Multilingual Students and Language-as-a-Problem Oriented Educational Policies: A Study of Haitian-American Generation 1.5 Students’ School Language Experiences

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Abstract

School language policies shape the learning experiences of all students attending an educational institution, but they have a particularly strong and lasting impact on multilingual students. This qualitative research study employed a series of five semi-structured interviews to explore the past and present school language experiences of two Generation 1.5 Haitian-American students enrolled in their first semester of college. Findings indicate that in the participants’ Haitian primary schools and U.S. secondary schools, language-as-a-problem oriented policies contributed to discouraging the participants from drawing on their home language, Haitian Creole, as a resource for learning. These prior experiences seemingly continued to affect the participants in their first-year college writing courses, where they were hesitant to use Haitian Creole as a resource for composing writing assignments. It is argued that primary and secondary school language-as-a-problem oriented policies can have lasting effects on Generation 1.5 students, discouraging them from drawing on their multilingualism as a resource for completing school assignments. Suggestions for future research and the creation of educational and community resources promoting multilingualism as a resource for learning are provided.

Keywords: English language learners, multilingual students, Haitian students, Generation 1.5, language policy, composition

The proportion of children in U.S. schools who do not speak English in their homes is growing (Garcia, Klieggen, & Falchi, 2008). Among these emergent bilinguals (EB) are Generation 1.5 students, or students who were born and began their schooling outside of the United States, then immigrated to the U.S. and enrolled in primary or secondary schools. Generation 1.5 students have often had the opportunity to begin building academic language and literacy skills in a language other English before enrolling in U.S. schools, a characteristic which distinguishes them from EB students who did not attend schools outside of the U.S. (Roberge, 2009). Empirical research has demonstrated the important role that a student’s first or home language or languages can play when the student undertakes academic listening, speaking, reading or writing tasks in a second or additional language (Cummins, 1979; Grosjean, 1989). Thus, a Generation 1.5 student who immigrates to the United States draws on language proficiency built in his or her home country to assist in both acquiring and completing academic tasks in English (Grabe, 2009; Leki, Cummin, & Silva, 2008).

In his seminal paper, Richard Ruiz (1984) detailed three distinct language planning orientations, which he termed language-as-problem, language-as-a-right, and language-as-a resource. Ruiz asserted that according to a language-as-a-problem orientation (p.18), an individual’s first language, if it is not the majority language, is a handicap that can be overcome by the individual learning the majority language. By contrast, a language-as-a-right orientation (p.21) proposes that an individual has a basic human right to his first language, while the language-as-a-resource orientation (p.25) posits an individual’s first language as a resource that should be developed for the benefit of both the individual and society.

Research in the field of social psychology has demonstrated that environments in which language-as-a-problem policies and practices are present discourage multilingual children from developing and drawing on their first language. By contrast, contexts with language-as-a-resource policies create environments in which children are more likely to value, develop, and utilize their first language proficiency when engaging in a variety of communicative tasks (Hamers & Blance, 1982; 2000). Thus, in the context of education, a school’s linguistic environment can influence
the extent to which multilingual children come to value and utilize their first language when learning.

Although language policy research often focuses on the perspectives or actions of stakeholders such as political leaders, state agencies, institutions, and classroom practitioners, this paper examines school language policies from the perspective of students educated under the policies (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Shohamy, 2006). The sections which follow describe the findings of a study that employed a constructivist theoretical perspective and used qualitative research methods to explore the potentially lasting effects of language-as-a-problem oriented education policies on students (Crotty, 1998).

Literature Review

Haitian-American Generation 1.5 Students

When statistics concerning the home language of EB students in U.S. schools are gathered, just one home language for each student is generally indicated. Such statistics fail to take into account that many EB students are multilingual, having lived in contexts where more than one language was used in their daily lives. For example, some EB students were initially educated in contexts where their home language differed from the language of school instruction. Refugee students who attended schools outside of their home countries and Generation 1.5 students educated in postcolonial contexts are examples of students who may have been initially educated in contexts where the language of home differed from the language of school instruction (McBrian, 2005).

Haitian-American Generation 1.5 students are a group with significant representation in U.S. schools who are initially educated in a postcolonial context where their home language, Haitian Creole, differs from the language of school instruction, most often French (Buchanan, Albert, & Beaulieu, 2010; Hebblethwaite, 2012; Locher, 2010). Haitian students are especially well represented in educational institutions located in certain regions of the United States, such as the Northeastern and Southeastern United States (Stepick, 1998; Zéphir, 2004). In the state of Florida, for example, Haitian Creole is the second most commonly spoken home language among EB students enrolled in K-12 public schools, and significant numbers of these students are Generation 1.5 students who initially attended schools in Haiti, then immigrated to the United States and began attending U.S. schools (Florida DOE, 2011; Florida DOE, 2015).

Mother Tongue Instruction in Postcolonial Settings

As nations in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean gained their independence from European colonial powers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, numerous multilingual societies conceived of and enacted policies dictating the language of school instruction in their educational institutions (Lin & Martin, 2005). Some nations or communities chose to provide some or all educational instruction in a mother tongue, or local or national language, while others continued to use a colonial language as the sole language of school instruction (Spolsky, 2012; Tollefson &
Tsui, 2003). Haiti is a postcolonial nation which has continued to use French, a former colonial language, as the language of instruction in a great number of schools.

