



A publication of the  
New York State Association  
for Bilingual Education

2014

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### Recommended Citation

Parra, Elena B.; Evans, Carol A.; Fletcher, Todd; and Combs, Mary C. (2014) "The Psychological Impact of English Language Immersion on Elementary Age English Language Learners," *Journal of Multilingual Education Research*: Vol. 5, Article 4. Available at: <http://fordham.bepress.com/jmer/vol5/iss1/4>

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# The Psychological Impact of English Language Immersion on Elementary Age English Language Learners

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To date, most studies about English language learners (ELLs) in Structured English Immersion (SEI) classrooms in the state of Arizona have focused on ELLs' lack of English acquisition in one year, a time frame expected by Arizona policymakers, as well as their lagging academic progress. While these studies almost uniformly have surfaced educational and policy concerns about the effectiveness of SEI, the debate about this approach has been marked by a lack of attention to research addressing the *non-academic* ramifications of enforcing this model on children who speak or understand little or no English. One relatively unexamined consequence of the SEI program is its potentially detrimental emotional, psychosomatic, and mental effects on students forced to receive instruction (and to be tested) exclusively in English, a language they are still in the process of acquiring. The qualitative research study described in this article addresses this issue by examining the participation of monolingual Spanish-speaking children in SEI classes in one school district. Drawing from the research literature on child maltreatment investigators sought to determine if SEI placement subjected monolingual Spanish-speaking students to conditions of maltreatment. The researchers acknowledge that the theoretical operationalization of child maltreatment remains a challenge, in part because of an absence of consensus among social science researchers about what precisely constitutes child maltreatment, and because social sensibilities change over time. Nonetheless, results indicate that the English learners in this study experienced clear psychological effects like anxiety and depression symptomatology, anger, school phobia, and eating and sleeping difficulties. In-depth interviews with students and parents indicated intense emotional distress from being subjected to environmental conditions from which they could not escape. Their experiences, analyzed within the broader socio-political context of contemporary Arizona, suggest that for some children participation in SEI classrooms constitute a form of emotional maltreatment.

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**Keywords:** English language immersion, Structured English Immersion, bilingual education, psychological maltreatment of children

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The Arizona public school system (K-12) is plagued with a myriad of challenges, including consistently low statewide standardized test score averages across demographic groups and high dropout rates. From 1999 through 2003, for example, Arizona had the highest dropout rate in the country (Bland, 2005), and in 2006, only three states, Louisiana, Mississippi, and New Mexico, reported higher dropout rates (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2008). The number of students who drop out of school in Arizona remains high. In 2014 alone, 18,000 students dropped out of high school (Scott, 2014). This subpar performance by the state school system is probably not surprising, given that schools and teachers must cope with stubbornly parsimonious state legislative funding levels. In 2012, although Arizona was already near the bottom (rank-48<sup>th</sup>) it was also ranked number one for making the deepest spending cuts of all states since 2008 (Kossan, 2008; Oliff, Mai, & Leachman, 2012).

In the midst of such difficulties and challenged by the demands of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, (and its several ancillary programs) the state schools' abilities to achieve high academic standards have been complicated since 2001 by the implementation of Proposition 203 (Arizona Revised Statutes §15-751, 2015), the ballot initiative replacing most bilingual education programs with Structured English Immersion (Combs & Nicholas, 2012; Mahoney, MacSwan, & Thompson, 2005; Wright & Choi, 2006). This law requires that students who do not know English well, and who through their performance on the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA) are designated as English language learners (ELL) students, be instructed and tested only through English. Precise identification of the number of English-learning K-12 students is difficult, in part because of changes in the way that the Arizona State Department of Education (ADE) reclassified students between 2004 and 2012 (Combs, 2014a). For example, ADE reported a 51 percent decrease among Latino ELLs and an 89 percent decrease in Indigenous ELLs (Milem, Bryan, Sesate, & Montaña, 2013). The validity of the AZELLA was challenged by the U.S. Office for Civil Rights and the Department of Justice because the "cut scores" for student reclassification as fluent had been manipulated in order to reclassify English learners as proficient when they had reached only an intermediate level of proficiency as determined by the state's own ELL performance standards (Florez, 2012). In addition, a change in the Home Language Survey, used by schools to identify students for English proficiency testing, resulted in a serious undercount of ELLs in Arizona (Goldenberg & Rutherford-Quach, 2012). The most accurate count comes from a 2010 study by the Migration Policy Institute (Batalova & McHugh), which estimated Arizona's ELL population at 166,000, or 15 percent of the total number of K-12 students.

Paradoxically, while Proposition 203 eliminated bilingual education programs as an option for instructing English learners, the law permitted only fluent English speakers to enroll in dual language programs. The latter group qualifies for waivers provided to children who already knew English. English language learners by definition are acquiring English and thus are legally prohibited from placement in a program designed to teach them English (Combs, Evans, Fletcher, Parra, & Jiménez, 2005).<sup>1</sup> In

2006, the Arizona State legislature redefined the state's Structured English Immersion program as a year-long, grammar-based experience in English Language Development (ELD) classes for four hours each day. Subject areas like science, social studies and language arts are withheld until English language learners are reclassified as fluent (Combs, 2012). The belief that children can learn English well in one year contradicts decades of research on second language acquisition. Numerous studies indicate a range between 4 to 10 years to achieve academic proficiency in English, depending on the variables like how states define proficiency, whether ELLs can read or write in their first languages, the income and education level of parents, or whether students receive first language support in school. Similarly, the "one-year to full proficiency" reflects at least two folk myths held by state legislators about second language acquisition. The first is that immersion in English is superior to other approaches because of the assumption that instruction in English about English will accelerate acquisition of the language. The second is young children are better able to learn a second language than older children or adults. While presumptively logical, these beliefs are challenged by the research studies that overwhelmingly indicate a benefit to students from learning English and academic subjects through their first language, though this finding seems counterintuitive to most members of the general public, including state lawmakers (Combs, 2015; Combs et al, 2005). Additionally, the law's explicit prohibition of content area instruction – required for all other students in Arizona -- raises serious civil rights concerns about whether English learners are receiving a meaningful education (Combs, 2014b).

Although state policymakers and state educational leaders have sought to paint the SEI English-only program as successful, their statistics and data analysis have been consistently found questionable by researchers and studies have provided sound empirical data to the contrary (DaSilva Iddings, Combs, & Moll, 2014; Jimenez-Castellanos, Blanchard, Atwill, & Jimenez-Silva, 2014; Krashen, 2004; Wright & Pu, 2005). Indeed, the quality of the state's database prohibits reliable analysis of academic progress such as the tracking of individual students across the years (MacSwan, Stockford, Mahoney; Thompson, & DiCerbo, 2002; Mahoney, MacSwan, & Thompson, 2005).

A national study conducted by Losen (2008), compared the progress of Arizona English learners to that of English learners across the country, using 4th-grade reading scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) database. Findings show that scores of Arizona English learners fell sharply after 2005, widening rather than shrinking the achievement gap between them and the national average for English learners (Losen, 2008).

