

*Transcript edited for length and clarity.*

Otto ([00:00:00](#)):

This is Rafael Otto for the Early Link podcast. Today, I have the pleasure of introducing an amazing panel to discuss the needs of English learners and dual language learners in our schools, communities, and early learning systems. We'll also learn about a recent report called Promising Futures that offers recommendations for how to promote the educational success of young English learners. And we'll take a look at two Oregon districts leading the way on language development for their students. First, I would like to introduce Ruby Takanishi. She's a senior research fellow with the early and elementary education policy program at New America. She's the author of First Things First: Creating the New American Primary School.

Otto ([00:00:54](#)):

And she recently chaired the National Academy of Sciences Engineering and Medicine consensus report called Promising Futures, which focuses on the education of English learners from birth to age 21. We also have Perla Rodriguez, who is the principal at Echo Shaw elementary in the Forest Grove school district. A first generation Chicano born and raised in Eastern Oregon, she is the product of Head Start and Oregon's public education system. We also have Maria Adams. She has worked in education for 23 years and is currently a language development specialist at Earl Boyles elementary in the David Douglas School District and an English language development presenter for the district. Ruby, I'm going to direct the first question to you. You recently chaired a committee for the National Academy of Sciences Engineering and Medicine that looked at how to promote the educational success of children learning English. Can you talk about the purpose of the report and the highlights and findings?

Takanishi ([00:02:00](#)):

Sure. I'd be happy to. The purpose of the academy's report was really focused on how we can use the research and scientific knowledge that we currently have to inform policy and practice that would result in better educational outcomes for children who are called DLLs or EDLs. What we essentially did was to define dual language learners or DLLs as children from birth to five whose first language is not English and are in the process of or will be learning English in the schools consistent with particularly federal rules and regulations that govern the education of children learning English.

Takanishi ([00:03:31](#)):

We use the term ELLs, which is specified in current federal legislation to talk about children from ages six to 21, who are in the kindergarten to grade 12 education system whose first language is not English and who are learning English as their second language, as well as learning the subject matter or academic content required in their grade levels. So I would just like to say that this is a very, very important issue. It varies by region and locality, but one out of about 10 children in the United States are growing up in families where at least one person does not speak English. In places like California, it would be over 60% of the children would be categorized either as DLLs or ELLs. Whereas in places like West Virginia, it would be about 2%.

Takanishi ([00:04:37](#)):

So I think the important point is that in the very large states like California, Florida, Texas, Illinois, certainly in Oregon as well. There are very large and significant groups of children who are dual language learners and ELLs. The important fact to take into account is that while these children are extremely

diverse in the languages, they speak, their national origins, their parental education, the economic backgrounds of their families, the conditions under which they immigrated, and so forth. Most of the particularly young DLLs are U.S. citizens - they're born in the United States. So they're very, very important part of our population. This is a large group and their educational success has important consequences for their individual futures, but also for the society and the communities in which they live. So it's in our interest to educate them as well as we can.

Otto ([00:05:54](#)):

The report also touches on the science of bilingualism. Can you talk about what that means and why it's important?

Takanishi ([00:06:01](#)):

We were asked to address what the scientific research and evidence says about the development of bi- and multilingualism, particularly in young children. And there are several chapters in our report because there is a lot of research in this area. And I think the basic conclusion that we come to from this extremely large body of research, which also includes research that has been conducted in the neurosciences, the brain sciences, where we're able to observe brain pattern activity as children hear and learn multiple languages - is this basic conclusion that bilingualism is a universal asset. It's one in which, children and people throughout the world are able to learn one or more languages from birth. It does not impede other language development. It doesn't confuse children.

Takanishi ([00:07:14](#)):

And in fact, we conclude that bi- and multilingualism is an asset to children themselves and to individuals. The research shows that it has cognitive consequences. It has emotional and social consequences, such as the ability to take the perspectives of others -- empathy, self control, self regulation, executive functioning -- which are really important for learning and in the workplace. It also contributes to greater social understanding and trust, among children and hopefully in the future. And it has consequences for older people in terms of either delaying or preventing the development of dementia. And so we see that there are just enormous positive outcomes for being a bi- or multilingual individual. We really are seeking to challenge the notion that bilingualism is a deficit and that it is a serious problem in our schools.

Otto ([00:08:28](#)):

Perla, as a principal, you're using what's known as the Gomez and Gomez dual language enrichment model, which emphasizes native language learning to improve English learning. Tell me about the model and how it works at Echo Shaw.

