

“ENTIÉNDEME”: A REFLECTION ON THE INTERDISCIPLINARY PROBLEMS SURROUNDING EDUCATIONAL MODELS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Karla Daniela Salazar Chavira, Grand Canyon University

ABSTRACT

The word “entiéndeme,” Spanish for “understand me,” here invites compassionate inquiry, urging empathy. For over twenty years, emergent bilingual students in Arizona have struggled under the state’s English-only policy. Despite the lack of research supporting its effectiveness in promoting English acquisition, this educational model continues to be enforced in Arizona classrooms. This reflection explores whether Arizona’s Proposition 203 was ever designed considering the “best interest” of Arizona’s emergent bilingual population or if its foundation was built under a false premise of “helping” to perpetuate specific ideals. Through this reflective piece, I bridge disciplinary boundaries by integrating theoretical frameworks across the disciplines of history, education, and psychology to examine the efficacy of Proposition 203 in addressing the complexities of language acquisition and the academic success of English Language Learners (ELLs). By drawing comparisons to other instructional methods employed in other unique student populations, this reflection provides a unique interdisciplinary perspective and a multifaceted approach that can help educators and policymakers address the current practices and existing programs impacting ELL students in Arizona.

Keywords: Structured English Immersion (SEI), Proposition 203, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), English Language Learners (ELLs), Arizona, English-only

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

“Por favor entiéndeme” is a phrase I often repeated in my mind with tears brimming in my eyes as I stood before my elementary school teachers, who crouched down to try to console me. “Please understand me” is what I longed to say and wished for every day on my way to school. Memories of their distraught faces flood my mind as I reminisce on how they searched my eyes for any sign that might lead them to understand why I was crying. It has been 24 years since Arizona voters approved Proposition 203 in 2000—the

English-only law prohibiting using any other language besides English in the classroom. In 2007, as a kindergartner, I was designated an English Language Learner (ELL) student, which, according to the state, meant I lacked English proficiency. However, to my classmates, it was a seal that marked me as “different,” which, unbeknownst to me, would follow me for years to come despite my transition out of the program after 2nd grade.

As of 2023, Arizona remains the only state with English-only education legislation still in effect (Brown, 2023). Its

law—Proposition 203—exemplifies the issue of educational policies that hinder equitable access to education for all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs). Under Proposition 203, “Sheltered English Immersion” or “Structured English Immersion” (SEI) is the educational methodology enforced in Arizona classrooms in which “all children in Arizona public schools shall be taught English by being taught in English, and all children shall be placed in English language classrooms” (15 A.R.S. § 752 (2000)). Since 2000, this policy has undergone three iterations: its inception with Proposition 203, the passing of HB 2064, and, most recently, the introduction of SB 1014 (Brown, 2023). With the implementation of Proposition 203, many district leaders and administrators understood the legal requirements of the proposition. However, the vague implementation requirements provided by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) resulted in inconsistent implementation across the board (Brown, 2023; Lillie et al., 2010; Martinez-Wenzl et al., 2012). This resulted in the passing of HB 2064, which established the four-hour ELD block and the creation of an English Language Learner Task Force. This task force’s primary responsibility is to “develop and adopt research-based models of structured English immersion programs” that are “cost-efficient” and meet “all state and federal laws” (Brown, 2023; English Language Learners, HB 2064, 47th Cong, 2006; Lillie et al., 2010; Martinez-Wenzl et al., 2012). In 2019, SB 1014 was passed by the Arizona Senate, which provided four approved English Language Development (ELD) models and lowered the number of ELD instruction hours (15 A.R.S. § 756.01 (2019)). In its current application, there are four English Language Development (ELD) models authorized by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), including a Pull-Out SEI Model, a Two-Hour SEI Model, a Newcomer SEI Model, and a 50-50 Dual Language Immersion SEI Model (Arizona Department of Education, 2023). Despite being constructed on the premise of being “cost-efficient” and “research-based,” all current models authorized by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) have no support in recent literature (Brown, 2023; English Language Learners, HB 2064, 47th Cong, 2006; Jiménez-Castellanos et al., 2014; Jiménez-Silva et al., 2014; Krashen et al., 2007; Lillie et al., 2010; Martinez-Wenzl et al., 2012). Additionally, the SEI Model Implementation Guide

only provides examples of the previously outlined models and is not meant to be prescriptive. This indicates that students from different schools may have varied experiences as a result.