Two studies have noted that many SEI teachers feel under prepared for the new program, and doubtful of its benefits. Only ten percent of the teachers of English learners surveyed by Wright and Choi (2006) believed that Proposition 203 led to effective programs for their students. In an ethnographic study of the effects of Structured English Immersion on one school by Combs, Evans, Fletcher, Parra, and Jiménez (2005), teachers worried that the requirement to teach literacy and English language development as well as content in English to students who did not understand the language (or did not understand it well) impeded the opportunity to learn the

content required by the state's academic standards. The researchers argued that the policy for one-year SEI programs was a failure, since more time was needed for learning English. Finally, administrators, parents, teachers, and children were demoralized by the requirement that children be taught and tested in a language they could not understand.

The use of the mother tongue in the teaching of English has been an established practice for some time and there is significant research demonstrating the effectiveness of mother tongue instruction for teaching English language learners (Collier, 1987; Cummins, 1991; 1992; Cummins & Swain, 1986; DaSilva Iddings & Rose, 2012; Ramírez, 1992; Ramírez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991; Wong Fillmore, 1991). In this context, then, the passage of Proposition 203 constitutes a departure from established practices involving the educational welfare and well-being of children.

To the faculty and administrative staff of Nopal Elementary School<sup>2</sup> in southern Arizona where the study was conducted, the English-only instructional requirement seems cruel and wrong-headed. At the direction of the Arizona State Superintendent of Instruction, however, schools have been heavily monitored and are being held accountable for the rigid implementation of the law. District officials have been threatened with the loss of their teaching credentials. Thus, although the faculty and staff at Nopal Elementary have looked for ways to soften what they see as the policy's negative effects on the students, they have been very limited (Combs et al., 2005).

The lack of attention to research in second language acquisition by supporters of Proposition 203 has been discussed elsewhere (Arias & Faltis, 2012; Combs, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Combs et al., 2005; Gándara & Hopkins, 2010; MacSwan, 2004; Moore., 2014; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005; Wright, 2005; Wright & Pu, 2005). In addition, the debate about the efficacy of Structured English Immersion has been marked by a lack of interest in research addressing the non-academic ramifications of implementing this approach with non-English-speaking children. One relatively unexamined consequence of the proposition concerns the possible detrimental emotional, psychosomatic, and mental effects on English language learners forced to receive instruction (and to be tested) exclusively in English, a language they are in the process of acquiring. The research project described in this article addresses this issue.

Purposely, the current study examines the psychological impact of state language policy on Mexican American and Mexican immigrant children attending Nopal Elementary School in the Loma Vista School District in Southern Arizona. In the sections that follow, we situate our findings within the research literature on child maltreatment. The historical context of education policies toward English learning populations has also been considered.

### **Theoretical Conceptual Framework**

The study of child maltreatment has evolved over the past 60 years and has been understood to include both physical and psychological abuse. Although psychological maltreatment is considered an implicit aspect of physical abuse (Cicchetti & Manly, 2001; Gabarino, 1998; McGee & Wolfe, 1991), research on child abuse has generally focused on the physical forms of maltreatment primarily because of the greater ease and confidence with which physical abuse can be identified (Doyle, 1997). Some would

argue, however, that a full understanding of what constitutes any form of child maltreatment will be achieved only by placing psychological maltreatment at the center of all child maltreatment research (Gabarino, 1998).

When viewed from an academic perspective, the basic question of how to operationalize child maltreatment remains a challenge (Cicchetti & Manly, 2001; Korbin & Krugman, 2014). Socio-cultural consensus does not exist among social science researchers about what constitutes child maltreatment and social sensibilities change over time. In this context, questions about the basis and definition of child maltreatment persist. An example of the ambiguity of an adequate definition of child maltreatment would be that some individuals experience what would objectively seem to be abuse, but apparently do not develop emotional and psychological symptoms from it (Campos, Frankel, & Camaras, 2004; Feiring, 2005).

However, many have argued that children who have been abused present a number of internal (e.g., emotional distress, anxiety depression) and external (e.g., aggression) symptoms (Bender, Postlewait, & Thompson, 2011; Topitzes, Mersky, & Reynolds, 2011) manifested in their behavioral, emotional, social, psychophysiological and cognitive performance (Korbin & Krugman, 2014; Righthand, Kerr, & Drach, 2003). For example, it has been found that children who have been exposed to abusive environmental conditions can develop mood disorders (e.g., anxiety, depression), trauma, and impaired sense of self (Bender, Postlewait, & Thompson, 2011; Korbin & Krugman, 2014; Silvern & Griese, 2012).

Gabarino (1998) further argued that when “children are psychologically abused, their development of self-esteem, of social competence, of the capacity for intimacy, and for positive and healthy interpersonal relationships, is jeopardized” (p. 3). Additionally, his work provides a useful symptomatic matrix that can be used to help determine if the conditions for child maltreatment exist for those children forced to be taught under the new language policy.

Table 1 below specifies five forms of abuse that Gabarino believes should be considered carefully. He argues that maltreatment can be said to exist when a serious violation has occurred in one of the indicators along with an even moderate violation in another.

Table 1  
*Gabarino's Indicators of Child Maltreatment*

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>
Rejection:	In which there is a refusal to acknowledge the child and the child's needs
Isolation:	In which the child is cut off from normal social experiences and friendships, and made to feel alone in the world
Ignoring:	In which the adult is unresponsive to the child's need for interaction
Terrorizing:	In which a climate of fear and threat is created around the child
Corrupting:	In which the child is stimulated to engage in destructive behavior

Source: (Garabino, 1998)

The above table will prove beneficial for analysis and interpretation of the experiences of study participants. In short, the core issues in the definition of abuse pertain to the child's identity and development and the environmental conditions under which the abuse is perpetrated.

Based on the above constructs and for purposes of the present investigation child abuse/maltreatment is defined as *any action or environmental condition that hurts or belittles a child and result in psychological damage as evidenced by feelings of anxiety, sadness/depression, psychosomatic conditions, negative changes in self perception and the development of interactional difficulties*. It is important to understand how education policies potentially can lead to the maltreatment of children. More specifically, this study seeks to discover whether the conditions created by a restrictive language and education policy constitute abuse.

### **Child Abuse, Schools, and Educational Policies**

Research about child abuse and child maltreatment in schools is scarce. The best scenario suggests that this deficiency would be attributed to school policies and practices regulated by both government entities and local community stakeholders which provide the necessary infrastructure to safeguard against the possibility of gross or systematic maltreatment. It does not always follow, however, that the existence of such checks and balances prevents a form of child abuse and child maltreatment caused by the schools themselves and the policies they are required to implement. It is argued that if a child suffers stress or anxiety because of a school language policy, for instance, parents or teachers might not automatically recognize it as maltreatment.

Furthermore, it is not within the expertise of parents and teachers to diagnose the child's symptoms. The proper care of the child is entrusted to the school by the parents and it is the responsibility of the school to appropriately evaluate the consequences of its actions for the physical and psychological health and safety of the children under its charge.

