

# “That’s Where the Rubber Meets the Road”: The Intersection of Special Education and Dual Language Education

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**Background:** *English language learners (ELLs) with special needs remain an under-researched student population. Although providing services to these students proves to be a daunting task, bilingual schools are uniquely poised to meet the educational needs of ELLs with special needs. Yet, research has not explored service provision practices in bilingual contexts for ELLs with special needs.*

**Purpose of Study:** *This study examined the service provision practices of a bilingual school for ELLs with special needs and how these practices shaped the educational opportunities of these students.*

**Research Design:** *This study is an ethnographic case study of a charter bilingual elementary school.*

**Data Collection and Analysis:** *Fieldwork lasted for a majority of one academic year with the following data collected: classroom observations, interviews with staff, participation in meetings and informal conversations with staff, and school artifacts. The data were analyzed through an intersectionality framework, examining how disability and primary language resulted in multiple disadvantages for ELLs with special needs.*

**Findings:** *That data analysis revealed how providing services to ELLs with special needs is fraught with challenges and compromises. Specifically, despite the school’s commitment to bilingualism, ideological and material conditions in the school worked in concert to restrict the access of ELLs with special needs to bilingual and academic support. The findings also illuminated how in an attempt to provide services, the school was enacting a de facto policy that both disregarded the bilingual development of ELLs with special needs and misappropriated effective models of bilingual and special education.*

**Conclusions/Recommendations:** *The study argues that when schools prioritize language and special education services in parity, educational opportunities for ELLs with special needs will improve. This study also asserts that the educational opportunities of ELLs with special needs are contingent upon the implementation of bilingual and special education programs with fidelity. Thus, to best prepare schools to serve ELLs with special needs, teacher education programs need to dedicate more attention to developing in-service and preservice teachers’ interdisciplinary knowledge about these students and their educational needs and rights.*

As documented both in research and the popular press, bilingual education programs, a term used to describe a variety of programs in which students learn content in two languages, have been increasing steadily in recent years in the context of the United States K–12 educational system (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2006; Maxwell, 2012; Watanabe, 2011). These programs are often used to promote the academic and bilingual development of English language learners (ELLs), bilingual students who are still acquiring grade-level English proficiency.<sup>1</sup> Bilingual programs that integrate the first language (L1) throughout schooling to develop ELLs' bilingualism and biliteracy more fully have been dubbed “strong forms” of bilingual education (Baker, 2006), and it is these strong forms that yield higher academic outcomes for ELLs (Alanís, 2000; Baker, 2006; Marian, Shook, & Schroeder, 2013; Murphy, 2014; Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002; Umansky & Reardon, 2014).

One relatively unexplored benefit of bilingual education programs is for those ELLs who have also been identified with disabilities or are suspected of having a disability. Bilingual education programs, theoretically, are uniquely poised to provide services to ELLs with identified special needs, as these students can receive academic supports for their disability while also being provided linguistic support through the presence of the L1. Further, from a legal perspective, the importance of such confluent services cannot be underestimated, as the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and U.S. Department of Education (DOE) (2015) established that schools are persistently failing to comply with federal law in service provision for ELLs with special needs. The Departments identified a pervasive *de facto* policy in schools that only permits one set of services—either ELL or special education. In theory, then, bilingual schools are at an advantage: They can ensure both language and special education services are provided by using the L1 to support ELLs' language needs while simultaneously supporting their disabilities. Moreover, these programs can more aptly evaluate the bilingual abilities of ELLs who are struggling academically to determine whether the source of their poorer performance is the result of disability or second language acquisition (SLA). Making this determination is a critical component of ethical, accurate special education referral processes for ELLs. Further, in recent years, scholars have challenged the assumption that bilingual programs are potentially harmful for children with disabilities because they create yet another barrier to learning by learning in two languages (e.g., Genesee, 2015; Kremer-Sadlik, 2005; Paradis, Genesee, & Crago, 2011; Simon-Cerejido & Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2013). With ELLs with special needs representing almost 10% of all ELLs (Zehler, Fleischman, Hopstock, Pendzick, & Stephenson, 2003)—a number that is only expected to increase with the rising ELL population—and

the growing presence of bilingual education programs, several questions become critical to ELL education: What happens when a student is dually identified as both an ELL and a student with disability? How do bilingual schools provide services for one of the most vulnerable populations of ELLs—those with special needs? As I discovered in the context of this study, these questions have messy answers. Through a case study of ELLs with special needs in a bilingual school, the present study illuminates how service provision is riddled with unintended complications and educational compromises; that is, I will explicate both how and why a school that prioritizes bilingualism, in an attempt to support ELLs with special needs, unknowingly forfeited these learners’ bilingual development and compromised bilingual and special education program models.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies at the interface of bilingual education and special education have more generally explored the benefits of *bilingual special education*—an umbrella term used to describe the presence of the L1 and second language (L2) used in conjunction with special education services and supports. In the literature, bilingual special education is the panacea for the academic and linguistic challenges ELLs with special needs encounter. More specifically, bilingual instruction can play a pivotal role in preventing erroneous special education referrals and placements for ELLs and can operate as an intervention tool for improving the academic achievement of ELLs with identified disabilities.

## PREVENTING ERRONEOUS REFERRALS

When teaching an ELL who may be struggling in her English academics, whether the ELL’s performance is attributable to SLA or a disability routinely arises as a critical question. Conflating the process of acquiring an L2 with the presence of a disability has high-stakes implications for ELLs: referral for special education services (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higuera, 2005; Klingner et al., 2005; Ortiz et al., 2011; Samson & Lesaux, 2009). For this reason, it is considered both best practice and a matter of social justice to distinguish between disability and SLA by ensuring the ELL is tested for a disability in her most dominant language (Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2010; DOJ & DOE, 2015). By doing so, schools can reduce the possibility of overrepresenting ELLs in special education. In cases when the evaluator, such as a school psychologist or speech pathologist, does not speak the ELL’s dominant language, a translator can be utilized. Categorically, the CEC (2010) states that all testing procedures and materials must not be linguistically or culturally discriminatory.

However, utilizing the L1 should not be a matter restricted to disability assessments; educators should use both languages to implement educational interventions as well as to collect bilingual data to understand the current abilities and needs of ELLs, especially those who are struggling academically (Esparza Brown & Doolittle, 2008). Ortiz et al. (2011) remind us that bilingual educators can be instrumental in preventing inappropriate referrals of ELLs for special education in early intervention or prereferral intervention models, such as response to intervention (RTI). Such models, which introduce systematic levels of interventions that increase with students' needs before a special education referral (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010), have been widely recommended for ELLs (Esparza Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Hoover, 2008; Klingner, Barletta, & Hoover, 2008; National Center on Response to Intervention, n.d.; Orosco & Klingner, 2010). Further, it is in these models that instruction in the L1 can be used as an intervention tool, aimed at strengthening the ELL's academic performance while also serving the purpose of providing bilingual student data (Escamilla, 2006; Esparza Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Ortiz et al., 2011) to ensure a data-driven multimethod approach is being used.

More generally, ELLs seem to benefit from the presence of both the L1 and L2 with regards to special education referral. In a study of California school districts, Artiles et al. (2005) found that participation in bilingual education programs significantly decreased the likelihood of ELLs' placement in a resource room—a separate location where students receive specifically designed instruction for their disabilities—as compared to ELLs participating in English-only programs. Their findings, in fact, revealed that ELLs in English immersion programs were more frequently referred for special education services than ELLs in bilingual education programs, suggesting that the decreased presence of the L1 may be influential in increasing special education referrals.

