

A Tribute to Richard Ruiz
Empirical Applications of Ruiz's Language Orientations:
From Theory to Practice

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Abstract

In the essay below, I illustrate how the research and writings of Richard Ruiz have influenced my research across three decades. I demonstrate how the totality of Ruiz's orientations toward language planning have been taken up as good theory and then empirically applied and tested beyond the point of theoretical supposition. Throughout this work I argue that while the development of empirical evidence to support Ruiz's language-a-resource orientation is paramount, one cannot engage in this work without simultaneously understanding and examining the pervasive language-as-problem orientation as well as the wildly unpopular but critically necessary language-as-right orientation. In sum, knowledge of the totality of the language orientations framework remains as relevant in 2015 as they were when they were first discussed in 1984.

A Tribute to Richard Ruiz

Language Orientations: From Language as a Problem to Language as a Resource and Back to Language as a Problem

Introduction and Highlights of Ruiz's Work

For many years, all aspects of Ruiz's work have inspired and been utilized to capture how language orientations play out in language planning, language allocation and language use for bilingual programs in the US context with children especially those who are Spanish speaking and predominately of Mexican descent (see Chapter XX). As will be illustrated in this essay, my work as inspired by Richard Ruiz has primarily been enacted through empirical applications of his orientations in the areas of bilingual education and biliteracy.

Ruiz's work is significant both historically and currently for many reasons. His 1980's work was written in a time period in which there was an on-going national debate about the efficacy of bilingual programs. The critique about these programs focused particularly on Spanish speaking students and whether or not they bilingual programs were teaching English. At the time, there was a parallel debate about whether or not English should be declared to be the official language of the United States (Crawford, 2004).

In 1981, California Senator S.I. Hayakawa introduced legislation proposing that English be declared the official language of the United States. While Hayakawa's proposed legislation never passed at the federal level, it inspired many movements at the state level to enact official English legislation and in the 1980's 23 states declared English to be their official language. At the same time, the U.S. Department of Education considered eliminating federal funding for programs of bilingual education with Secretary of Education William Bennett citing the following reasons for the proposed elimination of programs, "Bilingual programs have lost sight of the goal of teaching English and instead have become a way of enhancing students' knowledge of native language and culture" (Bennett, 1985). He went on to say that, "After seventeen years of federal involvement and after \$1.7 billion of federal funding, we have no evidence that the children whom we sought to help have benefitted" (Bennett, 1985 as cited in Crawford, 2004). While this statement was untrue and there was ample research to support the efficacy of bilingual education programs, Bennett's statement is illustrative of the climate of the time. Clearly, the period of time in which Richard Ruiz came of age as a scholar and researcher was hostile for policy makers, researchers and practitioners advocating for programs of bilingual education for the nation's burgeoning population of emerging bilingual learners.¹

In 1984 Ruiz published an article on "Orientations in Language Planning." In that article, he defined an orientation as a disposition or attitude toward something. He proposed that an orientation frames or filters one's choice of action toward a language issue. Ruiz posited that the hostility and divisiveness directed at programs of bilingual education in the United States largely

resulted from the fact that language orientations toward bilingual education were predominately focused on two language ideologies that he termed language-as- problem and language-as-right orientations. He clearly situated the official English movement and the federal government's hostility toward bilingual education in the language-as-problem camp. He added, however, that the language-as- right paradigm was also problematic in the field for different reasons. The language-as- right orientation advocates for the right to use one's languages in the activities of communal life, the right to freedom from discrimination on the basis of language, and the right to access formal processes like voting, civil service examinations, judicial proceedings etc. in a language that one can understand. As essential as these rights are in U.S. society, with regard to language planning and school programs, it could easily be argued that emerging bilingual children have a right to instruction in their native or home languages only until they are proficient in English. Further, Ruiz effectively argued that children in the U.S. have a right to worship in a non-English language, attend community events conducted in non-English languages etc. etc. however the language of the school should be predominately in English. In this sense, the language-as-right orientation, just as the language-as- problem orientation, impedes language planning for comprehensive programs of bilingual education.

