguals in all subjects begin performing at or above grade level, often surpassing monolingual English speakers and their bilingual peers in English-only classes (Marian et al., 2014) (Thomas & Collier, 2017) (Thomas & Collier, 1997). These impacts are confined to two-way dual language programs, as other programs for EBs do not have as strong positive impacts (Collier, V.P., & Thomas, W.P., 2009). Some studies have found null effects on the academic achievement of majority language speakers in these classrooms, challenging the notion that the two-way system is universally superior (Steele, et al. 2024). Though an important consideration, this finding indicates that English-speaking students do just as well in dual classrooms as they do in mainstream classrooms.

An important caveat to all research regarding the benefits of TWDL is that they focus on students' achievement in English. Though the stated goal of these programs is to create a bilingual student body, the lack of reporting of programs in partner language retention is concerning. Additionally, the researchers in this field often fail to probe that angle, raising questions about what the standard of a good program is (Gándara, 2020). A focus on English retention over the partner language fails to follow culturally sustaining pedagogical practices and raises concerns that the two languages are not being equally valued in the classroom. To fill that gap in the literature, portions of my interviews were devoted to understanding how teachers were teaching and evaluating Spanish, how students were responding to Spanish instruction, the prevalence of Spanish resources in the classroom, and the overall treatment of Spanish by school administrators and the district.

Dual Language as a Resource or a Tool?

A prominent ideology surrounding dual programs is that they should exist as resources for emergent bilinguals (EBs) first and foremost (Flores & García, 2017) (Williams et al., 2023). In developing programs for EBs, schools must ensure that their most vulnerable populations are being educated properly by providing safe and welcoming spaces in which students can learn. This ideology holds that in trying to appeal to English-speaking groups, schools shift towards providing language enrichment to English-speakers rather than advancing linguistic equity and educational opportunity for EBs (Williams et al., 2023; Flores & García., 2017). Given the research on the demographics in some of these programs, scholars are right to be worried about how students are being impacted by the current structure of these programs. Researchers' inability to compare Spanish acquisition in dual programs plays into the concerns of these critics,

as it creates the danger of assimilating students instead of creating space for their strengths in mainstream education.

Other scholars view dual programs as tools for schools and their surrounding communities to thrive. These programs achieve this by being implemented in schools struggling to retain students and facing closure (Palmer & García-Malthus, 2024) (Darriet & Santibanez, 2023) (Gándara & Aldana, 2014) (Asson et al., 2023). Authors have identified how the implementation of dual language programs in struggling schools has protected them from closure and shielded their students and families from displacement (Palmer & García-Malthus, 2024). Research on the topic has also identified a correlation between the opening of a two-way dual language program, the opening of charter schools nearby and/or declining enrollment, suggesting that the schools analyzed also viewed two-way programs as a tool to retain and attract students amid increased local competition (Darriet and Santibanez, 2023). More generally, scholars writing about schools' relation to dual programs often explicitly suggest that schools adopt those programs to improve enrollment, attract more diverse students, and attract more resources (Gándara & Aldana, 2014; Asson et al., 2023). The implementation of dual programs for anything other than the benefits of EBs seems opportunistic, but if these programs save schools from closure, there are still benefits to students and families. This research expands on the literature that positions dual programs as tools for schools' benefit by probing into how administrators use dual language programs to benefit their schools.

A Focus on Teachers

This research positions teachers as mediators of knowledge, positioning them as the most important components of student learning. It also operates under the assumption that when

conditions improve for teachers, teachers can in turn improve conditions for students and ultimately improve student learning. As such, it is crucial to understand the experiences of teachers and identify any shortcomings that may be limiting their ability to do their job.

The examination of teaching practices in two-way dual language education classrooms falls within the realm of culturally conscious teaching (Navarro Martell, 2022). The idea of culturally conscious teachers (CCTs) stems from Critical Theory and situates teachers as agents of change that prepare students to be self-advocates, agents of social change, and to engage in the transformation of education (Navarro Martell, 2022). Within the language field, researchers view dual language educators as "critical educators" who bear a responsibility to their students and to the overall community. These educators are expected to either be from the community they are advocating for or have learned about and joined (through ally-ship or otherwise) that community. CCTs are also expected to engage with their students in strategic manners that enact change, meaning that their impact is deliberate and calculated and not a random consequence of their presence in the classroom.

To understand the experiences of dual language teachers, it is crucial to understand the environments they are operating in. Existing bodies of literature have examined the resources available to dual language teachers and examined teachers' satisfaction with said resources. For instance, Brannan and Bleisten's (2012) study of English as a Second Language (ESOL) teachers revealed that teachers relied largely on coworkers for tangible support but felt more or less effective based on the support of their students' families. A small ethnographic study of dual language teachers in the Pacific Northwest found great disparities in the types of resources teachers had access to and that differences in learning styles and social networks negatively impacted teacher's abilities to utilize all the resources at their disposal (Lucero, 2015). Despite

the importance of understanding *how* some resources are used, it is also crucial to understand what is missing. Studies in this field have identified teachers' lack of partner-language proficiency, poor professional development opportunities, lack of books in the partner-language, and limited planning time with other dual teachers to be detrimental to teachers' experiences in the classroom (Amrein & Peña, 2000) (Howard & López-Velázquez, 2019). This project expands on this research by examining what factors impact teachers' access to resources, and how this impacts their instruction.

Teachers in this study follow a 50:50 model in where they teach each language for 50% of the day. This simultaneous literacy model aims to for students to develop skills in English and the target language at similar rates (CABE, n.d.). Unfortunately, the resources and expectations imposed on teachers complicate the feasibility of a true 50:50 model. For instance, Spanish dual language teachers are forced to navigate teaching a partner language while preparing their students for standardized tests in English (Zúñiga, 2016) (Howard & López-Velázquez, 2019). This creates a tension for teachers as they must navigate fidelity to the model alongside unequal evaluative measures. Existing literature on bilingual education positions teachers as responsible for various tensions in dual language such as balancing partner language instruction when conducting standardized tests in English (Amrein & Peña, 2000) (Zúñiga, 2016). Though these tensions highlight an important issue within the implementation of dual language programs, they neglect to recognize that teachers operate within structures imposed on them by administrators and their district. English test scores are often used for school and teacher evaluation by the district, forcing teachers to devote more time towards test-prep in English. I expand this notion by exploring the practices imposed on teachers and examining the implementation of evaluations of partner languages.

Though teachers are considered the leaders of their classrooms, their autonomy is restricted by the oversight of their administrators (Bidwell, 1965). In some cases, teachers can negotiate with administrators to enact what they consider to be the best practices (Alanís & Rodríguez, 2008). This negotiation may consist of regular meetings about interventions and data with administrators to advocate for a modification of the curriculum to satisfy teachers' standards. However, this is not standard practice. Teachers aren't always listened to, and the resources they do have access to may not address all their needs. For instance, teacher partnerships can consist of monolingual English teachers and bilingual Spanish teachers, resulting in Spanish teachers constantly translating to accommodate the English speakers to the point that English speakers rely more on translations than on their knowledge of Spanish (Amrein & Peña, 2000). This limits the 50:50 model because the Spanish instruction becomes diluted.