## IMPROVING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

One concern frequently raised about children with disabilities learning in a bilingual context is that the presence of two languages will counteract their academic progress, compounding the academic difficulties they already experience (Genesee, 2015; Paradis et al., 2011). The belief that children with special needs only have the cognitive ability to process and use one language is not a new idea; in fact, this concern has been often applied to bilingual children in general. Indeed, deficit perspectives of bilingual children are prevalent, and as Flores, Kleyn, and Menken (2015) claim, such positioning of bilingual students are

often racially charged through a practice they refer to as *epistemic racism*. Constantly compared to privileged white, monolingual practices, the language forms of bilingual children are deemed deficient. Paradis et al. (2011) identify a similar deficit view of bilingual learning for those with and without disabilities as the *limited capacity hypothesis*. But as Genesee (2015) points out, the claim that learning in two languages is harmful for children with disabilities because of their “limited capacity” is baseless. Research has only demonstrated the converse: Bilingual children with disabilities demonstrate greater growth in both languages than those exposed to one language. Simon-Cerejido and Gutiérrez-Clellen (2013) implemented a bilingual curriculum called VOLAR (Vocabulary, Oral Language and Academic Readiness) specifically tailored for children with speech or language impairments (SLIs). They found that children with and without SLIs who participated in the VOLAR bilingual curriculum made significant gains in both English and Spanish as compared to the control group that did not participate. From this, they strongly conclude their findings “provide further evidence that children with language impairment should not be excluded from a bilingual or dual language curriculum” (p. 250). Likewise, Thomas, Collier, and Collier (2010) found that students with disabilities participating in two-way immersion programs—a type of bilingual education program in which half of the content during the school day is delivered in English and the other half is delivered in a partner language—in both reading and math outperformed their peers with disabilities who were enrolled in other types of language programs. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that children with more severe disabilities do not experience adverse effects from exposure to bilingual environments. In their study of children with Down syndrome, Kay-Raining Bird et al. (2005) found that those exposed to two languages scored comparably to their monolingual English-speaking peers with Down syndrome on a number of language-based assessments. For bilingual children with autism, Kremer-Sadlik (2005) identified the deleterious effects of parents relinquishing use of the L1 in the home, including weakening the parent–child bond as parents may not be proficient in English to connect meaningfully with the child; lessening the pragmatic models accessible to the child; and exacerbating the child’s social isolation in the home. Thus, Kremer-Sadlik soberly reminds us: “To be or not to be bilingual is *not* the question” (p. 1232, original emphasis). Unquestionably, barring bilingual children with disabilities from bilingual education programs results in detrimental effects that also extend beyond the walls of the school: The opportunity to develop two languages is essential for participating in their families and larger communities (Kremer-Sadlik, 2005; Paradis et al., 2011).

Although environments that incorporate both the L1 and L2 lead to positive effects for bilingual children with disabilities, very little research has explored how bilingual school environments provide services to ELLs with special needs. This paucity of research is especially alarming given that (a) service provision for ELLs with special needs is one the top 10 noncompliance issues in ELL education (DOJ & DOE, 2015) and (b) as discussed earlier, schools that incorporate the L1 are particularly positioned to best serve this population. Yet it is clear that schools are struggling to provide both language services and special education services. Kangas (2014) found that ELLs with special needs frequently received limited language support, as their disabilities were deemed “more significant” to their academic progress. In fact, special education and language services competed for available resources and time, with special education managing to “trump” English as a Second Language (ESL). However, this was a monolingual English school, and as such, it provided less than ideal language programming for ELLs with special needs. What happens, then, if a school is dedicated to bilingual language development? Would the same prioritizing of disability over language occur? How can such a school harness its unique programming in service provision? These research questions underpinned this investigation and aimed to explore a profound gap in research: service provision for ELLs with special needs in a bilingual school.

## THEORETICAL FRAME

ELLs with special needs are located at an intersection: They are students with disabilities and they are acquiring English as an additional language, representing two minority groups—minority status based on ability and primary language. Crenshaw (1991) identified that individuals at such an intersection encounter a troubling practice: “The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (p. 1242). That is to say, in matters of identity, only the group exists, and not the differences within it. Based on this premise, Crenshaw (1989) conceptualized *intersectionality*, a term for how individuals who represent multiple minority social categories are affected—more specifically marginalized—by the intersection of these very social categories.

But how does this marginalization occur? Intersectionality was first conceptualized vis-à-vis African American women, whose collective needs were subsumed by the Women’s Rights Movement that was largely dominated by Caucasian women and the Civil Rights Movement dominated by African American males (Crenshaw, 1989). In short, their marginalization

occurred—and occurs for other intersectional individuals—as their unique needs are ignored and subsumed into one group or another (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw argued that social interventions and resources set in place for women in general were futile in addressing the needs of African American women because they fundamentally “face[d] different obstacles” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1246). For ELLs with special needs, the same holds true; they can become easily marginalized if they are educated as either students with disabilities *or* ELLs.

Anthias (2012) enhanced intersectionality as an analytic lens by conceptualizing layers of analysis that extend beyond the individual’s experience—a well-noted limitation of intersectionality research to date (see Anthias, 2012; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Nuñez, 2014)—to macro-level factors. Anthias emphasized the significance of expanding intersectional analysis by positing that a wider lens encapsulates context, including power structures and established hierarchies. To expand the analysis, Anthias proposed examining *societal arenas of investigation*, the contexts that create inequalities between minority social categories, and connecting these contexts and their practices to even larger sociopolitical factors. One possible approach to studying societal arenas of investigation is through an organizational analysis wherein the researcher attends to the ways in which intersectional individuals are organized (Anthias, 2012) and resources for them are allocated within local contexts (Yuval-Davis, 2009) to pinpoint whether social minority categories are being placed into a constructed hierarchy and how this hierarchy results in equitable access to life—or in the context of this study, educational—opportunities (Yuval-Davis, 2009).

## METHODOLOGY

The data are drawn from a 7-month ethnographic case study. Stake (2006) reminds us that case study research was developed for the very purpose of examining real world situations, or in this study, real classrooms. Case studies are both common and invaluable in education research (Gerring, 2007; Merriam, 2009) for tracing the linkages between macro and micro behavior and thought, as Gerring (2007) claims. Thus, both the design of the study and intersectionality underpinnings work together to explore the ways in which micro factors stem from macro conditions. Also, using ethnographic methodology allows for deep inquiry into the macro–micro interplay, capturing policies that are produced and implemented by those with power (Levinson & Sutton, 2001) while also considering how policy is not merely a top-down enterprise, as educators, too, are policymakers (Menken & García, 2010).

## SITE

San Pedro School<sup>2</sup> is a public charter school located in northeastern United States. Although the school includes both elementary and middle grades, this study focuses on the elementary grades, kindergarten through fifth grade. San Pedro is a Title I school with 79% of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch. The school has a large Latino population—mostly of Puerto Rican or Dominican descent—at roughly 85% and the remainder of the student population includes African Americans and students of other or multiple races at 12% and 3%, respectively. Of its 550 students, 143 (26%) were identified as ELLs and 65 students (11.8%) had identified disabilities. In total, 15 students were dually identified for a disability and English language learning need.

San Pedro was selected for this study based on its emphasis on bilingual development. Their stated mission is to promote the bilingual development of all students. Further, according to their mission, they espouse that a successful future for their students categorically involves bilingualism. Early on during my fieldwork, it was evident that bilingual development was at the core of the school; it was not just a matter of purported beliefs. San Pedro sought out personnel for the various positions in the school who could teach and work bilingually, including specialist teachers (e.g., art and music), paraprofessionals, caseworkers, nurses, etc. In fact, only one of the five focal teachers in the study was not a bilingual Spanish–English speaker. Moreover, the school invested in professional development opportunities to bolster their teachers’ knowledge of bilingual education in the form of workshops, book clubs, and even ESL certificate courses with a local university. In describing the school’s focus on bilingualism, the ESL coordinator said, “I mean, that’s [language education] like the purpose of the school. I mean, we’re really designed around language. It’s a dual language, you know, a dual language school.” Throughout meetings with teachers and administrators, a strong emphasis on bilingual development was listed as one of their defining qualities.