However, in this seminal work Ruiz called for the development and elaboration of language orientations to include language-as-resource orientations. The new orientation he argued was important to determine, "What is thinkable about language in society" (1984, pg. 4). A language-as-resource orientation, he argued, "Could have a direct impact on enhancing the language status of subordinate languages; it could help to ease tensions between majority and minority communities and it could help to provide a resource for a great deficiency in the country – the language deficiency" (pg. 15). The U.S. could better be served by developing "bilingual schools for all Americans" (pg.15). Rather than non-English languages being impediments to learning, or problems to be solved by schools, Ruiz proposed that more than one language should be better viewed as a value added and a resource to an individual, a community and a nation. It was a way of framing language a value added rather than a deficit to overcome.

In this article, in clear and direct language Ruiz synthesized the field and captured the failings of educational policies and attitudes of the time, even as he laid out a vision for the future. For those of us in the field of bilingual education at the time, this article created an epiphany. Using terms and descriptions easily understandable to researchers, policy makers and practitioners, Ruiz gave voice to the frustrations that many of us felt toward the language-as-problem and language-as-right practices and policies in the field, but for which we did not have the words, definitions, or empirical evidence to challenge. At the same, time the additional orientation of language-as-resource gave us inspiration and hope; a new term that could be translated into policies and practices that could move the field beyond the antagonistic stance of language-as-problem and into a new world of potential bilingual programming whose goals included the development of biliteracy, bilingualism and biculturalism. As an indication of the influence of Ruiz's work, the Taylor and Francis on-line citations indicate that the 1984 article alone has been cited 1,015 times

As inspiring as Ruiz's new orientation was in 1984, however, over the years many of us would learn through our research and work that, "*Entre dicho y hecho hay gran trecho* (things are easier said than done)." In fact, I will go so far as to say, that while many individuals in the field aspired to have language-as-resource programs and practices, policy and practice in the field writ large is predominately mired in language-as-problem orientations. Witness for example, that about 81% of all students in the U.S. who are emerging bilingual learners are in English medium programs, meaning they are in programs where English is the only language of instruction and the primary language of communication in the school.

Through this essay, I will discuss how Ruiz's work has influenced my research over the past three decades, and then I will propose how I think Ruiz's work can and should be used to influence the next generation of scholars and researchers attempting to insure that the language-as-resource orientation gets taken up in this age of monolingual English curricula that was not developed with emerging bilingual learners in mind and English-only high stakes testing.

In attempt to honor Ruiz's third paradigm (language-as-resource) and in a further attempt to avoid the deficit language that has so dominated the field of bilingual/ESL/dual language education, the students in my research presented herein as it has been influenced by Ruiz will be referred to as emerging bilingual students, a term that I am using interchangeably with the more common term of English Language Learners (ELLs).

The Multiple Uses of Ruiz's Tripartite Approach to Language Ideology

An important consideration in understanding Ruiz's tripartite approach to language ideology is the realization that within one research study or context, one may observe and study all three orientations. Such was the case with a sociolinguistic case study that I conducted in 1994 in a school in Southern California (Escamilla, 1994). At the time, there were few studies that looked at or studied programs of bilingual education at a school-wide level. Most studies focused on classroom level instructional issues and language allocation guidelines. Using Ruiz's orientations, I demonstrated that in the context of classroom instruction, teachers generally held attitudes that language was a resource. Further, they lamented that the program in which they were teaching was a short-term transitional bilingual education program (TBE) program. As an example, when asked about language status at the school, on teacher said, "Everyone is super-supportive of bilingual education at this school. We send all our notes and report cards home in English and Spanish. We have a very active parent advisory council and their meetings are always conducted in English and Spanish. We have excellent teachers who are always telling the kids how good it is to be able to speak two languages." (Escamilla, 1994, pg. 32).

However, using Ruiz's tripartite approach to language ideology, I demonstrated that the total school environment outside of the classroom embodied the language-as-problem paradigm, and the official written documents reflected language-as- right. For example, in the school office, although all staff was bilingual, they started all conversations with parents in English and only used Spanish if parents could not speak English. Further, they frequently used English to

talk in disparaging ways about emerging bilingual children in front of the children (e.g. a staff comment when a new child enrolled, “Just what we need, another kid who doesn’t speak English and our bilingual classes are filled to the max”). English was the language of the teacher’s lounge, the PTA meetings, the discourse between teachers and between teachers and the principal (the principal was bilingual).