In other cases, dual language teachers are subjected to the whims of administrators with no dual experience (Howard & López-Velázquez, 2019) (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2017). A common issue in the implementation of dual programs is a disconnect between the knowledge possessed by administrators and that possessed by teachers. This results in irrelevant recommendations that can greatly inconvenience teachers. In studies of teachers' perceptions of their jobs, teachers advocated for principals and other administrators to be trained and educated in the world of dual language education so that they could better understand the constraints dual teachers operate under (Howard & López-Velázquez, 2019; Alanís and Rodríguez, 2008). My project elaborates on the shortcomings of administrators by highlighting administrator behavior that is inconsistent with the needs of teachers and best practices of dual language instruction.

Theoretical Framework

The work in this paper can be understood using the concept of conventional, environmental, and personal resources posed by Cohen et al. (2003) and elaborated on by Lucero (2015). Conventional resources represent more tangible tools such as curriculums and textbooks. Environmental resources are dependent on the social and professional tools provided by administrators, coworkers, or parents. Personal resources represent an individual's knowledge and will to implement various lessons. An educator's personal resources can also be gleaned from their experience doing the work rather than from any lessons from credentialing programs. This categorization was developed to enable a more holistic understanding of how resources impact teachers' days (Lucero, 2015) and to distinguish between the power of different resources to impact student performance (Cohen et al., 2003). Conventional resources were understood to only be as valuable as the quality of their implementation, which is directly impacted by the implementation environment (Cohen et al., 2003). Limitations on environmental resources, such as collaborations between coworkers, can limit educators' implementation of conventional resources by obscuring implementation methods and supplemental knowledge. Additionally, teachers' behaviors have been identified as responsive to their environment: "The more knowledgeable and skillful teachers are, the more likely they will make productive use of signals from the environment, but the more inchoate the environments, the more difficult it is for even the best teachers to make use of them" (Cohen, 2003, 127). As a result, I view the environmental resources as a significant part of this research and devote ample time to exploring how teachers interact with their district, administrators, and coworkers, and how these interactions may be limiting or enhancing teachers' performance.

METHODS

Data collection for this project occurred through 12 interviews with current ($n = 11$) and former ($n = 1$) dual language teachers in Southern California. I chose to focus on Southern California because of its high percentage of immigrants and speakers of languages other than English. Due to these demographics, I theorized that dual language programs would be more popular in the region to meet the needs of the student population. All but one of the teachers I spoke to taught in English and Spanish; the remaining respondent taught in English and Korean. In writing about an area with many speakers of other languages, I hope to highlight issues that may be impeding their instruction.

Recruitment

Participants for this study were recruited at first through personal connections and then through snowball sampling. Following interviews, participants were thanked for their time, compensated with a gift card, and asked to provide my contact information to any other dual-language teachers they think would be interested in participating.

Data Collection

I conducted 12 interviews to gather data for this project. Interviews were semi-structured and took place over Zoom or via phone. All interviews were recorded for transcription purposes. I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews to give flexibility to the conversations while also having a set of questions I could rely on. The interview guide consisted of questions and probes that explored teacher experience; collaboration and relationships with coworkers; support received from administration, parents, and the school district; teacher's assistants (TAs); and attitudes towards the curriculum (see Appendix A).

All my interviewees came from two schools, allowing for a comparative case study. The two schools, which I will call Orchard and Grove, had different dual language set-ups that required me to alter my interview guide depending on the background of the teacher I was speaking to. At Orchard, most dual teachers operated in a partner system in which one taught English and the other taught Spanish. Orchard teachers had their own classroom, and they shared two cohorts of students which they would switch halfway through the day. As a result, my questions for these teachers revolved more around cooperation between partners, trouble finishing lessons before having to switch cohorts, and the usage of the language they weren't focusing on in the classroom. At Grove, teachers operated in a self-contained classroom, meaning that one teacher was responsible for teaching both English and Spanish to their students. My interview guide for those teachers focused more on troubles with navigating between both languages, external pressure to invest more time in one language rather than another, and resources they received in both languages.

Participants Demographics

Of my 12 participants, 11 of them identified as female and 1 identified as male. This was an accurate representation of the demographics of the schools I was researching, as Grove has 0 male dual language teachers and Orchard only has 1. Additionally, within my sample of elementary teachers, 91% were female; nationally, 89% of elementary teachers are female (Pew Research Center, 2024). With regards to grades, I was able to speak to at least one teacher in all elementary grades, with more teachers teaching a in lower elementary (K-3rd), with 1 Universal Transitional Kindergarten (UTK) teacher, 3 kindergarten teachers, 3 1st grade teachers, 2 2nd

grade teachers, 1 3rd grade teacher, 1 4th grade teacher, and 2 5th grade teachers¹. One limitation to this study is that the Orchard teachers I interviewed were from grades 2nd and under, meaning that I was unable to discuss Orchard teachers' experiences with standardized tests and how they are used by their administrators, making comparison on this topic impossible.

Please refer to Figure 2 for more information on these demographics including the pseudonyms assigned to each educator.

Participant	Sex	Grade	Language	School
Ms. Daisy	F	UTK	English & Spanish	Orchard
Ms. Guadalupe	F	K	English	Orchard
Ms. Corona	F	K	Spanish	Orchard
Ms. Alyssa	F	K & 1 st combo	English & Spanish	Grove
Ms. Flores	F	1 st	Spanish	Orchard
Ms. Patty	F	1 st & 2 nd combo	English & Spanish	Grove
Mr. Carlos	M	2 nd	English	Orchard
Ms. Newton	F	2 nd	Spanish	Orchard
Ms. Pineda	F	3 rd	English & Spanish	Grove
Ms. Dana	F	4 th	English & Spanish	Grove
Ms. Gonzalez	F	5 th	English & Spanish	Grove
Ms. Angeles*	F	5 th	English & Korean	Grove

FIGURE 2: Participant Demographics

*Ms. Angeles was a dual language teacher in a third elementary, but she currently works at Grove and compared her experiences with those of her peers.

	Sex		School		Language			
	Female	Male	Grove	Orchard	Eng & Span	Spanish	English	Eng & Korean
Count	11	1	6	6	6	3	2	1
	Grade							
	UTK	K	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	
Count	1	3	3	3	1	1	2	

FIGURE 3: Summary Statistics

¹ 2 teachers I spoke to taught in a combination class where they had students from two grades, so they were counted twice

Site Backgrounds

This work takes the form of a comparative case study to highlight which challenges faced by dual language teachers are district-wide problems and which are localized. Both Orchard and Grove are in the same district, with roughly 10 miles between them.