While some may not perceive this as problematic, I can say from personal experience that although I eventually became “proficient” in English, my first core memories involved analyzing nonverbal cues from facial expressions to body posture. In my buried memories of these experiences, I remember having a piece of paper, watercolor paint, and a paintbrush in front of me in first grade. I had begun painting when suddenly the paper was ripped right out from in front of me. My classmate sat next to me wide-eyed. As a six-year-old, I was petrified. I had done something wrong but had no idea what I had done. When I looked up to see my teacher towering over me with her arms crossed, all I could tell was that she was upset. After that experience, I was left with a haunting fear that followed me throughout my elementary school years. Children have a keen sense of nonverbal cues, being able to pick up on any cues, from a smile of encouragement to a frown of disappointment (Koegel & LaZebnik, 2023). For many students immersed in an English-only classroom with no knowledge of the language, these are, unfortunately, everyday experiences. These experiences can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and harm a child’s psychological, social, and cognitive development (Combs et al., 2005; Parra et al., 2014).

This reflective piece is structured to provide a thoughtful reflection on the interdisciplinary problems surrounding educational models and English language acquisition, integrating Dewey’s model of reflection to examine the efficacy of Arizona’s Proposition 203. Through the integration of the disciplines of history, education, and psychology, this piece aims to provide an interdisciplinary perspective to help educators and policymakers effectively address the current practices and existing programs impacting ELL students in Arizona.

REFLECTIVE READINESS

Reflective readiness refers to the attitudes and traits that enable individuals to reflect effectively and are essential for engaging in reflective practice (Greenberger & Or, 2022). Reflective practice is a process of self-reflection and critical thinking that allows individuals to gain deeper insights into a

contextualized problem and gain personal growth and understanding, leading to practical and scientific insights (Greenberger & Or, 2022). As a former ELL student, I acknowledge that acquiring a new language is a personal experience. I recognize that reflection is necessary to provide meaningful new insights that contribute to the nature of the problem. By incorporating Dewey's model of reflection, I commit myself to effective reflection on this topic by grounding myself within these three attitudes: Open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility.

DEWEY'S MODEL OF REFLECTION

Open-mindedness

Dewey viewed the attitude of open-mindedness as acknowledging fallibility or error in one's personal beliefs and enabling alternative explanations (Greenberger & Or, 2022). Within this reflective practice, I have disclosed my personal experiences, intending to be open to and acknowledge the experiences of others. In doing this, I recognize that my experience may differ from others, allowing room for empathy to acknowledge our unique experiences and stories. Therefore, despite my own experiences, I actively seek to explore more perspectives beyond my own when conducting this interdisciplinary reflective practice, seeking the benefits and disadvantages of the educational models mentioned and providing insights into the complexity of this subject in a larger context.

Wholeheartedness

The attitude of wholeheartedness operates in intellectual force, which involves being fully engaged and committed to the reflective process (Greenberger & Or, 2022). As a former ELL student, I want to highlight the implications surrounding SEI's enforcement and provide a new perspective on the nature of the problem. While I conduct this reflective piece, I wholeheartedly engage in the research and fully commit to integrating ideas from multiple academic disciplines to advocate for the children, both past and present, who could not do so themselves.

Responsibility

Finally, the attitude of responsibility includes having the will to see the reflection through regardless of whether the outcome is the one that was expected or against one's views (Greenberger & Or, 2022). It is the ethical commitment to provide critical insights into the topic of reflection and

hold oneself accountable for reporting all data in a revealing manner. I acknowledge that, given my experiences, I have a bias on this topic of study. Still, I commit to the intellectual responsibility of carrying this reflective piece through to completion, reporting all data, and not limiting my research solely to personal perceptions and experiences.

DEFINING THE DISCIPLINES

To reflect on the efficacy of the SEI model in addressing the complexities of language acquisition and academic success of ELL students, I will draw comparisons to other instructional methods employed in unique student populations, integrating frameworks and theories across the disciplines of history, education, and psychology. Often, academic disciplines are thought of in isolation or "silos," often believed to be inwardly focused, blocking attention to developments occurring in other fields (Jacobs, 2014). Despite this, the complexity of addressing real-world problems requires an interdisciplinary approach that enables the exploration of the connections and relationships between various fields of study. To engage in such an approach, researchers must bridge disciplinary boundaries by integrating theoretical frameworks across different disciplines and exchanging ideas and perspectives (Christensen et al., 2021). Thus, this reflection will explore the historical context of English-only legislation, analyzing its foundation through a holistic and interpretive approach to understand the motivations, values, and beliefs contributing to Proposition 203's existence. Additionally, I will explore educational pedagogy, particularly the techniques or principles that can improve students' learning experiences. Lastly, I will explore the psychological and physiological factors that impact a student's learning to understand what influences a student's academic achievement or "success" in the classroom.