We propose another less favorable interpretation of the lack of research investigations into school-based child maltreatment. That is, children who exhibit symptoms of maltreatment are considered to be projecting personal psychological problems brought on by problems experienced at home with their families. For example, children who exhibit excessive anxiety concerning separation from the home or from persons to whom they are attached can be said to exhibit a Separation Anxiety Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) for which a number of treatment strategies may be applied to correct the child's inability to adapt. The possibility that the school environment may have contributed to the anxiety the child is experiencing is not likely to be explored. While it is certainly fair to say that some cases of maltreatment are attributable to issues in the home environment, there may be alternative explanations. For example, an alternative explanation for a child's distress can be found in the phenomenon of bullying. Bullying in schools creates an environment in which a child is repeatedly exposed to negative actions which result in the development of increasing symptoms of distress (Mash & Wolfe, 2010). However, schools are not held responsible for the emotional or physical symptoms these children manifest.

Numerous anecdotal, narrative, and biographical accounts in immigrant, American Indian, and minority communities have documented what certainly appears to be the historical maltreatment of children (Gándara & Orfield, 2010; Villaseñor, 2005) in United States schools. Such accounts described education policies and practices that sought to *Americanize* children. In Texas, California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado, Mexican American school children were often segregated into remedial *low first grade* or *IC* classrooms where they were retained until they had learned English. Children who knew no English were forbidden to speak Spanish, even on the playground, and often physically punished for breaking this rule. American Indian children in boarding schools were similarly subjected to coercive and homogenizing policies designed to strip them of their indigenous languages, cultures, and identities. The research and anthropological literature is replete with narrative accounts of the devastating effects of these policies; these accounts, the high dropout rates, and resulting low levels of schooling among Mexican Americans in the Southwest and Native children on Indian reservations provide powerful indictments of these practices (Crawford, 2004; Grande, 2004; McCarty, 2002, 2011 2013; Ruiz, 2004; Spring, 2010; Villaseñor, 2005; Wyman, 2012).

It is unfortunate that research pertaining to child maltreatment has generally assumed that the causes for maltreatment fall almost exclusively within the purview of the parent(s). It has been observed that if a child manifests symptoms of abuse at school, the parents are most likely to be blamed, as it is assumed that the abuse most certainly occurred at home, long before the child entered the school building. In the present study, a need for a broader explanation is put forth. The position taken by the researchers conducting this study is that the trauma experienced by the participant children at Nopal Elementary is influenced by the State of Arizona's language policy, which at the very least, tacitly implies responsibility on the part of the school, the district, the state department of education and state legislators. Based on the notion that institutions like schools are responsible for the care and supervision of children



over an extended period of time and that they are in a position to advertently or inadvertently maltreat their students, then these institutions must be diligent in considering the psychological impact on students of programs, policies, and methods of instruction. Moreover, given that it is a well documented fact that SEI programs have created conditions in which the child's needs (e.g., communication, cultural, social, emotional, linguistic) are not acknowledged (Combs & Nicholas, 2012) and in which one has been cut off from normal social experiences, then it should not be surprising that an atmosphere of unresponsiveness for the child's basic need for social interaction is produced. This study seeks to investigate if children who participated in SEI classroom had developed symptoms associated with children who have been exposed to abusive conditions.

### **Relevance of the Study**

In view of the increasing concerns about recent mandates to increase SEI participation by three or four years until the child has acquired English Proficiency (Jiménez-Castellanos et al., 2014) and the alarming findings about the failure of these programs to meet the academic and linguistic needs of English Language Learners (Combs & Nicholas, 2012; DaSilva Iddings, Combs, & Moll, 2012; Gándara & Orfield, 2010), it is vital to examine the psychological implications of participation in these programs. In addition, recent research has raised concerns about the effectiveness of SEI classroom instruction and the negative academic impact of the lack of exposure to content learning and literacy development (Rios Aguilar, González-Canche, & Moll, 2010). Thus, a growing but unexplored fear of the impact of the social isolation to which English Language Learners are subjected frames the relevance of this study.

### **Research Questions**

The central questions of the present study are:

- 1) What happens when the native language is not allowed to be used in the school setting? Is the denial of the child's innate, though legally abstract right to speak their native language harmful to their psychological, social and cognitive development? Is this a form of child maltreatment?
- 2) Does subjecting children to roughly six and a half hours of classroom instruction per day in a language they do not understand harmful to their self-esteem and confidence and to their ability to interact well with others?
- 3) Do children who are segregated in English only classrooms functioning under learning conditions that do not meet their linguistic and learning needs develop mood disorder symptoms (e.g., anxiety, depression, sadness) associated with abuse?
- 4) Are schools capable, through the policies that govern them, of child maltreatment/abuse?

## The Study

The present study is part of a larger investigation into the effects of Proposition 203 in an urban elementary school in which the majority of students (between 60 and 70 percent) are English language learners. Data collection for the first part of the larger study took place between July 2003 and May 2005, and included classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with 36 members of the school’s faculty and district staff, and 27 interviews with parents and children. Findings reported thus far have focused primarily on the effect upon school administrators, staff and programs at the school (Combs, Evans et al., 2005). The study reported here constitutes the second part of this investigation and took place between 2005 and 2010. It included 28 interviews with parents and children.

Following the implementation of the new law, most children at Nopal Elementary were placed in SEI classrooms. By law, and regardless of the wishes of the parents, only children who had met a high standard of proficiency in English were allowed to enroll in the school’s dual language program. As it was noted earlier, this situation is paradoxical, with only fluent English-speakers legally eligible for a bilingual program that at least historically, was designed to help ELLs acquire English as a second language and to keep up academically in content areas. Dual language programs also specifically brought together English and Spanish-speakers in a single classroom to learn about and through both languages and to serve as linguistic resources for one another (Adelman-Reyes & Crawford, 2012; Adelman-Reyes & Kleyn, 2010; Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010; Howard, 2007; Howard & Christian, 2002; Howard, Sugarman, Christian, Lindholm-Leary, & Rogers, 2007; Soltero, 2004).<sup>3</sup>

## Method

### Subjects

Eighteen parents, representing 16 families and ten children belonging to ten of the families, participated in the study. Fourteen families were represented by one of the parents and two families were represented by both parents. All

Table 2.

*Parent and ELL children participants*

	Parents	Children in SEI	Children in DLP
Prior to the study	18	8	2
During the study	18	9	1

18 parents (11 mothers and 7 fathers) who participated in the study, with the exception of one, were immigrants who had been living in the United States for 5 or fewer years. Specifically, 17 parents were from the state of Sonora (the Mexican state that borders Arizona) and 1 was from Jalisco (Southwestern Mexico). Only one of the parents was bilingual, all others were predominantly Spanish speaking. All parents preferred that the interview be conducted in Spanish. Two of the parents had completed high school and the rest had an educational level of less than 9 years. The parents interviewed had a total of 23 children at Nopal Elementary at the time of the interview, of which 10 agreed to participate in the study.