Orchard Elementary is around 98% Hispanic or Latine, higher than the district average. Of the student body, 93% of students are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged, and roughly 30% of their student body is classified as emergent bilinguals (EBs)². This means that these students speak a language other than English at home and have limited English proficiency. Orchard has strong academics, with its students outperforming the state average in math, EB progress, and ELA, as measured on standardized assessments. Students' progress is evident in their scores on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress or CAASPP, with 44% meeting or exceeding standards in ELA and 47% meeting or exceeding standards in math. Though Orchard is not an entirely dual language school and instead only has a dual program, all the resources uploaded on the school's website are included in English and Spanish, allowing families to understand material without needing an external translation tool. Their website also includes free Spanish websites in which students and families can practice the Spanish alphabet and phonics.

Grove Elementary is around 67% Hispanic or Latine, which is lower than the district average. 85% of the student body is considered socioeconomically disadvantaged and roughly 20% of the students are classified as EBs. Around 90% of their EBs speak Spanish. The other

² To preserve the anonymity of the schools, I will not be providing direct sources for the school statistics, but I can share that all information was acquired from the schools' district-provided websites, the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress website, and the California School Dashboard.

10% speak Vietnamese and a “Philippine language,” as labeled on the website. Grove’s students’ standardized test scores in ELA and math are slightly below those of the state average, but their EB progress is significantly higher than the state average. Student performance on the CAASPP is below Orchard’s, with 32% of students meeting or exceeding standards in ELA and 25% meeting or exceeding standards in math. Grove’s website has a stand-alone dual language page and even suggests it as soon as one looks up the school online. The school also provides links to Spanish resources. However, none of the web pages (including the page promoting the dual language program) are available in Spanish. This means that Spanish-speaking families can only access these pages by using translation tools and not by school-provided Spanish information. The dual page also focuses on awards such as California’s Seal of Biliteracy, which is awarded to bilingual students in high school, and the academic benefit that EBs and other subgroups may experience, making for a very technical presentation of the program.

FINDINGS

My findings revealed that the main driver of the experiences of teachers was the ways in which different actors treated the Spanish component of the dual language program. This treatment impacted dual language teachers’ relationships with their administrators and their coworkers. As a result, this section focuses on how these different actors treat Spanish in the eyes of my interviewees and how this treatment impacts teachers’ ability to do their job.

District

Given that Orchard and Grove are in the same district, this section will not differentiate between their experiences. Instead, it will focus on how the decisions of the district has impacted its relationship with its teachers.

Curriculum

In recent years, teachers have implemented a new curriculum called Medals. Medals was chosen by the district and mandated on teachers, overruling any preferences dual teachers may have had. Teachers in both schools had strong feelings about the new instruction, with only one defending it. Educators have little say in which curriculum the district is adopting and often must figure out how useful of a tool it is as they're working with it. Bluntly, teachers shared: "Right now, we're using Medals, and it sucks. It's not a great program. It doesn't work for the kids; it doesn't work for the teachers" (Mr. Carlos, Orchards, 2nd). Critiques of Medals varied, with some teachers viewing it as a poor instructor of phonics, some criticizing its lack of connection between the sounds being learned and the corresponding books for the lesson, and others questioning its cultural relevancy. The most popular critique, however, was that it was not effective at teaching students grade-level material. For lower elementary teachers, this meant that they struggled to teach students sounds and the fundamentals of reading because the material from the curriculum was poorly structured. For upper-grade teachers, this meant that by the time students came to them, their reading levels were often not at grade level and teachers found themselves having to alter the way they taught to accommodate these students who would otherwise be left behind.

The curriculums used by these teachers are dependent on the decisions made by the district with seemingly zero teacher input. As Mr. Carlos shared:

For example, they asked us at our school, "Do you want to stay on the old program, or do you want to go do the new program?" And we said, "We want the old program for another year." And we're like, cool, we'll do it. And then 2 weeks later, the principal comes by and says, you're doing the new program. And we're like, "But we said we didn't want to." "The district is mandating you to do it. Or we have to pay for it completely and the district won't pay for it. So, then we lose our TAs, or we lose something else," and so, OK, we'll do the program and for a year. **Nobody opened the program.** The program just sat in boxes because we got partial components. So, and [the district] gave us an hour training and said, you

guys are awesome, you guys can do a great job for, with an hour training.
(emphasis added)

-Mr. Carlos, Orchard, 2nd

In Orchard, administrators took the initiative of seeking teacher opinions when it came to choosing a curriculum, recognizing that they are the authority on this matter. However, the disconnect between the district and the teachers made it such that the district's curriculum of choice did not align with teachers' needs. Teachers exercised autonomy in this situation by not utilizing the new materials, instead relying on materials that were tried and true. To understand autonomy, I use Little's (1995) definition which includes teachers' "capacity to engage in self-directed teaching or professional action." Adding to the challenge of integrating new classroom material, the district provided little and subpar training to teachers, deeming a one-hour training as enough for teachers to implement an entirely new curriculum. The disregard for teachers' wishes and time reinforced to teachers that the district did not have their best interests in mind. Deviating from Alanís and Rodríguez's findings, educators in my study were unable to influence school/district practices through communication with administrators (2008). Though my interviewees did express their discontent, their preferences were beneath district mandates, and there was little to no leeway on those matters.

This challenge with conventional resources was mediated through various personal and environmental resources. Some teachers preserved materials from previous curriculums that they preferred while having to sacrifice some of the materials available only when the alternative curriculum is purchased: "But we kept like posters, the letters, the sounds, and sometimes you have those extra, I guess, resources where you could supplement. Sometimes, I have to now go into Google and because we don't have that program, I just type "[old curriculum] sounds" and then we'll use those" (Ms. Corona, Orchard, K). Teachers who've been in the field long enough

to experience different curriculums have amassed personal and conventional resources that they're able to preserve even if a curriculum is scrapped. This means that with seniority, teachers are better able to choose what and how they want to teach their students, as they can glean materials from their previous resources.

At times, however, this compilation of materials does not suffice. One teacher I spoke to shared the work she puts in to ensure her students receive a high-quality education regardless of the quality of the curriculum:

So, with me, and I know I'm crazy, but I have I have typed out questions for every story that we have because in the beginning of the year, the assessments where you read a story and then questions number 1 through 5 are a picture of a thumbs up or a thumbs down. And to me I thought, "How does that assess anything?" you know, because at that point they're just picking any eeny meeny miny mo like what is that assessing...I've recreated entire workbooks, you know, the entire workbooks, like there'll be a page on a workbook with two questions on it. I'm like, "OK, well that doesn't give me enough evidence of their comprehension. That doesn't give me enough evidence that they know how to conjugate these verbs," you know, they had two attempts. They're learning the language, they need more practice, they need a little bit more problems, more words to figure out. So, I made everything, and I've done that with every program that we've had, so I'm used to it.

