



## **Equalizing Educational Opportunity: In Defense of Bilingual Education— A California Perspective**

Under critical examination, the English language and its use in daily interactions carry with them symbolic values in our social world, including social mobility, educational achievement, and employment. Its representations in government bodies, mass media, education, and legal documents have further increased those values and subtly created a hostile environment for many US immigrants who are nonnative English speakers. In the bilingual education debate, this view of nativism and monolingualism has received support from critics who believe that bilingual education serves only to disembody national unity and cohesion. As a result of the English-only view, a number of bilingual education programs are curtailed in the states of California, Arizona, and Massachusetts. In this article, I adopt the theoretical framework of equal educational opportunity (EEO) to examine bilingual education conceived by the California Education for a Global Economy Initiative. In the discussion section, I also propose a bilingual education plan that could better reflect language-positive liberalism and a participatory educational ideal.

*It is the aim of progressive education to take part in correcting unfair privilege and unfair deprivation, not to perpetuate them. (John Dewey, 1916, pp. 119-120)*

**A**s a progressive movement, bilingual education emerged during the 1960s in an effort to change educational outcomes of and bring equality to language-minority students (Nieto, 2010). The ideal of recognizing the voices of minority students and providing them an educational environment that includes their native

language and culture is commendable; however, since its inception, a number of opponents have argued that bilingual education poses a threat to national integrity because of the use of languages other than English in education (Wiese & García, 1998). California (1998), Arizona (2000), and Massachusetts (2002) followed suit in their support of this view by passing propositions to dismantle bilingual education in these states, resulting in a significant drop in the number of minority students in bilingual programs. These propositions are reminiscent of the submersion bilingual education model, also known as the “sink or swim” approach, in which English language learners (ELLs) are taught almost exclusively in English with no access to special language services (Kim, Hutchison, & Winsler, 2015). When placed under programs informed by this education model, students are denied access to equal educational opportunity because this “sink or swim” approach to educating minority-language students has proven to be neither beneficial to improving their test scores nor their English language learning (Krashen, 2005).

In California, Senator Ricardo Lara originally proposed Senate Bill (SB) 1174, also known as the California Education for a Global Economy Initiative, to provide structured immersion programs to English language learners if needed. While this initiative, on the 2016 California ballot as Proposition 58,<sup>1</sup> recognizes the values of multilingual and multiliteracy in California, I believe that it falls into the utilitarianism conception of bilingual education, which is not conducive to equalizing educational opportunity for language-minority students. When bilingual education programs are guided by the thought of utilitarianism, language learning becomes economically driven and is designed in a way that glosses over the sociopolitical aspect of being a language minority. In these situations, the educational opportunities provided to ELLs are not real or worth wanting because there is not enough space for individuals who are historically marginalized to participate in public institutions without losing their identities. Furthermore, because of the lack of attention to minorities’ language and culture, these types of bilingual education programs narrow educational opportunities for ELLs whose failure at maintaining their native languages and developing proficiency in English would restrict their access to their next educational end, which then affects their enjoyment of equal educational opportunities (EEOs) and equal opportunities in general (Howe, 1992). In this article, I propose a bilingual-education program model that is conceived by Howe’s interpretation of EEO, which calls for a participatory educational ideal and language-positive liberalism with the goal of promoting language diversity. In my proposed bilingual education program for the state of California, I also

analyze the rationales of blending language-positive liberalism and the participatory educational ideal.

### **Models of Bilingual Education**

Among the models of bilingual education, the dual-language program, also known as the two-way bilingual program, is one of the most popular choices for many bilingual schools in the US (Genesee & Gándara, 1999; Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Palmer, 2007; Varghese & Park, 2010). In a dual-language program, both native speakers of English and native speakers of another language are present. Classes usually take the form of 50/50, in which both languages are evenly used during the school day, or of 90/10, in which the minority language receives the dominant position at the beginning and works toward a 50/50 share with the English language (Palmer, 2007). The purposeful integration of native and nonnative English-speaking students is to achieve biliteracy, academic competence, intercultural communication skills, and positive attitudes toward other culture groups (Lindholm-Leary, 2001). Other models include transitional, maintenance, structured immersion, sheltered immersion, and Canadian French immersion education.

