

Proposition 227: Tales from the Schoolhouse

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Abstract

This article explores the impact of Proposition 227 on students and teachers based on interviews with parents, teachers, and administrators of a school in the Bay Area. We discuss four themes that emerge from the data: parent involvement, academic impact on students, the instructional challenges posed by Proposition 227, and the emotional impact on teachers and students. Connecting these themes is an overemphasis on language of instruction, which we found to overshadow other issues critical to the education of language minority students.

The passage of Proposition 227 brought much debate about its impact on classrooms, students, and teachers. Historically, there has been a focus on language in education, particularly when language of instruction took prominence early on in the fight for bilingual education in the 1960s and 1970s (Crawford, 1999). Proposition 227 further magnified this focus through the development of an argument that reduced the issues of educating English language learners (ELLs) to solely comprise that of the language of instruction, thus diminishing the critical roles of access to grade-level content, appropriate instructional materials, and prepared teachers.

Here, we present the findings of a case study that explored how administrators, teachers, and parents of one elementary school in the Bay Area responded to and were impacted by Proposition 227. For reasons of anonymity, this school is identified as the Bay Area School (BAS). It is important to note that BAS is atypical from many California schools in that it has a late transition bilingual program, meaning that students in the bilingual track tend to remain in that track through the fifth grade, at which point they transition into English, and after which they proceed to junior high school. Students in this track are gradually exposed to more English instruction in the classroom as they progress through the fifth grade.

This paper begins with a brief description of the methodology used to conduct this study. The remainder of the paper is structured around four themes that emerged from the data. These themes include parent involvement, academic impact on students, the instructional challenges posed by Proposition 227, and the emotional impact on teachers and students.

Methodology

This study contained two phases. Phase 1 took place in the months following the initial implementation of Proposition 227. It consisted of interviews with four groups of people: parents, district and school site administrators, teachers, and advocacy groups, and included classroom observations. Phase 2 was conducted one and a half years later. We employed interviews with many of the individuals interviewed for Phase 1, as well as observations in classrooms of the teachers interviewed. In total, six parents and five teachers participated in the study. The majority of the parents we interviewed were immigrants from Mexico and tended to be limited English proficient. The teachers interviewed included two from the bilingual track, two from the English-only (EO) track, and one resource teacher. The methodology employed in this study provides an opportunity to gain insight into the ways in which Proposition 227 impacted these particular people. While we fully recognize that these findings are not representative of parents or teachers beyond those interviewed, these findings provide specific examples of the impact of Proposition 227. The research team involved in collecting data was comprised of three graduate students with varied experiences in the education of language minority students. A more detailed description of methods used for this study can be found on the ERIC database, where the full text of the paper is available. Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper.

Results

Parent Involvement

Parents unite, parent involvement increases

The parents interviewed in Phase 1 first heard about Proposition 227 in March of 1998 when they were attending a women's group session at the school's Healthy Start center. They spoke of their surprise at what they characterized as the racist nature of the proposition. This group of parents decided to find out more about the proposition and the district's response by attending the regular school board meetings. They each brought at least one other person with them such that parent attendance at these meetings dramatically increased. After the proposition passed, these parents heard about parent groups forming at other schools. They decided to come together in a united force at the next school board meeting to express their condemnation of Proposition 227 and to urge the district to take an anti-Proposition 227 stance similar to that taken by San Francisco Unified School District, who, under Federal Court order mandating bilingual education, refused to implement Proposition 227 and obtained a districtwide waiver.

The parents indicated that nearly 500¹ parents attended this school board meeting. According to parents, teachers, and administrators interviewed, the

school board was shocked at the large number of concerned parents. The board meeting lasted four hours as parent after parent came forward in support of the district's bilingual program. The parents applauded after each presentation even though a board member had told them not to do so. They returned to subsequent meetings until one of the board members told them that there was nothing that could be done and that they should go sign waivers at their individual school sites.