- Ms. Newton, Orchard, 2nd

To Ms. Newton, the curriculum was supposed to be a tool of instruction and evaluation. However, it fell short of this with its inadequate assessment of student knowledge. Instead of being able to use the assessments and workbooks provided by curriculums, Ms. Newton has created new versions for *each curriculum* she has used in her 12 years of teaching. Though an extremely kind act, this represents an added workload for teachers because of poorly developed instructional tools. This educator when analyzed through the lens of Cohen et al. (2003), represents someone with rich personal resources. Through her experience and determination, Ms. Newton aimed to improve the low-quality conventional resources she was given to ensure it would better serve her students. Ms. Newton exercised her autonomy by defying district orders

to engage in self-directed teaching, consistent with Little's understanding of teacher autonomy (1995).

Evaluation of Spanish

Though both Orchard and Grove use the 50:50 model, meaning that English and Spanish should be given equal weight in all aspects of the classroom, poor curriculum and resources influenced teachers' concerns about the avenues the district provided for student evaluation.

Standardized Testing

Prior to academic year 24-25 dual language students in grades 3 and above were required to take the California Spanish Assessment (CSA), a part of the California Academic Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP, n.d.). Though this was a way for teachers to evaluate their students' grasp of Spanish in a standardized manner, the assessment itself wasn't ideal: "The Spanish [assessment] had the exact same expectations as they would for the English 3rd grade, and it was just not matching. I had students cry throughout the test because they just couldn't read the passage, and it was very reading heavy" (Ms. Pineda, Grove, 3rd). Ms. Pineda felt that the Spanish assessment was written unfairly, as it expected students to have the same level of proficiency in both English and Spanish at the time of the assessment. Students often come to schools with a grasp of English and the majority of their interactions in school (with adults and peers) occur in English. Thus, their English is more developed by 3rd grade than their Spanish. As such, it was unfair for the CSA to assume that students' English and Spanish levels were equivalent. Under a functional 50:50 model, students may have comparable comprehension levels, but the fact remains: students are exposed to significantly more English in their interactions outside of the classroom than Spanish. As a result, the CSA was too challenging for Ms. Pineda's students, leading to high stress amongst the children. Due to the inadequate

assumptions the CSA was based on, the results were unreliable. Though it is not clear what happened to encourage this decision, the district moved away from requiring the CSA instead of opting to improve it.

Another qualm teachers had with the CSA was that the results were difficult to access and thus they could not use data to modify their instruction: “There will be like an assessment, but then it's not, it's never counted, or there's never any data, or it's not easy to access, and so it makes it really hard for the Spanish teachers to like get that information...” (Ms. Guadalupe, Orchard, K). Despite having access to a standardized assessment tool, teachers were unable to access their students’ data to inform their instruction. When considering the time required to administer these tests, the stress they impose on students and teachers, and the cost, it seems illogical that teachers wouldn’t be able to easily access results. Yet, despite teachers expressing their concerns at meetings with district officials, they feel as though they’re always being dismissed, with no real change happening.

Another district tool through which teachers could evaluate their students in Spanish was IReady. IReady provided assessments in English and Spanish along with lessons for students to practice and improve their scores. The issue, however, was that the practice lessons were only available in English:

The district is very strict on IReady. They want students to complete the two lessons a week, the 45 minutes, and it takes up a lot of class time trying to have them meet those goals. And the last time that an IReady person came in, we asked about IReady lessons in Spanish because they're tested on IReady in Spanish, but how can they improve on their lessons if they're not available? And he just said that that's something they were working on, so maybe it will have it next year.

-Ms. Dana, Grove, 4th

As with other tools, teachers identified discrepancies between the district’s treatment of English and Spanish. Importantly, the district expected students to do constant practice lessons to

improve their IReady scores, but no practice lessons were available in Spanish. Despite being an assessment students completed 3 times a year, the developers and the district had not considered Spanish lessons necessary for implementation. Teachers had to advocate for the implementation of these tools into the system, and even then, developers only said they were working on it. The lack of Spanish practice lessons meant that students were unable to devote extra time to enhancing their Spanish like they could English, contributing to their gap in English and Spanish performance.

Another challenged face by teachers when it came to standardized testing in Spanish was the lack of clarity around the exams:

So, everything that was always put out was always just for English, English, English, English. It was never...they never knew what was going on with Spanish. So, we had to dig through resources in the district to find out when our deadlines were and things like that. Just recently in the last 2 years, they've started adding our deadlines for assessments, you know, in the reminders or in the schedules. But I feel like they've slapped on a name in a school.

-Ms. Alyssa, K, Grove

In district provided schedules, dual language teachers felt ignored, given that the documents provided information for English instruction and tests but had nothing about Spanish assessments. As a result, dual language teachers were pushed to seek these deadlines out themselves. Instances such as these made Grove teachers feel as though their position within the district was not valued, with their school being dual in name but not in practice.

Grading

Traditional grades are also an important measure to determine progress and proficiency in English and Spanish acquisition. However, dual teachers struggled with grading their students in Spanish because of poor assessments and the challenging language grading model implemented by the district:

It is so weird. I honestly, to this day I'm very confused at how I grade my students. We got a training, like a fast, quick look because there's like 6 or 8 different types of grades you can give them...it is so vague...They told us there nobody in elementary should be getting an advanced score because advanced means that you could have like a political conversation, you know, and I'm like, "OK, well then why is it there?" you know?

-Ms. Newton, Orchard, 2nd

Straying from the standard 1 (low) through 4 (high) grading system used by the district for all other subjects, teachers were provided with a new tool for grading students' Spanish progress. The new labels were complicated and unintuitive, resulting in my elementary interviewees not feeling as though the labels truly applied to their students' development. The intangible structure of the new system made teachers question why this was a tool they were being provided, as it seemed to only complicate how they did their job. Orchard teachers worked together to create a uniform implementation of the system, but inevitable changes in staff structure challenged the agreements teachers had made. Despite being in-use for over 5 years, my interviewees at both schools expressed confusion about the system. As of my data collection, their concerns hadn't been addressed, as no district meetings have been held to discuss the system since the original trainings. The lack of environmental resources—such as professional development—provided by the district raises concerns over the teacher's use of this system, as it is theorized that a deficiency in environmental resources limits the efficacy of conventional resources such as the grading system (Cohen et al., 2003).

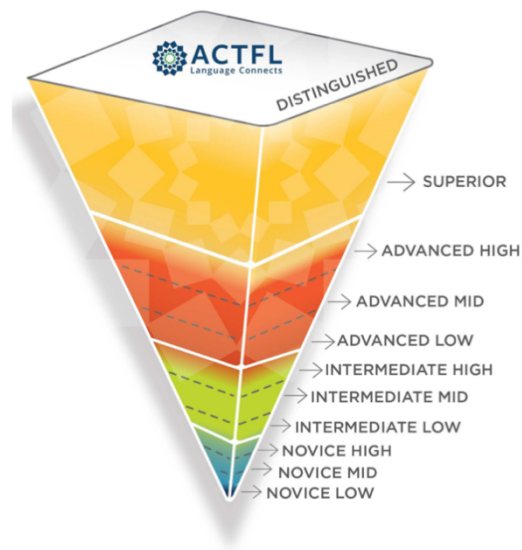


Figure 2: ACTFL's Inverted Pyramid for Language Evaluation. Source: [ACTFL 2024](#)

Districts throughout the country—including that of Grove and Orchard—use the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' (ACTFL) inverted pyramid as a guide for language evaluation. As is evident from Figure 2, the pyramid is an unintuitive tool that provides teachers little guidance in distinguishing between the different levels. Ms. Newton expressed confusion over the 8 levels above the novice classification, considering that the district expected none of her students, not even her native Spanish speakers, to be able to exit the novice section.