As a bilingual school, San Pedro self-identifies as using a two-way immersion (TWI) 50/50 model in Spanish and English. In this model, there were roughly 600 minutes in each school day with half of the instructional time (i.e., 300 minutes) dedicated to Spanish-medium instruction and the other half dedicated to English-medium instruction. For example, some first-grade classes had English instruction in the morning with the exception of their special classes, which for two of the three special area subjects (i.e., art and music) instruction was in Spanish, and then in the afternoon most of the classes were instructed in Spanish (Table 1). Most students were instructed through a side-by-side model in which one teacher



instructs students in English and then later in the day the students switch classrooms to receive instruction in the partner language. The students in the inclusion classrooms were taught in a self-contained classroom by the same classroom teacher. However, as will become clear from the findings, the school did not implement its TWI program with fidelity, especially for ELLs with special needs. Such program fidelity issues continue to be a concern for bilingual schools, as the features of the programs often become compromised (Torres-Guzmán, Kleyn, Morales-Rodríguez, & Han, 2005).

**Table 1. Grade 1 Sample Schedule of Content and Language Instruction**

Time	Content	Language
08:15–08:45	Writing	English
08:50–09:35	Specials	Spanish
09:35–09:45	Bathroom	N/A
09:45–10:45	Reading	English
10:45–11:45	Math	English
11:45–12:00	Book Challenge	Spanish
12:10–13:50	Lunch and Recess	N/A
13:15–14:15	Reading	Spanish
14:15–14:45	Writing	Spanish
14:45–15:30	Language	Spanish

Bilingual education programs can be used by schools to support ELLs' academic and linguistic development in compliance with the outcome of federal cases, such as *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) and *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981), which require that ELLs receive language supports in various forms from their schools and establish standards for evaluating the quality of these supports, respectively. In addition to using the bilingual program to support ELLs, San Pedro also incorporated push-in ESL, a model in which an ESL teacher pushes into the general education classroom to support ELLs while they are learning content. Typically, at the school ELLs received push-in ESL support during language arts and math, which both occurred in English.

For students with disabilities, San Pedro School purported to use an inclusion model, in which students with disabilities are taught in the general education context. In each grade there was a designated inclusion classroom for students with disabilities. For roughly half of the day a special education teacher would push into these classrooms and coteach along with the general education teacher (hereafter referred to as *classroom teacher*). During that time, the special education teacher was responsible

for implementing students’ Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), which are legally binding documents that serve as an educational plan for students with disabilities, specifying the individualized supports and accommodations they require. Towards the end of fieldwork at San Pedro, special education support also included a pull-out literacy intervention. During select times, a special education teacher would pull out the lowest performing students from the inclusion classrooms to work in the hallway or another empty classroom on a new English literacy intervention.

**PARTICIPANTS**

There were five focal teachers in this study: one ESL teacher, two classroom teachers, and two special education teachers (Table 2). The two classroom teachers, Mr. Alvarez and Mrs. Soto, taught the designated inclusion classrooms in both English and Spanish for first and third grades. The two special education teachers, Mr. Medina and Ms. Calderon, provided push-in support for these classrooms, while the ESL teacher, Mrs. Neal, also provided push-in ESL support for the first-grade inclusion class. Other participants included 10 school staff members, including administrators, special area teachers, and paraprofessionals.

**Table 2. Teacher Profiles**

Teacher	Age	Grade	Subject	Years Teaching	Specialization
Mr. Alvarez	Late 30s	3	Inclusion Bilingual Education	9	Elementary Education
Ms. Calderon	Mid 30s	K-1	Special Education	5	Special Education Spanish Certification
Mr. Medina	Late 30s	3-4	Special Education	1	Elementary Education Special Education
Mrs. Neal	Mid 30s	1	ESL	3	Elementary Education ESL Certification
Mrs. Soto	Late 40s	1	Inclusion Bilingual Education	15	Early Childhood Education

**FOCAL STUDENTS**

The eight focal students at San Pedro were in first and third grades concentrated in two inclusive classrooms. Except for one student, Darrell, these students were included in the study because they represent a “typical” ELL

with a special need: L1 speakers of Spanish who are diagnosed with high incidence disabilities (Zehler et al., 2003). In Mrs. Soto's first-grade class there were three ELLs with special needs: Alexa, Christian, and Alonso (Table 3). All three had speech or language impairments (SLIs), specifically language disorders, which affected their ability to express themselves and to process receptive language (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, n.d.). They received speech services from the school's speech-language pathologist (SLP) on a weekly basis for 30 minutes each time (see Table 4). Alexa was retained in first grade, so this was her second year as a first grader. As it relates to the findings of this study, one student in the first-grade class was thought to be an ELL by some of her teachers; however, according to school records, she was a bilingual student with a learning disability (LD) in reading and math.

**Table 3. Focal Students**

Student	Grade	LI	Disability	ACCESS English Proficiency
Alexa	1	Spanish	SLI language disorder	Emerging/Developing (2.9)
Christian	1	Spanish	SLI language disorder	-
Alonso	1	Spanish	SLI language disorder	-
Zoe	3	Spanish	LD in reading and math	Developing (3)
Bruno	3	Spanish	LD in reading and math	Emerging/Developing (2.8)
Dominick	3	Spanish	LD in reading and math SLI language disorder	Developing (3)
Rafael	3	Spanish	LD in reading SLI language disorder	Emerging/Developing (2.6)
Darell	3	Spanish	-	Emerging/Developing (2.6)

*Note.* There were no ACCESS proficiency scores for Christian and Alonso at the time of the study. These learners were initially assessed when they entered San Pedro with the kindergarten WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT). Their scores are available for the W-APT, qualifying them for L2 services. At the school, ELLs' Spanish proficiency was not tested.

In Mr. Alvarez's third-grade class there were five ELLs—Zoe, Bruno, Dominick, Rafael, and Darell—and four of these ELLs also had at least one disability. Darell was suspected of having an LD, so he was placed in the inclusive classroom to receive extra support and monitoring (Table 3). In the initial weeks of fieldwork, some of Darell's teachers along with a few administrators thought he was an ELL with a special need. It was only after tracking down school records that I discovered Darell did not, in fact, have a diagnosed disability, which came as a surprise to several participating staff. Zoe, Bruno, and Dominick were identified with an LD in reading

and math, but in addition Dominick was also identified with an SLI with a specific diagnosis of a language disorder for which he received speech services twice weekly (Table 4). Rafael had a dual diagnosis with LDs in reading fluency and comprehension and a language disorder. Rafael was making progress in his speech sessions—so much, in fact, that he only received speech services once a month. All of the ELLs received push-in support every day for 3 hours from a special educator, and in the second trimester all five ELLs started to receive pull-out literacy interventions to bolster their reading levels in English (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Focal Students’ Special Education and Related Services**

Student	Grade	Service	Setting	Frequency	Duration
Alexa	1	Speech Therapy	Pull-out	1 time/week	30 minutes
Alonso	1	Speech Therapy	Pull-out	1 time/week	30 minutes
Christian	1	Speech Therapy	Pull-out	1 time/week	30 minutes
Bruno	3	LD Support	Push-in	5 times/week	3 hours
Dominick	3	LD Support	Push-in	5 times/week	3 hours
		Speech Therapy	Pull-out	2 times/week	30 minutes
Rafael	3	LD Support	Push-in	5 times/week	3 hours
		Speech Therapy	Pull-out	1 time/month	30 minutes
Zoe	3	LD Support	Push-in	5 times/week	3 hours

*Note.* During the later months of the school’s second trimester, all third-grade ELLs with special needs started receiving a pull-out reading intervention, Leveled Literacy Intervention, instead of participating in guided reading. This intervention was implemented by a special educator during push-in LD support.