According to administrators interviewed, when Proposition 227 initially passed, the district considered not offering waivers. However, given the large-scale parent mobilization that occurred during the spring and summer, the district decided to offer waivers to parents who requested them. Their decision to implement the parent waiver option appeared to be based upon a general fear of potential parent litigation against the district. Thus, the direction given by the superintendent was to err on the side of parent choice. The director of the district ELD program summarized this position saying, "We want the parents to know their options and we want them to choose what they think is best."

Several implementation procedures followed the district's decision to offer parent waivers. First, schools now had to conduct at least two meetings to explain to parents their options given the programmatic changes resulting from Proposition 227. It was at these meetings that district-prepared videos explaining parents' rights were shown to parents. BAS administrators predicted that only a handful of parents would attend the two-parent meetings. However, according to site administrators, nearly 200 parents attended both meetings. In addition, several of the parents involved in parent advocacy groups encouraged other parents to fill out waivers and even helped parents with limited literacy skills fill out waivers. The school had never seen this type of parental involvement, initiated by the parents themselves. Due in large part to this parent mobilization, BAS had 95% of parents of ELLs sign waivers, compared to 80% districtwide. These parents thus felt they had successfully upheld the bilingual program at BAS.

When asked about parent waivers, one parent, Lucila, stated that she signed a waiver for her son because she was concerned that he would not understand the teacher's instruction if placed in a classroom taught entirely in English. Ester also signed waivers because she felt that her children needed help in Spanish since that was their native language. Ofelia stated that she signed a waiver because she wanted her child to be bilingual. She also voiced a concern about her daughter who, in the fifth grade and already receiving much instruction in English, was losing her Spanish proficiency.

Decline in parent involvement

Upon returning to BAS for Phase 2 of the study, we found a different picture in terms of activity around Proposition 227 and parent involvement in general. The groundswell of parent mobilization had diminished. The parent meetings at the school site had returned to the small, pre-Proposition 227 size. According to staff interviews, they were even having difficulty getting parents

to attend meetings like the School Site Council (SSC) meetings. During one SSC meeting, a main agenda item focused on ways to get parents involved in the school. When asked about parent involvement during the current school year in comparison to the year before, the parents in our study expressed great dismay at the lack of parent involvement. These parents concurred in their belief that many parents were concerned with their jobs and that those jobs came before their involvement in their children's school.

Interestingly, these parents also seemed to feel that, in part, BAS' low SAT-9 test scores, released during Phase 2, were attributable to the lack of attention that parents paid to their children's schooling. In support of this belief, Ester commented, "I understand that they [other parents] work, but I work too, and I have to get up at 4:30 [a.m.] to make their breakfast and lunches, and before I leave to work, I leave them all combed and ready. They [other parents] have to try harder." With a daughter in the fifth grade, Ofelia had already learned the kinds of parent involvement that American schools value. In her observations of BAS, Ofelia noticed that the teachers pay more attention to the children of parents who come to school. These observations are what led her to believe so strongly that parents must come to their children's school. Thus, while the parents we interviewed tended to continue their involvement in their children's school, they seemed to be the exception.

Academic Impact on Students

When describing the impact Proposition 227 had on their students, the bilingual track teachers expressed their greatest concerns around the academic impact of the 30-day English instruction mandate.² These teachers were especially concerned with the negative effects on the reading and writing development of their students. One teacher commented, "For a whole month I wasn't allowed to do reading and writing in the native language. When literacy is so critical—it's the whole focus of the whole district and the whole state—it seemed like 30 days wasted." This sentiment echoed the concerns stated by the other bilingual track teachers interviewed during both phases of the study. Furthermore, according to interviews with parents, teachers, and school site administrators, the first 30 days were an eye-opener for most parents. Many parents did not realize the overwhelming nature of the English-only lessons. The parents commented on their inability to help their children with their homework, which for those 30 days was in English. In addition, there appeared to be some long-term academic outcomes, with one bilingual track teacher stating that her lowest achieving students had not caught up in reading even by the end of the first year.