Teachers were vocal about their discontent, both with me and their district. As Ms.

Guadalupe shared:

Concerns are definitely expressed year after year in those meetings, but what we have noticed is we're always kind of getting the runaround by the district. Even as simple as, like, library books in Spanish, you know, like that concern has been brought up so many times and it's still not being met, like we still have a limited amount of Spanish books in our library, considering we're a dual language school. So, I feel like it, the concerns are constantly there, and we are, we all have the same concerns, but um they're just not being addressed. Yeah, cause the primary is always English.

-Ms. Guadalupe, Orchard, K

Ms. Guadalupe shared that she and her fellow dual coworkers would express their grievances to the district in meetings, particularly as it pertained to the lack of resources in Spanish. Despite having over half of their students enrolled in a dual language program, Orchard was unable to provide sufficient resources in Spanish presumably due to budget limitations. This complicated the teaching of Spanish, as teachers struggled to supplement the readings from the inadequate curriculum. Aside from literature books, teachers expressed concerns of lack of flashcards and posters, materials instrumental to the instruction of young kids.

The district has an important role in providing resources for teachers, but a disconnect between the needs of the teachers and the decisions of the district resulted in a tense relationship between the parties. The district did not listen to teacher voices and repeatedly positioned Spanish acquisition and assessment as secondary, signaling to dual teachers that a large component of their work wasn't important to the district.

Administration

Most of the admin have never taught dual language because when they were teachers, dual language wasn't like a huge thing...So I think trust and support from admin is super key because um doing dual language is not always like a straight line, right?

-Ms. Angeles, Grove

I hope other dual language schools are doing a lot better with the program...it really comes down to the administrators.”

-Ms. Alyssa, Grove, K/1st

While district decisions impacted my interviewees' experiences, interviews revealed that their administrators had the power to mitigate negative impacts through cooperative leadership. Teachers felt that their ability to maintain fidelity to the dual language program relied heavily on the proper support from their administrators. Grove teachers in particular felt as though their administration was not meeting their needs, and there was a strong desire for administrators to

trust that teachers knew what was best for their unique classrooms. The only topics regarding administration in which teachers at Grove and Orchard converged was in their experiences with administrators placing students in dual language classes and the time allocated to teacher collaboration.

Student Placement

Teachers in both schools encountered trouble when it came to the way in which their administration placed students into dual language classes. District policy is such that after 2nd grade, students need to have their linguistic proficiency evaluated before being allowed into a dual language classroom. This is to ensure that the students in the class are on a similar level of proficiency and thus that the classroom runs more smoothly. However, this policy was often ignored when administration was deciding which classrooms to put newly enrolled students in. Multiple teachers identified the overruling of this policy to be a result of administrator's desire for higher enrollment, as a higher enrollment equates to more attendance, which means more money for California public schools (Lafortune & Guinan, 2024). This overriding of policy poses a great challenge for teachers because, as Ms. Newton phrased it, "You can't enter a calculus class if you haven't done, you know, algebra" (Ms. Newton, Orchard, 2nd). A part of the problem, Ms. Patty elaborated, is that students are coming into a 3rd grade dual language class with absolutely no Spanish, equivalent, almost, to placing an emergent bilingual in an advanced English class and expecting them to catch up quick.

Ms. Newton's metaphor highlights how lost students inadequately placed in dual classes may become once classes begin. Both Ms. Newton and Ms. Patty referred to students in these cases as "numbers" to the administrators, bodies that will boost enrollment instead of young learners that need to be placed in classes with adequate rigor. This practice is consistent with the

ideological camp that views dual language programs as tools for school advancement, with administrators considering the benefits for the school over the challenges imposed on teachers and students (Gándara & Aldana, 2014; Asson et al., 2023). The politics of placing students in dual classes is not often discussed in the literature on dual language classes, but it has a huge impact on teachers. The variation in skill created by this overriding of district policy negatively impacts teachers' ability to maintain fidelity to the dual model:

So, what I find myself doing is I translate a lot, which unfairly so it does tend to water down the program in my opinion... [The students who speak Spanish] know I'm going to translate for [the student], who doesn't understand anything, so they're gonna wait on the translation. So, as a teacher that's a struggle because I don't want them to wait. I want them to think in Spanish. I want them to process in Spanish, but if I don't translate for those others, then they're getting left behind.

-Ms. Newton, Orchard, 2nd

Ms. Newton was faced with a challenge when non-Spanish students arrived in her Spanish class composed mostly of students who were in their 3rd year of dual instruction. She often had to decide between translating and breaking the 50:50 distribution or letting some students fall behind. This impacted her whole classroom, as even her students who were more proficient in Spanish began waiting for her translation, saving themselves the trouble of needing to decipher words and meanings in Spanish, and thus hindering their acquisition of Spanish. Literature on dual programs has highlighted this issue, as it is common for teachers to find themselves accommodating the students who struggle the most, sometimes at the expense of instruction for other students and fidelity to the 50:50 model (Amerin & Peña, 2000; Henderson & Palmer, 2015).

Time Allocated to Teacher Collaboration

Interviewees at both schools also expressed concern over how little time they were allocated to meet with their fellow dual coworkers. While Orchard teachers were granted weekly meetings with their partner teachers, they were unable to have school-sponsored development with any dual teachers in other grade levels. For instance, Ms. Flores shared: “I can think of some meetings that we've had, but because I can think of them, that they're not systematic, you know, we, we have them occasionally when issues have come up at times, um. So not enough of that.” (Ms. Flores, Orchard, 1st). Our interview took place in February of a school year that began in August. In those six months, the dual team had only had a handful of meetings. Ms. Flores viewed her ability to remember all the meetings as an indicator of them not being a regular or frequent occurrence. She also shared that these meetings only took place when there was a problem, raising questions regarding if programs could be avoided if the dual team was allocated more time to convene.

Grove teachers had the same experience, with interviewees sharing: “The language teachers, we don't see each other at all. We literally just see our grade level and so all of our talk and conversations are always about data intervention, whatever it is that [admin is] pushing on us. It's always English, it's never Spanish.” (Ms. Alyssa, Grove, K/1st). Weekly grade level meetings consist of the one dual teacher per grade and the English-only teachers for that grade, making the meetings English-centered. While this still benefits dual teachers as half of their instruction is English, it neglects the Spanish component of their lessons entirely. This lack of time allocation was interpreted as a reflection of the importance administrators grant dual teachers: “We're not really given much time to work as a department either... We don't really have much support in the dual sector.” (Ms. Patty, Grove, 1st/2nd). Grove’s programs self-

contained nature doesn't *require* dual teachers to work together as in Orchard's case, but the opportunity was still deeply desired by Grove teachers.