Rodriguez ([00:08:44](#)):

Okay. I appreciate Ruby's definition of DLLs and ELLs and within the bigger context of a pre-K 20, that makes perfect sense. In the traditional K-12, we define them differently. For us, a DLL is a dual language learner. So it would be students for whom English, or Spanish in our case, is our first language learning a second language. We are very clear that the goal for them is that they will leave our school system fluent, bilingual bi- cultural, bi-literate, right? And so it's school-aged children in my school. They're all considered DLLs, whereas an ELL, an ELL student would traditionally be a student for whom the goal is ultimately that they would get to English acquisition. There isn't that importance of them maintaining their first or second language. So we use the Gomez and Gomez model. It's a model created by Richard

and Leo Gomez. They're both bilingual educators who have taught through the university level. They are out of Texas.

Rodriguez ([00:10:02](#)):

In our district, we've had dual language for many, many, many years, and we found that throughout Oregon, the outcomes of our dual language program were outperforming other dual language schools in Oregon, but we definitely weren't getting the outcomes that we see like on the Virginia Collier graph where students in dual language programs are outperforming English-only students at the 50th percentile. And that's our goal. So we studied different models throughout the country that were taking place in schools with demographics like ours. And we landed on Gomez and Gomez. There are several features of the model. None of it is rocket science, but it is the power of articulating a cohesive plan and program pre-K through 12. In my building, I'm a pre K -six school. So for me, it's pre K six, but it's very specific in terms of all the nonnegotiables.

Rodriguez ([00:11:03](#)):

We do L-one literacy and the students receive instruction in their first language, explicit literacy instruction, and pre-K, kindergarten, first grade. Then beginning in second grade, all of our students receive two hours of literacy instruction a day --one hour in English, one in Spanish. Math is always taught in English, only science and social studies are always taught in Spanish only with very structured, kind of language of the day, activities that happen in the opposite language. So there will be bilingual learning centers set up where all of the activities are math focused, but they're all in Spanish, just to also expose children to the academic language, in the opposite language in which they're receiving the formal instruction. I think what I appreciate the most about our transition to Gomez and Gomez is that they're very explicit about it calling it an enrichment program. So a lot of our professional development is anchored in this idea that this is the type of instruction that children identified as talented and gifted receive. That we, aren't looking at this as a deficit model of, "Oh, these poor babies don't speak English." We look at it as, this is pretty amazing that their minds are functioning at four and five years of age in two languages, and that they can acquire it. And that this is the highest level of instruction that children can receive and that they can perform. And just changing what we call it - -this is an enrichment, enhancement, talented and gifted program for kids -- has changed that the approach that we all take to our program .

Otto ([00:13:00](#)):

Has it changed the perception in the community as well? And with parents and families?

Rodriguez ([00:13:04](#)):

You know, it's interesting because we are a neighborhood school. And so we first served the kids in our neighborhood, but we've always had a waiting list. Our waiting list typically consists of families for whom the parents are highly educated. And for years we have known this -- monolingual, English-speaking, parents who have said, of course, I want my child in a public school to leave bilingual who wouldn't want that? Right? And then our waiting list also consists of many families who've lost their language, you know, certain generations who, who say, when I was little, my parents didn't want us to speak Spanish because of what they had experienced. It pains them that they've lost that connection and they want that for their children.

Rodriguez ([00:14:08](#)):

What has changed is more, I think just internally how we speak about our students, it is so much more focused on the assets that the kids have and what, what are they getting. Whereas I feel like in general, at the K 12 system, especially K to three, there often feels to be a hyper-focus on who are your red zone kids? Who's not making it, who's the lowest and how are we going to intervene? And that's important. But if your eye is always on the lowest group, then it begins to jade where your top is. Whereas, if your whole focus is on this idea of on grade level or advanced, that lower group just kind of has to come along naturally, because that's what the system expects.

Otto ([00:15:01](#)):

And your approach is pretty unusual. There aren't other programs like it in the state are there?

Rodriguez ([00:15:07](#)):

There aren't very many. I would say in general, you don't find a lot of pre-K programs that are fully part of K-12 . You can find several schools that share a space, but they're parallel programs. I would say it is rare to find schools where the pre K program really is part of the regular K. And also the fact that our entire school is dual language. You'll find a lot of dual language schools where there's a strand of dual language or of English only. So I think the combination is perfect. Having pre-K through sixth grade, in our case, we have eight years with the kids. What we know from the research is children who are in high quality programs, it takes about that long to see that academic language. And I feel like we were always working and we just kind of would send them to the next level, like crossing our fingers, but we didn't benefit from seeing really how fluent the children can be.