In a *transitional* model, minority students' native languages and English both are used; however, as the students progress toward second or third grade, their native language use in classrooms is gradually discontinued. Abandoning the students' native language use in a transitional model is mainly due to its primary goal of developing minority students' English language proficiency and the belief that native language use in classrooms fails that objective (Kim, Hutchison, & Winsler, 2015). Thus, a transitional model is subtractive because of its main purpose to incorporate language-minority students into mainstream society through cultural assimilation. Elsewhere, this model of bilingual education is also critiqued for its view of minority languages as problems to be overcome (Ruiz, 1984). Unlike in the transitional model, language-minority students in the *maintenance* model receive years of schooling that is distinguished for its use of significantly more instruction in the minority students' native language (Kim, Hutchison, & Winsler, 2015). While a maintenance model seemingly values the language rights of the minority students through allocating time for developing minority languages, the concept that minority students could maintain their native languages only if a clear demarcation between their language and English is drawn is not helpful in sustaining bilingualism. This view of compartmentalizing language creates a mechanism in which the dominant language is designated as the authentic and the minority language the position of unqualified (García,

2011). A *structured immersion* program is mostly considered monolingual and is one in which teachers use simplified majority language for instruction. There will be rare moments in classrooms when teachers engage with the students in their first language, or L1 (Hornberger, 1991). *Sheltered immersion* programs provide content-knowledge instruction in strategic ways, such as the use of visual and tactical aids to help language-minority students develop knowledge in content topic, English, and accomplishing academic tasks (Hornberger, 1991; Short, 2002). *Canadian French immersion* education was developed first in St. Lambert, Quebec, and then other provinces in the 1960s when Anglophones realized the economic, political, and social drives of the French language (Roy & Galiev, 2011). As a radical immersion program, the medium of instruction remains in French until later grades, when English is introduced (Swain & Lapkin, 2005). With its aim of additive bilingualism, Canadian French immersion education develops students' French proficiency at no major cost to their academic skills in English (Cummins, 2014). Table 1 outlines the main features of the above bilingual education models.

### **The Bilingual Education Movement in California**

To set the scene for discussing equalizing educational opportunity for language-minority students and to connect readers to the current status of bilingual education in California, a brief historical review of the bilingual education movement is in order. Bilingual education in California has received close attention nationwide mainly because of the state's high percentage of immigrants. Particular policy-related events include the landmark decision in the *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) case against the San Francisco Unified School District, the Chacon-Moscone Bilingual Education Act in 1976 (Johnson & Martinez, 1999), the English-only initiative Proposition 63 in 1985, a more severe curtailment on bilingual education with Proposition 227 in 1998 (Gándara & Rumberger, 2009), and the more recent SB 1174, now Proposition 58, the California Education for a Global Economy Initiative, which would be operative in 2017 and which seeks to repeal and amend Proposition 227 (California Legislative Information, 2014). Until the initiative is enacted, schools in California are required to follow Proposition 227, which has lowered the number of language-minority students in bilingual education programs (Parrish et al., 2006). Of relevance to the current discussion, the new initiative replaces sheltered English-immersion programs with structured immersion programs, which differ from the former model in language of instruction and language ideology; the new initiative also authorizes legal guardians of pupils to choose a language

**Table 1**  
**Bilingual Education Models**

<i>Model</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Student type</i>	<i>Language of instruction</i>	<i>Language ideology</i>
Dual-language	Literacy in both languages	Language-minority and language-majority students	Commonly half L1 and half L2 or mostly L1	Multilingualism
Transitional bilingual	Prepare students for mainstream classes quickly	Language-minority students	Mostly L1	Monolingualism, subtractive bilingualism
Maintenance	Develop language-minority students' L1	Language-minority students	L1 and L2	Additive bilingualism
Structured immersion	Develop English proficiency	Language-minority students	Mostly simplified L2	Monolingualism
Sheltered immersion	Develop content knowledge and English proficiency	Language-minority students	Mostly L2	Subtractive bilingualism
Canadian French Immersion	Develop French proficiency	Language-majority students	Initial emphasis on L2	Additive bilingualism