However, both Phase 1 and 2 interviews indicated that Proposition 227 had a greater negative, yet unanticipated academic impact on the LEP students who transferred from the bilingual track to the English-only track, than on students who remained on the bilingual track. Yet, it seemed as if no one, including the district, school site administration, or other teachers, had considered the extent

to which Proposition 227 might affect the English-only track. The focus at all levels had been on the bilingual track. When asked about Proposition 227's effects on her students, Tiffany, the third-grade English-only teacher, used words like "frustrated" and "bored" to describe their responses to her English immersion instruction. She predicted that most of the transferred bilingual track students would not finish the year on grade level.

Linda, the fourth-grade English-only teacher interviewed in Phase 2 described many of the issues mentioned by Tiffany in Phase 1. According to Linda, the students who transferred into Tiffany's third-grade English-only class had struggled academically throughout the entire first year of Proposition 227's implementation. Now in her class, she still saw these students struggling academically. She attributed their struggles to the fact that these students had been placed in an English-only classroom for the first time the previous year, before they were even at grade level in the bilingual classroom. She believed that their English was improving, but that it would take a few years for them to get up to grade level, especially considering that, in her words, "It took them last year just to learn English."

Instructional Challenges of Proposition 227

Loss of instruction

One of the greatest challenges reported by the bilingual track teachers and parents in both phases was the 30-day English instruction mandate. Teachers described the first 30 days of implementing Proposition 227 as "scary," "chaotic," and "a waste." When interviewed immediately after the 30-day English mandate, Jan described the toll it took on her instruction, stating: "[I] felt like I had the brakes on . . . [I] couldn't dive into anything. I felt like I was in limbo."

The bilingual track teachers were also faced with the uncertainty of their final class makeup after the initial 30 days of class, at which point parent waivers would be signed and tallied. Further impacting the situation was the district's decision to withhold newly adopted Spanish language arts materials until after the 30-day English mandate had ended. According to these bilingual track teachers, the district withheld these materials until they had definitive knowledge of the number of bilingual and English-only classes that would be formed. So, for the bilingual track teachers the first 30 days of Proposition 227 implementation was a serious impediment to doing their job of teaching that had academic repercussions on their students well beyond the initial 30 days.

Wide linguistic range

As previously mentioned, it appeared that for the English-only track, Proposition 227 had its deepest impact on the third grade. While BAS had one classroom for each English-only track grade level, the third grade saw the largest number of parents who opted out of bilingual education for their children by not signing the waivers. This unexpected impact on the English-only track's third grade appeared to catch all parties, including teachers,

administrators, and district staff by surprise. According to interviews with both bilingual and English-only track teachers, the reasons these parents did not sign waivers varied. For several parents, they simply did not have the time to physically come to the school campus to sign the waiver. Some simply forgot. For others, it was a conscious decision to take their children out of bilingual education into an English-only classroom with the belief that their children were not learning enough English.

Although the total number of transferred students in this classroom was small, around six, this number was equal to roughly a third of the class, with the remaining students in the English-only track since Kindergarten. This created a classroom demography in which the teacher needed to address the needs of a much wider scope of English language levels than ever before. Post Proposition 227, this classroom now contained native English speakers, fluent (non-native) English speakers who had transitioned via sheltered English classrooms, and due to Proposition 227, limited English speakers, some of whom were just beyond non-English speaking proficiency. Making the situation even more difficult was the fact that with the late transition nature of the bilingual program, these transferred students had received their instruction almost entirely in Spanish their entire schooling career. These students did not have the opportunity to proceed through a sheltered English classroom and to develop a higher, more academic level of English vocabulary and comprehension, as do students who remain on the bilingual track. Thus, their English proficiency was in marked contrast to the rest of the class.

When describing the impact Proposition 227 had on her teaching, Tiffany spoke candidly about the resulting instructional demands, as well as the emotional toll it was taking:

This [Proposition 227] is crazy! I'm teaching native English, second language learners, and transitioned [students] . . . three different language types! I'm just irate about the whole thing. We already have a million different academic levels, now these different language levels on top of that. I feel like I need a different curriculum for every child and I just don't know where to begin. I'm so overwhelmed.

