

At School, I Speak *Silence*

Public Intellectual Essay (PIE)

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Re-envisioning Education and Democracy

EDU 280-01

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*Learning English forces
 Peb tsis paub hais peb cov lus
 At school, we speak 'sshhh.'*

Introduction

The United States public education system¹ was serving more than 46.9 million students during the school year of 1999-2000. From this number, 62.1 percent are White, non-Hispanics; 17.2 percent (8,021,000) are Black, non-Hispanics; 15.6 percent (7,278,000) are Hispanics; 4.0 percent (1,880,000) are Asian/Pacific Islanders; and 1.2 percent (541,000) are American Indian/Alaskan Natives.² These numbers support the fact that the public school system is increasingly diversifying in terms of race and ethnicity. Many of these numbers include immigrant children or children of immigrants who are learning English as a second language. Data collected by the Office of English Language Acquisition states that in 2005 the total enrollment for English language learning students in the public school system totaled 5,014,437 students out of a total student enrollment of more than 49 million.³ With these growing numbers, it is vital for our public schools to create a support system for these students that will ensure equal opportunities for and in education for these students.

¹ “Public Education System” includes primary and secondary public schools in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), “State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education,” 1999–2000.
 <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol_3/3_2/q2-6.asp#Table-1>

³ National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instructional Educational Programs. U.S. Department of Education.
 <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/policy/states/reports/statedata/2003LEP/GrowingLEP_0304.pdf>

The public education system has been developing various programs, for English language learners whom they have come to define as limited English proficient (LEP) students. Though programs have already been implemented, many of them still do not meet the needs of limited English proficient students, especially immigrant students.

This piece of literature will provide you with a brief overview of the history of immigration. It will proceed to discuss the impact of immigrants on the public education system. After formally defining LEP, this essay will identify programs that have been developed for LEP immigrant students as well as problems that affect the education of LEP immigrant students. The essay will end with possible solutions to the problems that include exploratory teaching and learning in more than one language in ESL classes and non-school related after school programs that aim at helping immigrants or students with limited English skills.

Brief Overview of United States Immigration History

One of the most important ways to create change is looking to the past to see the present and plan for the future. In order to learn about LEP programs in the public schools, we need to know exactly for whom LEP programs are being developed. Many students in LEP programs are immigrants from another country who do not speak English as their first language. Immigration to the United States post-1965 has greatly influenced the development of LEP programs.

In the history of the United States, there were two major waves of immigration after the establishment of the country. The first wave occurred between 1881 and 1930.

Most of the immigrants who came during this time emigrated from eastern, central, and southern Europe.⁴

The second major wave of immigration occurred after 1965, when the Immigration Act of 1965 established new criteria for immigrants. This act was considered an amendment to the McCarran-Walter Act (1952) which allowed for immigration based on ethnic quotas and eliminated the Immigration Act of 1917. With the Immigration Act of 1965, immigrants already in the United States could bring over their families and relatives. Family brought over other families, immigration increased from wars the US participated in, and immigration numbers increased.⁵ Ten years later, in 1975, the Indochina Migration and Refugee Act would attract thousands of refugees from Southeast Asia to come to the United States because of the U.S.'s colonialism and war. As numbers of undocumented immigrants from Mexico, Latin America, China, and Haiti, two more laws were enacted to restrict immigration: The Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986) and the Immigration Act (1990).⁶ It became clearer and clearer that this wave of immigration would not be majority Europeans. By the 1980s, European immigrants only constituted 11 percent of the total immigrant population, as compared to 90 percent in 1900.⁷ Immigration post-1965 was clearly consisted of a diverse group of people that have greatly impacted the United States. People were coming from all over the world.

⁴ Gerstle, Gary. & Mollenkopf, John. *E Pluribus Unum?*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. 2001. p. 1

⁵ Ueda, Reed. *Postwar Immigrant America: A Social History*. New York: Bedford Books. 1994. p. 60

⁶ Lowe, Lisa. Department of Comparative Literature at U of Massachusetts at Amherst in Amherst, MA. ACLAnet. History of Migration and Immigration Laws in the United States.

<<http://www.umass.edu/complit/aclanet/USMigrat.html>>

⁷ Ueda, Reed. *Postwar Immigrant America: A Social History*. New York: Bedford Books. 1994. p. 58.