## DATA COLLECTION

I made a total of 46 visits to San Pedro School during the 2013–2014 school year, collecting ethnographic data consisting of the following: (a) classroom observations, (b) school personnel interviews, (c) meetings and conversations with personnel, and (d) school artifacts.

### *Classroom Observations*

I conducted observations of the classrooms of focal ELLs with special needs, focusing on pedagogical approaches, implemented interventions, and student interactions and behaviors. To gain a holistic view of their learning environments, I observed a range of content areas—math, science, English language arts, social studies, Spanish language arts—and

various service delivery contexts, such as ESL, special education, and speech therapy. In the analysis of the school rostering practices, it became evident that students' placement into specific classrooms, such as the inclusion class, influenced the services and instruction they received. Thus, to draw meaningful comparisons between classrooms, I also observed classes in which ELLs with special needs were not placed. All observations were participatory, as I interacted frequently with both teachers and students, and aligned methodologically with ethnographic inquiry, affording the researcher an insider's perspective (Bloome, 2012). In total, I conducted 58 classroom observations over the course of the 7 months of fieldwork.

### *School Personnel Interviews*

At San Pedro School, I conducted 20 semistructured interviews with school personnel, including 10 interviews with focal teachers and 10 interviews with administrators and support staff. Each interview was audio recorded and later transcribed.

Interviews with focal teachers occurred in two waves, with the first set of interviews occurring once in the beginning of fieldwork to gain insight into the teachers' background and experiences supporting ELLs with special needs. The second set of interviews occurred in the final months of fieldwork, targeting specific themes that emerged during classroom observations and interviews. The first wave of interviews ranged from 20 to 37 minutes in length, while the second wave of interviews ranged from 31 to 45 minutes total. Administrative and support staff who were interviewed included the following: two assistant principals, two special area teachers for music and technology, a special education coordinator, an ESL coordinator, a professional development dean, a speech pathologist, a school psychologist, a paraprofessional, and an additional ESL teacher. Each of these participants was interviewed once for a range of 27 to 60 minutes.

### *Meetings and Conversations*

To prepare for fieldwork and to coordinate this planning with the school's administration, I participated in meetings throughout the course of my time at San Pedro. During these meetings, administrators shared school demographic information as well as documents such as school records. In addition to meetings, throughout fieldwork opportunities arose for brief, informal conversations with teachers and staff. These conversations provided useful information about recent occurrences in the school as well as relevant information about teacher and staff experiences teaching and/or supporting ELLs with special needs.

### School Artifacts

I collected a number of artifacts from the school's website, administrators, and teachers. Specific artifacts include the diagnosed disabilities, English language proficiencies, trimester grades, and reading assessment scores of the focal ELLs with special needs; demographic data pertaining to the student body; reports on per pupil funding and expenditures; and instructional documents used in the focal classrooms.

### DATA ANALYSIS

I analyzed the data from San Pedro systematically in two cycles. For first cycle analysis, commonly referred to as initial coding, I used the methods of descriptive coding and hypothesis coding. Descriptive coding can be easily understood as topic coding, in which I identified the topic of a chunk of data for the benefit of attempting to understand what topics were prevalent and which were not (Saldaña, 2009). After several weeks of fieldwork, I began using hypothesis coding, a method that utilizes codes specifically to test emerging hypotheses. Saldaña (2009) attests that hypothesis coding is particularly useful in examining explanations and causes found in the data and is an appropriate method once the researcher has spent sufficient time in the field. In the context of San Pedro School, there were several hypotheses to code, such as "Services for ELLs with special needs do not reflect intersectional practices." Therefore, short phrases were developed as codes to capture the essence of these hypotheses. Reexamining first cycle coding is the focal task of second cycle coding; in essence, its purpose is to fit the codes together, creating synthesis (Saldaña, 2009). To accomplish this, I employed axial coding, wherein I regrouped or chunked similar coded data together. In doing so, the number of codes from first cycle coding was reduced into a new relabeled category or theme (Saldaña, 2009).

As Gerring (2007) reminds us, internal validity can be one the most significant merits of case study research, but this is contingent upon the researcher's effort to ensure credibility of the data. In their seminal work, Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer a framework for increasing credibility—what they refer to as *trustworthiness*—which includes triangulation of data sources, consistent and continued observation, and extended engagement in fieldwork. These criteria were used together with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommended analytical processes of seeking disconfirming cases, conducting peer review, and implementing informal member checking. Disconfirming cases were not merely ignored as aberrations but instead were coded and incorporated into the findings to demonstrate how even with such discrepant cases the principal argued explanations of the data still hold firm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer reviewing also occurred

during data collection, analysis, and later the writing of this article by a senior scholar in educational linguistics to evaluate the credibility of the findings based on the data collected (Merriam, 2009). Informal member checking occurred during interviews, wherein I raised themes emerging during data collection to “give the respondent an immediate opportunity to correct errors of fact and challenge what are perceived to be wrong interpretations” as well as to begin the initial stage in data analysis—summarizing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314).

## RESULTS

Although San Pedro School centered its entire mission around bilingualism, thereby poised to foster the academic and linguistic development of ELLs with special needs, the analysis illuminated how the coalescence of (a) limited resources, (b) educators’ expectations of their students, and (c) beliefs about educational law influenced the educational opportunities of ELLs with special needs. In what follows, I will demonstrate that the intertwining of these material and ideological factors created a set of educational conditions for ELLs with special needs—quite unlike the majority of the students in the school—that restricted their opportunities for bilingual and academic development. Ultimately, these conditions denied their intersectional needs, while also violating foundational tenets of special education and bilingual education.

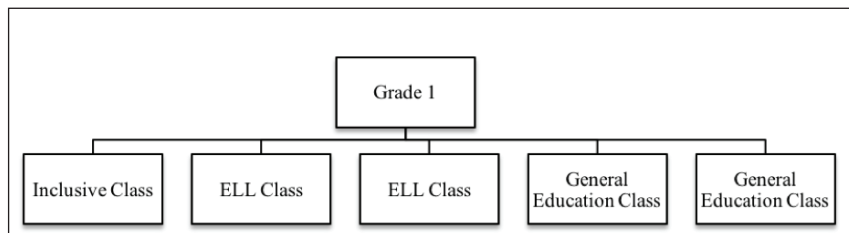
### LIMITED RESOURCES

Limited resources, namely in the form of trained specialists, constrained the opportunities of ELLs with special needs as they received less L2 support and instruction in the L1 as well as no special education support during Spanish content.

#### *Bilingual Support*

Due to the limited number of specialists (i.e., special educators and ESL teachers), students were rostered according to their institutionally assigned label—whether relating to their disability or English proficiency—to maximize the amount of support they could receive. Thus, each grade had one inclusive classroom in which almost all students with IEPs were placed and one if not two classrooms for all ELLs. After this bifurcation occurred, the remaining students—those without disabilities *and* who were not ELLs—were rostered into the other classrooms for that grade (see Figure 1). When a student was both an ELL and had a disability, she was rostered into the inclusive classroom automatically regardless of her disability.

**Figure 1. First-grade rostering**



On the surface, the practice of grouping students according to their educational needs seemed cogent; it allowed either the ESL or special education teachers to push into fewer classes, thereby providing more instructional support to the students. The need to maximize the time of special education and ESL teachers was inseparable from the size of the Special Education and ESL Departments at San Pedro. For the 143 ELLs in Grades 1 through 5, there were only three ESL practitioners who split their time between multiple classes. The school’s four special education teachers, too, divided their time between 65 students across multiple grades. One administrator explained the connection between the cohorts and number of personnel: “And so really I think that if they [the students] were just actually like dispersed within the different classes, it would be really hard to service the kids and make sure that they were getting the supports and interventions.”