Otto ([00:16:24](#)):

Can you talk a little bit about the transition from pre-K into kindergarten and the early grades and what you're seeing there and what kind of outcomes you're seeing?

Rodriguez ([00:16:35](#)):

So our first cohort of pre K students this year are third graders. I know it doesn't sound like very long, but for us, this is our fifth, sixth year of pre-K. And we've continued to refine what we're doing. What we were the most excited about initially was that because it isn't part of the K 12 continuum, there weren't specific rules or regulations or curriculum. And so it was just so exciting and liberating to be able to develop a program by researching and taking everything that we were seeing was working in all of these early learning programs and kind of melding them, making them ours and aligning them to our program so that we knew that we were preparing our students for a rigorous K-6 experience. We have learned a lot and continue to learn a lot.

Rodriguez ([00:17:43](#)):

The transition is so seamless because our students are used to it. All of the social parts, the socializing of kindergarten, even the transitions walking in line to the cafeteria when they start kindergarten. Strangers could walk in on the first day and I could say, "Point to the students that you think were in our pre-K." They're the ones that just understand, "This is my cubby. This is where I put my jacket. I'm sitting on the carpet, I'm waiting for instructions." It's kindergarten readiness from day one..They are all really pre-readers. They have developed that early, you know, even just directionally, tracking left to right. They had experiences with books and with manipulatives, with the school setting.

Rodriguez ([00:18:47](#)):

And we see some students who I feel like even if they have something, some exceptionality, language challenges, we have students on the autism spectrum. I'm just so glad that we've gotten to know them at four years (old). They are coming to us in kindergarten, regardless of what they're doing before. So I always feel like some of our children who are in kindergarten and first grade are still struggling with things like self regulation. I just look at them and think, gosh, imagine what, it would look like had we not had that full year with them before we even started kindergarten? Yes, absolutely.

Otto ([00:19:32](#)):

Maria you're out at Earl Boyles, part of the David Douglas School District. David Douglas uses a push in approach to language instruction that involves all students and is implemented district wide. How does that look when it's implemented and tell me why it's effective?

Adams ([00:19:50](#)):

We have about 70 languages spoken in our district and I know the benefits of dual language -- that is really amazing. I wish we could offer that for all of our languages, but, in our district, because it is super diverse, we feel like this is the next best approach for us. About 40% of our students are active ESL students. So that means that they qualify for language instruction. When we started this, about eight, nine years ago, just playing with it and noticing as an ESL teacher coming from the classroom that there was this disconnect from what the classroom teachers felt was their responsibility and what the ESL teachers (felt) was their responsibility and the academic language was not being addressed. You know, the, the need to shelter, the language, the classroom teachers were not trained or equipped in that. ESL teachers without a classroom background, they were not equipped on the flip side. So we started sort of meshing the two together and instead of pulling 40 to 80% of a class for the pullout model and teaching them separately, we started one school where we just pushed in and taught all students. When we compared writing samples, our reading scores, our students were actually doing pretty well, compared to their peers. Both groups grew -- the writing got better, their reading got better.

Adams ([00:21:40](#)):

They were able to have academic discourse and talk to their teachers and their teachers were talking to them. So, that was sort of the beginning. Then, we did a full scale district wide. We did it a lot sooner than we thought we would. We learned a lot along the way. This is our sixth year doing it. And some of the biggest benefits were that teachers are now prepared. They're tuned into what their students are saying. One of our first rules was where students need to be talking 50% of the time within this 30 minute block that we're providing. And everyone, it's on everyone's schedule, you know, third grade walks at this time. They trade students. There are however many classrooms that are at that grade level.

Adams ([00:22:24](#)):

That's how many proficiency levels we can offer. So most schools have three classrooms within a grade level, and then you have wherever they fall. So you might have early intermediate, intermediate, early advanced advanced, which is pretty typical for third grade. At the beginning, actually we had more of a beginning, intermediate, and then an early advanced. Maybe now our students have grown so much and we're getting to see them from preschool that our beginning level (group) in kindergarten is small. We don't even have a whole classroom of beginners anymore. We had a classroom of beginners in fourth grade when we started, you know, so we're just seeing our students' English proficiency levels growing. This 50% talk time -- I think that's one of the keys for us is that students are actually speaking. They're asked to speak.