The school’s official written documents reflected a language as a right orientation. Examples of this included the following from the Bilingual Handbook published by the district “Parents must be informed of all school proceedings in plain non-technical language that includes both English and Spanish” (pg. 32). Further, to insure that the rights of the parents were supported the school district employed an official translator to translate written documents from English to Spanish.

This study illustrated that all orientations can occur within a single school and that it is unlikely that the issues of equalizing language status between Spanish and English can be solved at the classroom level alone. If a language-as-resource paradigm is going to be seriously taken up, they must be taken up at the school wide level as well as inside the classroom.

In a later article about the national orientation toward language, I utilized Ruiz’s tripartite approach to language ideology to illustrate the false dichotomy between ESL and Transitional Bilingual Programs (Escamilla, 1999). Using Ruiz’s language -as- problem orientation as both a theoretical framework and analytical tool, I argued that the debate about whether bilingual education programs were more effective than English medium programs such as ESL represented a false dichotomy because, in fact, both programs were mired in deficit assumptions about language being a problem to be corrected in emerging bilingual learners.

As evidence for this argument, I cited that fact that 98% of all emerging bilingual learners, at the time of the study were either in ESL or TBE programs. There were a few dual language programs but only a very few. Both ESL and TBE programs, identified and placed students in programs based on their limitations in English and not their potential as emerging bilinguals. Further, in both programs only students labeled as Limited English Proficient were eligible for program services (these are the students with the perceived language problems). In these programs, there is little room or desire to serve students who aspire to learn Spanish (or another language) as a second language. Because the language-as-problem orientation framed their instruction, -these students were kept in programs only until they were perceived to be proficient in English, i.e. the problem had been eradicated. In both programs the ultimate goal was to move emerging bilingual learners from short-term language programs (be they TBE or ESL) into mainstream English medium programs as quickly as possible. Further, an explicitly stated goal of both programs was to help students overcome their language barriers by becoming proficient in English. Results from this study were useful in future research I would conduct arguing for a change in terminology with regard to how we define and talk about emerging bilingual learners and what our programs goals should ultimately be (cf Escamilla, Hopewell, Butvilofsky, Sparrow, Soltero-Gonzalez, Ruiz-Figueroa, & Escamilla, 2014). This work will be discussed below. As a cautionary note, however, in 2015 as in 1999, we must not gloss over the

fact that the more the population of emerging bilingual learners grows, the fewer educational opportunities we provide.

Ruiz's tripartite approach to language ideology vis-à-vis my own work also involved an examination of the standards-based education movement that began in the US in the 1990s and was institutionalized at the federal level with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002). The standards-based education movement, as with many education reforms in the US, was created for monolingual native English speaking students and only considered the policy implications for emerging bilingual learners after the initial legislation was created and introduced to Congress. The two major components of the standards based movement, later expanded by NCLB, were content and assessment standards (NCLB, 2002). The initial application of the new standards via NCLB largely continued the tradition of language-as-problem for emerging bilingual learners, however there was a small loop-hole that allowed for native language testing if individual states approved such policies and if children in the state had been participating in bilingual education programs. Using Ruiz's tripartite approach, I conducted a case study in the state of Colorado of 10 schools that were majority Latino, majority emerging bilingual learners and majority poor to examine language ideologies around the use and value placed on the Spanish language version of the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) (Escamilla, 2006). I also compared these outcomes to school rankings for the year.

It is important to note that, rather than a robust system of assessment in Spanish at all grade levels and in all content areas, CSAP only had a Spanish version in reading and writing, and was only allowed in grades 3 and 4. The limited opportunity for students to demonstrate their reading and writing achievement in Spanish fit well with Ruiz's language-as-problem orientation in that the state determined that only a short amount of time should be needed by students to take assessments in Spanish and after that they should be ready to transition to English and demonstrate their academic skills in English only. However, the fact that it was provided in Spanish, at all, and that a large urban school district in Colorado allowed students to be assessed in Spanish in 3rd and 4th grade provided a window of opportunity to document the potential of language-as-resource. Sadly, an unintended finding of the study demonstrated the ways that the results of these Spanish language exams were used and misused which only served to reinforce the language-as-problem paradigm even in the presence of powerful empirical evidence to the contrary.