It is true that grouping students by educational need did maximize the amount of push-in support both ELLs and students with disabilities received. Those ELLs placed in the ELL-designated classrooms received a range of 6 to 12 hours of weekly support from an ESL teacher during English content in addition to the instruction they received in their L1 in the bilingual education program, while students in the inclusive classrooms received 15 hours of weekly support from a special educator. However, the services provided to the ELLs with special needs demonstrated the school’s lack of human resources: School-wide, ELLs with special needs received little to no ESL services (see Table 5). For instance, ELLs with special needs in first and third grades received a range of 0 to 1.5 hours of ESL support on a weekly basis.

At first glance, receiving less support than their peers may hardly seem significant for ELLs with special needs when they are being taught in a bilingual program, receiving half of the content instruction in the L1. In fact, teachers pointed to their bilingual program as the main conduit through which ELLs with special needs received linguistic support. In light of the very limited—or in most cases no—ESL support provided to



**Table 5. Weekly Hours of Push-in Services by Student Group and Grade**

Grade	Student Group	ESL	Special Education
1	ELLs	12	-
	Students with special needs	-	15
	ELLs with special needs	1.5	15
3	ELLs	6	-
	Students with special needs	-	15
	ELLs with special needs	0	15

ELLs with special needs, investigating the L1 support provided through the bilingual program became a critical matter.

Classroom observations revealed that many Spanish-medium classes were, in fact, taught in English. In the inclusive classrooms, for one third of the observations of first grade and nearly half of the observations of third grade scheduled during Spanish-designated content, English was the medium of instruction. In contrast, none of the observations scheduled during English content were in Spanish. For example, during one observation, classroom teacher Mr. Alvarez elected to play two educational English videos on the rainforest and the life cycle of butterflies. Noticing this occurrence in several observations, I asked Mr. Alvarez whether this was a consistent pattern even when I was not present, to which he responded with a resounding "Yes." Further, when asked about the frequency of substituting English instruction for Spanish, he reported: "I would say at minimum two times a week." Likewise, in Mrs. Soto's inclusion class, Spanish-designated content occurred in English every one of three observations. Both Mr. Alvarez and Mrs. Soto claimed that Spanish instruction was not really beneficial for the ELLs within their classes for reasons that will be explored in the subsequent theme.

In addition to the infrequent L1 instruction, the focal classroom teachers did not provide tailored L2 support for ELLs with special needs. Classroom teachers Mrs. Soto and Mr. Alvarez did not have professional certifications in bilingual education or ESL,<sup>3</sup> although Mrs. Soto completed some coursework for a degree in bilingual/bicultural education. But even she conflated ESL with the mere presence of English: "So they're still getting that ESL support from me 'cause I'm doing the English with them." She asserted that because the ELLs were instructed in English, they received ESL services. Without differentiated instruction or supports, however, ESL services were not being offered; instead ELLs with special needs were expected to understand academic content in a language they were still learning. When asked about specific supports she provided to ELLs with special needs, Mrs. Soto offered the following examples: grouping

ELLs with special needs together to provide differentiated instruction, offering vocabulary support, and monitoring student progress during multi-step tasks. However, in none of my observations of first grade did Mrs. Soto group the ELLs with special needs during instruction or provide more tailored support during reading or writing. She often circulated the room to monitor student progress, but this was not a specific accommodation for ELLs with special needs. The same held true for the third-grade class wherein instruction and directions were not provided with scaffolding, as my fieldnotes of observing Mr. Alvarez's class show:

Mr. Alvarez then directs the students to write the meaning of *stem* and *root* and then to finish their drawings. They [students] are supposed to complete two worksheets after that. But, he gave the direction in such rapid-fire that I, as a native speaker, could not really understand what he wanted them to do.

Here, Mr. Alvarez did not support the ELLs' understanding of the four-step directions through providing *linguistic amplification* (Walqui, 1992)—a process of elucidating and enriching the meaning of produced language to facilitate comprehension—such as repeating the message in alternate forms, supporting oral language input with written language, inquiring about ELLs' understanding, and scaffolding the process in stages. Such examples call into question whether the classroom teachers were supporting ELLs' linguistic needs.

The notion that classroom teachers who did not hold certifications in bilingual education or ESL were providing linguistic support to ELLs with special needs became even more implausible with the discovery that most of the teachers did not know which students qualified for both ESL and special education services. Across the board, the focal teachers were not in agreement about which students were actually ELLs with special needs. For example, special education teacher Ms. Calderon even by the end of the study thought one particular student with an LD named Tiffy was an ELL when she, in fact, was a bilingual student who did not qualify for ESL services. In the same class of students, Mrs. Soto's knowledge about who was an ELL with special needs wavered throughout an interview. First, she said, "I don't think any of them really have been identified special ed. I could be wrong." Later in the interview, however, she added, "I just remembered, maybe, I think there is, one student is both ELL and special ed. Two now [pause], now I'm thinking two. You know, two." The same confusion over students' status as ELLs and/or learners with disabilities was present in third grade. Mr. Alvarez during a meeting pulled out a stack of flashcards; each one had a student's name listed on it along with a profile of the learner. He flipped through the stack reading the names

of the ELLs with special needs, not knowing who qualified without his notes. It is reasonable to contend that if teachers themselves did not know which students were ELLs within their classes and did not have training in bilingual education or ESL, they most likely were not providing tailored support to these learners based on their language proficiency. In this way, primary language—one of the focal students’ intersectional needs—was denied through the limited bilingual services that San Pedro provided, despite its mission to foster bilingualism for all students.

### *Special Education Support*

When it came to special education services, it is evident San Pedro followed the letter but perhaps not the spirit of the law, and this became apparent through the lack of special education supports provided during the afternoons when students were learning in Spanish, as no special educators pushed in during these times. Although students with disabilities continued to receive select accommodations like preferential seating or extended test time, they did not receive any differentiated or tailored instruction during Spanish. Some of the focal ELLs with special needs had LDs in reading, which proved significant during the afternoon when content instruction included Spanish literacy. Ms. Calderon, a special education teacher, shared that because IEP goals only pertained to English content, services from a special educator were not provided during Spanish instruction. The third-grade special education teacher, Mr. Medina, corroborated this rationale: “Spanish language acquisition is not mandated by the state. And so, it’s not mandated in IEPs.” Further, Dr. Dalton, the school psychologist, explained how state testing played a pivotal role in the divorce between Spanish and special education support: “When the state looks at everything, it’s how are these kids doing in English. There are no state testing for how they’re doing in Spanish.... When it comes down to it, English is the language they have to learn.”

But the discontinuation of special education in Spanish presented a challenge, as Mrs. Soto intimated: “It’s also difficult if I’m here by myself with some of these students to provide the special ed. piece of and really, you know, targeting everyone’s IEP goals.” Mr. Holloway, the special education coordinator, corroborated the difficulty of not having special education support in Spanish:

I think that’s where the rubber meets the road. Um, so the biggest challenges we have from a programmatic standpoint, from an instructional standpoint, from a management and behavior standpoint, has been the intersection of students with IEPs when they’re in the Spanish block.