Adams ([00:23:17](#)):

When we first started, the research was showing that students were asked to speak 4% of the school day, and that those are native English speakers for ESL students, which is what we're calling them in David Douglas. For ESL students, it was more like 1% of the school day that you were actually speaking. And so they weren't having this oral production of the language. Once they started being asked to have discourse and to speak to their peers and to have dialogues with their teachers, it increased their social interactions, their ability to get along with each other and to express when something came up. So we saw that growth in their social discourse, in their academic discourse, and just having dialogues that might inform the teacher of what else they need to know what else needs to be explained.

Adams ([00:24:10](#)):

The teachers were literally tuned into students, hearing gaps that maybe they never heard before or hearing things that they could address that is in their control. And now they're equipped to address students. We're not missing more of the school day, which is what was happening the pullout program. Instruction would continue when 40 to 60% of students would leave the classroom. So they were naturally falling even further behind because they were missing math or writing or whatever happened to be happening during that instructional part of the day. Another benefit was while students were now in the classroom, everyone was learning language and it was called academic language, which we sort of caught onto. But then we realized, wait, this academic language that we're talking about, many of our students don't hear that in the home.

Adams ([00:25:07](#)):

It's not just a typical part of the discourse they hear at home. And then we had this realization of standard, you know, American education requires a middle class language for our students. So if the majority of our students are not hearing that in the home, then that's something we have to teach before we get to the academics. It's not a conceptual misunderstanding, it's a linguistic hole that needs to be filled in order to get to the conceptual and the academic part of it. So that was a big aha for us. When we tie in ELD with with science for several months, at a time, we see it's reflected in our SBAC scores. When we tie it specifically with math, we see it directly affected in our SBAC scores, we get higher scores. So that's something that we're playing with this year to try to address.

Otto ([00:26:00](#)):

Are there other outcomes that you're seeing specifically in the Earl Boyles community or elsewhere -- you've talked a little bit about the impacts and the outcomes that you're seeing, but is there anything else that comes up when you think about what's happening at Earl Boyles ?

Adams ([00:26:12](#)):

The school has brought a lot of wonderful benefits and one is just a high level of parent engagement and parent involvement. We're able to offer, even before preschool, zero to three playgroups, where parents are getting to sit down and, you know, talk to their babies. And, there's an instructor there that sort of helps facilitate some of those conversations that parents are having with babies. And there are different groups, there's a Slavic group and a Spanish speaking group and a Chinese, and Vietnamese group that meets. And so it's in the native language of the parent and that brought this other awareness too. We have parents that are active in the school and we're able to bring them along. At the same time, over the last few years, our students are learning English faster rate because of this new ELD walk to

language approach that we've implemented, but our students are also losing their native language at a faster rate than ever before.

Adams ([00:27:16](#)):

We're seeing that when our students pass the LPA, I usually call them into my office and have them call their parents and tell them, you know, "I passed the LPA! That means that I speak English, proficiently." And students, many of them are unable to have a conversation like that with their parents. And that's new, that's the last three or four years, I started seeing that more and more. Last year, the fifth graders, like five of them couldn't have that conversation. They would say, "Would you call my mom?" Or, "Would you have an interpreter call and tell my parents, because I don't speak the same language as them." One, it's heartbreaking. And two, that's an unintended consequence of our program. I believe because they're just acquiring at a faster rate and we're not addressing this other important detail of your native language is an asset, like Ruby described, has all these cognitive benefits that can only be had if you maintain both languages.

Adams ([00:28:25](#)):

When our students come in speaking two languages that are not very fluent, they many times don't exit the LPA. They don't exit out of ESL because there is not a solid language that they've acquired from, you know, early on. And so when we were speaking academic English, it's just a little bit shakier. I don't know what the research is behind that, but I have some theories. It's just harder to hear the differences and the nuances and to hear the academic part that we're correcting. You know, it takes a lot more deliberate practice to undo some of the grammatically incorrect structures that students have acquired to teach them correctly the first time around, you know, as academic English. And so some things we've done to sort of remedy that is we're being very intentional in our parent outreach.