The influx of immigrants from diverse places has changed the face of the United States. Immigrants are entering the United States with their own cultures, their own values, customs, celebrations, foods, and languages, and are assimilating into American culture. One of the first places they learn about American culture and assimilation is in school. Non-English student speakers who have limited English proficiency are the fastest growing population in the public schools. Eight different languages represent eighty-five percent of non-English languages spoken in schools, but all in all, 350 language groups are actually spoken in schools across the United States.⁸

What is LEP?

Children who are learning English are often referred to as Limited English Proficient (LEP) students by government agencies. Educators and researchers usually refer to these children as English Language Learners (ELLs).⁹ Definitions for LEP students vary. Some schools who qualify for funding from the Emergency Immigration Education Program (from the U.S. Department of Education) define students as “not born in this country who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for less than three years who are between the ages of 3 and 19.” Other agencies and school districts have defined LEP students by language, country of origin, or both. This includes students who are limited in English proficiency or immigrants.¹⁰ According to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, an LEP student, when speaking on individual terms, is:

- (A) aged 3 through 21;
- (B) enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school;

⁸ Smith-Davis, Judy. *The New Immigrant Students Need More than ESL*. Principal Leadership. April 2004.

⁹ Ma, Jacinta. *What Works for the Children? What We Know and Don't Know about Bilingual Education*. The Civil Rights Project. Harvard University. September 2002. p. 1.
< <http://moodle.macalester.edu/mod/resource/view.php?id=3771> >

¹⁰ Smith-Davis, Judy. *The New Immigrant Students Need More than ESL*. Principal Leadership. April 2004.

- (C) (i) not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English;
- (ii) (I) a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and
- (II) comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency; or
- (iii) a migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and
- (D) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual—
- (i) the ability to meet the State's proficient level of achievement on State assessments described in section 1111(b)(3);
- (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or
- (iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society.¹¹

It seems the definition that most significantly influences LEP students is NCLB's definition. One of the reasons why this may be is because NCLB mandates Title I funding that impact LEP students.

Title I and LEP Students

Title I (or formally referred to as Chapter 1) funding, is the largest single grant program for elementary and secondary schools.¹² Because it is the largest grant program for primary and secondary schools, it funds most programs for LEP students. Title I was enacted as part of the war on poverty during the 1960s, and its purpose was to provide supplemental, remedial services for poor, educationally disadvantaged children to overcome various problems rooted in poverty. LEP and language-minority children are far more concentrated in schools with high poverty rates compared to native-English speakers.¹³ An important question to address is, is Title I reaching LEP students, and if they are, what has Title I been providing for those students? It is difficult to determine

¹¹ Federal PL 107-110, The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, [Title IX, General Provisions](http://www.helpforschools.com/ELLKBase/legal/Definition_LEP.shtml), Part A Definitions, Section 9101(25) < http://www.helpforschools.com/ELLKBase/legal/Definition_LEP.shtml>

¹² Jaynes, Gerald D. *Immigration and Race: New Challenges for American Democracy*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press. 2000. p. 98.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 104.

whether Title I funding and programs are reaching LEP students because schools do poorly on documenting the demographics of LEP students entering their schools. Over the last twenty-five years, Title I has mainly taken students from regular classrooms and put them in classes with remedial instruction. Often times Title I is mistakenly replaced by ESL classes or bilingual education.¹⁴

ESL classes and bilingual education are probably two of the most widely implemented programs for LEP students. Similar to Title I, ESL classes consist of activities in which students “receive special periods of instruction aimed at the development of English language skills.”¹⁵ This includes narrowly focusing on grammar and vocabulary rather than on other academic subjects. English language skills in ESL classes may also include communication in English.¹⁶ Bilingual education also allows students to receive instruction in language skills but also include instruction on academic subjects in their primary language. As students’ English skills progress, instruction in their native languages decreases, with the goal of transitioning the students into mainstream classes as quickly as possible.¹⁷ This goal may have developed from common misconceptions that have affected how LEP immigrant students are educated.

Misconceptions with Educating LEP Immigrant Students

When educating immigrant or LEP students, there are common misconceptions that affect the educator’s perception of English learners. Some misconceptions include:

- The first priority for immigrant students is to learn English as quickly as possible.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 101-103.

¹⁵ Ma, Jacinta. What Works for the Children?: What we Know and Don’t Know about Bilingual Education. The Civil Rights Project. Harvard University. September 2002. p. 4.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Walqui, Aida. Access and Engagement: Program Design and Instructional Approaches for Immigrant Students in Secondary Schools. Illinois: Delta Systems Co, Inc. 2000. p. 25.