More than 30 days of school had passed when this teacher was interviewed. Throughout the interview she readily admitted that she had not yet modified her curriculum to meet the needs of her LEP students: "I don't think [this situation] is fair at all, but I don't know what to do and I feel angry, not at the kids, but at the [situation] . . . what am I supposed to do, create a whole other curriculum now?"

Generally, these students were expected to do the same work as the other native English or transitioned, fluently proficient students. One strategy she implemented was to "buddy up" the LEP students with fluent, bilingual students so that they had at least one person to help them in the class. Making matters even worse was the fact that this teacher had never taught

English language development (ELD) because her students had always been at a fluent level, close to or already transitioned into English. Although Tiffany was CLAD certified, this teacher's shortage of materials, experience, and technical skills led her to feel totally unprepared to teach ELD or offer sheltered English instruction.

Linda, the fourth-grade English-only teacher interviewed for Phase 2, had received Tiffany's students the year after Proposition 227 passed. Interestingly, this teacher felt that Proposition 227 hadn't impacted her instruction directly, "except for the fact that I got kids that were impacted by it." Although she admitted that because these transferred students lacked English skills equivalent to the other native and transitioned English speakers in her class, perhaps she should make some adjustments to her instruction: "I do need to be teaching sheltered English and sometimes I forget that." Indeed, the minimal observations made in this teacher's classroom revealed a lack of adjustment made in teaching these students, with very minimal sheltered English techniques used.

Lack of instructional materials and support

According to school site administrators, the schools did not purchase new Spanish language materials that had been adopted by the district because of their uncertainty of the demand for either the English-only or the bilingual programs, although they did prepare for what they perceived to be a stronger push for English by purchasing new ELD materials. However, contrary to these expectations, an unexpectedly high number of parents signed waivers. As a result, after Proposition 227 imposed a 30-day period of English-only instruction, the overall class structure of the school looked very similar to the previous year. The number of English-only classes at BAS, one per grade level, was the same as the year prior to Proposition 227, thus leaving the bilingual track teachers unprepared to teach language arts still without the necessary materials after the initial 30 days.

Because the third-grade level was the only class on the English-only track to experience an influx of students transferring from the bilingual track, this teacher felt very isolated in her situation, unlike the bilingual track teachers who had support in their numbers. Although the district offered two staff improvement days to ease the strain of the 30-day English instruction mandate and to provide information, assistance, and some English language materials to the bilingual track teachers, no such support was directly aimed at the English-only track teachers. While the bilingual track teachers seemed most affected by the initial 30-day English mandate, they were able to return to their regular instructional practices, (teaching in the native language to students whose parents had signed waivers) once the 30 days has passed. Thus, it appeared to this English-only teacher that they were no longer as concerned with Proposition 227 and its effects. Yet, for this teacher, the initial 30 days of Proposition 227 were just the beginning of what promised to be a very difficult year filled with uncertainty and a classroom of students with extremely diverse needs, all exacerbated by her feelings of isolation and lack of support.

Emotional Impact on Teachers and Students

Another theme that emerged during both phases was the psychological and emotional strain that came from Proposition 227's passage and implementation. After weeks of interviewing teachers, observing classrooms, and in general just hanging around, we sensed a strong "emotional buzz" in the school in the months that followed Proposition 227's passage. The feeling we got was a combination of confusion, high levels of frustration, and a deep sense of desperation. The teachers and staff looked tired and almost dazed. Many of the teachers and staff appeared to be in a deep quandary over what they philosophically and professionally felt was best for these students (native language instruction) and what they were being forced to do by the new law (English-only instruction).

In reflecting upon this theme, all of the teachers spoke of low morale during the first year of implementation, particularly among the bilingual track teachers. In describing the uncertainty that existed the first year, one teacher commented: "There was low morale before we started the 98-99 school year because nobody [knew] what Proposition 227 was going to bring. [Nobody knew] what it was going to be like and how we were going to teach kids, who don't have much English at all . . . in English for 30 days." Each of the teachers interviewed described how the psychological/emotional impact was so high for some of the bilingual track teachers that several spoke of quitting.