Adams ([00:29:24](#)):

When we have interpreters come into the school, we also have either a short article or something that they can tell parents. You know, we really honor your language, the culture that you bring. And it's very important for us that, you know, that and that you maintain culture and the language at home. We will teach your children English, but we also want you to continue to speak the language that you're comfortable with at home. And maybe it is English and another language. And if that's what they're comfortable with, then we want them to continue to communicate with their child. I'm also a product of this notion. My parents somehow got the message that Romanian was not important in the home. So I remember when I was in about second grade, my dad came home from a parent conference and said, we are not speaking Romanian in the home anymore. We were only going to speak English.

Otto ([00:30:26](#)):

Based on what he learned from your teachers at the time or the school?

Adams ([00:30:31](#)):

You know, when I tried to ask him about it, he wasn't sure if someone had told him that, or if it was just a message that he understood without words. But he definitely got the message that Romanian was not important and that we were supposed to be speaking English even at home. By default, neither was our culture, you know, and all the cultural things that we did as a family and as a community were also not very important in the grand scheme of things. You know, if we were to get a job and have education in



America, we needed to be American and speak English, you know? We do offer English classes to our parents if they want to learn.

Adams ([00:31:20](#)):

We have at least two or three different (programs)-- Multnomah County library and there's a community college that offers it. Our SUN programs offer English. So we have lots of ways that parents can learn English if they want to, but we don't push that. We try really hard not to mix the two messages. You speak your native language at home, and then we have this English class that you can take. We try to keep those two messages separate because we do want to emphasize maintaining the native language and the native culture. And like Ruby said, this perspective taking. There are benefits that language is bringing to the way that we see the world that are unique to certain languages. For example, in English, we are constantly thinking about time. Every verb has to be conjugated and, you know, the correct time and tense that it happened.

Adams ([00:32:10](#)):

And that is not present in every language. And there are benefits that language is experienced when they're not constantly thinking about time. So we want to honor that and we want those perspectives and we are richer together when we have more perspectives. Having PD on that for teachers and having this message directly told to parents that we honor them, instead of not saying anything and by default sending the opposite message. Telling our students that, they just light up when you tell them that it's so cool that you speak a different language.

Otto ([00:32:53](#)):

Right. When it takes some time to recognize that and honor that.

Adams ([00:32:56](#)):

Yeah. They know when it feels genuine, you know, and I think that we, we have been working on it now for, for a few years and they know, and they're speaking up more. Whereas when we first started, it was kind of like, I don't know how to say that in my language, or they would be embarrassed to say it or just not, not respond or look at us. So we're seeing that kids are really just more comfortable and being who they are and knowing that their culture is valid. And that it's important. That it's beautiful.

Otto ([00:33:31](#)):

You've each talked about sort of the value of learning and understanding another language. At the same time, I think with English-only speaking families, there's a craving to learn another language or to learn more about another culture. And it seems like there's gotta be a way to bring these two worlds together a little bit more. If we think about Oregon at the moment. Spanish is the leading language with nearly 80,000 DLL parents speaking Spanish, and then Russian Ukrainian after that with about 5,000 parents. And then we have Chinese and Vietnamese each with about 4,000. So when we think about the sheer numbers of David Douglas school district with 70 languages, how do we really, how does the system, how does K-12 reach everyone to make sure that the system itself is inclusive and is effective?

Takanishi ([00:34:45](#)):

You know, my grandparents are from Japan and they were immigrants and they really didn't even speak standard Japanese, they spoke the regional dialect and they sent their children, their first generation children to Japanese schools because that's where you learn standard Japanese. They learned English in



the schools, you know, there was another language or other languages that they were surrounded with. So I just think that what's really important here is that communities really recognize that you can have a very rich country with multilingualism. Most countries like China or India have official languages, but they coexist with hundreds of dialects and other languages as well. So, you know, this is somewhat what we're talking about is somewhat uniquely American. And the reason why I bring in this larger global context is when I think of the loss of language, it's a very serious problem, very serious. Because when you think about it, if you can't communicate with your parents and your family and your grandparents and so forth, there's an absolutely huge loss. So, you know, the maintenance of the that first language is really important.