Strictly learning in English is not sufficient in enabling students to succeed, especially during middle and high school because students are expected to perform at sophisticated cognitive levels at this age. Too much focus on English may inhibit their development and progress in other academic subjects. Native English speakers do not wait until their English is fully developed to progress in other academic subjects; their English is constantly expanding their linguistic and cognitive English abilities.¹⁹

- Once students can converse in English, they will succeed in mainstream classes taught in English.²⁰

The biggest problem with this misconception is that students are placed into mainstream classes without the proper English training. Students in placed in this situation often lag behind in their academic process compared to their English-speaking counterparts. Social and academic uses of language are very different²¹

- Native languages impede on the students' progress in learning English.²²

It is often assumed that first-languages interfere with second languages; so if the first language is excluded, chances of second language proficiency will increase. Another assumption is that if students can access native-languages for communication and academic instruction, then they won't learn the second language because they don't feel the motivation or need to learn it.²³ However, as Walqui states, "... the development of students' first language cognitive and academic skills is as important as exposure to the

¹⁹ Collier, V.P. (1995). *Acquiring a Second Language for School*. (Directions in Language Education No. 4). Washington DC: National Clearninghouse for Bilingual Education. In Walqui, A. p. 26.

²⁰ Walqui, Aida. *Access and Engagement: Program Design and Instructional Approaches for Immigrant Students in Secondary Schools*. Illinois: Delta Systems Co, Inc. 2000. pg. 26.

²¹ Cazden, C. (1988). *Classroom discourse*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. & Heath, S.B. (1983). *Ways with Words*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. In Walqui, A. p. 26.

²² Walqui, Aida. *Access and Engagement: Program Design and Instructional Approaches for Immigrant Students in Secondary Schools*. Illinois: Delta Systems Co, Inc. 2000. p. 28.

²³ Ibid.

second language for the development of cognitive-academic skills in the second language.”²⁴

- Immigrant students will progress at the same rate when learning English.²⁵

Immigrant students progress at different rates and levels while learning English. For example, the linguistic and conceptual sophistication required for teenagers is greater than required for elementary school students, so teenagers are going to need more than exposure to English in order to develop communicative skills that may require varying lengths of time to learn. This time may depend on their level of exposure to learning English, academic achievement, or development of their native language.²⁶

Common misconceptions significantly affect how LEP students are educated.

Some questions to think about:

- What other misconceptions exist about LEP/immigrant students?
- Are LEP students truly receiving an equal education with misconceptions that already exist in LEP programs?
- What other programs, besides Title I programming, ESL programs, and bilingual education programs have been implemented to assist LEP students?
- How can LEP programs be improved to meet the needs of LEP students and provide them with an equal education, promoting their educational success?

Recommendations

Lucas, Henze, and Donato conducted a study in 1990 that identified key features that promote the success of language minority students through effective teaching and learning.

The key features:

²⁴ Concluded in Walqui, A. p. 28-29. From Cummins, J. (1981). The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students. In California State Department of Education, Office of Bilingual Bicultural Education (Ed.), *Schooling and language minority students: A theoretical framework* (p. 3-49). Los Angeles: California State University; Evaluation, Dissemination and Assessment Center.

²⁵ Walqui, Aida. Access and Engagement: Program Design and Instructional Approaches for Immigrant Students in Secondary Schools. Illinois: Delta Systems Co, Inc. 2000. p. 29.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 30.

- Value is placed on the students' languages and cultures.
- High expectations of language and minority students are made concrete.
- School leaders make the education of language minority students a priority.
- Staff development is explicitly designed to help teachers and other staff, serve language minority students more effectively.
- A variety of courses and programs for language minority students is offered.
- A counseling program gives special attention to language minority students.
- Parents of language minority students are encouraged to become involved in their children's education.
- School staff members share a strong commitment to empowering language minority students through education.

**Adapted from: Lucas, T., Henze, R., & Donato, R. (1990). Promoting the success of Latino language-minority students: An exploratory study of six high schools. *Harvard Educational Review*, 60, 315-340. In Walqui, A. Access and Engagement: Program Design and Instructional Approaches for Immigrant Students in Secondary School.

If schools serving LEP students integrate these key features into their programs and curriculum, LEP students can begin to experience a holistic education that promotes their educational success and the success of their student communities.