Of the 10 case study schools, 8 were ranked as low, 1 as unsatisfactory and 1 as average. The state called the CSAP results alarming for this school district and the popular media reported that the results demonstrated a 'gap in achievement' between emerging bilingual learners and others in the district. Among the responses given for the low rankings district officials cited the following: 1) poverty; 2) large numbers of Latino students; and 3) bilingual education programs.

While these perceptions lend credence to Ruiz's language-as-problem ideology, it was noteworthy that the school rankings were based solely on English CSAP outcomes. The Spanish data were not used to determine the rankings and the omission of these data caused a negative interpretation of school achievement. When the Spanish CSAP achievement data were added

quite a different picture of achievement emerged.. The addition of the Spanish achievement data changed the entire school profile.

To illustrate, at one school 79% of the children who took the CSAP in Spanish were proficient or advanced (at or above grade level on state standards) while only 35% of the children who took it in English were at these same levels. The children who took the CSAP in English at these schools were children who were in the English medium classrooms at the school. The same was true in writing. Since children took the test either in Spanish or English and not both, it was the English-speaking children at the school, in the English medium classrooms, who were the sources of the low English test scores. These children were not emerging bilingual learners nor were they in bilingual education programs. This study illustrated how difficult it is to change deeply rooted orientations toward language-as - problem. To bring this point home, despite these findings, even when counter evidence was presented that challenged the perceptions that not speaking English and being Latino were causes of poor achievement at schools, the central district and state administrators either dismissed, degraded or ignored the evidence. At a meeting of principals and other administrators where these data were presented, one participant said, “We don’t care about Spanish, just English. Another one said, “Perhaps we should just quit teaching in Spanish and focus on English.” A third said, “Even though the data are positive, I still think that teaching reading in Spanish takes time away from English.”

The outcomes of the Spanish CSAP documented that poor Spanish-speaking children of immigrants can learn to read and write well, and can meet the demands of high stakes testing when allowed to demonstrate their learning in Spanish thereby supporting the orientation of language-as-resource. The challenge to us, however, is how to change deficit orientations that are decades old and that are currently being reinforced by the educational reforms that value high stakes assessments offered only in English?

Toward Actualization of the Language as a Resource Paradigm

Concomitantly with my studies that applied empirical tests to support Ruiz’s language-as -problem paradigm, I also had opportunities to engage in and explore programs that empirically established that language can be identified and utilized as a resource in educational programs even when they are viewed by the larger community as a problem. One such example is my work, in 1992, with colleagues in Tucson, Arizona. Together we developed and tested a program called, “Descubriendo La Lectura.” (Escamilla, Andrade, Basurto & Ruiz, 1996). Descubriendo la Lectura is a first grade reading intervention that is a reconceptualization of an English Reading Program titled, “Reading Recovery” (Clay, 1979, 1993a, 1993b). When the English Reading Recovery program came to Tucson, Arizona in 1988, leaders in the bilingual education department at the Tucson Unified School District successfully advocated for the creation of a parallel program in Spanish. In fact, they were firm in the conviction that the only way that Reading Recovery in English should be implemented, in Tucson, was if a Spanish component was created, not as a translation but a ground up reconceptualization. Briefly stated, Reading Recovery was a program developed for first grade children who were struggling in their

acquisition of reading. Unlike other programs for struggling readers, Reading Recovery was not meant to be long-term remediation. Rather, it was meant to be a short-term intense program to accelerate reading development so that children would not need long-term remedial reading programs (Clay, 1993a).

The opportunity to create the program in Spanish added a new dimension to bilingual education in Tucson (and eventually around the United States) in that it encouraged teachers to continue teaching native Spanish speakers to read in Spanish even when they were having difficulties learning to read. Further, and in line with language-as-resource, research on *Descubriendo la Lectura* established that the vehicle for accelerating the reading development of struggling Spanish-speaking students was to use Spanish as the language of intervention and not to switch to English as was the typical practice of the time (Baca & Cervantes, 1996). Eventually the program added new assessment and teaching tools for teachers to use in Spanish/English bilingual programs and empirical research conducted in *Descubriendo la Lectura* (Escamilla, 1994; Escamilla, Loera, Rodríguez, & Ruiz, 1998) further established the desirability of teaching Spanish speaking children to read and write in Spanish while they were learning English.