Not providing support in Spanish created a dualism that does not exist for bilingual students with disabilities—that their disabilities only manifest in one language. Surely, when a bilingual child has a disability, the effects of the disability do not appear only in one language, as if he possesses two separate brains (i.e., one for English and one for Spanish). In fact, one of the principal ways to distinguish a disability from SLA is to determine whether the same learning difficulties manifest in both languages. Yet as the services were delivered for special education at San Pedro, this conceptually did not seem to be the case. Moreover, service provision did not reflect intersectional practices because disability and language proficiency were conceptualized as divorced, not intersecting and mutually influencing one another. By failing to provide special education support in Spanish, the school was unable to take advantage of one of its greatest assets: bilingual special educators, who are able to support the ELLs' disabilities while utilizing the L1.

#### EDUCATORS' EXPECTATIONS

Semilingualism—a concept that has been severely criticized by those in educational linguistics—is the state of being neither proficient in an L1 nor in an L2 (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981). Although San Pedro staff never explicitly used this term, the perception that their ELLs—with and without disabilities—were limited across both of their languages became influential in the implementation of bilingual services. Speaking of their student population, Vice Principal Solis stated, “There’s no language that’s been really, you know, developed.” The third-grade ESL teacher, Mrs. DiLella, offered a comparable perspective: “The fact is a lot of our students come in at a language deficit.” She elaborated further:

What’s really challenging is when you have students that really have neither language. And so, their entire day is a struggle because they’re not strong in Spanish and they’re trying to understand what’s going on. They may understand “Get up. Sit down. Sharpen your pencil,” but they don’t have the academic knowledge in the language.

Mr. Alvarez similarly attested that students’ “limited” abilities were more confined to academic language: “If their parents are uneducated then they’re not gonna, you know, read to them in Spanish and it makes it much, much more harder for them.” Frequently, staff spoke of the assumed linguistic and resource deficits of the students’ home communities as the genesis of the semilingualism. Further, in light of the perceived linguistic deficits of the community, educators identified a mismatch

between the language practices of the ELLs and the language practices of the school, as special educator Mr. Medina opined:

There’s a difference between intellectual Spanish, academic Spanish and colloquial Spanish... And so, yeah, most of the students, I mean, if you’re sensitive to the, to the neighborhood—it’s a socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhood. So, you know, even though they are Spanish dominant, socioeconomically they’re gonna be in the lower strata, unless they live elsewhere. Um, and so with that, again, there does come more of non-academic terminology and slang and all that kind of jazz.

Some staff recognized, however, that their testing practices contributed to the perception of semilingualism. That is, the school’s literacy testing in particular did not recognize the ELLs’ language abilities. Mr. Holloway explained: “And you can just say, well, both parents speak Spanish, for example, at home. Um, that’s not necessarily the type of Spanish that we’re assessing for.” Indeed, in characterizing the language practices of the school, he stated bluntly: “It’s not your momma’s Spanish.” Significantly, only two participating teachers pointed to factors external to ELLs, such as testing, as the explanation for ELLs’ alleged semilingualism—a piece of disconfirming evidence. Yet most other staff assumed that the ELLs’ linguistic deficits were undeniable and referenced assessment data as the basis for their beliefs. For instance, all focal ELLs performed lower in Spanish and English by several grade levels on the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and Evaluación del Desarrollo de la Lectura (EDL), reading assessments for school-age students for English and Spanish, respectively (Table 6). Such data suggested to the teachers that ELLs were not proficient in either language. Notably, educators did not interpret the performance of ELLs with special needs as a manifestation of a disability because, as they posit, this pattern was prevalent across the entire ELL population.

Although a deficit perspective of ELLs’ language practices was common among San Pedro educators, for ELLs with special needs this perspective was exacerbated by a belief in their limited capacity for bilingualism. Because the educators believed that ELLs with special needs were semilinguals *and* had a limited ability to acquire two languages, the impetus to provide bilingual services through consistent L1 instruction and L2 support dissolved. Drawing on the limited capacity hypothesis (Paradis et al., 2011), one teacher questioned whether the expectation for ELLs’ bilingual development was realistic when they have a disability: “Since these are a [sic] self-imposed regulations, since we have all expectations of how well we want the students to perform in this other language, well then, I don’t know the expectations that we have are unreasonable and

**Table 6. Summary of Focal Students’ English and Spanish Reading Assessments**

Student	Grade	DRA Level	EDL Level
		<b>Target Levels: 4–6</b>	<b>Target Levels: 8–12</b>
Alexa	1	6	4
Alonso	1	4	1
Christian	1	4	1
		<b>Target Levels: 20–24</b>	<b>Target Levels: 34–38</b>
Bruno	3	10	4
Darrell	3	6	3
Dominick	3	14	10
Rafael	3	12	4
Zoe	3	10	6

*Note.* All DRA and EDL target readings levels are for L1 speakers of Spanish.

they just need to be adjusted.” Indeed, the expectations for the ELLs, especially those with disabilities, were decidedly low. Consequently, these interwoven deficit perspectives at the school rendered the minority social category of primary language—and the services stemming from it—of lesser significance.

### EDUCATORS’ BELIEFS

Throughout interviews, teachers and administrators shared their beliefs about education law, divulging how not all mandates are created equal. Special education was revered as legal—albeit only as it applied to English—while bilingual education/ESL was deemed optional. For this reason, special education services in English were more carefully preserved through designated time with special educators and paraprofessionals. Using a coteaching model, special educators at San Pedro would primarily provide individualized instruction for students with disabilities and were responsible for implementing the Specially Designed Instruction, which is the portion of the IEP that identifies what specific services, accommodations, and teaching approaches the student requires as a result of her disability. Their supports occurred for approximately 3 hours each day for a total of 15 hours a week (Table 5). Yet it was not just the amount of support that the ELLs with special needs received, it was how more vigorously special education services were “protected” that stood out in sharp contrast to ESL services.

The rostering practice itself speaks to the school's effort to preserve special education services. ELLs with special needs were immediately rostered in the inclusion classroom to maximize the amount of time they received supports for their disability. As previously referenced, the amount of staff within each department indicated the importance of special education. Although San Pedro had more than twice the number of ELLs ( $N = 143$ ) than students with disabilities ( $N = 65$ ), the San Pedro ESL and Special Education Departments were both staffed with the same number of specialists—four. Albeit not a large staff, four special education teachers was still a substantial number considering the ESL Department had double the students. Staffing priorities also emerged for long-term substitutes. ESL teacher Mrs. Neal was in the last trimester of her pregnancy, and her replacement was debated among the administration, but this was not the case for a special education teacher who was also pregnant; she was immediately replaced without debate, as Mr. Holloway explained: "Are they gonna find a replacement for the special ed. teacher? Oh, they don't need it for ELL. This was what was kind of the thought, because there's not really any legal matters connected to ELL. That was what the conversation was about."

The perceived legal force of special education was inseparable from the presence of IEPs, which serve as legal contracts between the school, student, and student's family. Thus, the legal imperatives of special education were often invoked as a reason why these services must occur, although this same argument was not applied for ESL/bilingual education law. Mr. Alvarez shared about potential lawsuits as guiding the decision to preserve special education services:

The IEP is a contract that the parents sign it and if we don't follow it, there could be legal troubles. And of course a school doesn't want to have the legal troubles, so we definitely have to prioritize one thing [special education] over another [language support], unfortunately.

One administrator substantiated this assertion: "Because I'm sure that you know by now that the IEP will supersede any-, basically anything really." Certainly, legal and financial consequences can result from schools not providing services to students with disabilities, but L2 services are legally required as well. Why did the staff not have the same level of concern for ESL/bilingual services? Mr. Holloway offered one possible answer: ELL parents posed less of a "threat":

So, I think there's kind of a lot of interplay and assumptions that go along with, you know, they're [ELL parents] not even very defensible themselves.... there's a lot of rights associated with students with IEPs compared to, well, you're just learning English, you know?

Educators' stated beliefs about the legal force of special education resulted in a pulling of power and resources around the minority social category of disability while simultaneously minimizing the significance of primary language.