acquisition program for the students. Additionally, the new initiative makes the argument that bilingualism or multilingualism contributes to the state's economic vitality and global competitiveness. In one of the very few critical studies of bilingual education, Huber (2011) critiqued teacher practices of English hegemony, which is created by the discourse of racist nativism that marginalizes Latina/o students' language, culture, and value in California public education. In this article, I follow the critical perspective presented in Huber (2011) by examining the California Education for a Global Economy Initiative through the lens of equal educational opportunity.

## **Theoretical Framework of Equal Educational Opportunity**

Howe (1992) suggests that a thorough understanding of the notion of equal educational opportunity encompasses three fundamental aspects, which are freedom and opportunity that is worth wanting, education that is enabling, and responsible parents/school that provide access to EEO. In explaining the concept of freedom and opportunity worth wanting, Howe believes that the ability to deliberate effectively is crucial, because it not only signals the obtainment of opportunity and relevant information required for deliberation, but also the absence of burdens engendered from social conditions. To illustrate an ineffective deliberation, Howe uses Dennett's (1984) concept of bare and real opportunity in relation to a prisoners' escape scheme. In this scheme, a bare opportunity for the prisoners to escape existed when the jailers did not share the information that the prisoners' cell doors would be open at night; in order for the prisoners to deliberate effectively, the information that the doors would be open at night was vital. An example Howe provides to illustrate the burdens of social conditions is of a family that displays dissatisfaction with US military operations in the Persian Gulf and subsequently receives threats to its property and safety of its members. In this case, the family is not enjoying its ability to deliberate effectively because although it had enough information, its freedom to do so is outweighed by the burdens from social conditions. Similarly, when enrolled in bilingual programs that align with monolingualism, language-minority students' freedom to exercise opportunity worth wanting is limited because they are situated in a learning context in which the information to cultivate and harness their native languages is absent. In other words, they do not have a real opportunity to develop bilingualism and knowledge about the assimilationism rhetoric circulated among antibilingual education initiatives.

In discussing the second feature of his EEO as education as enabling, Howe (1992) pointed out that education serves as a means to expand one's opportunity range to obtain other societal goods. If a person fails to acquire an adequate amount of knowledge at a certain point, then he or she will have limited opportunities in adulthood compared with others who had quality education early on. Consider Howe's example of a free adult literacy program in his elaboration of EEO as education as enabling. Placing adults into a free literacy program suggests that at a certain point in their educational experience the adults missed effective literacy education and thus their opportunities are limited now and into the future. Such adult literacy programs would also barely achieve their goal in the first aspect of EEO because the choices they provide are not choices worth wanting.

The choices between being literate and nonliterate should not exist because any rational human being would choose to become literate. The offering of such remedial programs could contain only bare opportunity because it narrows an adult's opportunities to further advancement in education and broader social fields. Similarly, the mentality that minority students' legitimacy in bilingual classrooms builds on their conformity to the majority group is problematic and incapable of producing education as enabling, because the minority students' capacity for effective deliberation is compromised by the asymmetrical power relations in society. For bilingual education that mostly reflects mainstream US culture and the dominance of English language, language-minority students will have limited viable options except working assiduously on their academic development or even sacrificing their identities in order to succeed in the larger social world where the political-economic order reflects the status quo.

Another feature of EEO that is worth attention is its conception of children. Because children are young and thus unable to exercise freedom and opportunities worth wanting, EEO is largely deliberated by schools or children's legal guardians in the form of paternalistic interference (Howe, 1992). In their deliberation of education, schools need to be cognizant of EEO, including EEO as enabling, educational opportunity chains, and the fact that children are unable to deliberate effectively before they develop that capacity. Thus, schools that provide bilingual education programs are in the position of equalizing educational opportunity for language-minority students through policy making, classroom instruction, curriculum design, and parental involvement. The preceding discussion includes three ideas central to Howe's characterization of EEO, which will be employed in the critique of California Education for a Global Economy Initiative. Now I turn to the introduction of utilitarianism along with Howe's critique of EEO informed by this political theory.