The bilingual track teachers we interviewed also described the sense of anxiety that lasted the entire year. This anxiety stemmed from the loss of native language instruction during the first 30 days of school and the resulting instructional lag in which teachers felt behind in their teaching the entire school year, coupled with a sense that many of their students would end the year academically below grade level.

The bilingual track teachers also described the confusion that arose in trying to interpret the rules of the new law, including trying to understand the district's interpretation of these rules. One example included the law's mandate that instruction in all classes be carried out "overwhelmingly in English." This particular district interpreted "overwhelmingly in English" to mean that all instruction should be in English during the 30-day English Mandate, but that a teacher could use the native language to conduct lesson previews and reviews and to meet students' emotional and physical needs. This interpretation was confusing to many of the bilingual track teachers. Rosa described her fear that she would do something wrong, that she might accidentally break the law. Observations of her classroom made it difficult to know that hers had once been a bilingual classroom in that she hid or put away most native language materials. For example, she had covered the Spanish alphabet cards in her classroom with English alphabet cards. Throughout the Phase 1 interview, she spoke of her fear that she might accidentally break into Spanish when speaking with the students. This fear

led to what we observed to be a “paranoia-like” state in which she was fearful that a parent or even more frightful, that the “227 police” might be lurking and call the Proposition 227 hotline to turn her in. Rosa described her fear stating, “They could come down and say, ‘That’s it . . . you’re not speaking any more Spanish in this school, it’s all English . . . If we see one book in that classroom it’ll be confiscated.’ It’s really scary.” Rosa’s feelings exemplified a commonly cited fear of unknowingly doing the wrong thing, of using Spanish in the wrong way at the wrong time, and of being turned in and/or losing her job for making any such mistakes.

The emotional impact of Proposition 227 also extended to students. The bilingual track teachers spoke of their students’ confusion and lack of understanding during the 30-day English mandate. One teacher described the blank expressions on the faces of her students and how some students, particularly the younger ones, were so confused that they cried throughout those 30 days of English-only instruction. Parents also described how their children would often come home in tears during the 30 days of English-only instruction.

A longer ranging effect was in terms of behavior. In their reflections upon the first year of implementation, teachers on both tracks described what now seemed to them to have been a “tough group of kids” and as a “very difficult class.” Tiffany believed that the extreme range of language proficiencies brought together in her class under Proposition 227 had in essence caused many behavior problems because of the students’ lack of comprehension: “It’s caused so many behavior problems in this class, because they get frustrated because they don’t understand and then they trigger all this [bad behavior].”

Again, perhaps less anticipated by all we interviewed, particularly the English-only teachers, was the emotional strain Proposition 227 had on those students immersed in English. Tiffany felt that the English immersion instruction had placed an extreme amount of pressure on her third grade LEP students. In the following account, she tells of how Proposition 227 was especially affecting one student:

I had a kid who got into an argument with another kid and he just burst out crying and he couldn’t stop crying for half an hour. It was obviously more than just that fight. I had a teacher who speaks Spanish come over and talk with him about it and it was a lot more . . . He [told the teacher] ‘It’s really hard for me to be here. I don’t understand what’s going on some of the time.’ This was a kid who was a top student in his [bilingual] class. He’s not understanding everything and just struggling. It’s really hard on the kids.

This teacher felt as though her students would ultimately learn English, which she saw as the goal of Proposition 227; however, she wondered about the cost: “They are learning English regardless of how it affects them academically or emotionally . . . they have to in a way.”

Unbalanced Attention to Language

The themes that surfaced from our data and described here were broad in scope. Yet, upon further analysis a common underlying framework emerged to connect these themes. This larger, connecting framework was an unbalanced attention to the language of instruction. This resulted in diverted attention from other important issues in the education of language minority students, such as prepared teachers, access to grade-level content, and appropriate instructional materials. This focus on language was found throughout both phases and was emphasized in all interview groups.