## DISCUSSION

The foremost goal of this study was to gain insight into the interface of bilingual and special education with specific attention to educational services for ELLs with special needs. As the analysis illuminated, the complexities of services provision for ELLs with special needs in a bilingual school are manifold. As ideology and institutional structures meld, a school that, in theory, should be able to meet the educational needs of ELLs with special needs largely abandons the bilingual instruction and support that would advance these students' academic development. In this way, the intersection of primary language and disability results in (a) multiple oppressions for ELLs with special needs and (b) programmatic implementations that run in contravention to bilingual and special education theory and law.

## STUDENT IMPACTS

In taking up the intersectionality framework, Anthias (2012) recommends attending to the contexts intersectional individuals inhabit, noting the ways in which these institutions create inequalities between social categories. Despite the school's mission to foster the bilingual development of its students, there was an axiomatic prioritization of disability as the minority social category of significance. The elevating of disability over primary language is not a new phenomenon in schools. As Kangas (2014) found, in educating ELLs with special needs, language development is rendered a last priority. This study builds upon Kangas' findings, demonstrating that this is not merely an occurrence in English-dominant schools, but the same phenomenon can even occur at a school with an explicit commitment to bilingual development. For example, the ways in which San Pedro School physically organized ELLs with special needs into cohorts revealed how at this institution the social category of disability carried greater educational significance. The rostering practice was well intentioned, maximizing services and offering efficiency, but instead further marginalized ELLs with special needs by elevating the importance of their disabilities while simultaneously ignoring their language proficiencies. It is often the case that policies of efficiency have surreptitious political underpinnings (Shore & Wright, 1997). Even ELLs, like Darell, who were not identified but were suspected of having a disability were rostered into inclusion rooms. Eventually, his placement in that classroom caused staff



to believe he had a disability. In this way, his *potential* disability superseded his *actual* identified L2 needs. Even at a school that was centered around language, power gravitated toward the social category of disability: Having a disability—or even potentially having a disability—was the most influential factor in determining how resources were distributed. As a consequence, ELLs with special needs, despite having unique learning needs distinct from ELLs *and* students with special needs, were subsumed into the school’s population of students with special needs. As intersectional individuals, ELLs with special needs became part of an “either/or” paradigm (Crenshaw, 1991), and as a result, the resources and interventions set in place for them were misaligned to their actual needs.

As disabilities were elevated in the school, they were also flattened. Essentializing or flattening intragroup differences is another problematic practice involving individuals at an intersection (Crenshaw, 1991; Guidroz & Berger, 2009), which manifested in San Pedro’s rostering practices. For instance, ELLs with SLIs, such as Alexa, Alonso, and Christian, were placed into the inclusion classroom despite the fact that they did not receive support from a special educator. This placement ultimately created an ironic contradiction: Although they needed language support both for their disability and ELL status, they were rostered in a class where they received fewer language services. In this way, the physical organization of the school’s ELLs with special needs demonstrated a profound “conflation of intragroup differences” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242)—only having an IEP mattered.

## PROGRAMMATIC IMPACTS

The material and ideological conditions in the school also compromised the integrity of the bilingual and special education programs. In bilingual education, there are recommended guidelines for effective program implementation, such as the number of enrolled students representing each language and the percentage of instruction taught in the two languages. San Pedro professed to be a TWI school utilizing a 50/50 model; however, for this particular program model no more than two thirds of the students should represent one of the languages of the program (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2011). In this way, the school can ensure that students representing each language are taught together and have rich opportunities for authentic, interactive bilingual practices. But if students are separated by either their disability or ELL status, then this disrupts the balance between English and the partner language. For example, in one inclusion classroom there were only three ELLs who also had disabilities, while the remainder of the class consisted of students who were

L1 speakers of English. To that end, for every one L1 speaker of Spanish there were roughly eight L1 English-speakers. Such demography works counter to the TWI model the school purported to use. More importantly, bilingual instruction fell apart for those in the inclusive classrooms with the presence of infrequent L1 instruction and limited L2 support. That is, the inclusive classrooms became the site of “situation of disadvantage” (Yuval-Davis, 2009, p. 56), thereby echoing the theoretical premise of intersectionality—that institutions create inequities between minority social categories through differential access to academic and linguistic opportunities. For those ELLs with special needs, the inclusive classrooms ironically became a sink or swim context lacking consistent language support and bilingual special education. Yet, administrators and teachers at the school believed “that what they do *is* dual language” (Torres-Guzmán et al., 2005, p. 470) when, in fact, it is not for *all* their students. The misappropriation of bilingual education models undoubtedly creates a problem for bilingual education overall (Torres-Guzmán et al., 2005) but, as I argue, it has higher stakes for those language learners with disabilities.

Principles considered fundamental to special education were also conceded due to limited human resources. First, not including special education services for Spanish content is antithetical to both ethics and reason. Educators insisted that ELLs with special needs were “weak” in both languages, and yet the school persisted in a practice that created an academic “situation of disadvantage” (Yuval-Davis, 2009, p. 56) for these learners. To claim that IEPs have no application to content delivered in Spanish contradicts the spirit of the 1975 *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA, 2015), which established the creation of the IEP as an individualized educational roadmap and plan of success for students with disabilities. Further, grouping a high proportion of students with disabilities into one classroom is not inclusive education. The school’s model was more akin to *reverse inclusion*, grouping *some* students without disabilities into a class of students with disabilities (Rafferty & Griffin, 2005). Not only is there scant evidence supporting the academic and social benefits of reverse inclusion (Hardin & Hardin, 2002; Rafferty & Griffin, 2005; Schoger, 2006), I argue that these practices also violate the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), a stipulation of IDEA mandating that students with disabilities be educated with their peers without disabilities and placed in separate classes or locations only in instances where the disability is too severe for the general education classroom (IDEA, 2015, § 1412). With the focal ELLs’ specialized placement into classrooms where they had limited access to peers without disabilities, the school’s adherence to LRE is spurious.

## CONSIDERING CONTEXT FURTHER

Some may attribute the school's programmatic and instructional challenges discussed above to its status as a charter school. In fact, such a claim would seem to align with current understanding of service provision in charter schools. It is well documented that charter schools often struggle to meet the needs of students with disabilities, particularly because of programming, resources (both fiscal and material), and infrastructure constraints (Estes, 2004; Howe & Welner 2002; Lange, Rhim, & Ahearn, 2008; McLaughlin & Henderson, 1998). Wieselthier (2013) captures the dilemma many charter schools experience:

Despite this autonomy, charter schools are still bound by the federal special education and civil rights laws that protect students with disabilities. The rigid and rigorous standards of these disability laws are incongruent with the flexible and innovative structure of charter schools, making compliance a challenge. The problem with most charter schools is not that they seek to violate the laws protecting students with disabilities, but rather that they do not have the resources to provide these students with appropriate special education and related services. (p. 69)

San Pedro School was not immune to these challenges, mainly suffering from a lack of resources and a period of retrenchment, which is fairly common for charter schools. A recent survey by the Center for Education Reform (2014) found that charter schools typically operate with 64% of the funding as local public schools—a discrepancy mostly attributed to state charter laws. Compounding the issue further is the matter of state funding for ELLs. In this particular state both public and charter schools receive no state funding, only federal Title III funding, for ELLs. This creates an additional fiscal burden for schools with a large ELL population. Moreover, for charter schools, especially relatively newer ones like San Pedro that are still attempting to establish an armature of resources (e.g., a school library and technology center), there are never enough funds. Most charter schools receive no start-up funding, beginning at a deficit in terms of available resources (Center for Education Reform, 2012). Indeed, during my fieldwork I observed small groups of donors ushered around the building by the principal and I was invited to attend a fundraiser dinner for the establishment of a school library. The biggest cost savings then that charter schools can institute are in their operational costs (Center for Education Reform, 2014), which are certainly inclusive of service provision and its requisite resources.