HISTORY

By placing history within the context of the humanities, this discipline recognizes the importance of moral judgment and values as intrinsic to historical understanding (Wierzbicka, 2011). History ultimately is a discipline that aims to provide knowledge and analysis of past events, including their causes, consequences, and significance. It is also not limited to just the recording of facts. However, it involves interpreting values and

moral judgment, allowing for a unique approach to understanding the motivations, actions, and consequences of human behavior, culture, values, and beliefs. Therefore, studying the United States' long recurrent theme of English-only legislation through this holistic and interpretive approach will allow me to discover the motivations, values, and beliefs that have contributed to the implementation and current enforcement of Arizona's Proposition 203.

Law is multifaceted and has been defined in various ways, including as an "interpretive concept" and as an "authority to mediate people's interests" (Quadiri, 2013, p. 3). This suggests that law is both objective and subjective. Legal philosophy has two prominent theories, including natural law and legal positivism, which offer distinct perspectives on the nature of law. Natural law refers to the "pre-existing law of nature," a set of universal principles and rules that properly govern human conduct in which the law is subordinate to morality (Office of the Law Revision Counsel, n.d.). According to Thomas Aquinas, the authority of legal standards is derived from human beings' rational nature in which "good is to be done, and evil avoided," as well as are universally known by nature and thus is "natural law" (Himma, n.d., para. 4; Murphy, 2019, para. 11). Conversely, legal positivism suggests that the existence and content of law depend on social facts and not necessarily on its merits (Green & Adams, 2019; Hart, 1958). Under this idea, a positive law is a law that an authorized legislature has enacted (Office of the Law Revision Counsel, n.d.). Moreover, it suggests that laws are nothing more and nothing less than simply the expression of the will of whatever authority created them.

Take into consideration the founding of this country, which is affirmed in the Declaration of Independence paragraph two (1776)

[T]hat all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. —That to secure these rights Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

This last sentence has proven to be controversial as "consent of the governed" in application refers to the consent of the majority of "We the people," which is typically a small body of men and women

titled "legislators" and "representatives" (Barnett, 2014, para. 2). The issue, as addressed by Barnett (2014), is the prevailing conception of the "collective" becomes a problem if the consent of this small body of people is assumed to be the same as the consent of the people themselves. During this time, "We the People" was and, in a way, still is exclusive to a particular group of people, those of whom also dictate what constitutes "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." In the United States, a racial hierarchy reflects the ideologies that shape the country's laws. As White Protestant settlers exerted their dominance over both Native Americans and new immigrants, they established themselves as the true "Americans," and as a result, they also instilled a narrow definition of who is "American" and, most importantly, who is not (Lee, 2020; Lee, 2021).

This can be seen in one of the most notable and often overlooked historical events that predate the formalized English-only legislation at the national level. This effort traces back to the establishment of Indian boarding schools, which facilitated the forced assimilation of Native Americans through English language instruction and suppressing the use of native languages and cultural practices (Dussias, 1999). In 1885, the Bureau of Indian Affairs issued the following regulation:

All instruction must be in English, except in so far as the native language of the pupils shall be a necessary medium for conveying the knowledge of English, and the conversation of and communications between pupils and with the teacher must be, as far as practicable, in English. (Dussias, 1999, p. 912)

This regulation set a precedent for future English-only policies, demonstrating how English literacy is not just a skill but also a tool that can be used for political purposes. Similar to this policy, Proposition 203 mimics the language used years ago and states:

All children in Arizona public schools shall be taught English by being taught in English and all children shall be placed in English language classrooms. Children who are English learners shall be educated through sheltered English immersion during a temporary transition period not normally intended to exceed

one year. (15 A.R.S. § 752 (2000))

Further entailing that:

Books and instructional materials are in English and all reading, writing, and subject matter are taught in English. Although teachers may use a minimal amount of the child's native language when necessary, no subject matter shall be taught in any language other than English, and children in this program learn to read and write solely in English. (15 A.R.S. § 751s (2000))

When establishing both policies, government officials would validate their implementation, often arguing that a common language fosters national identity and unity, facilitates communication, and promotes assimilation (Dussias, 1999). Despite differing contexts and targets, both legislations mirror American cultural ideologies and demonstrate the subordination of law to morality.

Based on the principles of natural law, what is "common to all" will be what is deemed as "natural." Therefore, the values and morals that define American laws are controlled by those considered the "all," which have typically excluded anyone who does not fit the narrow conception of who is "American." In the context of legal philosophy, this regulation was enacted by a government institution, which explains only the formal legality of forced assimilation practices but does not constitute a moral justification, especially for those oppressed by such policies. This is particularly true for marginalized groups such as ELLs, as support for the English-only movement hinders the rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Not to mention that in Arizona, approximately more than three-fourths (77.1%) of school-aged children reported as Limited English Proficient (LEP) in census data were U.S.-born (Sugarman & Geary, 2018).