1) SAMPLE ESL CLASS for 10th GRADERS

Class length: 80 minutes, 2:10-3:30 4th period, 12 students speaking Spanish, Hmong, Somali, Amharic, and Vietnamese

- **Teacher description:** received a teaching degree in English as a Second Language instruction, two years experience working with immigrant students outside of educational instruction (tutored at Hubbs Center for Lifelong Learning for a year, facilitator for East African Circle at Jane Addams School for Democracy), speaks or proficient in another language other than English
- **Teacher Aids/Volunteers:** two TAs, one speaks Spanish, one speaks Vietnamese—three days a week; Two college volunteers, one speaks Somali, one speaks Hmong— three days a week, Amharic-speaking senior comes into class once a week for half an hour. TAs/volunteers to help with homework, interpreting, weekly activities (such as weekly vocabulary), and literacy skills
- **Class Curriculum/Structure:**
 - Once a week check-in with students on homework, classes, this class, Life. Takes form of a circle, all students encouraged to participate (10-15 min)
 - Everyday English lesson from teacher, partnership teaching twice a week between teacher and TAs/volunteers (20 minutes)
 - Weekly vocabulary lessons on varying subjects including science, math, and civics terms/concepts and meanings (fifteen minutes on Fridays)

- Homework Help (40 minutes Mon-Thurs, 20 minutes Fri)
- Monday-Thursday Group activities (15 minutes)—Same language groups twice a week, mixed every other day
- Monthly meetings between students and teacher
- Quarterly fieldtrips to local resources including Hubbs, Jane Addams, Science Museum, and Progressive Minnesota
- Quarterly (end of the quarter) Parent-Teacher Conferences with interpreter and student (optional for student)

2) AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS/ORGANIZATIONS

When programs during the school day just doesn't offer enough for students, after school programs might help. Because many schools do not offer sufficient services for LEP immigrant students, other resources and programs have been developed. One such program is located at the Jane Addams School for Democracy, an organization that promotes democratic learning through cross-cultural exchanges.

- Jane Addams School (JAS) for Democracy

Jane Addams School Mission:

“The mission of Jane Addams School is to free and cultivate the talents, cultures, and interests of people from diverse backgrounds and traditions in order to add their energy and wisdom to the common public wealth of all. The soul of this work is the relationships we build as we engage in learning and collaborative action.”²⁷

Jane Addams School offers various programs for its participants including Learning Exchange Circles (There are currently four: Hmong Circle, Spanish Circle, East African Circle, and the Children's Circle) and Reflection Sessions. The Circles offer an opportunity for cross-cultural exchanges. Every week there is a different theme to discuss. Examples of themes of included governing systems, cultural differences, and perspectives on certain issues (i.e.: gender roles, employment/work, etc). Also during the Circle sessions, participants are partnered up with facilitators or volunteers to learn mainly English literacy skills and practice for the citizenship test. Facilitators and

²⁷ Jane Addams School for Democracy. <www.publicwork.org/jas>

volunteers also learn the native languages; though not to the same extent non-native English speakers learn English. Other programs JAS offers are Monday Night Live, Partners in School Change, Voting and Democracy Work, and Striving for Human Rights in Laos. For more information, contact JAS at (651) 209-3519 or check out their website at <www.publicwork.org/jas>.

Three other organizations that are similar to Jane Addams School are the Hubbs Center for Lifelong Learning (please refer to Alternative representation), Lauj Youth Society (LYS), and the Minnesota Literacy Council. Lauj Youth Society is catered to Hmong children who need extra time and space for learning English and homework help. Tutors from the surrounding colleges (Twin Cities) go to the center, located in Frogtown, Monday through Thursdays and provide assistance to elementary and middle school students. Many of the tutors are Hmong, which is a plus for students because they are learning bilingually. Besides the tutoring program, LYS also runs two other programs where tutors go to schools or homes of children to tutor. For more information on LYS, please contact:

The Minnesota Literacy Council (MLC) works mainly with Americorps, and focuses on literacy skills. Three of their programs are directly connected with Americorps: The Americorps Early Literacy Corps (ELC), Americorps VISTA programs (two subprograms: Summer Reads and Yearlong VISTA), and Americorps Teacher Corps Programs (subprogram: Saint Paul Early Language and Literacy Collaborative Program). These programs work mainly with non-native English learners who do not receive enough services in school or do not go to school. For more information on MLC, please contact:

After school programs offer great teaching and learning alternatives outside of school. Many after school programs similar to those mentioned above may be beneficial to LEP immigrant students who need extra space and time to improve English literacy and communicative skills. Perhaps after school programs can further be developed within schools that would involve administrators, teachers, other staff members, and students working together to improve education for all.