Grove teachers have not been silent about their desires for dual teacher collaboration. As

Ms. Pineda shared:

We actually tried to fight our principal on this a lot, and we got so much pushback for it. Her commitment to us was that we would meet every single 5th week. So, if we have 4 meetings like every Tuesday, that 5th week we would meet, so far it hasn't happened. But we are always suggested and encouraged to stay after school outside of our contract hours, but that's just not realistic for everybody, so we don't really have time to collaborate.

-Ms. Pineda, Grove, 3rd

Grove teachers exercised their autonomy by advocating for their needs and were met with resistance and eventual defiance from their principal. Instead of being allocated school time to collaborate, teachers were being asked to work outside of their contract hours—without pay—to accomplish things English only teachers are able to accomplish during paid hours. As a result, the dual language teachers at Grove rarely met.

A striking point of contrast between Orchard and Grove teachers was that Orchard teachers had predominantly positive feelings towards administration, emphasizing that despite what can be improved, admin was doing what they could. A good representative of feelings towards administrators in Orchard was Ms. Flores. She shared:

I do think our administration values the program and so they do support it ...but it's always hard to have enough time for everything and so they, you know, it's not like they're not giving us teachers enough planning time just because we're in dual, it's just there is hardly time for any teachers to have extra planning time...

-Ms. Flores, Orchard, 1st

Ms. Flores recognized that there are areas that can be improved, but she identified larger themes like time constraints as the causes of these challenges, not the shortcomings of administrators. She also emphasized that any constraints she as a dual teacher may feel are shared by the non-

dual teachers, showcasing that she didn't believe in any differentiation between the roles of the two groups. Orchard teachers expressed few other grievances with their administration. The rest of the information in this section consists of topics and issues brought up by Grove teachers.

Spanish Treatment at Grove

Grove teachers were particularly outspoken regarding their school's treatment of Spanish and the dual program broadly. As teachers shared:

It just very much feels like, "Look guys, we have this dual language program." That's it. That's all they can give you and the teachers are left to figure it out.

-Ms. Patty, Grove, 1st/2nd

Unfortunately, since I started in the Spanish language department, teachers, we were completely ignored. I feel like they've slapped on a name to a school. They say, "Oh we're a dual language school", but when I was given the classroom, there weren't even Spanish books for the students to read outside of their textbooks. So, all of our reading books were all in English. It felt fake...

-Ms. Alyssa, Grove, K/1st

Ms. Patty and Ms. Alyssa criticized the promotional nature of the dual language program at Grove, feeling as though the program existed solely to attract enrollment. The actual workings of the program were not the concerns of administration, however, and teachers were left to their own devices to figure it out. Ms. Patty shared with me that 4 of the 5 of the dual language teachers at Grove were new teachers, meaning that even though they can support each other, their knowledge of the field is limited. Part of the neglect of dual language teachers within Grove came in the form of limited resources. Despite being hired to lead a Spanish class, Ms. Alyssa recalls that when she began teacher at Grove, her classroom had no supplemental Spanish materials. The only way for her students to enrich their Spanish was through the textbook.

Meanwhile, the classes' supplemental readings were all English. This resulted in the program feeling unreal, as it manifested itself only on paper, but not in practice.

While some of the issues at Grove can be traced back to the district, administrators still have the power to reduce the impact of district decisions. Orchard administrators better listened to and communicated with teachers, resulting in teachers' generally positive perceptions of admin. By contrast, Grove administrators made no attempt at helping dual teachers, instead making promises they weren't willing to keep.

Resources at Grove

Grove teachers struggled to get their hands on resources that would enhance their instruction. Specifically, they had limited access to Professional Development (PD) opportunities and supplemental materials: "[Administration's] responsibility is to ensure that their teachers are getting high quality trainings so that they can provide students with high quality instruction" (Ms. Alyssa, Grove, K/1st). While teachers understood conventional resources to be something that would benefit both administrators and teachers, teachers critiqued administrators' lack of initiative on the matter. My interviewees wanted their administration to provide them with opportunities to advance their knowledge and improve their skills as teachers to, in turn, be better educators to their students. However, it seemed increasingly improbable as despite their efforts, progress was slow.

Grove teachers did experience support from their administration when their principal agreed to purchase materials to supplement the curriculum. Unfortunately, there were issues when it came to the distribution of the supplemental material: "We've also gotten [the materials] really late in the year, so instead of being able to start our students on the program in August, both years, I think they've given it to us like by the 2nd semester. Yeah, and in another case like

towards the end of the year. They forget about us” (Ms. Alyssa, Grove, K). My interviewees were grateful for resources to supplement their curriculum, but they couldn’t help but question the effectiveness of such interventions when they are being handed out so late into the school year. By that point, much of the foundation has already been established, and teachers may have other learning goals that they’re working towards. Ms. Alyssa’s closing note, “They forgot about us” embodies how the needs of dual language teachers are often overlooked in these spaces, and teachers are left to work for the majority of a school year with inadequate tools. This practice is also concerning because a student’s foundations in reading are crucial for further learning, and a weaker foundation can negatively impact students’ later performance.

Priorities for Instruction at Grove

My interviewees perceived Grove’s administration to favor both English acquisition and English teachers. However, interviewees had different explanations for administrators’ behavior toward dual. Ms. Pineda interpreted admin to be “very hands off” due to their lack of knowledge with the dual program. However, contrary to the administrators in Alanís and Rodríguez’s research who decided to invest time into understanding how dual language programs function, Grove administrators opted to maintain their focus on English (2008). Ms. Gonzalez (Grove 5th) and Ms. Alyssa (Grove, K/1st) interpreted their administration’s distance from dual as indicative of their priorities. Both interviewees mentioned how administrators are pressured by the district to produce certain test scores on English tests, and thus they focus on providing English resources and support to meet these demands.

This focus on English test scores was evident in “data chats” between teachers and their principal in which student performance data was discussed. These conversations aim to identify potential areas of improvement for teachers and provide them with guidance from their

supervisors. However, what's discussed in these chats is not representative of the work dual teachers do:

This is my 3rd year in dual language, not once have they pulled up my Spanish data. And in all 3 years, not once, never, never have they talked about where my kids stand in terms of their Spanish development. So, I feel like that just speaks volumes to what is important to the higher ups and therefore what I should be more concerned about.

-Ms. Patty, Grove, 1st/2nd

The diagnostic is like the end, the last of their problems, to the point where, the principal has said to me, "Do you want me to check your Spanish grades or no?"

-Ms. Pineda, Grove, 3rd

When the principal has like our data chats with us, and she asks us questions regarding the data of IReady, Spanish never comes up...It's kind of just put to the side, like it's not as important to them, I guess.