EDUCATION

Within the broad scope of the social sciences is the discipline of education, which facilitates realizing an individual's potential and talents (Quadiri, 2013). Education as a discipline is multifaceted, encompassing theoretical and practical teaching and learning applications drawing on various disciplines such as linguistics, neuroscience, psychology, philosophy, and sociology (Quadiri, 2013). While the historical context of English-only policies explains

the legality of ELLs' experiences with oppressive classroom environments through the exclusive use of English, the continued enforcement of such policies has yet to be addressed. Especially when a 2019 poll found that only 24% of responding Arizona voters favor keeping Proposition 203 in effect, while 67% would prefer a switch to dual-language immersion in the classroom (American Immigration Council, 2023).

Considering the historical and underlying social motivations and beliefs behind the establishment of English-only policies, the support for its current continuation can be found in the design and intention of the U.S. public education system. Since the beginning, its purpose has been to prepare students in mass to work in an industrialized, standardized economy, often favoring standardized approaches (Kaput, 2018). Given that this model was never intended to meet the needs of students or consider the varying differences that a classroom full of children may have, this reflection will consider education pedagogy, specifically the methods and techniques found to improve students' learning experiences. Drawing from various influential figures, including Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Carol Ann Tomlinson, I will delve into their respective contributions to educational theory, concepts such as constructivism, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), scaffolding, and differentiation.

PIAGET'S AND VYGOTSKY'S THEORY OF CONSTRUCTIVISM AND THE ZPD

Constructivism, as proposed by Jean Piaget, is a learning theory that suggests that learners build their understanding and knowledge of their world through experiences and reflection on those experiences (Devi, 2019). This process is dynamic and interactive, with learning being driven by the learner's active engagement with their environment. The teacher's primary role is to encourage students to explore, ask questions, and engage in activities that help them build their understanding based on prior experiences and knowledge.

Lev Vygotsky's view of constructivism, referred to as his sociocultural theory of constructivism, is based on the view that cognitive development is a socially mediated process dependent on the assistance children receive from peers and adults in tackling new challenges (Devi, 2019).

According to Vygotsky, children learn the concepts best in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD refers to the gap between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance from a more skilled peer such as a teacher, parent, or classmate (Shabani et al., 2010). Within this framework, scaffolding is the support provided by the more knowledgeable or skilled peer, which helps the learner perform tasks within their ZPD (Shabani et al., 2010). This support is gradually removed as the learner becomes more competent, similar to how scaffolding is removed from a building once it is stable.

This teaching approach helps promote independent problem-solving skills and helps students internalize new concepts and skills (Shabani et al., 2010). Each student's ZPD may differ in application, including the support needed to complete such tasks. For ZPD and scaffolding to be effective as a teaching method, there must be a supportive learning environment where students feel safe and engaged. This also includes adequately assigning tasks that students can achieve independently and with scaffolding (Wass & Golding, 2014).

TOMLINSON'S DIFFERENTIATION

As a differentiation expert, Carol Ann Tomlinson (2000) defines differentiation as an active effort to respond to students' needs, emphasizing a balance between course content and individual student needs. This educational approach ensures that students engage in challenging and meaningful work by differentiating four elements in the classroom: content, process, products, and learning environment (Tomlinson, 2000). Differentiation within these four elements can vary based on a student's readiness, interest, or learning profile. Examples of differentiation include using reading buddies or presenting ideas through both auditory and visual means, as well as using tiered activities with different levels of support and complexity.

Although state legislators and state educational leaders have sought to paint the SEI English-only program as successful, various studies have provided empirical data to demonstrate the contrary (Jiménez-Castellanos et al., 2014; Jiménez-Silva et al., 2014; Krashen et al., 2007; Lillie et al., 2010; Martinez-Wenzl et al., 2012; Parra et al., 2014). However, even the ADE has shown some apprehension about the authorized models' timeline and

effectiveness. One of the critical components of Arizona's Proposition 203 is the belief in the rigorous timelines for exiting the program in which children are expected to learn English within one year (15 A.R.S. § 752 (2000)). Despite this, the ADE's A-F Letter Grade Accountability System Technical Manual (2014) specifies that bonus points are to be awarded to schools with a minimum enrollment of 10 ELL students when at least 95% of both Full Academic Year (FAY) and Non-FAY ELL students are tested with at least 23% of FAY ELL students reclassifying to proficient, according to the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA) (Arizona Department of Education, 2014).

