

***Reimagining Dual Language Education: Promoting Equitable Bilingualism and Biliteracy Outcomes through a Focus on Sociocultural Competence***

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With current estimates of over 2,000 programs (Gross, 2016), dual language (DL) education, an approach that promotes grade-level academic achievement, bilingualism and biliteracy, and sociocultural competence (SCC) to integrated groups of students through content-language integrated instruction, is a rapidly growing program model in the U.S. The reasons for this growth include a growing body of research on the benefits of bilingualism, awareness of the competitive advantages of multilingualism and SCC in a global economy, and the demonstrated efficacy of these programs for students from diverse backgrounds (Howard et al., 2018). However, the rapid increase of these programs and their embrace by English-speaking parents has led to criticisms of the programs as being elitist and failing to serve the needs of students of color in general and English learners (ELs) in particular (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017; Flores, 2016). These scholars have called for programs to respond to the cultural needs of minoritized students and address the power dynamics that may be influencing program design and outcomes. This call aligns with the goal of SCC, which has been excluded from accountability systems, thus relegating it to a low priority for overburdened educators who are evaluated based on their ability to promote students' academic achievement. Of the three DL goals (academic achievement, bilingualism/biliteracy development, and SCC), SCC is the least well-defined and therefore the least understood by practitioners, policymakers, and researchers alike, leaving teachers with little guidance about how to promote or assess it. However, as the rising criticisms of DL education point out, this lack of attention to the so-called 'third goal' (Feinauer & Howard, 2014) may seriously undermine the ability of DL programs to meet the other two goals, and to do so in a way that is equitable for all students.

This 3-year project seeks to address this issue through a collaborative social design-based experiment (Gutiérrez, 2018) jointly conducted by university researchers together with dual language classroom teachers. This research project has four major goals: 1) improve the equitable bilingualism and biliteracy attainment of all DL students through a greater focus on SCC, 2) improve the measurement of SCC, 3) foster SCC among dual language students, and 4) enhance dual language teachers' professional competence related to SCC-focused language and literacy instruction. To accomplish these goals, university researchers and participating DL teachers will engage in a professional learning community (PLC) in which they will develop and implement instructional approaches designed to promote SCC development. Using a mixed methods research design that incorporates qualitative thematic analysis and multiple regression, the researchers will collect and analyze data from PLC activities and student outcomes. In addition to Dr. Howard, UConn collaborators include Dr. Manuela Wagner, Dr. Aarti Bellara, graduate students Sandra Silva-Enos and Nikki Galvez, and recent graduate Dr. Elena Sada of Eastern Connecticut State University.