As my colleagues and I worked on the development of this program, we discovered that there was a great deal of compatibility between the theoretical frameworks presented by literacy researcher Marie Clay and Ruiz's language-as-resource orientation. Clay's theoretical framework called for teachers to focus on children's potential, to identify what they could do and to use what children could do as the foundation for teaching reading and to value what children bring to the table as assets to be built upon in initial reading instruction. For example, if a child comes to first grade only knowing one letter (for example 'S') instead of lamenting that the child doesn't know the other 31 letters, a teacher should look for a book that has a lot of words with "s" and use what the child knows as a starting point for instruction. This view of teaching reading as an asset based (rather than deficit) practice was highly related to Ruiz's language-as-resource framework. Together, Clay's knowledge of reading theory and Ruiz's language-as-resource orientation formed the theoretical underpinning of *Descubriendo la Lectura*.

Descubriendo la Lectura and its application of the language-as-resource orientation, in its totality, supported other emerging theories of the time with regard to the language development of emerging Spanish/English bilingual learners in the U.S. This was especially demonstrated in the creation of an assessment system that provided evidence that the ontology of being bilingual is different from being monolingual. Further, evidence was presented demonstrating that assessment systems that did not understand these ontological differences were invalid for emerging bilingual learners and likely underestimating the knowledge of these children.

One example of the application of the language-as-resource orientation is seen in our assessment instrument. In the development of the *Instrumento de observación de los logros de la lecto-escritura inicial* (the assessment system for *Descubriendo la Lectura*) (Escamilla et. al., 1996), we demonstrated that what emerging bilingual learners know about literacy might easily be misunderstood if assessment is done in only one language without understanding how two

languages are interacting. When we developed the assessment system and began the process of creating the validity and reliability of the tool, we observed that when we gave the tool in Spanish, many children code-switched (that is they used two languages in their responses). Initially, we counted answers that contained code-switching as incorrect responses. As we examined the data in more depth, however, we later realized that we too were guilty of viewing language-as-problem.

To illustrate, when children were given a task to identify letters, they could do so in 3 ways. They could identify the name of the letter, the sound the letter made, or a word that began with the letter. Children who code-switched might say, “*Este es ese* (this is “s”), *hace el sonido s-s-s-s-s* (it makes the sound s-s-s-s), *como* snake (like snake).” The word “snake” is a code-switch. When our team considered code-switches as incorrect responses our Spanish data were negatively skewed. That is, it seemed like the Spanish speaking children did not have knowledge of the Spanish phonological system at a level equivalent to English speaking children.

However, upon further examination and using the asset based frameworks of Clay and Ruiz, we concluded that in the case of the child’s answer (above), the letter ‘s’ is the same phoneme in English and Spanish and therefore the child used both of her languages in cognitively appropriate ways and should be given credit for a correct response. This epiphany inspired us to reanalyze all of our data and when we did so we found that the majority of code-switches were cognitively appropriate. In the second analysis, we no longer had negative skewing in our data and our emerging bilingual learners’ data mirrored that of monolingual English children in the Reading Recovery studies. This work provided empirical evidence for an asset based approach to assessing emerging bilingual learners and evidence that language-as-resource orientations must consider ontological realities of emerging bilingual learners.

In his language-as-resource paradigm, Ruiz stated that, “Planning for language as a resource can have a direct impact on enhancing the language status of subordinate languages; it can help to ease tensions between majority and minority communities; it can serve as a more consistent way of viewing the role of non-English languages in US society; and it highlights the importance of cooperative language planning” (p. 15).

In the case of *Descubriendo la Lectura*, the asset based orientation enabled us to elevate the status of Spanish as a language equal to English in its potential to accelerate the literacy acquisition of struggling readers, it enabled us to empirically establish that the code-switching behaviors of many young emerging bilingual learners were actually cognitively appropriate and not signs of linguistic deficits in two languages, and it enabled us to develop additional instructional assessment and intervention strategies for Spanish/English bilingual teachers.