Classical utilitarianism, broadly defined by Mill (1861/1987), considers that "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness" (p. 6). Utilitarianism is thus of the view that social justice and moral standards are set up in a way that good consequences are maximized in relation to bad ones and the absence of alternative actions that would produce more good consequences (Carson, 1983). In his seminal work *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls (1971) pointed out that utilitarianism fails to take individual rights seriously. Rawls suggested that morally unacceptable actions such as slavery and suppression of speech become less significant issues if the outcome of a policy suggests that maximization of human welfare is achieved. In terms

of equal educational opportunity, Howe (1997) provides critiques of meritocratic utilitarianism, which considers the effectiveness of educational policies to be correlated to their economic productivity and educational opportunities to be distributed on the basis of economically profitable skills. Students are thus not viewed as individuals with free will to engage in social activities as they please; instead, they are manipulated to meet the needs of economic productivity. In Howe's example, children from low-income families who do well in educational programs such as Head Start will likely receive limited educational opportunities once it is discovered that the resources devoted to those educational programs will result in greater economic productivity if they are used for gifted students in science and technology education. Utilitarians believe that the achievements made through scientific and technological programs would ultimately benefit people with lower socioeconomic status, thus increasing the overall welfare and happiness of society. Regrettably, this belief is problematic because it overlooks individuals' needs and considers economic productivity as the only purpose of education. So far, I have introduced the main characterizations of Howe's EEO and his critique of utilitarianism in providing education worth wanting. Using these discussions as a theoretical framework, I now turn to the critique of California Education for a Global Economy Initiative.

### **California Education for a Global Economy Initiative**

Based on SB No. 1174, the California Education for a Global Economy Initiative (California Ed.G.E. Initiative, or Proposition 58) replaces sheltered English-immersion programs with structured immersion programs. *Sheltered English immersion program* in the previous Proposition 227 refers to the use of English as the dominant language in all instruction and materials for English language learners for less than one year before they are transferred to mainstream classes. While such an educational approach to language-minority students is problematic because of its subtractive view, offering critiques of Proposition 227 is not within the scope of this article. The structured immersion program distinguishes itself from the sheltered immersion program in that it relies on the monolingualism ideology as its guideline and uses simplified L2 in instruction. Integrating features of the structured immersion program, the California Ed.G.E. Initiative also requires that parents or legal guardians of pupils choose a language acquisition program that would best suit their children's needs (California Legislative Information, 2014). To show how the California Ed.G.E. Initiative distinguishes itself from its predecessor,



I draw some comparisons with Proposition 227. Unlike Proposition 227, which emphasizes the importance of the English language for English language learners, the initiative bases its argument for education in not only the English language but in additional languages such as Mandarin and Spanish from a socioeconomic perspective. Additionally, while Proposition 227 attempts to eliminate bilingual classes as far as possible, the new initiative considers being bilingual or multilingual an economic resource for citizens in California. In light of the previously discussed conception of EEO, the California Ed.G.E. Initiative does not provide equal educational opportunities for language-minority students. To begin with, the initiative makes the obvious connection between bilingual education and economic competitiveness both in its title and document, which falls under the utilitarian line of thought that uses education to maximize economic productivity. As a result, languages that promote the economic vitality of the state of California may become supported while languages that are less useful in the realm of economic productivity are marginalized. Moreover, this market mentality runs the danger of using language-minority students as live specimens of a new language and culture for language-majority students to study, which further deepens the hegemony of the English language (Petrovic, 2005). Furthermore, the proposed structured bilingual model in the initiative is an ineffective bilingual project as it fails to achieve meaningful multilingualism, equal opportunity for academic success, and a supportive environment for intercultural communications (Skutnabb-Kangas & García, 1995, as cited in Bekerman, 2005). When defining the term *structured English immersion programs*, the new initiative indicates that “nearly all classroom instruction is provided in English” for English language learners (California Legislative Information, 2014). The action of promoting English-only instruction is again utilitarian based, because it suggests that the way to become a productive citizen depends largely on gaining mainstream-culture currency. On its agenda, the new initiative uses the same language as the group English for the Children, an organization that supports English-only education and is responsible for the decreasing bilingual education in the states of California, Arizona, and Massachusetts. It states:

The government and the public schools of California have a moral obligation and a constitutional duty to provide all of California’s children, regardless of their ethnicity or national origins, with the skills necessary to become productive members of our society, and of these skills, literacy in the English language is among the most important. (Cited in Petrovic & Kuntz, 2013, p. 134)

Thinking through the lens of utilitarianism, one sees that language-minority students in classrooms are not given considerable freedom to choose their way of life; instead, their language education is used by society in the name of preserving nationalism and promoting economic productivity. Such bilingual programs would neither provide opportunities worth wanting nor education that enables language-minority students to obtain other societal goods, because the curriculum is not intended to make them become aware of the sociopolitical role of the English language and the discourses of assimilation, subtraction, and marginality in a bilingual classroom and the detrimental effects of such power dynamics on their educational careers.

### **Proposed Bilingual Education Plan**

Based on the above discussion, what is problematic about the California Ed.G.E. Initiative is its market-driven educational missions and lack of critical thinking in designing bilingual education. Aiming for transformative bilingual education with elements of multilingualism, equality, and a supportive environment, the proposed bilingual education plan will reflect the thought of language-positive liberalism and the participatory ideal of education.

In their discussion of language policy in a liberal state, Petrovic and Kuntz (2013), building on Isaiah Berlin (1969), introduced the idea of *language-positive liberalism* and *language-negative liberalism*. The former term refers to the promotion of an ideal of language diversity that a transformative bilingual program should achieve. The pursuit of a language-positive liberalism is manifested in statements made by the National Association of Bilingual Education in the US and the Language Policy Research Center at Bar-Ilan University in Israel (Petrovic & Kuntz, 2013). In both cases, equal educational opportunity is recognized as being part of the broader equal opportunity in a democratic society. Language-negative liberalism, on the contrary, makes the argument that people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds should adopt a normative way of being by conforming to the mainstream values and culture, including the English language used by the dominant group. Negative-liberalism bilingual education does not provide EEO simply because of the pro-English view that compartmentalizes languages and considers one language to be the only legitimate voice representing the nation-state (Petrovic & Kuntz, 2013).

On the other hand, a participatory interpretation of bilingual education holds that individuals should be able to participate in social activities so that their voices can be heard and identities retained. To

make the connection between participation and equality, Kymlicka (1991) pointed out:

[I]t only makes sense to invite people to participate in politics (or for people to accept that invitation) if they are treated as equals. ... And that is incompatible with defining people in terms of roles they did not shape or endorse. (p. 89, as cited in Howe, 1997)

In bilingual education, the language-positive liberalism ideal and the participatory ideal suggest that a community that values and supports bilingualism and multilingualism needs to be in place, that language-minority students should have access to their native languages and culture during their classroom participation; such bilingual education programs should also aim toward creating plural linguistic circumstances that denormalize the institutionally imposed discourse of English dominance (Young, 1990).

What also needs to be taken into consideration in planning a bilingual program is the larger social world in which the minority students will enter upon the completion of their studies. When a community is mostly pro-English, there will be narrow spaces for language-minority individuals to foster their native languages and use them in professional workplaces, educational settings, and community involvement. Such hostility toward immigrant students has been documented in recent studies based in California (Huber, 2011; Palmer, 2007). Relying on the theoretical framework of racist nativism in Latina/o critical theory, Huber (2011) discusses how English hegemony is being practiced by teachers in California public education. Based on 40 testimonial interviews with 20 undocumented and US-born Chicana students, Huber observes Latina/o students' subordination through subtle forms of English dominance. These educational experiences include being teased and ridiculed by English-dominant groups, being considered as physically inferior, and a learning environment in which the deficient role of the Spanish language is legitimized by others. This subtractive schooling mentality could have significant and long-lasting effects on the conception of equal educational opportunity and the prospect of language-minority students (Valenzuela, 2010). In her study of a dual-language immersion program in Northern California, Palmer (2007), borrowing from Bakhtin (1998) and Bourdieu (1991), examines language-minority students' interactions with power, race, and language in an English-dominant school. Palmer makes the point that while the dual-language immersion program seeks to develop bilingualism, biliteracy, cross-cultural understandings, and high academic achievement for all students, the

rest of the school environment is mainly English dominant, which helps the framing of language-minority students as deficient.