Takanishi ([00:36:43](#)):

We know that health professionals, others, teachers, a lot of people are, are saying English, you know, don't speak any other language to your children. And so our report basically says, you know, that that family members and people who are in contact with, with children and teachers and so forth should highly encourage parents and family members to speak the languages to their children that they feel the most comfortable in. And it's a way of maintaining language and culture and identity, but it's an imperfect way. I would say because there's so many counter forces in American society, but I think if we can recognize that language loss is occurring and it is not a positive thing in terms of, you know, family relations, for example, or, you know, the development of a sense of who you are as a person and your heritage and so forth. Maybe we can have some changes in the positive direction. I hope our report contributes to that. I think the other thing that I would say is it's a very strong position based on scientific research. And that's where we thought we could really make a contribution.

Rodriguez ([00:38:04](#)):

There are reasons that parents --Spanish speaking parents -- want their children to have a strong command of English. Parents want what's best for their children. So I always assume there's a reason that they are questioning. Is this really best for them? We spend a lot of time explaining to parents because we have parents that will say, you know, we are going to maintain the Spanish at home. They're not going to lose the Spanish but we want you at the school to teach them English. And we spend a lot of time explaining to parents the difference in conversational Spanish and academic Spanish. I share with the families that that mentality of "you will not lose your language" is the mentality we were raised with, my brother and I. We knew we would always be Spanish speakers, but I went to school in Oregon in English only. And it wasn't until I started teaching third grade in a dual language classroom on the Spanish side that I realized I'm not as bilingual as I thought I was, it didn't even occur to me when I got my first teaching job that I was going to have to spend a lot of time learning academic. I mean, I wasn't teaching calculus. It was third grade, but I didn't know how to say metamorphic rock, why would I have that academic vocabulary? We still speak Spanish at home, but we don't sit around and talk about, you know, multiplying by the reciprocal in math.

Rodriguez ([00:40:11](#)):

And so we explained to parents, our goal is that your child be really fluently bilingual enough to be able to choose, to attend a university in a Spanish-speaking country. That's a different level of Spanish than what is maintained. If it's conversational at home, our goal is bilingualism at a very high level. And that's when parents tend to agree, because it's a different dialogue at home. It's such an amazing power that we have with the children. We can instill that pride. Depending on whether it's the English half of the day or the Spanish half, the children for whom the language of instruction is the first language, feel like the rock stars. So in the morning, if my morning is in English and I'm a Spanish speaker, it's challenging.

And then, but in the afternoon when I'm in the Spanish part is when I get to shine. And then what we see is that the real brokers are the bilingual students who can go between both languages. They see their power very early on and can help negotiate meaning for their peers. It really has raised the bar on being bilingual. I'll tell the students, "No, no, no, no. You have to be bilingual because I'm going to get very, very old. And when I'm old, someone will have to be here doing this job and you have to speak Spanish to do this job."

Takanishi ([00:42:07](#)):

I think the other thing that I would say that comes very strongly from our research that would be helpful to parents is to know that a strong first language is the foundation for learning the second language. I think they understand that because they speak the first language, they can be a very important influence on the development of the second language without speaking English. There was an important public agenda survey of particularly immigrant families. And it was very clear that for the respondents, English learning for themselves was very important. The reason they wanted to learn English was for economic mobility, economic and social mobility.

Takanishi ([00:43:14](#)):

I think it's really important to kind of realize that this is not an either/or situation. That you have many people who are not speaking English, who realized that it's very important for their own economic wellbeing and want to learn English. At the same time, they can really support their children in the home by speaking their first language. So we have to like look at this situation in a much more complex way than we typically do.

Otto ([00:43:51](#)):

Absolutely. Maria, do you have other comments just in thinking about how the education system itself can really be mindful of being inclusive and reaching everybody?

Adams ([00:44:02](#)):

Yeah. I just was sort of daydreaming. Imagining our parents, parents of our students, speaking to their, their children in their native languages. And I was thinking about, you know, the 30 million word gap study that we often talk about when we talk about language. So when students live in poverty or grow up in poverty versus the professional class, that the big thing is the amount of time that parents are spending talking to them. When we encourage parents to speak to their children, they're speaking to their children, they're hearing more words. Hopefully the quality of the words are increasing too. We're having an effect, a broader effect on not just the native language, but language in general, you know, and language literally builds the circuitry of the brain. The more language that children are exposed to, and the different types of language that they're exposed to, creates different pathways in the brain. The prefrontal cortex gets developed by certain language patterns that they acquire and things that they're able to notice in their environment, you know? So that's what I was daydreaming about. We're building language in general and when you speak to a child, even if they're not speaking back and especially if they're not speaking back yet, you're paying attention to them, you're in tune with them.