For example, when Phase 1 parents were asked why they and other parents had responded so strongly in the first year to Proposition 227 in comparison to other education issues, these parents again commented on the racist nature of Proposition 227. In particular, they felt that Proposition 227 was a reaction to the increasing number of Spanish-speaking minorities in California. Throughout the interviews, these parents repeatedly stated their belief that Proposition 227 attacked their language, their culture, and thus, their identity. They felt personally attacked and so reacted as such. They stated that the Anglos were trying to keep them down and destroy who they are. Furthermore, they saw the bilingual program at the schools as something that supported their identity by supporting their language and their culture. For these parents there was a connection between their language, their culture, and their identity as a whole. They did not want their identity to be taken from them. For example, Anita stated, "They want us to work in their houses like maids and gardeners and they want us to stay down there. They attack our language so that we lose our identity." Maria further commented that she felt her language was important. She pitied the Latinos who did not have their language. She said that language was a part of who she is.

For these parents, it appeared that success in school was defined as learning English, regardless of their support for bilingual education. When asked about their children, the bilingual program, and the school in general, these parents discussed how well their children were doing in school. Yet, throughout the interviews, each of them also described ways in which their children were not actually succeeding in school, although they did not explicitly label it as such. Analysis showed that these discrepancies centered on language. For instance, Ester commented on her observation that her younger child received more homework in English than her older child: "I see that my daughter [in third grade] is doing more homework in English than my son in fourth grade. She has sentences to write and my son does not have any. He gets math problems in English." Lucila stated that her son did not learn to read until he reached the third grade. Yet, in another instance when describing how one day she helped in her child's classroom from early in the morning until the end of the school day, Lucila commented in a positive tone about the 35 minutes of English instruction her son received. What is important about this

observation is that in the third grade Lucila's child should have been receiving 50% of his instruction in Spanish and 50% in English. Yet, the 35 minutes of English instruction that Lucila observed is roughly equal to a little over 10% of instruction. In another example, Ofelia commented on her happiness with the progress her daughter had made in English. Yet, in a later comment she discussed the uncertainty she had over why her daughter did not write well in English. Her daughter had attended BAS since Kindergarten and would be attending middle school the next year.

On the one hand these parents proudly stated how well their children were doing in school. On the other hand, they also described situations in which their children were not really doing well. It seemed that these parents believed that their children were doing well in school because they were developing oral skills in English—skills that are easily recognizable and that are of practical importance to the family. The fact that Lucila's son did not learn to read until the third grade did not seem to be of much concern to her. Instead, it was the 35 minutes of English instruction that he received that she felt good about. The practical importance of learning oral English is seen in Lucila's comment: "He [her son] can help me when we go shopping."

In many ways, these parents were similar to parents everywhere in that they wanted the best for their children. They wanted the best teachers and the best program, including the best bilingual program. However, the parents we interviewed carried a quadruple burden. They are members of both an ethnic and language minority group with many not fluent in English, they carried the burden of poverty, and many carried a burden in their lack of formal schooling experience, especially a U.S. schooling experience. So, while they were concerned about their children's homework and general success in school, as much as any other parent, they were even more concerned with their immediate needs, namely developing oral English skills. When these parents talked, they referred to English as the most important thing for their children to learn. They saw the lack of English skills as the greatest obstacle for their own independence, as well as that for their children. Thus, the parents we interviewed believed that learning to speak English was more important than any other skill taught in school.

In relation to Proposition 227, this larger framework of an unbalanced attention to language of instruction has several implications. First, it sheds light on the complexities behind selecting an education program for one's child when one is a language minority. These parents clearly acknowledged the desire that their children maintain their native language and feel comfortable in class, yet they strongly valued the learning of English, which also points to one explanation as to why some Latinos voted in favor of Proposition 227. Second, it highlights the reality of life that these parents face. These parents want to maintain their language and their identity. Yet equally important, they must survive, and in order to survive in this country they knew that one must be able to speak English.