This added structure prompts the question: If Arizona legislators genuinely believe that students will be "proficient" in English after one year of SEI, then why is a 23% reclassification acceptable? Contrary to this myth held by state legislators, research shows that the process of language acquisition takes longer than one or two years, with its duration varying significantly among individuals according to age, exposure, and individual differences, therefore suggesting that there is no fixed timeline for achieving fluency (Parra et al., 2014; Pliatsikas et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the educational frameworks provided emphasize individual student needs and differentiation in instructional methods, laying the groundwork for successful learning for all students.

PSYCHOLOGY

As an academic and applied field, psychology studies human behavior and mental processes, embracing all aspects of the human experience (Quadiri, 2013; Wierzbicka, 2011). Education focuses on "drawing out" an individual's potential in the context of teaching and learning, in which Piaget's, Vygotsky's, and Tomlinson's theories and frameworks provide foundational knowledge and practical approaches for educators (Quadiri, 2013, p. 3). Conversely, psychology analyzes the interaction of mental processes and behavior within systems and acknowledges how these interactions can impact an individual (Quadiri, 2013). While frameworks provided demonstrate how children learn by constructing their understanding of the world through meaningful personal/social experiences and interactions, the issue of SEI's continued enforcement remains. However, the generational impact of

Proposition 203 is a direct result of the social motivations and beliefs underlying English-only policies. Therefore, it is suggested that the internal and external systems impacting EBs are extensive.

Influenced by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) put forth a multi-level framework that explains how an individual's development is influenced by their environment and social interactions with four levels of systems, including:

1. **Microsystem:** The immediate environment with which an individual interacts directly, such as parents, teachers, and peers (Roe, 2020).
2. **Mesosystem:** The interconnections between different microsystems, including the relationship between a child's home and school (Roe, 2020).
3. **Exosystem:** The more extensive social system in which the child is indirectly impacted, such as parents' workplaces, the neighborhood they live in, and financial difficulties (Roe, 2020).
4. **Macrosystem:** The overarching cultural and societal frameworks that influence the other systems (Roe, 2020).

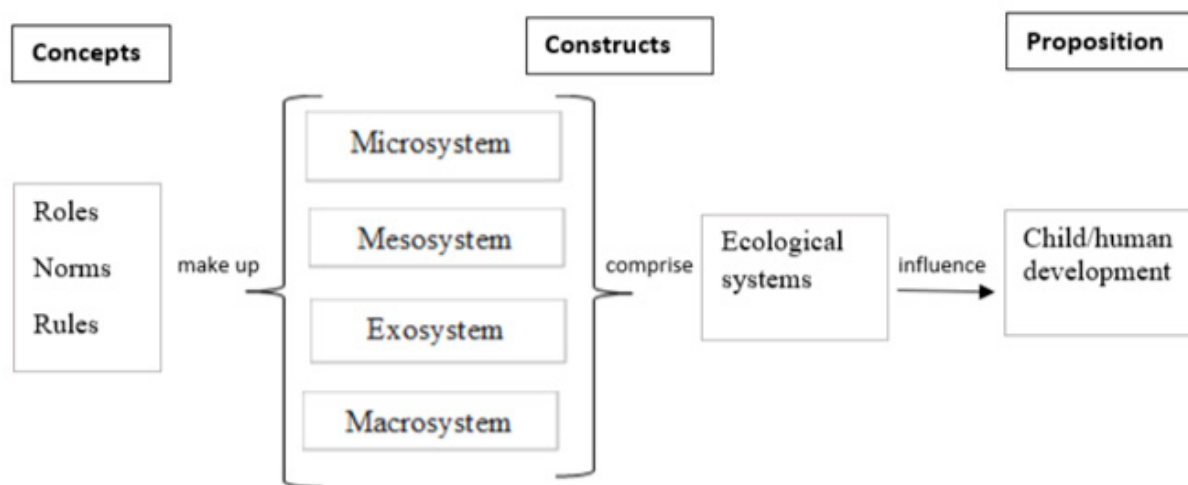
These four systems proposed by Bronfenbrenner are constructed by roles, norms, and rules and ultimately make up the ecological systems that influence a child's development (Roe, 2020).

Bronfenbrenner noted that these systems could influence a child's development either constructively or deconstructively.