Adams ([00:45:32](#)):

That whole idea of tuning in to your child, taking turns, talking more -- that those have tremendous cognitive benefits in general. So, whichever language that you're comfortable speaking in (just) speaking to your child is huge. If they are getting a second language and they're able to code switch and

maneuver in different social situations, that's part of what brings up flexibility, the cognitive flexibility too. They're paying attention, the more they're in tune, their phonemic awareness is automatically increased. They're able to hear more sounds and be familiar with more sounds. I'm loving hearing about all this too. Even if our children are monolingual, emphasizing language is huge and will bring a huge increase.

Adams ([00:46:42](#)):

We're being strategic and we're starting with oral storytelling, encouraging oral storytelling, and then encouraging literacy activities, encouraging some writing. Bottom line is that we want to know that we belong. And if that's not honored or somehow looked down upon, or if I have the sense of, well, that's embarrassing to admit that I'm an immigrant or that I was born in a different country, you know, that doesn't help me feel like I belong, you know? We're not building up our students when we don't honor who they are, who they are as people. I think it's very relevant because language is so important in defining who you are. Multilingualism is, is so valuable because you're able to see different ways of looking at things.

Otto ([00:48:18](#)):

Maria and Perla. Would you say that you are meeting the needs of dual language learners in your community? What are some of the challenges that you're seeing and what might be getting in the way of being able to do the work that you're doing more effectively?

Rodriguez ([00:48:33](#)):

How long do we have? First I, I feel that we are meeting the needs of the students who made it in, because we, we have a certain number of slots. I always want to take more families and take more families. And for the families that we don't have room for, I know some of them are ending up in, in English-only schools where they will be supported, but I don't believe it's at the level that we could support them. So for the ones that we have, and we serve, I do think that we are doing a very, very good job.

Rodriguez ([00:49:41](#)):

I mean, there's, there are different levels of challenges. Some are just the logistical, the policy with marrying pre-K to the K-12 system has been such a learning experience for me. As a principal, I try to protect my teachers from so much. So I take it on. So they don't have to worry about hoops. And it's a lot of hoops. The two systems are very different, and that is a challenge because it just is time consuming. It's not hard.

Rodriguez ([00:50:44](#)):

None of it is hard. I can figure it all out, but those are all hours that I could be sitting in classrooms, watching instruction, giving feedback to teachers, doing real instructional leadership that I'm not able to, because I'm trying to figure out if the substitute teacher can be in the pre K classroom because they have different regulations and they had to be through this other background check. And are they cleared? No. Okay. Well then I need to move assistance around. That is a very frustrating challenge that is just exhausting. I think right now, specifically in our country, a greater kind of sociopolitical challenge is that there is status assigned to certain languages. For us, being an English/Spanish, dual language program. I mean, we're not trying to fund a border wall to keep France out. It's very personal.

Rodriguez ([00:51:54](#)):

So to balance and build this pride when some of the discourse or the narrative on a political level is so anti Spanish, anti-Mexican is, is hard because you can tell the kids and build them up and love them up. But the second they turn on the TV at home, what they are hearing isn't, isn't reinforced politically. And if anything, I would say we've gone backwards. I mean, I I've teased colleagues who have said, we want to start a dual language in other districts. I just don't know if the board will approve. And I will say, just tell them it's going to be an English and French program.

Adams ([00:53:14](#)):

According to the state, we are meeting the needs of our language learners. Last year, we were awarded with the Carmen West award at the Oregon Department of Education that highlighted our ELA scores, English language, proficiency assessment scores, as well as some of our math scores on the SBAC. They said that David Douglas has one of the highest needs for English language learners in Oregon. There's so much room for growth. Imagine if we were really intentional, as I mentioned before, when we intentionally plan language instruction around science and around math, that we see these 20% higher scores on the SBAC compared to like schools or compared to other Oregon schools.

Adams ([00:54:20](#)):

That to me is huge. We have a lot of potential go really in depth, that's not really happening. this year I am rewriting the maps for Earl Boyles and already we're seeing a lot of growth. Teachers are seeing a significant difference in the ability for students to express their thinking, to go deeper with their conceptual understanding of math.