All the 10 participating in the study attended Nopal Elementary school and had been placed in SEI programs either before or during the time the interview was conducted. The distribution by grade was two in the first grade, one in the second grade, two in the third grade, three in the fourth grade, and two in the fifth grade. Prior to their participation in the study eight of the participating children had been categorized as English Language Learners as determined by an informal screening instrument used by the school bilingual specialist. Two of the children were initially placed in the Dual Language Program (DLP) but were transferred to the SEI program due to the fact that they could not be classified as fluent. Additionally, one of the SEI program participants was transferred to the dual language program at the time of his participation in the study. All of the children preferred to be interviewed in Spanish.

### **Instruments**

Semi-structured interview guides were developed for parents and for children (See Appendix A). The parent interview guide was developed and used to inquire about parents' knowledge of the law and their views of the implications of the implementation of Structured English Immersion classes as well as the impact of the program on their children's personality and educational future. Given the open-ended nature of some questions, the participants themselves were at liberty to determine the direction of the interview and address issues or concerns that might not have been anticipated by the original protocol.

A semi-structured interview was also developed for the children who participated in the study (see Appendix B). The interview guide consisted of questions aimed at generating understanding of how their school placement was affecting them, if at all.

### **Researchers**

The investigators were four educational researchers from the College of Education in the University of Arizona. One of the researchers is also a licensed, practicing psychologist in the state of Arizona. She has a doctoral degree from the University of Arizona in school psychology, had training and a clinical internship in psychology and post doctoral studies in neuropsychology. Three of the researchers hold faculty positions in the College of Education at the University of Arizona and one is an associate professor at Argosy University. One of the researchers has worked over 30 years in the educational field and specializes in the education of children with special needs. Two of the researchers conducting this study have written about state education and language policy. All participating researchers are bilingual. Two are native speakers and the other two acquired proficiency in Spanish as adults.

### **Study Site**

The study was conducted at an elementary school located in a school district in southern Arizona. According to data on their web page<sup>4</sup> at the time of the study, Nopal Elementary served a population of approximately 730 children with the following demographic characteristics: 92% of the students were of Mexican origin, 94% qualified for free or reduced lunches, and of those students more than 6% were

homeless. Almost 70% of Nopal students were designated as English Language Learners.

Prior to the establishment of Structured English Immersion programs, Nopal Elementary School had a well established bilingual program and it was in the fourth year of a newly developed dual language program. This dual program replaced an earlier transitional bilingual education model based on providing predominantly Spanish speaking children with Spanish literacy and content instruction in the first three years of schooling to later transfer to all-English instruction in about the third or fourth grade.

### **Procedure**

Parents were contacted at a parent-teacher community meeting at which two of the researchers explained in Spanish the nature and purpose of the study and the procedures to be employed. Parents received a detailed explanation of what their participation entailed. After the information was presented parents were invited to ask questions. Parents who were willing to participate were asked to sign an information contact form. Twenty five parents signed the form. Within the following week parents were contacted to schedule an interview meeting time. Parents were contacted by phone and were given the choice to be interviewed either at their home or at the school setting.

Out of the original twenty five parents who signed the willingness to participate form, seven indicated they were no longer available or interested. With the remaining 18 parents, the researchers scheduled semi-structured interviews at a site of their choice. Prior to conducting the interview parents signed a consent form. Parents could choose English, Spanish or both as the language of the interview. All parents chose to be interviewed in Spanish. The interview was tape recorded and took an average of one and a half hours to complete.

At the time of the interview parents, whose children were scheduled for participation, were informed about the timeline for interviewing children. Parents were asked to sign a consent form to allow their children to participate. All children were interviewed in the language of their choice (all participating children indicated that they preferred Spanish) in a private room situated inside the school's library. A semi structured interview format developed to be used as a guide when interviewing participating children was administered. The semi-structured interview guide constructed for children consisted of questions aimed at generating understanding of how their school placement was affecting them. All interviews were tape recorded.

### **Data Analysis**

Interviews were transcribed and read individually and as a group by all investigators. We used the constant comparative method of analysis for understanding data, coding, and finding themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Each investigator first identified tentative categories and themes, and then the group met to discuss and compare these, returning often to the data for clarification. Many themes emerged directly from the categories anticipated by the questions contained in the semi-structured interviews. Others, however, emerged only when the data was read across

the sets of transcripts, that is, when more in depth reading and search for common themes was conducted (Seidman, 2006). Researchers as a group held discussions to identify commonalities, to compare and verify support for the themes that had emerged in individual analyses phase, and to relabel and recategorize themes as group understandings of the data evolved.

### Findings

All children who participated in the study exhibited symptoms associated with emotional abuse and were found to either internalize or externalize their problems. Table 3 below specifies the results of the study.

Table 3

*Inventory of Abuse Symptoms Exhibited by Children in SEI Classrooms*

Abuse Symptoms	Reported by Parents		Reported by Children	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Anxiety	13	72%	10	100%
Headaches and stomach aches	3	16%	1	10%
School avoidance and refusal	9	50%	1	10%
Depression	9	50%	6	60%
Self-esteem changes from positive to negative	8	44%	5	50%
Dysfunctional social functioning	8	44%	4	40%
Anger	5	28%	3	30%
Negative changes in school performance or arrested academic development	0	55%	10	100%

Number of Parents = 18; Number of Children = 10

Findings from this study revealed that students participating in SEI programs exhibited the following maltreatment symptoms: excessive worry about school performance, verbalized fear that the teacher will hurt the children and nightmares and/or sleep disturbances, change from positive to negative self perception, changes in school performance from previous years, excessive crying and other symptoms of depression, school, headaches, stomach aches, decreased functioning in social situations, school avoidance, and withdrawal behavior. These symptoms were frequently reported by both parents and the participating students.

## Anxiety and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

All of the young participants in our study reported suffering from mood alterations such as anxiety or depression. Thirteen parents (72%) and all the children (100%) in the study made reference to anxiety symptoms as a result of placement in SEI programs. In fact some of these symptoms are specifically associated with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). For example, five (50%) of the participating children in SEI classrooms exhibited school avoidance behaviors such as refusing to go to school, or, once there, refusing to get out of the car or enter the school building. Moreover, parents reported excessive crying associated with school attendance, withdrawal, and isolation and that their children exhibited increasing *nerviosismo* (nervousness) as the time to go to school was approaching.

- As he was getting ready for school in the morning, child M said to his mother: *“Sentía bien feo, pues no entendía nada....si, volteaba para todos lados así, volteaba los ojos al revez me daban vuelta”* (I felt very bad, because I did not understand anything ... yes, I look all around like this, I turned my eyes upside down, and went in circles).
- Child IR said: *“Me sentía muy nervioso porque todos hablaban puro Inglés y yo no les entendía ... y no sabía contestarles, ni sabía que me decían”* (I felt very nervous because all of them spoke only English and I did not understand...and I did not know how to answer, did not know what they were telling me).