Conclusion

Immigration post-1965 has tremendously impacted the public education system forcing the government to include Title I funding for immigrants that have limited English proficiency who are often categorized as LEP students. A plethora of programs have also been developed to provide remedial services for immigrants. Some of these programs have been implemented through the school, including ESL classes and bilingual education. Though programs have been developed, several misconceptions still exist among educators that affect the education of LEP immigrant students, which is problematic. If key features identified earlier are integrated school curriculums and programs, perhaps equal education opportunities will continue to include all children in the public education system. ESL classes need to include more than English literacy to more deeply impact ESL students. Other alternatives such as after school programs are also available to students who need extra assistance. Hopefully with these few insights through this essay, motivation toward action to increase attention on improving education for LEP immigrant students have increased.

Works Cited

Federal PL 107-110, The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, [Title IX, General](#)

[Provisions](#), Part A Definitions, Section 9101(25)

<http://www.helpforschools.com/ELLKBase/legal/Definition_LEP.shtml>

This website describes, in summary, the provisions made in the No Child Left Behind Act. It provided the definition of LEP for this paper.

Gerstle, Gary. & Mollenkopf, John. E Pluribus Unum?. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. 2001.

This book provided contemporary and historical perspectives on immigrant political incorporation. I used the first and tenth chapters of the book to highlight the history of immigration and some thoughts on the racialization of immigrants in the public education system. It also provided some insights on the education of immigrants.

Jane Addams School for Democracy. <www.publicwork.org/jas>

This is the Jane Addams School for Democracy website. It provides the mission statement for Jane Addams School. Also included on the website is how the organization runs, what they do, and programs they offer for participants.

Jaynes, Gerald D. Immigration and Race: New Challenges for American Democracy.

New Haven & London: Yale University Press. 2000.

This book was a great resource. It provided great insights and concepts on the racialization of immigrants and how that has affect American democracy. I used bits and pieces throughout the book.

Lowe, Lisa. Department of Comparative Literature at U of Massachusetts at Amherst in

Amherst, MA. ACLAnet. History of Migration and Immigration Laws in the

United States. <<http://www.umass.edu/complit/aclanet/USMigrat.html>>

This website provided a timeline of laws that regulated immigration in the United States. It contributed to the history piece of this PIE. The website cited Lisa Lowe, so this citation is an indirect citation of her work, which provided some great insights on the mistreatment of immigrants.

Ma, Jacinta. *What Works for the Children? What We Know and Don't Know about*

Bilingual Education. The Civil Rights Project. Harvard University. September

2002. <<http://moodle.macalester.edu/mod/resource/view.php?id=3771>>

This piece was a study/research done on bilingual education. This piece was a PIE in itself. The structure was clearly in “PIE” form. It provided definitions for ESL classes and bilingual education programs. It also identified problems with language support systems and recommendations for language support systems.

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instructional Educational Programs. U.S. Department of Education.

<http://www.ncele.gwu.edu/policy/states/reports/statedata/2003LEP/GrowingLEP_0304.pdf>

This website provided statistics and demographics on students in the public education system.

Smith-Davis, Judy. *The New Immigrant Students Need More than ESL*. Principal

Leadership. April 2004.

This piece of writing was an article on the needs of immigrant students. It was also written from a study that was done on immigrants and ESL.

Ueda, Reed. Postwar Immigrant America: A Social History. New York: Bedford Books. 1994.

This book provided a history of immigration after 1965. It mainly provided information on laws and regulations and the current demographics of the impact of immigration in the US including the workforce, labor, and other aspects.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), “State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education,” 1999–2000. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/quarterly/vol_3/3_2/q2-6.asp#Table-1>

This website provided demographics on children in schools and stats about the public education system.

Walqui, Aida. Access and Engagement: Program Design and Instructional Approaches for Immigrant Students in Secondary Schools. Illinois: Delta Systems Co, Inc. 2000.

This book provided four case studies of LEP/ESL students, problems with current LEP curriculums, and quite insightfully progressive thoughts on improvements through teaching and learning.