But the claim that this is a “charter school problem” seems hardly plausible when this is a pervasive documented issue in American public schools in general (DOJ & DOE, 2015). In fact, according to DOJ and DOE, providing both language and special education services makes the top 10 list of issues facing ELL education. Further, attending schools with tight budgets is a common experience for ELLs: It is often the case that ELLs as a subgroup tend to be concentrated in schools with fiscal, material, and human resource restrictions in urban contexts (De Cohen, Deterding, & Clewell, 2005). At a national level, ELLs attend some of the most resource-deprived schools in the United States (U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee; Congressional Hispanic Caucus; & U.S. Senate Democratic Hispanic Task Force, 2002). These public urban schools face similar challenges as urban charter schools such as San Pedro. But even when ELLs with special needs attend schools with ample resources, service provision of both language and special education support is compromised for the sake of “stretching out” resources and also out of misconceptions about the legal requirements for ELLs (Kangas, 2014). Thus, this case study, despite its charter school location, represents a common experience in service delivery for ELLs with special needs: an inequitable distribution of resources for intersectional students. Moreover, the central contribution of this study is its finding that such inequitable allocation for ELLs with special needs can happen even in a bilingual school that is explicitly committed to language development.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

One recommendation of significant proportions is the need to confront educators’ deficit perspectives of ELLs with special needs. I was genuinely surprised that educators, including those in the role of ESL teacher, believed ELLs—with and without disabilities—were suffering from a limited proficiency across all languages. In part, these perceptions draw attention to epistemic racism (Flores, Kleyn, & Menken, 2015), beliefs that invalidate and marginalize the “language practices of communities of color” (p. 118) by reinforcing the hegemony of monolingual practices of standardized language forms. The student population of San Pedro was continually positioned as impoverished and lacking resources and requisite linguistic skills for schooling, thus corroborating the assertion that teachers may run the risk of stigmatizing the language practices of language-minority students even in bilingual education contexts, in part, because of a lack of training in matters of diversity (Cervantes-Soon, 2014). This underscores the necessity for teacher education programs to work towards systematically dismantling these perceptions through curricula. If teachers working

in the capacity of language specialists believe ELLs are semilinguals, then the possibility of high expectations for the academic and linguistic development of these learners is grim. For ELLs with special needs, the semilingual framework is further compounded by the belief that they have "limited capacity" for bilingual language development in general. Dismissing the importance of bilingual development for ELLs with special needs out of a belief in their pervasive deficits has serious ramifications, both academically and personally, for these learners.

Awareness about program implementation and educational law is also of paramount importance. Bilingual education did not create limited opportunities for ELLs with special needs; in fact, bilingual education should be able to support ELLs with special needs in ways that other weaker forms of L2 education cannot. But to do so, administrators must take care to implement their programs with fidelity. This requires knowing what is and is not bilingual education (Torres-Guzmán et al., 2005) and reflecting critically upon the ways in which the program models manifests in *each classroom*. Moreover, administrators and teachers alike must become properly informed about educational laws. Creating or reinforcing policies that eliminate bilingual/ESL support for ELLs with special needs is illegal according to the DOJ and DOE (2015):

Some school districts have a formal or informal policy of "no dual services," *i.e.*, a policy of allowing students to receive either EL services or special education services, but not both.... These policies are impermissible under the IDEA and Federal civil rights laws. (p. 25)

Correcting the assumption that bilingual/ESL services are optional or overly ideal for ELLs with special needs will lead to concomitant change in de facto policies that reinforce a hierarchy of services where bilingual/ESL education is placed squarely at the bottom. I argue that advocacy for ELLs and their legally required services must be established as core components of bilingual and ESL education programs.

Confronting educators' perceptions is one piece of the puzzle: There are logistical constraints that make educating ELLs with special needs a complex endeavor. For bilingual schools, providing special education services in both languages should be a foremost priority; however, this requires sufficient staffing and adequate training. One solution is to train special educators and general educators from a multidisciplinary perspective (Fletcher, Bos, & Johnson, 1999) to ensure that bilingual programs are able to integrate bilingual instruction into special education services (CEC, 2010). Indeed, teachers cannot remain unfamiliar with the pedagogical practices of their colleagues from other disciplines

(Roache, Shore, Gouleta, & de Obaldia Butkevich, 2003). Such confluent services require teacher education programs to recruit prospective bilingual educators and to provide explicit instruction regarding how they can utilize their L1 in the classroom as an instructional tool (Paneque & Rodriguez, 2009).

## LIMITATIONS

Despite safeguarding against threats to internal validity by adhering to well-established criteria for trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), there are a few limitations in this study's design and analysis. In examining the societal arenas of investigation (Anthias, 2012), the attention of this study places the institution as well as its practices and policies in the foreground, leaving the focal ELLs with special needs in the background. These students' voices and perspectives, therefore, are not represented in the data. Also, I was not able to examine the focal students' IEP documents first-hand, although throughout fieldwork administrators and teachers often shared some of this information. Thus, I cannot determine to what extent the teachers implemented *all* of the accommodations and modifications identified in each student's IEP.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

We have a clear understanding that ELLs experience higher academic achievement and language development in strong forms of bilingual education (e.g., Alanís, 2000; Baker, 2006; Marian, Shook, & Schroeder, 2013; Murphy, 2014; Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002). But to date, only one study by Thomas et al. (2010) has provided insight into how ELLs with special needs fare in programs with strong forms of bilingual education compared to their counterparts enrolled in other weaker forms of L2 instruction, such as ESL, that tend to yield lower academic and linguistic outcomes for ELLs. This study builds on the findings of Thomas et al. (2010) through an in-depth examination of the services provided in a bilingual education context for ELLs with special needs, illuminating the challenges these schools encounter *vis-à-vis* program fidelity when educators' beliefs intersect with limited resources. Yet, a pivotal question still remains: How can bilingual education programs facilitate the academic and linguistic development of *all* learners? Research describing effective service provision in a bilingual program implemented with fidelity would greatly benefit the fields of bilingual education and special education, providing an exemplary model to emulate. Also, if ELLs with special needs are to be educated holistically, according to all their education needs, studies that investigate effective collaborations between language specialists and special

educators are sorely needed. Finally, future research should investigate successful charter school service provision practices for ELLs and students with disabilities. Privatized schools that are able to rise above the material and financial conditions that often work against their specialized curriculum to meet the needs of diverse students would add greatly to charter school literature. More importantly, such research would give schools an effective blueprint to adapt and customize in their localized contexts.

Admittedly, providing language and special education services for ELLs with special needs is a daunting task; however, I return to my claim that bilingual schools are advantageously positioned to best support language learners with disabilities. Optimal service provision requires a critical awareness of educators' beliefs and assumptions as well as a willingness to prioritize language and disability in parity. Although an ideological and logistical challenge, for ELLs with special needs it is the first critical step in ensuring equity and opportunity in learning.

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#### NOTES

1. In this study, I refer to two types of bilingual students: *ELLs* and *bilingual students*. I use these terms to distinguish between those students who have and have not acquired grade-level English proficiency. *ELLs* refers to students who have been institutionally identified as having emerging English proficiency, which entitles them to language support services. *Bilingual students* are those students who are proficient in both Spanish and English, and therefore do not qualify for language support services.

2. All names included in this article are pseudonyms. Potentially identifying information about the school intentionally has been made ambiguous.

3. The state in which this study was conducted only has a certification requirement for ESL teachers, not bilingual education teachers. Thus, individual districts and schools can determine hiring criteria for bilingual educators.

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