-Ms. Dana, 4th

The 50:50 dual language model places equal emphasis on both English and Spanish in the classroom, but the explicit practices of Grove's principal indicate to teachers that she is not concerned with how students are progressing in Spanish. Part of the roll of a principal is to support the teachers in their instruction, this is often done through activities such as data chats, where educators use student data to determine areas of improvement. However, dual language teachers are being abandoned in a sense, with any questions they may have regarding their Spanish instruction being silenced. This is not uncommon in the literature on dual language education, with teacher participants in other studies lamenting the fact that their administrators only use English data to evaluate their performance (Howard & López-Velázquez, 2019; DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2017). In only using English data, administrators in my study and others are limiting teachers' growth potential, fostering development in one sector and not another.

Co-Worker Collaboration

The previous section touched on how little time dual teachers must cooperate with one another, but why is this important? Through collaboration, teachers can expand their environmental resources which have been identified to impact how teachers implement their conventional resources (Cohen et al., 2003). Additionally, teachers accumulate resources throughout the years, particularly remnants of previous quality curriculums that they can continue to use even when new curriculums are implemented. Through collaboration, teachers can share and expand their resource pool and their pedagogical practices, often doing so to mediate the poor language resources provided by the district. This section elaborates on how dual teachers collaborate and why it is crucial for their jobs.

Orchard

Due to their partner-teacher system, interviewees at Orchard needed to be in constant communication with their coworkers. At the very least, these partner educators needed to work with each other to ensure their lessons aligned. As Mr. Carlos shared, “We have a calendar for all our math lessons, and we try to blend our, our English lessons as much as possible, um, in Spanish so that they're similar... we try and do that as much as we can so that the kids get hit at the same time and they can see the differences.” (Mr. Carlos, Orchard, 2nd). Within their model, teachers are expected to teach parallel lessons in both languages, so it is crucial that their content align. In doing so, students can compare the same lessons in English and Spanish and grasp what similarities and differences exist in the subject between both languages.

Despite its importance, however, the teachers at Orchard don't always get the opportunity to work closely with their coworkers. Instead, the current system in place at the school favors whole grade cooperation:

And every Wednesday, we are planning after school, and that's uh the whole kinder level, but uh with my partner, sometimes I stay with her here and there without being getting paid. And even before we like we just started getting paid, but even though we don't get paid, we always plan because we always have to be on the same page. It's something we're always got used to doing.

-Ms. Corona, Orchard, K

Ms. Corona shared with me that though the whole-grade meetings were helpful, they occupied time that she and her partner teacher could use for more specific lesson development. As a result, Ms. Corona and her partner became accustomed to working outside their contract hours, unpaid, for the sake of lesson development. Despite the inconvenience, Ms. Corona and her partner felt it was their responsibility to meet because their model would not function if their lessons were not aligned. Luckily, Ms. Corona and her partner have recently began receiving compensation for their time invested outside of contract hours, but her depiction of the situation emphasized that money was not a consideration when it came to meeting.

Grove

Given that Grove teachers don't have partner teachers, bonds formed with dual teachers in other grades is crucial to their job. These connections assist teachers by providing access to resources:

I feel like as teachers, coworkers are like the most important part. I feel like if you don't have something or if you don't have a resource, you can always go to a coworker...I might be teaching more years than other people, but sometimes I feel like people who are newer to teaching, they come in for like from like more updated credentialing programs where they have like the new strategies.

-Ms. Gonzalez, Grove, 5th

Many of my interviewees at Grove shared this sentiment, emphasizing that strong relationships between teachers offset the challenges teachers face due to inadequate administration. Some

teachers, having had more experience, felt responsible for assisting newer teachers, ensuring that they have the right tools and understand how the system works. Many of my interviewees still remember the senior teachers who helped them settle into their new roles. These experiences are indicative of the significance of connections among teachers, and the value of school-sponsored coworking time.

Many Grove teachers resented their limited cooperation time, as they felt that it restricted their abilities as teachers. As Ms. Alyssa shared:

If we only saw each other and really [had] planning, true planning time, free to do whatever we want, not what administration is telling us to do, then I know we have the potential of developing units that can be implemented from K through 5th, you know, to really teach these kids how to use the language and understand it a lot more than what we currently have.

-Ms. Alyssa, Grove, K/1st

Ms. Alyssa viewed the limited planning time and overall freedom over instruction awarded to dual language teachers as something that was not only inconvenient, but also detrimental to students. Due to whims of Grove's administration, Ms. Alyssa was struggling to meet her lesson goals, which in turn impacts student progress. Ms. Alyssa viewed dual language teacher cooperation as an invaluable tool for the advancement of children and was confident that a streamlined, teacher developed curriculum would result in a stronger grasp on Spanish.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the experiences of dual language teachers to better understand the challenges they face in implementing their models. Using a comparative case study of Grove and Orchard elementary in California, I examine how school and district level factors shaped their experiences. In a 50:50 dual classroom, teachers are expected to deliver instruction in all subjects

across both languages, dedicating equal parts of the day to each language. At Grove, this task was accomplished by single teachers, as they operated in a self-contained classroom and were responsible for splitting their time themselves. In Orchard, their partner-teacher system allowed one teacher to focus on English and another on Spanish, with them switching student cohorts in the middle of the day.

Administrator behavior emerged as the key factor shaping educators' experiences in Orchard and Grove. Administrative decisions served as a mediator between district policy and teacher experiences, consistent with prior literature (Alanís & Rodríguez, 2008; Howard & López-Velázquez, 2019). These decisions impacted teachers' ability to make use of conventional resources by limiting both the acquisition of conventional resources and access to environmental resources—such as cooperation between coworkers (Cohen et al., 2003). Administrators impacted teachers' experiences in two major ways, their treatment of the Spanish component of the program and their restriction of teacher autonomy.

In Grove and Orchard, administrators' perceptions of the Spanish component of the dual language program were reflected in the ways they used Spanish data, fostered collaboration between Spanish teachers, and respected dual policies. Educators revealed that Spanish data could be hard to come by due to district designs, but even when teachers did access their data, it played no part in conversations with administrators. Both Grove and Orchard used IReady and the district provided grading system for all grades, but there were no accounts of this data being used to inform teacher development or interventions. Instead, professional development in the form of data chats or grade-level meetings centered around English. Additionally, dual teachers were not given an opportunity to collaborate with other dual teachers, particularly when it came to Spanish. Self-contained teachers at Grove interacted almost entirely with English teachers, and

though this helped them develop the English portion of their class, it left the Spanish portion untouched. Orchard teachers were guaranteed time to meet with their partner teachers, but with each teacher focusing on a different language, Spanish teachers were still unable to collaborate with each other. For the same reasons, English dual teachers at Orchard were able to reap more benefits from grade-level meetings with their fellow English-only teachers. Finally, teachers expressed concerns over administrators' disregard for district policies about dual enrollment post-2nd grade. In overriding district policies and enrolling unprepared kids in dual classrooms, administrators sent a message to dual teachers that their program was a tool for the school, and not a genuine resource for the kids.