Similarly, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (HON) suggests that individuals move through fundamental hierarchical motivations based on physiological and psychological needs. In order of importance, these needs are as follows: physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, and self-actualization (King-Hill, 2015; Noltemeyer et al., 2020). This hierarchy is further divided into "deficiency needs" and "growth needs." Maslow proposed that an individual must first meet the most urgent and basic needs (deficiency needs), which include physiological, safety, belongingness, and love (King-Hill, 2015; Noltemeyer et al., 2020). Once these needs are met, an individual moves on to the next level (growth needs), indicating that lower needs must be satisfied before higher needs, such as self-actualization, can be addressed (King-Hill, 2015; Noltemeyer et al., 2020). In application, Maslow's HON suggests that students' physiological needs must be prioritized to foster motivation and learning, with unmet needs negatively impacting academic performance. Despite the contributions of this theory, it faces critiques for its ethnocentricity and Western cultural bias. When implemented in educational settings, particularly for students from collectivist cultures, this hierarchy should be adjusted to reflect the significance of belongingness and group identity.

Figure 1

Ecological Systems Theory of Development Model



Note. From *Theoretical Models for Teaching and Research* (ch. 6), by J. Egbert, & M. F. Roe, 2020, Pressbooks. Copyright CC by 4.0.

DEFINING THE INTERDISCIPLINARY SPACE

Despite the division in disciplines, each academic discipline contributes unique perspectives to understanding human nature and societal dynamics, providing insights through their methodologies and disciplinary frameworks. Additionally, all three disciplines, history, education, and psychology, involve understanding human behavior, societal norms, and structures within a specific context. Cultural norms, values, and social structures shape the development of historical narratives, educational frameworks, and psychological theories, influencing the conclusions they draw. They often intersect with each other to address complex issues related to human behavior, social justice, and historical understanding. Therefore, to provide a new perspective and reflect further on Proposition 203's efficacy, I intend to draw parallels between two distinct yet similar student populations.

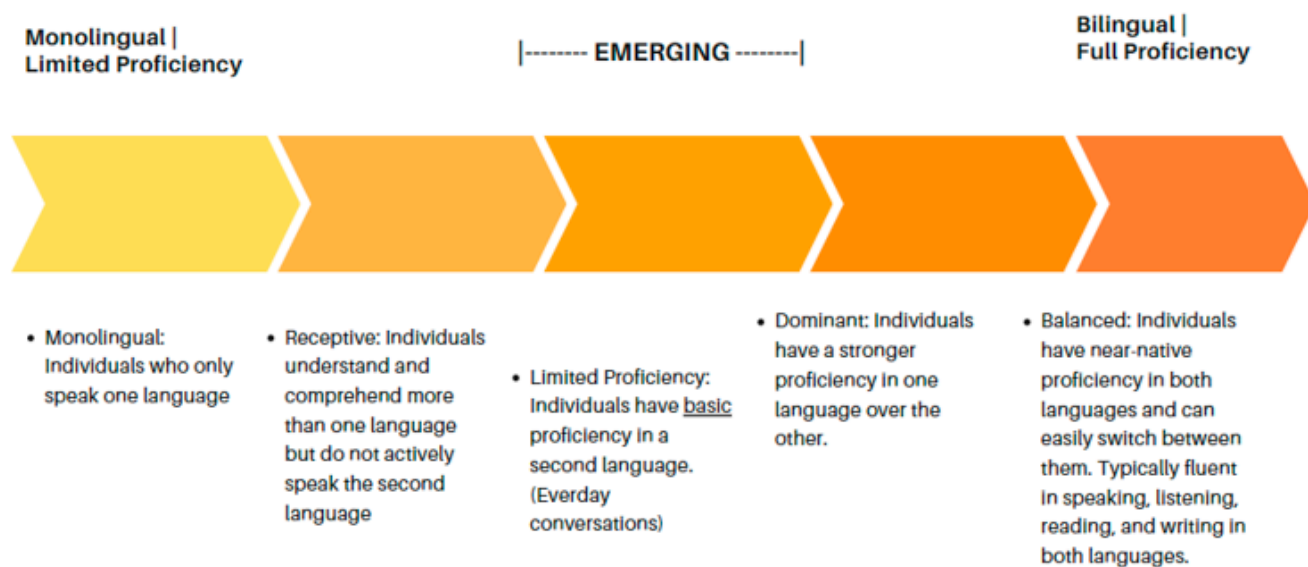
DRAWING PARALLELS AUTISM & ELLS

The two student populations that will be discussed include ELLs and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Both these groups, although distinct with unique characteristics and needs, are considered to be on spectrums, sharing similarities in educational needs and challenges. To reiterate, English Language Learners (ELLs) or emergent bilinguals (EBs) are defined as students whose native language is not English and who are learning English as an additional language (15 A.R.S. § 751 (2000)).

ASD is a neurological and developmental disorder that affects how individuals interact with others, communicate, learn, and behave (Hodges et al., 2020; National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.).