Anxiety is sometimes manifested in headaches and stomach aches. Three parents (16%) reported that since their children’s placement in SEI they had developed conditions such as colitis, headaches, and stomach aches. In response to questions about the changes mother AA had observed since his son had been placed in the SEI program, she indicated:

- *“Lo estuve batallando cada semana, sacarlo de la escuela porque había agarrado la costumbre de que sufría mucho. Lloraba mucho del dolor de estomago y entonces lo llevaba cada semana a México hasta que un especialista del estomago me dijo que tenía colitis nerviosa. (I struggled every week; I had to take him out of school because he had made suffering a habit. He would cry a lot due to stomach aches and I then, would take him to Mexico until a specialist told me that he suffered from colitis nervosa)”*.

Investigators have indicated that stress experienced early in life is linked to the development of fear and anxiety in children and adolescents and that the effects of mistreatment may trigger disordered patterns of adaptation which may emerge at times of stress or vulnerability (Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Hart, Brassard, & Germain, 1987; Hart, Germain, & Brassard, 1983; Korbin & Krugman, 2014). Samuda in 1998 conveyed that when ethnically different students are exposed to repressive conditions they are more prone to experience anxiety. This researcher also indicated that students experiencing high levels of anxiety are likely to perform less well than less anxious students. Moreover, highly anxious students may be more distracted from their tasks and may make more random errors.

The data examples, cited thus far, in addition to others described in the literature (Blasé & Blasé, 2004), provide evidence that being subjected to stressful conditions leads to both anxiety and self doubt about one's ability to understand instructions and perform successfully. Therefore, it is not surprising that Spanish speaking children placed in Structured English Immersion programs for the majority of the school day and at the expense of learning academic content experience anxiety, which in turn appears to negatively impact their ability to do well. For example, ten (55%) of the parents who reported their children as experiencing anxiety problems also believed that the children were not learning as much as they were capable of doing. Therefore, this set of circumstances is likely to result in a harmful internalization of self perceived inadequacies as the cause of their difficulties. Consequently the child's own sense of self as a competent individual may also be potentially damaged.

### **Self Esteem and Negative Self Perception**

Parents and children participating in this study also reported changes in the child's self perception. A transition from positive to negative self perception was reported by eight parents. Five (50%) of the participating children also indicated that placement in the SEI program had resulted in self doubting of their capabilities; in short, the students felt like failures. For example:

- Child NM 2 told herself: “*..No vas a aprender, vas a seguir siendo una burra igual* (you are not going to learn, you will continue to be dumb).”
- Child AA: “*Ama, si tu estuvieras como yo, estoy como los tontos. Nomás oyendo y oyendo y no entiendo. Tu ponte en mi lugar.* (Mom, if you were like me, like dumb people, only listening and not understanding. Put yourself in my place).”

Within the field of educational psychology it is well established that positive self-identity, a sense of belongingness, and a smooth transition during change are essential conditions for adequate personality development and higher levels of educational attainment (Gutierrez, 1985; Nekby, Rodin & Özcan, 2007, 2009; Sue & Sue, 2003; Zentella, 2002, 2004). When these conditions are disrupted a young child can experience conflicting feelings. As a result, the child may no longer be able to maintain a positive image of herself nor preserve the behaviors and attitudes brought from the homeland that may have facilitated and made possible a healthy transition and change. As Zentella (2004) has shown, immigrant children's ability to share languages alleviates the trauma of migration by facilitating a new dual vision of their own identity and eases the struggle of integration into the larger society.

Negative experiences in which individuals believe they have failed to live up to personally valued standards because of personal flaws can bring about guilt and shame. When experiencing shame the core self is threatened and attention is focused inward. When shamed, people may try to avoid this highly painful state by externalizing blame and displacing shame with anger, or by suppressing aversive feelings. These behaviors may lead to sadness and, ultimately, to internalizing problems such as depression (Bennet, Sullivan, & Lewis, 2005; Lewis, 1971; Lewis, 1992). Psychologists have repeatedly demonstrated the importance of self esteem in learning and teaching. A positive self-esteem, it is reasoned, helps to facilitate successful learning (Samuda,

1998). In contrast, a child's negative self esteem in theory would interfere with or block his/her learning potential.

The current anti-immigrant climate in Arizona, reflected in Proposition 203 and other coercive language policies, pathologizes the home language as a liability, something that interferes with academic success (defined overwhelmingly as proficiency in English rather than mastery of content subjects). Historically, schools have punished children for using their native languages. Currently, they even withhold meaningful content education from students who have not learned the target language well. The latter is the case in Structured English Immersion programs, where the home languages are simply ignored and all instruction is about the English language, delaying the acquisition of content area knowledge until students have learned English.

Lowered self esteem follows from what is known in the literature on culture and child maltreatment as negative distinctiveness (Turner & Coyle, 2000). In school environments that emphasize only the majority language, minority home languages constitute a negative distinction. As noted earlier, home languages represent a liability rather than a resource. Consequently, the social construction of linguistically different students as *handicapped* results in lowered self-esteem and atrophies their ability to participate in age-appropriate forms of interaction. The inability to communicate through one's language can create a crisis situation known as cultural shock (Jackson & Hogg, 2010). If children cannot use the language in which they are proficient for self expression, the self becomes passive, invisible, and socially irrelevant. If this situation is prolonged, the lowered self esteem and increased anxiousness the children experience in culturally discontinuous settings become impediments to learning. Parents participating in this study reported that since placement in SEI classrooms their children had shown a marked decrease in motivation to learn along with a marked increase in feelings of incompetence and anxiety.

## Depression

Nine parents (50%) reported being preoccupied with observed symptoms of depression in their children. They indicated feeling confused and unsure as to how to best handle their children's predicament. Some of them attempted to place their children in bilingual programs without success. Seventeen parents (94%) reported they felt frustrated and helpless at not being able to alleviate the source of their distress. As Mr. RR described the changes his son was experiencing he broke down crying and said:

- *“Es que estas cosas que le pasan a nuestros hijos son muy duras... los hijos le duelen mucho a uno. (These things that happen to our children are very hard... What happens to our children hurts a lot.)”*

Among the participants, nine parents (50%) and six (60%) of the children identified symptoms that are frequently associated with depression. The children frequently reported feeling frustrated, sad, and alienated from the learning environment. They also had difficulties understanding why their teachers were speaking to them in English if they knew that their students did not understand the language. As illustrated in the words of two of the student participants:



- Child CST: “... *la maestra me estaba hablando en la cara. No le entendía nada y empeze a llorar.* (... the teacher was talking in my face. I did not understand anything and I started to cry).”
- Child CS said: “*Me sentía como perdido, como si no sabía por dónde ir, ni nada, ni que decirle a la maestro.* (I felt like I was lost, as if I did not know where to go or nothing, or what to say to the teacher).”
- Child AC exclaimed: “*No le entendía nada y empeze a llorar. Me quería ir a a la casa y no quería estar allí.* (I did not understand anything and I started crying. I wanted to go home; I did not want to be there).”