This unbalanced attention to language was also evident in the heightened focus on BAS' English language development program. The English-only teachers interviewed felt that too many students were proceeding through the fifth grade without developing strong oral and academic skills in English. In commenting on this issue, Linda concluded, "There is no way that a kid should be here from Kindergarten to fifth grade and still be doing the bulk of their literacy in Spanish unless they have a learning problem." During Phase 2 in particular, teachers in both tracks commented on both the need for their students to learn more English and on the perception that increasing numbers of school site personnel were more vocal about the bilingual track students' need to learn English faster. The bilingual track teachers also acknowledged that Proposition 227 had led to some personal attempts to increase and improve their own English language instruction. Essentially, the exclusive focus on language of instruction was beginning to divide teachers, generally along bilingual/English-only tracks.

The focus on language was further emphasized during Phase 2 in the push from both the district and school site administrators to increase English instruction. The superintendent mandated that the third-grade classrooms follow a 50/50, English/Spanish format. While this had been an informal policy in previous years, it was mandated that year. It was during this time that the principal also spoke of a "fundamental shift" in BAS' education model, one that focused on language of instruction, and one that the principal believed was necessary in order for the students to become successful. This stance was contrary to the stance taken during the Phase 1 interviews, in which the principal indicated strong support in favor of the school's bilingual program. Throughout Phase 2 interviews and the School Site Council and English Language Learner Advisory meetings we attended, the principal suggested that due to BAS community demographics, in which there is a large immigrant and non- or limited-English speaking population, BAS was a school where perhaps bilingual education might not be the best program to serve its students' needs.

Discussion

Three main policy implications arise from this study. The first implication centers on the policy of educating language minority students. In the fight for bilingual education in the 1960s, the issue of language took on central prominence. Nearly 40 years later, with the passage of Proposition 227, we find that the emphasis in the education of ELLs is still on language. It is this unbalanced attention on language that reduces the very complex issue of ELL instruction to one of English versus the native language, thus creating a simplified, polemic view in which language is a panacea—ignoring other equally important issues such as access to grade-level content, appropriate instructional materials, and prepared teachers. Thus, it appears that the education field has failed to move beyond the issue of language.

Proposition 227 serves as an example of a policy that hinders any theoretical or policy progress in the education of ELLs and instead pulls the discussion backwards to focus once again solely on language. In doing so, policies such as Proposition 227 reverse prior advances made by the *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) ruling and the Castañeda standards as outlined in *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981). *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) highlighted two issues in the education of ELLs: access to English language development and access to content. Language of instruction became particularly important in relation to access to content. However, within this context, language of instruction took dominance such that ELD, pedagogy, as well as content itself became optional issues. The *Castañeda* standards also went beyond language of instruction to highlight three programmatic criteria in educating ELLs: a basis in sound educational theory, effective implementation, and an evaluation period. Again, Proposition 227 neglects these critical issues and reduces the discussion to language of instruction.

The second implication centers on the larger educational policy implementation. This study demonstrated that policy, as distant as it may seem for some, truly affects the lives of students, teachers, and parents in very real and often unforeseen ways. This study also showed that policy-makers, in this case Ron Unz, as well as those responsible for implementing the policy at all levels, yet particularly those at “the top” (i.e., voters, state department of education, district administrators) had no clear concept of its impact on students and teachers. Proposition 227 is, like many educational policies, short-sighted in that once accepted at “the top” or by a majority, the general expectations are that it will be implemented without adequate funding or support for even minimal application, again a neglect of progressive policies like the *Castañeda* standards. This lack of foresight and thoughtless preparation for implementation can clearly have a negative impact on teachers and students, as demonstrated in this study.

The third related implication lies in the fact that education is a public issue. Everyone has opinions on education such that the issues become extremely simplified. This was the case with Proposition 227 in which the voting public decided upon California’s education policy based on a polemic view of bilingual versus English-only instruction. This study demonstrated several of the dangers in allowing the public to determine education policy at a state level.

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Endnotes

¹ The parents claimed that 500 parents attended the meetings; the district believed some 400 were in attendance.

² Proposition 227 mandates that children who obtain waivers must be placed in an “English language classroom . . . for a period of not less than 30 days.”