In this era of growing xenophobia in the U.S., it is notable that two recent reports from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the National Academy of Sciences underscore the benefits of second language learning for all, the need to encourage language study, and the contributions of dual language and heritage language learners and their communities to U.S. multilingualism.

Notably, these reports reject a deficit approach toward heritage and English Learners’ language and their communities and present them as resources for multilingualism. These reports reinforce the position that the promotion of language and language study is beneficial to the long-term goals of the U.S. as part of a global, multilingual, multicultural community.

The U.S. has the potential for a rich and diverse linguistic future within its own immigrant, ethnic and Native American communities. Pivoting from a monolingual to a multilingual stance, the Commission on Language Learning states that “We are a proudly multicultural, polyglot nation, home to more than 350 languages. Yet we continually ignore opportunities to value, nurture and sustain languages other than English.” (p. 1) Opportunities to nurture languages other than English are greater than ever. The U.S. Census has identified sixty million U.S. residents who speak a language other than English at home and, although this is only 20% of the total population, it is a significant linguistic resource.

*America’s Languages: Investing in Language Education for the 21st Century* urges policy makers and educators to build on domestic linguistic resources in the U.S. and to make efforts to offset the decline of indigenous languages. The benefits of bilingualism and the need to prioritize language education are emphasized. The report presents a five-step strategy for addressing the nation’s linguistic deficit and sets the stage for the subsequent *Promising Futures* report.

The *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English America’s Languages: Promising Futures* devotes the volume exclusively to Dual Language Learners (DLLs) non-English speakers from age 0 to 5; and English Learners (ELs) students from age 6-18 or K-12. It provides peer reviewed research on the demography of English Learners, language development for DLLs/ELs, programs for DLLs/ELs, effective instructional practices with DLLs/ELs, building the workforce for DLLs/ELs and concludes with policy recommendations.
America’s Languages: Investing in Language Education for the 21st Century

America’s Languages is authored by the Commission on Language Learning of the American Academy of Sciences in response to congressional inquiries:  

- How does language learning influence economic growth, cultural diplomacy, the productivity of future generations, and the fulfillment of all Americans?  
- What actions should the nation take to ensure excellence in all languages as well as international education and research, including how we may more effectively use current resources to advance language learning?

America’s Languages underscores the importance of multilingualism in a global society and states that knowledge of English is critical “but not sufficient to meet the nation’s future needs.” (p. 6) The benefits of bilingualism are framed within a context of global competition. The report emphasizes that to prosper economically and improve relationships with other countries, Americans need to read, speak and understand other languages. In addition to promoting the acquisition of English, there is a need to recognize the benefits of bilingualism, allowing for the fact that bilinguals have certain cognitive advantages in thinking dimensions, such as divergent thinking, creativity, metalinguistic awareness, and mental flexibility. The evidence supports the fact that bilingualism can enhance aspects of cognitive function, and that knowledge of two languages deepens children’s understanding of key mathematical concepts.

America’s Languages asserts that the goal of any coordinated effort to improve language learning—for students, parents, school districts, states, and the nation as a whole—should be improved access to language education for all U.S. residents, irrespective of geography, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background.

The Commission on Language Learning recommends a national strategy to value language education as a persistent national need similar to education in math or English, and to ensure that a useful level of proficiency is within every student’s reach.

Providing access to language education for all means that a national goal should be that every school “offer meaningful instruction in world and/or Native American languages as part of their standard curricula.” (p. 8)

Furthermore, the Commission recommends that language education begin at the earliest possible moment in the educational continuum, rather than being in middle school or high school. Young

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learners have a much longer timeline for developing their skills before they reach adulthood with a much better facility. However, before universal access to language education can be provided, there is concomitant need to develop the language teaching force.

The Commission proposes a five-step national strategy to develop the nation’s linguistic resources.

First, it is necessary to address the shortage of qualified language teachers.
- The reality is that forty-four states and the District of Columbia report a shortage of qualified K-12 language and or bilingual teachers. More states report a teacher shortage in languages than in any other subject.
- In order to augment the teaching force, the Commission includes coordination of state credentialing systems, attracting teachers through federal loan forgiveness programs, and a recommitment to language instruction with consortia of two and four year colleges.
- The Commission recommends that “each state should commit to increase the number of language teachers in P-12 education so that every child in every state has the opportunity to learn a language other than English in an academic setting, whether the child is experiencing a second language for the first time, mastering a language he or she already speaks at home, or attending a school taught in a Native American language.” (p. 13)

The second step in this strategy is to supplement language education with public and private partnerships.
- Some examples of these partnerships include heritage language communities engaging with after school programs, state humanities councils which focus on local languages and language teacher associations which foster materials and professional development. International organizations also support the study and teaching of world languages.