Oppressive schooling experiences can leave profound impression on the student who experiences them. When social interactions with teachers and other students takes on an oppressive character (e.g., when students are discouraged from speaking the language they know best) students adjustment problems such as school phobia/separation anxiety, academic difficulties, and behavior problems may result (Brendgen, Wanner, & Vitaro, 2006; Brendgen, Wanner, Vitaro, Bukowski, & Tremblay, 2007; Krugmen & Krugman, 1984).

### **Negative impact on social functioning**

The present study revealed that at least nine (50%) of the parents reported their children as experiencing serious difficulties in Gabarino’s (1998) categories [(1) rejection, (2) isolation, and (3) ignoring] as a result of the communication barrier imposed by the SEI program structure. Instances of withdrawal and feeling cut off from normal social experiences and friendships were frequently reported by the participants. Forty four percent of adult participants (8 parents) reported their children as experiencing serious difficulties in social functioning such as making friends and being able to interact as expected in the school setting.

Instances of withdrawal, isolation, and the interference of language barriers in peer friendship making were clearly outlined.

- As illustrated by Mrs. XR: “*A lo mejor ella pensaba que ningún niño hablaba como ella. Era puro llorar y llorar. Ella no quería tener amigos. No quería tener nada*” (Maybe she thought that no child talked the way she did. All she did was cry and cry. She did not want to have friends. She did not want anything).”
- Or as JG said: “...*que todos se iban a reír de mi porque no hablaba en Inglés, todos ellos hablaban Inglés.* (... that everybody was going to laugh at me because I did not speak English, all of them spoke English).”

The ability to communicate effectively serves as the most vital element of socialization. If communication is impeded or interrupted, the socialization process may become dysfunctional or unattainable. As Gabarino (1998) indicates, when children are psychologically abused, their development of social competence, of the capacity for intimacy, and for positive and healthy interpersonal relationships is jeopardized.

## Anger

Five (28%) of the parents in our study revealed that they had witnessed their children becoming more frustrated, aggressive and angry since placed in the SEI program.

- Mr. JR said: “Se ha puesto agresivo. El se enoja y dice: No, no quiero, no voy a aprender. (“He has become aggressive. He gets angry and says: No, no I do not want to, I am not going to learn.”).”

This finding is not surprising. In a study examining the impact of frustration and organizational characteristics, Heacox & Sorenson (2004) found a relationship between frustration created by organizational characteristics and aggressive behaviors. That is, their results confirmed that high levels of frustration can lead to aggression.

## The Psychological Impact of SEI Placement in the Family: Family Disruption

Another major finding of this study was that 83%, that is, 15 of the participating parents reported that their children’s participation in SEI programs interfered with and disrupted family life. Three major sources of conflict were frequently identified:

- 1) Parents reported feeling bad about not being able to adequately help their children with their homework and some feared this situation would be seen as poor role modeling on their part and felt it would interfere with parental respect.
  - *While commenting about her son’s assignments, Mrs. XR said: “Ay, pues bien mal porque no lo puedo ayudar a hacer la tarea ... me siento así, como que no sirvo pa’ nada en ese momento. (Ay, I feel very bad because I cannot help him to do his homework ...I feel like this, like I am not good for nothing at that moment).”*
- 2) At times, translating homework assignments took hours and interfered with important family activities. Some parents also feared that asking English speaking relatives for help with homework assignments might impinge on their time and families and thus result in potential conflict.
  - Mr. AP: “...nos llevaba mucho tiempo el primer año de la niña, no? Nos llevaba horas y horas, imaginese con un diccionario buscando palabra por palabra. (...It took a long time the first year, you know. It took us hours and hours; imagine looking up word by word with a dictionary).”
- 3) Children blaming parents for their frustrations, and rivalry among siblings were also presented as issues of concern. For example, parents indicated that due to the time it took for translation they ended up spending more time helping the child placed in the SEI program, thus causing the other siblings to feel left out or rejected.
  - As Mr. UR expressed some of his frustrations with the impact his son’s placement in the SEI program had on his other child, he said: “*pues nada mas que él piensa que uno le da mas apoyo al otro niño que a él. (Well, only that he thinks that we give more support to this child than him).*”

In short, the results obtained from this study document the negative impact of participation in SEI programs, as implemented in Arizona's schools, in the emotional, cognitive, and social functioning of English Language Learners. These findings are also consistent with the results obtained from other studies (Brendgen, Wanner, & Vitaro, 2006; Brendgen, Wanner, Vitaro, Bukowski, & Tremblay, 2007; Krugmen & Krugman, 1984) that have investigated and assessed the effect of emotional abuse in the school settings. Research findings obtained revealed the psychological harm experienced by children who are schooled under the current policy. Interpreted as abuse, this harm influences students' suffering in SEI classrooms.

## Discussion

The academic and scholastic performance of Latinos in general and Spanish speaking children in particular has been a subject of major interest during the past half century. The academic performance discrepancy between Anglo Americans and Latino students, the high dropout rates of students of Latino descent, and overrepresentation of Latino students in lower educational tracks such as special education has been well documented throughout the years (Artiles, Aguirre-Muñoz, & Abedi, 1998; Artiles & Zamora-Duran, 1997; Beratan, 2006; Daugherty, 2001; Oswald & Continho, 2001; Samuda, 1998). While some researchers examined cultural and family factors that contribute to the educational disparities permeating the academic experience of Latinos in the United States (Saldaña, 1995), others investigated conditions such as socio-economic status and environmental influences and acculturation which may be instrumental in sustaining these disparities (Debons, 2011; Garza & Gallegos, 1995). However, the role of institutional abuse as it relates to failure to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of Latino English language learners has not yet been fully examined.

The need to understand how schools may function as perpetrators of abuse by jeopardizing the social, emotional, and cognitive development of English Language Learners has for the most part not been considered in the scholarly literature. In his article *Emotional Abuse in the Classroom: A Cultural Dilemma* Almon Shumba (2004) pointed out that emotional abuse that takes place in the classroom setting has been under researched and currently understood as a form of child abuse with destructive consequences on children. Although there are published accounts of educational abuse and violence against Latino, Native American, and other culturally diverse students (Archuleta, Child, & Lomawaima, 2000; Baron, 1990; Combs, Gonzales, & Moll, 2011; Crawford, 1992a, 1992b; Philips, 1983; Spring, 1997; Udall, 1969; Villaseñor, 2005) few studies have focused solely on the schooling conditions which usurp the personal dignity of English language learners and diminishes the respect of those whom school is expected to serve.