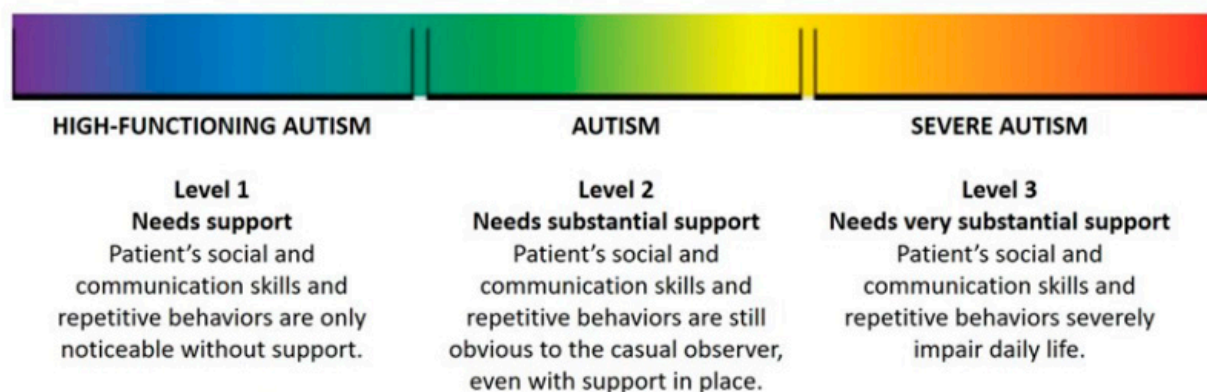
In educational settings, both these student populations encounter some of the same challenges, such as difficulty with social communication, language comprehension, and expressive language difficulties. Although these two groups face similar challenges, it is important to acknowledge that they result from different factors. For both these student populations, their intelligence and abilities are often overlooked and misjudged by those who rely on evaluation methods that do not consider neurodiverse ways of learning, communicating, and behaving (Koegel & LaZebnik, 2023). Professionals and politicians often present standardized tests as a predictor of future “success”—or, more commonly, lack thereof without acknowledging how flawed the system is for anyone with differences (Koegel & LaZebnik, 2023). During K-12 education, students' academic success is highly determined by standardized testing. Particularly for ELL students, their academic and overall success in the United States, as some state legislators would suggest, relies heavily on their English proficiency (Sievers, 2023). This concept of “proficiency” is inherently subjective; therefore, it posits the question of what these tests are measuring: intelligence or focus. Or conversely, proficiency or memorization.

Figure 2
Bilingualism Spectrum



Note. I created this visual depiction of the bilingual spectrum to illustrate the differentiation between an individual's various levels of bilingualism.

Figure 3
Autism Spectrum Disorder



Note. This model was adapted from "Kanner autism to Kanner syndromes, the difficult task to predict where ASD people look at" by O. Le Meur et al., 2020, *IEEE Access*, 8, p. 162135. Copyright CC by 4.0.

STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING APPLIED: IEPS AND DLBE

Given that both autism and bilingualism are considered to be on a spectrum, both populations demonstrate the need for comprehensive and individualized approaches. Combining Brofenbrenner's EST and Maslow's HON implies that the educational model should revolve around each child's unique systems and needs. In an academic setting, students with ASD are often provided with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that incorporate evidence-based practices (EBPs) such as modeling, prompting, reinforcement, visual support, and peer-supported instruction. These practices aim to support student's individualized needs and goals both academically and socially and have been found to be effective in teaching (IRIS Center, n.d.). It is crucial to recognize that the current implementation of SEI lacks a comprehensive evaluation of a child's developmental needs and influencing systems. The underlying principles and frameworks used within IEPs combine Piaget, Vygotsky, and Tomlinson's contributions to education pedagogy, which can be summed up into the Student-Centered Learning (SCL) framework. SCL focuses on principles such as whole child needs, building community, positive identity and belonging, student agency in pursuing interests, and real-world application. Research has shown that these principles positively impact student motivation and academic achievement with improved critical thinking skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities (Kaput, 2018; Tomlinson, 2000).

Therefore, given the principles of SCL and understanding the gaps within the SEI framework, I propose, in terms of efficacy, that dual language bilingual education (DLBE) would best address students' individual needs. DLBE refers to an overarching educational curricular design for promoting bilingualism and language maintenance (Brutt-Griffler & Jang, 2022; Morita-Mullaney et al., 2020). Embodying SCL principles, DLBE provides a comprehensive and immersive learning environment that supports students' second language development while also developing critical skills to ensure their success beyond the classroom. Although, according to Martinez-Wenzl et al. (2012), there is no evidence suggesting that one language instructional model is universally better than another, the use of SCL principles suggests that their implementation can contribute to their academic success and language acquisition. Studies on DLBE's efficacy have shown that students under this instructional model in subjects such as English Language Arts (ELA) and math academically outperform those in ESL programs over time (Baca, 2023; Gómez et al., 2005; Grundy & Timmer, 2017; Morita-Mullaney et al., 2020; Morita-Mullaney et al., 2021; Steele et al., 2017).