A crucial third component of the Commission’s strategy is to recognize the assets which the nation’s immigrant, ethnic and Native American communities provide.
- Functional ability in a second language comes in many forms and a range of skills. “Each skill set and level of ability is valuable, useful, and deserving of encouragement.” (p. 8)
- The Commission recommends encouraging heritage language speakers to pursue further instruction in their heritage language and provide more learning opportunities for heritage speakers in classrooms or school settings.
Examples for incentives for continued language study include the Seal of Biliteracy and college credit for advanced language study. Two year and four year universities have developed courses specifically designed for heritage speakers to offer credit for heritage language proficiency.

The Commission states: “Heritage language initiatives at schools and colleges are important, in part, because they recognize forms of self and cultural expression that have been devalued by our educational policies and practices, sometimes to devastating effect.” (p. 24)

As a fourth step, the Commission extends its scope to include support for Native American languages as a primary language of instruction and for the development of curricula and educational materials.

Noting that there are over 450,000 speakers of Native American languages in the U.S., most of the languages are classified as endangered languages and the focus of intensive reclamation projects.

Instruction in indigenous language has been found to be beneficial for Native American children often linked to improved academic achievement, retention rates, well-being, self-esteem and self-efficacy, providing opportunities for Native American and others to study Native American languages in English-based schools.

The final step in the Commission’s strategy is to promote opportunities to learn languages in other countries by experiencing culture and immersing in everyday language, encourage learning abroad, increase international internships, and restructure federal financial aid to help low-income undergraduates experience study abroad.

Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures

With its emphasis on heritage language resources and support for the retention and revitalization of indigenous languages, the Investing in Language report sets the stage for a report that focuses solely on heritage language learners: Dual Language Learners and English Learners.

Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures (2017)² is a National Academy of Sciences volume authored by the Committee on Fostering School Success for English Learners. The primary goal of this Committee was to review evidence based research relevant to the development of DLLs/ELs from birth to age 21. Promising Futures is

² The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) is a private, non-profit society of distinguished scholars. Established by an Act of Congress, signed by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863, the NAS is charged with providing independent, objective advice to the nation on matters related to science and technology. Nearly 500 members of the NAS have won Nobel Prizes, and the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, founded in 1914, is today one of the premier international journals publishing the results of original research. These reports are available at www.nas.edu.
comprised of 13 chapters which focus on topics from early childhood education DLLs (Dual Language Learners), to K-12 ELs (English Language Learners), policy, demography, programs and effective practices for each. Each chapter is research based and peer reviewed. The highlights of the volume are noted here, but the reader is encouraged to review the report at www.nas.edu.

Throughout the volume, the benefits of bilingualism and the supports necessary to develop it are outlined for young children, students in P-K12, parents and educators. Three chapters focus on DLLs and begin by noting the skepticism held by educators and health professionals as to the role of the child’s first language in their early development and later in classrooms. The research reported rejects this skepticism and reinforces the development of bilingualism. “DLLs/ELs have assets that may serve them well in their education and future careers. Those who become proficient in both a home or primary language (“L1”) and English (“L2”) are likely to reap benefits in cognitive, social, and emotional development and may also be protected from brain decline at older ages.

The research dispels the myth that children will be confused if they learn two languages: “There is no evidence to indicate that the use of two languages in the home or the use of one in the home and another in an early care and education setting confuses dual language learners” (p. 147) The Committee asserts that this language learning should begin at an early age: “The cognitive, communicative, cultural, and economic benefits of knowing English and another language are most likely to occur when individuals have high levels of linguistic and functional competence in both languages....this is most likely to occur if development of the home language is maintained throughout the preschool and school years as dual language learners learn English.” (p. 147)

Addressing the use of two languages in educational settings, the Committee states: “Dual language learners benefit from consistent exposure to both their L1 and English in early care and education settings.” (p. 199) As far as the assessment of DLLs, the report emphasizes the need “for linguistically and culturally appropriate assessments...the use of teams that include qualified bilingual and bicultural assessors...and inclusion of families in all aspects of the assessment process.”

Two chapters in Promising Futures focus specifically on the instructional programs and promising practices for ELs in grades Pre-K to 12. Monolingual and bilingual programmatic approaches to teaching ELs are reviewed along with program evaluations. The overall findings are that “in comparing ELs in English-only programs with outcomes for ELs instructed bilingually, either that there is no difference in outcomes measured in English or that ELs in bilingual programs outperform ELs instructed only in English.” (p. 280) It is noteworthy that the implementation of instructional programs for ELs occurs within a primarily English-only setting, where it becomes essential that school
leadership be particularly informed about the characteristics of the EL student population, the importance of the heritage language and culture. Promising practices for engaging families are the responsibility of the school leadership and it is important to create a welcoming environment, reach out to parents and families, provide access to information and establish adult education opportunities for parents.