Drawing from the discussion of bilingual education planning and implementation in California, the proposed critical dual-language immersion model aims at developing critical literacy in both students' primary and target languages. To foster multilingualism and emancipatory education in classrooms, language-minority students, language-majority students, and the teacher are encouraged to use the languages that they feel comfortable with (see Table 2 for the Proposed Bilingual Education Plan).

**Table 2**  
**Proposed Bilingual Education Plan**

<i>Model</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Student type</i>	<i>Language of instruction</i>	<i>Language ideology</i>
Critical dual-language immersion	Critical literacy in both languages	Language-minority student and language-majority student	A balanced view of using both languages	Multilingualism

The proposed bilingual education program places salience on critical reflections of language learning in that both teachers and students are given opportunities to problematize an apolitical view of language. Through discussion and analysis of cases in which language-minority students are oppressed, teachers and students are introduced to the power-dynamic aspect of language education and how language domination is intimately connected to it. For example, classroom dialogues could be conducted in a way that portrays how minorities are pressured to act white through appropriating one's racial identity toward whiteness or to remain silent, which exacerbates the problem of EEO for language-minority students. In the proposal, I also recommend diversifying the ethnicity of the teaching force. Teachers who are Korean Americans, African Americans, and Spanish Americans could share their heritage language and cultural backgrounds with the students and help foster an environment conducive to multilingualism.

### **Conclusion**

In this article, I have discussed the current state of bilingual education in California in light of the conceptual framework of equal edu-

cational opportunity. The state of California has been home to many Asian and Latino/a immigrants who will rely on their native languages and English for economic, social, and political purposes. Through Howe's EEO perspective, many current bilingual education programs fail to equalize educational opportunities for language-minority students because of their lack of freedom to deliberate effectively and the narrowed opportunity chain they are pulled into when they enroll in these programs. In addition to these problems, the California Ed.G.E. Initiative prioritizes economic development in designing its bilingual programs, which reflects the utilitarianism school of thought that appeals to market mentality. In these bilingual education programs, only languages that are widely circulated in the business world will be considered for teaching (Varghese & Park, 2010). To achieve EEO for language-minority students and to defend a legitimate role of bilingual education in California schooling, educators and policy makers need to be cognizant of power relations and the circulation of English dominance discourse in and out of schools. In an increasingly globalized world, the view of education as an instrument and commodity for further economic advancement has permeated the educational culture (Carr & Kemmis, 2003). Without understanding the power relations and taking actions to equalize educational opportunity for minority students, bilingual education proposals will continue to be manipulated by the market mentality as in the case of the Proposition 58 initiative, which does not provide language-minority students with opportunity worth wanting and education as enabling. In the proposed bilingual plan, I suggest that bilingual programs in California consider aspects of language-positive liberalism and a participatory educational ideal. Specifically, teachers and language-majority/minority students should become involved in critical discussions of language-learning issues such as student identity development, diversity, critical literacy, and language dominance. While it is difficult to be directly involved in the policy-making process, it is advocacy groups such as Californians Together, Multicultural Education Training Associates, the California Association of Bilingual Education, California Tomorrow, and Californians for Justice that have responded to the antibilingual education rhetoric (Olsen, 2009). Framed as civil rights movements and educational opportunity, such responses rely on legal advocacy and campaigns in the protection of immigrant students' access to equal educational opportunities. These public group actions play a major role in the battle with bilingual education that leads to language minority students' divestment in their native language and culture.

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## Note

<sup>1</sup>*Editors' Note:* In its September 2016 Board meeting, CATESOL resolved to officially support the passing of Proposition 58; see <http://catesol.org/CATESOL%20Resolution%20Prop%2058.pdf>.

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