The present study sought to determine whether the implementation of SEI programs in Arizona is subjecting Spanish speaking ELL students to conditions of abuse within the school setting. Abuse was examined from a perspective in which the holder of power, in this case the educational institution, subjects the subordinate, in this case the students, to conditions from which they cannot escape and which create one or more of the following manifestations:

- a) Intense emotional distress which may be manifested in symptoms of anxiety, depression, and/or anger. Thirteen parents (72% of the participants) and all of the children (100%) in our study reported feelings of anxiety as a result of their participation in SEI classrooms. Nine parents (50%) and six children (60%) reported feelings of depression since their placement in the English Immersion program. Five parents (28%) and three children (30%) revealed feelings of anger.
- b) Development of a sense of hopelessness and helplessness from frustrated attempts to derive meaning from an aversive set of circumstances or from failed efforts to escape them. Nine parents (50%) indicated that their children were becoming very frustrated about their failed efforts to avoid or escape the school experience.
- c) Intense emotional discomfort for prolonged periods of time which result in anguish, unhappiness, anger, and/or depression. Nine parents (50%) reported that their SEI placed child had been engaging in excessive crying associated with school attendance and had manifested withdrawn behaviors.
- d) Sense of lack of control which may manifest itself in psychological disorders such as enuresis -an elimination disorder characterized by repeated voiding of urine into clothes. Three parents (17%) reported their children were experiencing headaches and stomachaches which they see as beyond their control since their placement in SEI classroom. One parent (6%) reported her child had developed a colitis nervosa condition. One case (10%) of enuresis was also reported.
- e) An impaired sense of self which is reflected in the self-doubting of one's abilities and self worth, decreased performance, lower motivational levels, performance anxiety, and/or not achieving up to his/her capacity. Eight parents (44%) and five children (50%) reported changes from positive to negative self perception.
- f) Internalization of self-adjudicated blame for others' despair or suffering. Four (40%) of the participating children made statements indicating self blame for their difficulties understanding and/or for the suffering, they felt, these difficulties were causing to their parents. One child (10%) told his mother he wanted to die so she would not have to worry because he could not learn.

All parents who participated in the study were consistent in indicating that their children and their families were being subjected to situations of intense emotional distress and were experiencing one or more of the symptoms (e.g., anxiety, depression) previously identified as conditions resulting from exposure to abuse. Study findings are also consistent with the research literature claiming that when experiencing emotional abuse victims are aware that something is wrong but do not know that they are being abused (Shumba, 2002).

The findings of this study suggest that Spanish speaking children placed in English only classrooms, at the expense of learning content and using their home

language, are subjected to an emotionally abusive institutional environment. It is argued that emotional abuse is legally sanctioned in Arizona. Yet the proponents of programs such as SEI which jeopardize the psychological and social well-being of participating students are not held responsible for the psychological and academic damage these programs inflict.

It is commonly known that the most frequently used intervention with abused children is to remove them from the abusive situation and to place them in an environment which is more conducive to their psychological or physical well-being. Unfortunately, this has not been the case for the Spanish speaking students who are forced to remain under oppressive learning conditions for months or years until they are able to master English language skills. Individuals are generally assumed to be perpetrators of abuse but government and other entities may also be guilty, wielding their power over children through their institutions (Doyle, 1997; Gabarino, 1998, Jiménez-Castellanos et al., 2014).

It is demoralizing to know that there are double standards guiding ethical behavior toward children. To wit, if the abuse occurs in the home setting, the child is appropriately removed, but in the school setting the child remains. Thus, it is logical to ask whether these ethical standards are compromised. Is it an acceptable practice to remove children from home conditions which threaten their psychological functioning while permitting them to participate in programs which subject them to an aversive classroom environment?

The answer lies in understanding how an institution which purports to enhance children's cognitive and social development implements programs which hinder their intellectual and social-emotional growth. Given that schools are viewed as institutions which instill in students accepted societal values and morals, their policies are assumed to be both benign and sufficiently responsive to their constituencies. As such, they are typically deemed as incapable of gross or systematic maltreatment. This may in part explain the lack of research on child abuse in schools.

It seems that the legal boundaries used to determine emotional abuse are differentially applied to educational settings. Apparently, when abuse occurs within an institutional context the situation may for the most part be overlooked and/or ignored. Regulations guiding child protective services agencies appear more lenient when the school is the perpetrator.

As suggested by the psychological symptoms listed in the Arizona legal definition of abuse (Arizona Revised Statutes, Title 8, § 201) and demonstrated by abundant research, the maltreatment of children may profoundly affect children's psychological development, interfering with the ways in which they view, express, and conduct themselves (Beeghly & Cicchetti, 1994; Shipman & Zeman, 1999; Shipman, Zeman, Penza, & Champion, 2000). Results obtained from the present study suggested that Spanish speaking children who were participating in SEI programs suffered from various symptoms and conditions associated with emotional abuse. This finding implies the need to protect these children from institutional abusive conditions is crucial. Therefore, it is critical for child advocacy groups and agencies to intervene in protecting the emotional well-being of the Spanish speaking child. We assert that

school programs be carefully reviewed and assessed for potential abuse before programmatic implementation decisions are made.

### **Limitations**

The results from the present study should be considered in the light of several limitations. First, it is important to point out that although extensive interviews were conducted with children and parents, the researchers were not able to observe the participating children in their classrooms and had to rely on parental and children descriptions of the difficulties experienced by the children following placement in SEI classrooms. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that participant response bias may occur in interview based studies. A social desirability effect is possible when participants are asked to respond to potentially sensitive topics.

A second concern refers to the lack of objective measures to assess the veracity of the emotional problems inferred from interview and observational data. That is, use of parent and child report inventories could be used to assess the severity of symptoms reported in order to provide statistically reliable measures of symptom manifestation.

Thirdly, given that the sample studied is relatively small, findings obtained from this study may be accurately generalized only to the participants of this study.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Given the repressive educational policies toward English Language Learners which include an atheoretical, segregated program, and pedagogically backward teaching approach, the case is made that the way Arizona treats its English Language Learners population is a form of child abuse. Participation in SEI programs was found to jeopardize the cognitive, social, and emotional development of English Language Learners as evidenced by the development of symptoms associated with abuse such as mood alterations (e.g., anxiety, trauma), problem externalization (e.g., aggression), and a negative impact in the child's ability to socialize.

One research implication derived from this study points to the importance of implementing a research based approach to program development in the teaching of linguistically diverse populations. A careful analysis and review of the effectiveness and adequacy of educational programs can prevent potential conditions of abuse. More specifically, this approach will prevent the use of educational programs which, intentionally or not, promote social inequity and bias by making it more difficult for linguistically diverse students to thrive in a safe, non-threatening educational environment.

Another major implication is the need for child advocacy groups and agencies to intervene in protecting the emotional wellbeing of Spanish-speaking children in SEI programs. Because these students are instructed in English at the expense of learning academic content and using their home language as a resource in their learning, it is essential to implement safeguard measures against this abuse.

