

Video Transcript
English Language Learners
(With Francisca Sanchez, from Speaking In Tongues)

For English Learners as well — for anyone, it's important for them to be able to be fully versed in their own language. It's the language in which you communicate with your family; it's the language that carries your history; it's language that allows you to build bridges to new, new situations and new environments. For English Learners I think the challenges to, of course learn English, to fully develop their own language and to add additional languages as well.

The research is very clear that there is great power in children having achieved full literacy in their own language, that the ability to develop those skills is probably the most powerful predictor of their success, in future success, in English. And in the academics that they encounter in school and out of school, that there is such power in what they learn in their own language that I think at our peril, and the children's peril, we ignore that.

There's a powerful common trend in the research on what works for students who are learning English. The most powerful model, the models they get the most sustainable results, is dual language immersion where students, English learners, are paired with native English speakers, and they learn through both English and the target language over a period of time. In virtually, every one of those studies, they found that those students in dual language approaches are actually outperforming, not just in some cases other English learners, but native English speakers, and in some areas that we wouldn't expect such as mathematics.

One of the arguments that people use against teaching in a variety of languages and teaching those languages well is that, they say, well, we have people from all over the world. We have in one district a hundred languages represented. I think what make sense is to mount full programs in the languages that the community wants to have, in their community, for their children. And in Chicago it might be Arabic; in San Francisco it might be Chinese and Spanish. It could vary across the country. I think it's important to have children have the opportunity to learn their home language. It's just as important for them to have opportunities to learn other languages. Some of those are going to be world languages, some of those are going to be more isolated community languages. There is, there is power in any of those and all of those.

Language is such an interesting thing, because it's something that every normal person learns. And they learn it without benefit of school. But it's a certain type of language that they learn. It's a language of intimate communication; it's a language of the here and now; it's highly contextualized. There is another part of language that we usually learn only in school. It's the language of academic discourse; it's the language of deep analysis; it's the language that allows us to delve into different fields of inquiry in a common way across those different disciplines. Those are the types of things that we

learn in school. And, when we say, let them learn that language at home, what we're saying is let them only learn that one first type of language, let them not have access to the language that will actually allow them to move up and down and across the world.

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