However, as the findings revealed, Grove and Orchard administrators were not on the same level when it came to their treatment of their teachers. Though not without faults, Orchard's administrators were perceived as investing more into the dual program. This perception could be driven by Orchard's investment into Spanish programming. Orchard teachers had cultural activities, bilingual student concerts, and afterschool Spanish enrichment, showcasing a strong commitment to community engagement and the Hispanic culture of its students. Grove had no Spanish programming.

When it came to autonomy, teachers shared that they were not perceived as authorities in their fields, and it was reflected in the ways they were excluded from crucial dual decisions. My interviewees expressed great frustration with what they considered unnecessary interventions or meetings that would pull them out of their classes, complicating their already tight schedule. Teachers also bore the brunt of poor bureaucratic decisions, having to modify inadequate resources, purchase their own materials, and negotiate with poor administrative decisions. Many teachers expressed a desire simply to be "left alone." My interviewees believed that if they and

their coworkers were able to manage their programs on their own, teachers and students would be better off.

A point in which Orchard and Grove teachers consistently aligned was in their attitudes towards the district. Critiques on the curriculum, assessments used to evaluate Spanish acquisition, and the limited resources available in Spanish highlighted a large disconnect between the district and teachers. When the district chooses to invest limited funds on materials that haven't been vetted by knowledgeable teachers, they are jeopardizing the education of students. Students in Ms. Newton's class may have higher levels of reading comprehension because of Ms. Newton's rewriting of the reading comprehension tests, but students in other classes may experience an entirely different rigor. While Ms. Newton's dedication is admirable, such efforts should not be expected of all teachers, given that they are time-intensive and unsustainable without institutional support.

In sum, the experiences of dual language teachers at Grove and Orchard illustrate how administrator behavior and district policies shape the experiences of dual language teachers. Despite experiencing similar district constraints, administrative differences towards Spanish, support towards collaboration, and the recognition of teacher autonomy shaped distinct working conditions. Furthermore, district-level shortcomings in materials, assessments, and collaboration with teachers enhanced struggles experienced in schools. These findings highlight the need for more inclusive, teacher-vetted systems that recognize the value of partner-languages in dual language programs.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the district's efforts to expand dual language programs, findings reveal that support for these programs remains superficial, as teachers are frequently left without the

necessary resources or institutional backing. To ensure the success of dual language education, the district must move beyond program expansion and invest in meaningful teacher support. One key recommendation is the mandatory certification or targeted training of administrators overseeing dual language schools. This would equip school leaders with a deeper understanding of the goals, demands, and supports necessary for dual programs, positioning them to better advocate for and collaborate with dual teachers. Administrators' promotion of dual language programs must be matched with genuine commitment through collaboration with educators, professional development, and material support.

District policies should also mandate the use of partner language data in “data chats” and professional development sessions, signaling that partner language acquisition is as important as English. Including partner language proficiency in state and district assessments could incentivize administrators to prioritize bilingual learning outcomes. In turn, this would encourage a school-wide culture that values Spanish as an asset rather than an obstacle towards learning English.

Teachers must also be brought into decision-making processes around curriculums and assessments. Many of the issues identified stem from the district's top-down approach, which results in inadequate or irrelevant materials that teachers independently adapt. Rather than serving as a barrier for teacher advancement, the district should be a collaborative partner, providing appropriate tools and listening to the expertise of those in the classroom.

Lastly, the performative nature of the district's current commitment to dual language education must be addressed. While expanding programs suggests progress, the lack of attention to student outcomes in partner languages undermines these efforts. Until partner languages are treated with the same seriousness as English, the full promise of dual language education will

remain impossible. This seriousness can come in the form of adequate assessment tools, equal funding, and administrative accountability. With more equitable investment at both the school and district levels, dual teachers can be empowered to do the work they are already deeply committed to, fostering bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural students.

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated through the findings, administrators play a pivotal role in shaping the day to day lives of teachers and the success of dual language programs. While Grove and Orchard were subject to the same district policies, administrative choices influenced how heavily the burdens were felt at each school. Supportive administrative practices at Orchard, such as a more positive stance toward Spanish and a structured collaboration time, created a more favorable environment for dual language educators. In contrast, Grove's administration, with its preference for English and lack of support for Spanish instruction, contributed to teacher's professional isolation.

This study also highlights the disconnect between district decisions and the lived experiences of dual language teachers. Teachers at both schools criticized the lack of appropriate Spanish resources, insufficient assessments for language acquisition, and the performative nature of the district's investment in dual language education. Without intentional collaboration with teachers, the district's policies risk undermining the very programs they aim to popularize. The burden placed on teachers to rewrite materials and meet outside of contract hours reflects a systemic failure to provide adequate institutional support.

Finally, this study emphasizes that dual language success is about more than curriculum or structure; it is about support. Support from administrators, who must value bilingualism and support from districts, who must allocate appropriate resources and create equitable evaluation

metrics. These forms of support are necessary for such programs to thrive. Without this collective investment, dual language programs are at risk of becoming performative interventions rather than transformative spaces for bilingual learning. To facilitate teaching and learning, leaders in schools should prioritize providing adequate resources in partner languages, involving dual teachers in decisions impacting dual classrooms, and using adequate tools to evaluate and analyze progress in partner languages.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Introductory Questions

1. Can you tell me about your experience in teaching including things like...
 - a. The grades and languages you've taught
 - b. How long you've been teaching
 - c. What about the languages your current class speaks?
 - d. Anything else that may be relevant?
2. How would you describe your role to someone not familiar with it?
3. Why did you decide to become a dual language teacher?
4. How prepared did you feel for the role when you started teaching?
 - a. What characteristics of your preparation program helped you the most and the least?

For teachers who teach BOTH languages

1. How do you navigate using two languages in your classroom?
 - a. Do you teach each language as on its own, or do you make connections between the languages being used?
 - i. Is this how you were taught/are expected to teach?
2. Are you the only teacher in the classroom? If not, what system do you have and how do you split responsibilities?
3. What do you do when students don't engage with the target language?
4. Are you content with the current curriculum you're using? Why or why not?
5. Do you feel any pressure from parents, students, admin, etc. to devote more classroom time to one language over another?
6. What is the biggest challenge in using two languages in the classroom?

For teachers who teach ONE language

1. Are you fluent in the partner language?
2. Do you have any students who aren't comfortable in the language you teach?
 - a. What is your protocol for when students don't engage with the target language?

3. Can you tell me a bit about how you split responsibilities with your partner teacher?
4. How would your teaching experience be different if you didn't have your partner teacher?
5. Are you content with the current curriculum you're using? Why or why not?
6. Do you think the language you teach is equally respected by the students, parents, and school as your partner language?

All teachers

1. I'd like to talk a little about the role different people in the community play in your work.
 - a. To start, do you feel supported in your role by your coworkers?
 - b. Your school's administrators?
 - c. Parents?
 - d. District?
2. How would you compare the support your classroom receives to the support an English-only class receives?
3. Assuming you had a magic wand, what would you change to make your role easier?
4. What is your favorite thing about being a teacher?
5. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you feel is impactful to your teaching?