Adams ([00:55:13](#)):

We're really trying to be a lot more intentional. We're seeing a lot of growth already. So that's really exciting. There was a Scientific American article that came out a few weeks ago that said that our national discourse is changing. At a national level, it's sort of changed from discourse to learn to discourse to win. If you look at the triple Venn of math and science and ELA, English, language arts, the middle of that triple Venn asks students to construct viable arguments and to critique the reasoning others. Critiquing the reasoning of others -- that could take the discourse to win or the discourse to learn. But when we ask kids to revise their thinking -- that was our math map -- we were having kids go through this effective thinking cycle and to have discourse, to learn different ways to solve problems. And the more ways you have, the more perspectives you have for how to solve a problem. And by the end, you're asked to revise your thinking, well, that's discourse to learn, right? That you're not attacking the way that somebody else solved a problem.

Adams ([00:56:58](#)):

You're trying to come up with more ways. And if you apply that on a grand scale, that's sort of what we're saying with languages too, right? When we have different perspectives and we learn from each other's perspectives, we all win. That's on the decline at a national level, and maybe a world level is empathy that our teenagers are dramatically less able to be empathetic or to show empathy to peers. The study that I saw said that they're just less able to put themselves in other, other people's shoes. And I think through practicing this language and having this academic language generalizing into just the way that you think about things, that's a beautiful thing, right?

Adams ([00:57:50](#)):

Language can be really powerful and we've sort of scratched the surface on the impacts and, and address the needs or the potential impact that we can have on dual language learners.

Otto ([00:58:23](#)):

When we think about the needs of DLLs and ELLs, are there leading states or systems that come to mind, Ruby?

Takanishi ([00:58:32](#)):

I would start from the states that actually have official bilingual education policies. Minnesota, New York, California, Texas. Utah is officially a dual immersion language educational state. There are other states like Delaware, where it's not official policy, but in practice, they're putting it forward. States can be very important in terms of setting what I would call a milieu, or a context for enabling or allowing districts to do innovative practice. I'm very encouraged by it. I think the seal of bi-literacy which has been adopted by at least half of the states also provides a way of saying to the pre K to 12 system that we need to, to develop, through that pipeline, bilingual or multilingual students.

Takanishi ([01:00:27](#)):

That's another kind of pressure point. The big equity challenge is whether the dual language learners that we have talked about in the podcast, who typically come from lower income backgrounds will be able to have the same access and advantages and opportunities from these programs as the more advantaged children do. The demand among more advantaged affluent families for dual language programs has been well documented throughout the country. Some of the more mature programs like the District of Columbia, which has had a dual language immersion program for decades, is having to put into place that there is going to be, you know, equal access among children from different economic backgrounds.

Takanishi ([01:01:35](#)):

DC is not unique in that regard where there is a good dual mature dual language immersion program, you have those kinds of pressures. All of the things that we are talking about and trying to do at the policy level and the practice and implementation level is occurring within a very specific historical context that we find ourselves in. It has an impact on schools and kids and state policy and national policy. So we are going uphill right now and we need to take that into account. The biggest challenge that is typically identified in dual language education is the workforce.

Takanishi ([01:02:40](#)):

There's the implicit assumption that if we can solve that by educating the workforce, we're going to be fine. I think we need to think more carefully about it. Having super supportive superintendents and principals who support teachers to do these programs that Perla and Maria have described is very important. But you always have these cross pressures -- how people do see the populations that we're talking about? And we have to recognize it, recognize that bias. And we have to address that bias in order to have effective education. Frankly, as our report really indicates that at every level of education, the important factor in educational outcome is the trust, between the teacher and the student, and the respect of the teacher for children and families that provides the sort of the conditions for learning. Without that, you can have the best instruction, but you'll always be like one foot chained with a ball. What I hear here from these programs is that that kind of respect for children and youth and families is there. And that has resulted in, the trust that is fundamental to being successfully educated.

Otto ([01:04:33](#)):

Thinking about the state level; is there an opportunity to shape dual language programs through the Every Student Succeeds Act? What would that look like?

Takanishi ([01:04:46](#)):

We're getting into the important issue of what is the role of state departments of education in educational change? We're also moving from a compliance model to an accountability model to more of a, some people would call a technical assistance and support model. Different states are moving at different rates about this. Change is definitely in the work. So I would say that the potential in Oregon is can it make that shift from compliance, to providing the resources and assistance, to support districts and local schools to do better education in this area of dual language learners? I'm going to be talking to people who actually do this at the state level. We're a very diverse country, at very different places and leadership is really important. When I look across the states and where good things are happening, you typically have a person or persons in the state department of education whose heart and soul is devoted to making this work.