Ruiz’s work on language orientations along with Clay’s work in Reading Recovery have also significantly influenced a research project that I have been involved in for the past decade titled, “Literacy Squared.” Literacy Squared (Escamilla et. al., 2014) started with the notion that in order to apply the language-as-resource orientation framework, we needed to change the way that we talked about emerging bilingual students. For this reason, from the on-set we have

resolved to steadfastly refuse to use the terms English language learner or limited English proficient student to describe or label the children in our research studies. To date, our research has involved over 5,000 children and 300 teachers in six states. We have found that the majority of our colleagues have resonated with the change in terminology and our arguments have coincided with others in the field doing similar work (see for example, García, & Kliefgen, 2010; García, Kliefgen & Falchi, 2010). We fully understand that changing the way that we talk about children is only one step, but in the case of this research project it has been a significant step forward.

Literacy Squared is a comprehensive and holistic biliteracy framework designed specifically for Spanish speaking emerging bilingual children in the U.S. that has its theoretical grounding in the language-as-resource orientation and in the theories of holistic bilingual development (Grosjean, 1989). The program in its totality involves, research, professional development, assessment and a comprehensive biliteracy instructional framework. In this short essay, I will limit my discussion of Literacy Squared to its assessment framework as influenced by the work of Ruiz and others. From the on-set we have argued and demonstrated empirically that literacy acquisition of emerging bilingual children can never be fully understood by monolingual assessment systems whether they are in Spanish or English. Rather, emerging bilingual children are the sum of their two languages and need to be understood as such.

The language-as-resource orientation for us has meant that we needed to create new avenues for teachers' and others to interpret children's nascent biliteracy development. For example, too often emerging bilingual Spanish speaking children in the United States come to school only to have educators label them as "low" in both languages. Current assessment systems (even if they are bilingual) have served to confirm these assumptions. Let's take, for example, two commonly used informal reading assessments (the EDL2 and the DRA2). EDL2 is in Spanish and DRA2 is in English and a score of 16 equates to the benchmark goal at the end of first grade. If a child, at the end of first grade, scores a 14 in Spanish and a 10 in English, their scores may be interpreted as being indicative of low levels of achievement in two languages since the monolingual benchmark is 16. However, if we truly use a language as a resource perspective, we would interpret the child's achievement in literacy to be additive – that is what they know in Spanish combined with what they know and can do in English. This interpretation enables us to view the child on a trajectory toward biliteracy rather than as a child who is "low in two languages." Our work in this area has resulted in the creation of both reading and writing trajectories toward biliteracy to enhance the more additive terminology of the emerging bilingual learner (Escamilla, 2000; Soltero-González, Escamilla & Hopewell, 2011; Hopewell, 2011).

There are several important implications of this work. First, it speaks to the need to develop new lenses for interpretation the biliteracy development towards a more additive perspective. Next, it likely enables children to continue to participate in bilingual programs. Too often when children are perceived to be 'low' in both languages, the educational response is to teach in English only thereby almost undoubtedly insuring that children will never have an opportunity to become biliterate. Finally, we know that language loss, in Spanish, is almost

always the result of limited opportunities in U.S. schools for the development of bilingualism and biliteracy. We feel that our work is helping to reduce language loss and redefine what it means to be growing up bilingual in Spanish and English in the U.S.

Ruiz spoke to this need for language maintenance when he said, “The development, obviously, is an important aspect of any resources-oriented policy, but what is missing in these proposals is a direct concern with resource conservation; what is worse there seems to be no acknowledgement of the fact that existing resources are being destroyed through mismanagement and repression” (1984, p. 15). The work of Literacy Squared has been unapologetic in its focus on emerging Spanish/English bilingual learners. While we acknowledge the incredible potential of dual language programs to provide opportunities for native English speaking children to become bilingual, this work cannot and should not be done without considering how deficit-based bilingual programs destroy or mismanage the linguistic resources that children bring with them to school.

The noted multicultural theorist Carl Grant recently stated, “When people love someone they talk about them differently” (2015). I would like to think that our work in Literacy Squared has helped our colleagues learn to talk differently about biliteracy and its potential for emerging bilingual learners.