Through the lens of SCL, the educational approaches of IEPs and DLBE have notable similarities. Both programs effectively use the principles of Piaget's and Vygotsky's constructivism and Tomlinson's differentiation to promote the learning environments most beneficial to students. Although different in application, both models demonstrate

the impact of cultivating learning environments that follow each student's unique cognitive, social, and psychological development, suggesting these principles can positively impact a student's academic achievement (Baca, 2023; Gómez et al., 2005; Morita-Mullaney et al., 2020; Richards-Tutor et al., 2016).

DECISION

Reflection is a beneficial approach to gaining deeper insights into a contextualized problem, leading to key insights on how to address it. Given this, reflecting on such social issues is imperative to creating the change necessary to make a difference. While composing this manuscript and evaluating the SEI framework against others across historical, educational, and psychological contexts, I contemplated the profound influence of history on the present. In 1885, with the establishment of the original English-only policy, government officials argued that replacing Indian languages with English was in the Indian's "best interests" (Dussias, 1999, p. 915). In 2024, state officials offered the same argument, stating, "All I am doing is what is in the best interest of the students and in conformity with the law—happily, the two things are the same" (Ciletti, 2024, para. 19). Reflecting upon my time under SEI, I cannot express enough how misunderstood and frustrated I felt. My "success" and worth were constantly tied to a language I had yet to comprehend. As a child, the education system's lukewarm acceptance of me was far more confusing than outright rejection.

As a former ELL student, I believe it is essential to acknowledge that some individuals, whether teachers or legislators, genuinely believe learning English through this model is in the "best interests" of the students. However, after reviewing the efficacy of SEI through a unique lens, it cannot be said that the continuation of this program is in the best interests of EBs. While the disciplines of education and psychology offer insights into SEI's efficacy, they do not explain the rationale or foundational principles of the policy. Analyzing the historical context and social motivations of this proposition recontextualizes the problem, particularly when comparing it to educational frameworks for student populations facing similar needs and challenges as ELLs. The historical context of this issue is significant as it reveals that the rationale

for ongoing implementation is ideologically driven rather than empirically supported. Further, suggesting that to solve this issue, more extraordinary lengths will need to be taken to deconstruct the ideologies rooted in the past and address them in the present and future.

REFLECTIVE CRITIQUE

Given the new interdisciplinary perspective on the problem of practice, there is far more value in the learned insight from the integration of various frameworks across the different disciplines. Unfortunately, the promotion of English-only policies is not a new concept. The long history of English-only sentiments centered around American nationalism and its influence on American law, politics, culture, and worldview shows that the development of Proposition 203 is not exempt from its sphere of influence.

Initially, I believed that the implementation of SEI in Arizona classrooms was due to legislators' lack of understanding of educational and psychological processes and systems impacting teaching and learning concerning language acquisition. However, I now understand that the nature of this problem has nothing to do with this but is a consequence of the belief that literacy's inherent "goodness" could be manipulated to serve goals unrelated to actually measuring or promoting literacy, such as maintaining political power and control (Branch, 2015). I acknowledge that the primary goal of SEI is rapid English acquisition and not bilingualism (Martinez-Wenzl et al., 2012). Thus, this debate regarding bilingualism versus English only overshadows examining and addressing current factors affecting EB students' success in the classroom.

According to the Arizona AzMERIT assessment results, double-digit achievement gaps exist between ELLs and the all-student group in English Language Arts (ELA) and math content areas (UnidosUS, 2018). ELL students also graduate high school at much lower rates than their peers, with a 34% graduation rate compared to their peers who have an 80% graduation rate (UnidosUS, 2018). While SEI's enforcement impacts ELLs' academic performance, other factors must also be considered, such as the frameworks analyzed in education and psychology.

Furthermore, this inquiry has broader implications for other researchers grappling with similar issues of inequality in educational settings, suggesting the significance of adopting an interdisciplinary approach to comprehensively understand the issue's complexities and underlying causes. While reflecting on this research, I cannot help but acknowledge the resiliency found within my experience and of others in my community. The experiences and trauma shared within this reflection were difficult to navigate; nevertheless, I celebrate how far my peers and I have come despite this and hope for a better future in which *all* students can receive the educational support necessary to truly succeed.

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