Unfortunately, state legislators and other policymakers have shown little interest in research studies on either English language learning or the pedagogical recommendations informed by them. Legal challenges to the state's ELD program are also difficult. The Arizona State Constitution prohibits the governor from vetoing ballot

initiatives. Nor can the state legislature repeal initiatives or referenda (Arizona Constitution, Title 4, Part 1, § 6a, 6b). Undertaking a new ballot initiative to repeal or change Proposition 203 would be prohibitively expensive, labor intensive, and time consuming (Combs, 2012). In 2013, a Federal District Court ruling in *Flores v. Huppenthal* acknowledged withholding science and math from English learners would leave them behind academically, but also declared, nonetheless, that the English Language Development blocks did not violate federal civil rights laws:

Education in this state is under enormous pressure because of lack of funding at all levels. It appears that the state has made a choice in how it wants to spend funds on teaching students the English language. It may turn out to be penny wise and pound foolish, as at the end of the day, speaking English, and not having other educational gains in science, math, etc. will still leave some children behind (Judge Raner Collins, quoted in Hogan, 2014).

Implying that further litigation on the issue would be disregarded, the Court also declared that the Flores lawsuit “is no longer the vehicle to pursue the myriad of educational issues in this state” (cited in Hogan, 2014, p. 41).

It is discouraging to witness the apparent closing of legislative and legal avenues to effect reasonable, compassionate, and research-based educational change for English learners in Arizona. Strict implementation of the ELD blocks and the rigid time allocations within them are enforced by monitoring teams regularly dispatched by the State Department of Education to schools and districts serving large numbers of ELLs. These visits clearly signal that any deviation from the model is precluded, and that teachers have little recourse but to follow the program according to state’s SEI classroom observation protocol (Arizona Department of Education, 2014). There is an obvious need for parent and public education about the effects of SEI programs on ELL’s. Education and public awareness may constitute avenues to influence legislation to opt for the implementation of research-based educational programs.

Lastly, it is imperative to call for expanded research on child abuse in the school setting to investigate the perception that schools are incapable of gross or systematic maltreatment. One of the fundamental questions with which educators, politicians, and the society at large must come to grips is whether or not we accept the notion that schools, and by implication the policies that govern them, are capable of child maltreatment. Final analysis reveals that they are. That is, data obtained from this study suggests that Structured English Immersion, especially in its current segregated form with four hours a day of grammar instruction, can be appropriately considered as a form of abuse and leads to maltreatment of the Spanish speaking children in schools. Further investigations are needed to understand the nuances of this societal perception and how best to challenge it.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Arizona state law makes it difficult for parents to “waive” their children out of Structured English Immersion programs. There are only three exceptions to mandatory placement in SEI: (1) for children who are already proficient in English, (2) are over the age of ten, or (3) are suffering from a physical or psychological need that would make bilingual education preferable (such a need must be documented in a 250 word statement and approved by the school superintendent). Based on their scores on the state's proficiency test, all of the elementary age children in our study were classified as English language learners and therefore not eligible for type one waivers. As children under the age of 10, they similarly were ineligible for type two waivers. Paradoxically, although all of the children in our study would appear to qualify for a type three waiver – for “physical or psychological needs” – the school district was reluctant to grant the exception because of the negative labeling associated with it and the fact the students' described pathologies would remain in their cumulative folders until they graduate.
- <sup>2</sup> A pseudonym used to identify and protect the school in which the present research was conducted.
- <sup>3</sup> Non-English proficient special education students are granted an exception and may be placed in dual language settings.
- <sup>4</sup> These figures were formerly available on the school web site.

## Appendix A

### Interview Question for Parents

- 1) What is your understanding of Proposition 203 and exactly what it means to your son/daughter's educational program?
- 2) What kind of program is your child in at Nopal school? Why was your child placed in this program? How do you feel about this placement? How do you feel this program or change is affecting your child now and how will it affect him/her in the future?
- 3) Do you think it is important for your child to learn academic subjects in Spanish rather than academic subjects in an English only academic program?
- 4) Did the school explain to you how you could obtain a waiver for your child to be enrolled in a dual language program?
- 5) How were you informed about the waiver process? Did you have to request this information? Do you feel like you have a choice when it comes to the type of educational program (e.g., SEI, bilingual, or other) you want your child to participate in?
- 6) Have you noticed any changes in your child's behavior or attitude (e.g., acting out, crying, behavior related concerns, concentration, etc)?
- 7) How does your child feel about his/her current SEI classroom? Did he/she begin in a SEI classroom (in a Dual Language Program) and then transfer? How and why?
- 8) How well do you speak, read or write English? Do you consider yourself bilingual? How many years of school have you completed? Do you read stories to your children in Spanish?
- 9) Do you feel comfortable going to the school and asking about your child's educational program? Are you pleased with the school?
- 10) Have you met the principal at Nopal Elementary School?
- 11) How difficult or easy do you find it to talk to your child's teacher? How many times have you talked to your child's teacher?
- 12) Do you feel your concerns are being addressed by the school?

- 13) Has your child engaged in behaviors that indicate that she/he may not feel comfortable or safe in school? If so, what has she/he said or done?
- 14) Has your child self perception (how she or he feels about himself) changed? Or has it changed since he/she was placed in a particular program (SEI or Dual Language Program)?

#### Questions for Parents with Children in Special Education

- 15) Have you noticed any changes in the way your child is receiving special education services or instruction (e.g., more English, more Spanish, less Spanish)?
- 16) In your opinion what would be the best language approach to help your son/daughter to overcome learning disabilities? Is it better to teach your child just in Spanish, English or both languages?



## Appendix B

### Sample of Structured Interview Questions for Children

- 1) What kind of classroom are you currently in at school (e.g., English only, Dual English Program)? What language does your teacher use when she is teaching? What about your reading teacher? Do you understand your teacher when she speaks in English? In Spanish? How do you feel about that? How much do you feel you are learning?
- 2) What kind of classroom were you in last year (if the child is confused, ask if the teacher taught in Spanish or English)? Are you in the same kind of classroom this year? If the answer is no: why do you think you were changed to an SEI/Dual Language Program this year? Is it hard to be in a different kind of classroom this year?
- 3) Have you heard about proposition 203? What is it? How does it affect you? How do you like it?
- 4) Do your parents approve of the program you are in?
- 5) Do you consider yourself bilingual? What can you do in both languages? Do you think it is important to be able to speak, read and write in two languages? Why or why not?
- 6) Even if your teacher does not speak Spanish to you in the classroom, do you speak it in other places in the school (e.g., cafeteria, halls, playground, bathroom, etc.)? Do you read books in Spanish outside school? Do your parents read to you in Spanish? Do you read books in English? Do you use the school library to check out books?
- 7) How did you feel your first day in the SEI classroom? Did you understand your teacher? Can you tell us what kinds of things your teacher did to help you understand English? How do you feel now?
- 8) How do you feel in a class where you can't understand what is being said? What kind of feelings, behaviors or thoughts do you experience? Can you do anything about it? Do you and your friends talk about it in school or outside of school? What do you say?
- 9) Do you feel safe in school? At home?

- 10) Tell me some of the things you like and some of the things you do not like about yourself. If you were to put what you like and what you do not like on a weight scale, which will weigh more, has it always been that way? When did it change?
- 11) Do you find yourself being harder or angry at yourself lately? If so, how come? When did this start?