One chapter synthesizes the research on effective instructional practices with ELs, PreK-12. Overall, there is more research which addresses effective instructional practices in the early grades, K-5, than in middle or high school. In elementary school settings, ELs benefit from instruction which provides explicit instruction, develops academic language in the content areas, makes core content comprehensible and capitalizes on student’s home language and cultural knowledge. These practices are also found to be effective with middle school students. However, the developmental needs of adolescent ELs also require that attention be given to students’ identity formation and social awareness. At the high school level, while there is less research, findings suggest that secondary ELs benefit from a focus on academic language, explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies, opportunities for extended discussion and peer assisted learning. Examples of the promising practices are provided in the chapter.

Promising practices are presented for specific EL populations including Gifted and Talented, Migrant, and ELs on Tribal Lands. Despite efforts to address issues of equity and access, the report notes the persistence of ELs’ under-representation in gifted education programs. The salient factors that influence identification of ELs for gifted education include: the assessment tools used, teacher awareness and preparation and district level support. Services for migrant students vary from state to state, and vary from well-coordinated programs to less adequate services.

There is a scarcity of teachers who are prepared to work with the educational and linguistic needs of migrant students. At the secondary level, the goal of successful completion is threatened by the frequent moves that students necessarily make, and jeopardizes the accrual of credits for graduation. With regard to ELs on tribal lands, the report affirms the importance of the reclamation of indigenous heritage languages. Yet in many English dominant cultural contexts, the perception is that the goal of revitalizing indigenous languages is in conflict with the school’s goal to promote English language and literacy.

Finally, Promising Futures addresses the issues related to having a well-prepared workforce to care for and educate children who are DLLs or ELs. The Investing in America report initiates its strategy to address the nation’s language deficit by emphasizing the need for more language education teachers. Similarly, Promising Futures includes a chapter dedicated to building the workforce to educate DLLs and ELs.
The first issue identified in educator preparation is specifically the lack of educator preparation in their preservice training to understand the needs of the DLL and EL student population. The report states that professional development, coaching, and continuing education for education providers, teachers and administrators serving DLLs and ELs have not developed a coherent set of strategies for improving their effectiveness with DLLs and ELs. Furthermore, ancillary personnel working with DLLs and ELs such as health professionals, counselors and school psychologists, also lack adequate preparation to work with DLLs and ELs.

Promising Futures issues specific recommendations targeted to Federal and state agencies and situates these recommendations within this context:

- all children and youth have the capacity to become bi- or multilingual given appropriate opportunities,
- many institutions responsible for the education of DLLs and ELs are failing to provide DLLs and ELs with appropriate opportunities to learn, and
- “DLLs/ELs strong acquisition of their first language (L1) serves as a foundation for learning English as a language that is essential for educational success in the U.S.” (p. 472)

Recommendations are presented for all DLLs/ELs, for specific DLL/EL populations, for the DLL/EL workforce, and for research and data collection. The ten recommendations stress the need to provide evidence-based program guidance and examples of effective practices for DLLs and the importance of marketing campaigns to promote the capacity of all children to learn more than one language. Recommendations also stress the need to examine the appropriateness of district and school wide practices for DLLs/ELs, the dissemination of information about valid assessment methods and tools used for DLLs/ELs, and the need for family participation. The recommendations address the under-identification and over-identification of DLLs/ELs in Gifted and Talented education and special needs respectively. Recommendations include support for the revitalization of indigenous languages; assessment literacy for all professionals across agencies as well as for families, inclusion of professional preparation for DLLs/ELs in certification requirements and recruitment and retention of teachers, care and educational practitioners, and educational leaders.

How can the U.S. overcome its linguistic deficit?

The scholars at the National Academy of Sciences have proposed a comprehensive set of research based recommendations toward a national policy which values bilingualism for all. Investing in America provides a strategy for the U.S. to shift from its monolingual lens to a multilingual lens based on a recognition of the benefits of bilingualism, internationally, domestically and locally. At the local level, the Commission encourages the recognition of the contributions of heritage language learners and their communities to U.S. multilingualism. This stance is a far cry from the assimilationist English-only perspective which viewed linguistic minority communities in a deficit perspective.
At the national level, the Commission equates the study of languages as crucial to national security as math, science and technology. It calls for every school in the nation to prepare to offer language education, beginning with the earliest grades and through high school stating that: “given all of the apparent benefits of bilingualism, it appears important to stress the learning of multiple languages in school.” (p. 6)

Internationally, business, science, technology, diplomacy and international relations depend upon multilingual skills which are “key to our future: a valuable asset in our relations with other nations and cultures and a benefit to our children as they grow up in an interconnected world.” (p. 5).