Summary

I end this essay by saying simply that knowledge of Richard Ruiz’s work is critical if one purports to have deep knowledge in the field of bilingual/ESL/multicultural education particularly as it is currently conceptualized and practiced in the United States. As I have tried to demonstrate above, however, it is not enough to use Ruiz’s work without understanding all three orientations. Many young scholars gloss over language as a problem and language as a right orientations and prefer to only engage in language as a resource discussions and dialogues. While the desire to move on to more positive and hopeful orientations is laudable, it represents a limited understanding of the many daunting obstacles that still present themselves to bilingual educators in the U.S.

It is not inconsequential to this discussion that the new Common Core Standards and their accompanying high stakes English only assessment present new types of coded language that represent the decades old view that language is a problem. The mere fact that in 2015 we have a “new” set of standards that are monolingual and monocultural and that the only way that students can demonstrate academic competency is in English only shows that there is much more work to do in illuminating the language-as-problem paradigm. While controversial on many levels, the fact that in the 21st century we have developed a nationally driven set of standards that, from the on-set, have marginalized 10 million students who are emerging bilingual learners is proof that we need many more scholars looking at language-as-problem paradigms.

It is also important to note that issues with regard to language-as-right are in need of further discussion and study. For example, I shudder to think what schooling and educational policy would look without long-standing federal and state statutes protecting the rights of children to have school programs that provide them access to the full range of the curriculum

while they are acquiring English. I am the first to admit that our current approach to the education of language minority children is minimal, at best, but I cannot imagine what these educational opportunities would be if there were no federal or state laws protecting emerging bilingual children and their families. There is a need for more research that illuminates the language-as-right orientation. While I agree, in principal, that the legal discourse surrounding the language-as-right orientation such as “compliance” and “enforcement” creates an automatic resistance to whatever one is talking about, it is, at present, one of the only vehicles for families and advocates to pursue if children are being placed in punitive and ineffective learning environments. It is important knowledge for parents to know that there is a legal guarantee of language rights. This language-as-right orientation has become even more important with the passage of language restrictive legislation in states like California, Arizona and Massachusetts (Crawford, 2000).

Moreover, as Ruiz stated, “Language planning efforts which start with the assumption that language is a resource to be managed, developed and conserved would tend to regard language minority communities as important sources of expertise. (1984, pg. 17). Sadly, it seems three decades after Ruiz wrote these words we seem to be farther away from this vision than ever. While many verbalize that they value language as a resource, it is almost always qualified by new codes to further marginalize our communities in the U.S. New codes-include discourse replete in our schools and communities about perceptions of what emerging bilingual children do not have. For example, it is perceived that they do not have, “academic language,” and that the children come to school without a dominant language to build on. Further, without a dominant language it may be difficult to develop bilingualism and biliteracy at high levels. This discourse extends to our current bilingual teacher work force in the oft-stated belief that in order to develop bilingualism we must recruit Spanish speaking teachers from Spain or other countries because the linguistic resources present in our country are weak and lacking in proficiency. It is questionable that language-as-resource can ever become a reality if we purport to value Spanish, or any other language as a skill at the same time we devalue the millions of people in our community who speak it.

While there are numerous scholars, like me, who have devoted their professional careers to developing programs and amassing empirical research to support the language as a resource paradigm, we must continue to be realists. That is, we must understand that our research is being done in a context that is frequently not supportive of our efforts, and we must be cognizant that school or classroom based research conducted without attention to or knowledge of the larger policy context is likely to not have the desired impact. As we move forward, it is critical that we heed Ruiz’s admonition that the articulation of new orientations toward language must include the development of language attitudes and dispositions that are currently in short supply. The orientations to language planning is a legacy left to us by the work of Richard Ruiz, maximizing its potential is a continuing challenge.

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ⁱ Emerging bilingual learners are defined as children (ages 3 and up) who speak a language other than English and who are in the dynamic process of developing bilingual and biliterate competencies (in this case English and Spanish) with the support of their communities (parents, schools, neighbors) (Escamilla, Hopewell, Butvilofsky, Sparrow, Soltero-González, Ruiz-Figueroa & Escamilla, 2014). In this paper the term is used interchangeably with the term English Language Learner.