If there was any doubt about the importance of languages the report concludes: “It is critical that we work together at this moment in history, when there is so much to gain by participating in a multilingual world, and so much to lose if we remain stubbornly monolingual.” (p. 6)

Building on these recommendations, Promising Futures is noteworthy not only for exclusively focusing on ways to improve the educational outcomes for DLLs/ELs from birth to 21, but also for dispelling the view, held by many in society, that fostering a student’s native language is deleterious to their success in English.

The Committee makes a point of noting that DLLs/ELs “have assets that may serve them well in their education and future career. Those who become proficient in both a home or a primary language and English are likely to reap benefits in cognitive, social and emotional development and may also be protected from brain decline at older ages. In addition, the culture, language and experiences of English learners are highly diverse and constitute assets for their development, as well as for the nation.” (p. 2).

Taken together, these two reports from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the National Academy of Sciences recommend that the national linguistic deficit be addressed through a transformation of values which makes bilingualism paramount and equal to our national curricular concern for the development of math and science. To achieve this goal, new efforts need to be implemented to support the preparation of language education professionals. The reports present research which identifies the best practices in Pre-K-12 education for DLLs/ELs and both reports urge educators to look within to recognize the assets that U.S. DLLs/ELs and indigenous speakers bring to this transformation.
Connecting Research and Practice

What are the implications of the two language focused reports for educators; what can I do?

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) reports provide a source for policy and research information on the benefits of bilingualism, the implementation of second language learning programs, and the need for the professional development of teachers. As an educator, there is much you can do to inform your colleagues, school leadership, and community regarding English learners, second language acquisition, and effective schooling practices. Here are a few suggestions:

- Be an advocate for second language learning. The two reports provide basic policy and research information which overwhelmingly support second language learning. What are the opportunities for second language learning in your district or school?

- Inform your colleagues and school leadership of the resources which students who speak languages other than English bring to the community. Identify how many communities of second language learners are enrolled in your district. Discuss with your colleagues how these students can be supported in their school settings.

- Offset the negative stereotypes that linger regarding second language learners. Research dispels the myth that children will be confused if they learn two languages.

- Explore second language learning opportunities in your community. Are there Saturday or after school programs supported by heritage language associations?

- Support EL access to Advanced Placement and Gifted Education courses.

- Promote the Seal of Biliteracy in your school or district.

- Encourage revitalization efforts for indigenous languages in your community.

- Foster the professional development of educators working with ELs.

- Invite representatives of bilingual programs or revitalization programs to address your faculty.

- Invite district representatives to share information on the linguistic demography of the school with your faculty.
References


About the Author

M. Beatriz Arias, PhD, is a senior research scientist at the Center for Applied Linguistics. Arias previously served as the Vice President for Development for CAL from 2011-2017. She was formerly an Associate Professor in the Department of English with a focus on Applied Linguistics in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Arizona State University. During her tenure at ASU she Directed the Center for Bilingual Education and research, served as the Principal Investigator for several Department of Education grants, mentored doctoral students, directed a teacher preparation program and worked extensively with teachers and administrators serving ELs in local school districts.

Arias is editing a new volume on dual language and bilingual education as part of the CAL Series on Language Education with Multilingual Matters. Dr. Arias, currently a National Education Policy Fellow, writes about the Latino experience in school desegregation. She has been a Court-appointed expert in many school desegregation cases across the nation, including Los Angeles, CA, Denver, CO and Chicago, IL. She was a federally appointed Court Monitor in San Jose CA from 1987 through the termination of the desegregation decree in 2003. Dr. Arias focuses her work on equity issues for Latinos especially English Learners.

About CAL

The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) is a non-profit organization founded in 1959. Headquartered in Washington DC, CAL has earned an international reputation for its contributions to the fields of bilingual and dual language education, English as a second language, world languages education, language policy, assessment, immigrant and refugee integration, literacy, dialect studies, and the education of linguistically and culturally diverse adults and children. The mission of the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) is to promote language learning and cultural understanding by serving as a trusted resource for research, services, and policy analysis. Through its work, CAL seeks solutions to issues involving language and culture as they relate to access and equity in education and society around the globe.

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