**Language and Education in Haitian Schools**

After driving the French from the island during the Haitian Revolution, Haiti became an independent nation in 1804. Despite having forced the French off of the island more than 200 prior, in contemporary Haiti, both French and Haitian Creole serve as official languages (Stepick, 1998). According to linguists, Haitian Creole and French are two equally complete and complex languages, which are distinct from one another and mutually unintelligible (Degraff, 2005). Although both French and Haitian Creole are the official languages of Haiti, it is estimated that up to 95% of Haitians are monolingual speakers of Haitian Creole, and Haitians use Haitian Creole in nearly all communicative situations in their homes and communities (Hebblethwaite, 2012). In spite of this fact, until the enactment of the 1979 Bernard Reform, all instruction and academic materials in school settings in Haiti were in French (Hadjadj, 2000).

The Bernard Reform was Haiti’s first language-in-education policy, and it mandated that students receive early primary grades instruction and build initial literacy skills in Haitian Creole, then transition in middle school to receiving all school instruction and literacy activities in French (Dejean, 2010; Hadjadj, 2000; Locher, 2010). The Bernard Reform remains Haiti’s official language-in-education policy; however, the policy has never been fully implemented for several reasons (Dejean, 2010; Trouillot-Lévy, 2010). First, believing that knowledge of French would provide their children access to higher status jobs, when the reform was enacted, Haitian parents of all social classes demanded that schools continue to instruct their children in French (Trouillot-Lévy, 2010). Moreover, because lessons in Haiti had been traditionally taught in French, and the government failed to provide a curriculum in Haitian Creole, teachers did not use the language to instruct students (Dejean, 2010; Hebblethwaite, 2012; Trouillot-Lévy, 2010). In addition, after the reform was introduced, the majority of books and other educational materials remained in French because the materials were generally produced by and purchased from French publishing companies. As a result of these factors, to this day, a great number of Haitian schools provide instruction and materials solely in French, a second language for Haitian students and teachers alike, while forbidding the use of Haitian Creole, the first language of nearly all students and teachers (Dejean, 2010; Trouillot-Lévy, 2010).

**Language and Education in U.S. Schools**

After beginning their education in Haiti, Haitian-American Generation 1.5 students immigrate to the United States and attend schools in their new U.S. communities. Although U.S. schools are required by law to provide education that is linguistically accessible to all students (Lau v. Nichols, 1974), schools have no mandate to provide bilingual education (National Association of Bilingual Education, 2015). Researchers have argued that in the absence of a clearly articulated federal language-in-education policy, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law has come to serve as a de facto policy (Evans & Hornberger, 2005; Menken, 2008). The law places pressure on students to perform well on mandated high-stakes standardized tests, which are very often given only in English. As a result, educators in many U.S. schools endeavor to hasten Generation 1.5 students’ acquisition of English by providing language support that assists them in
learning English as quickly as possible, while failing to support the continued development of their first language proficiency (Center for Public Education, 2007; NABE, 2015).

After graduating from U.S. high schools, Generation 1.5 students may enroll in an American college or university. Colleges and universities generally gather data on the racial backgrounds, but not the ethnic or linguistic backgrounds of their students; thus, it is difficult to ascertain the college attendance patterns of Generation 1.5 students. However, empirical studies have demonstrated that many immigrant students, including Generation 1.5 students, intend to enroll in colleges and universities, and among the Black population, immigrant students are more likely than their American-born peers to attend a U.S. tertiary institution (Louie, 2005; 2007). In spite of many immigrant students’ intentions to attend college, researchers have also found that immigrants and the children of immigrants face many barriers to accessing and succeeding in college. Some of these barriers include immigration status, low English language proficiency, a lack of adequate financial means, and inadequate preparation in K-12 schools (Greenman & Hall, 2013; Rodriguez & Cruz, 2009; Wells, 2010).

Although Generation 1.5 students face many barriers to accessing college, many do ultimately attend U.S. post-secondary institutions (Roberge, 2009). Empirical studies have demonstrated that Generation 1.5 students often find college language and literacy tasks novel and challenging because high school literacy tasks often include the memorization and reporting of facts; whereas college tasks include gathering information from academic materials and presenting critical written arguments (Callahan, 2005; Harklau, 1994; 2001). At many U.S. colleges and universities, Generation 1.5 students first engage intensively with these new and challenging language and literacy practices in a first-year English composition course (Roberge, Siegal, & Harklau, 2009).

To support Generation 1.5 students enrolled in first-year composition courses, some colleges and universities have designed courses specifically for this student population. Evaluation studies of such courses have demonstrated that Generation 1.5 students’ success on new and challenging college composition tasks is enhanced when they are encouraged to draw on their proficiency in, and knowledge of, their home language and culture (González & Moll, 2002; Moore & Christiansen, 2005; Murie & Fitzpatrick, 2009; Rendon, 2002).

Generation 1.5 students’ willingness to draw on their first language as a resource to complete literacy tasks in an educational setting cannot be assumed, as many Generation 1.5 students have studied in educational environments where they were discouraged from using their first language proficiency as a resource to complete academic tasks (Hamers & Blanc, 1982; 2000). Haitian-American Generation 1.5 students serve as an example of a group of students who are unlikely to have been educated in primary and secondary school contexts where they were encouraged to draw on their first language, Haitian Creole, as a resource.

The sections which follow present empirical data from a series of interviews with Haitian-American Generation 1.5 students enrolled in a first-year college composition course. The study data aim to illustrate that the participants’ language experiences in their K-12 schools were shaped by these institutions’ language-as-a-problem oriented policies. These primary and secondary school experiences ultimately influenced the participants’ views of the role that their first language, Haitian Creole, could and should play when they composed writing assignments for their first-year college composition course.
Method

This paper draws on data collected for a larger study aiming to understand Haitian-American Generation 1.5 students’ writing experiences in both Haitian and U.S. schools. In much of the data collected, the participants described experiences that were shaped by their schools’ language policies; therefore, the sections that follow describe Haitian-American Generation 1.5 students’ school writing experiences as shaped by their schools’ language policies. To understand the participants’ experiences, the study employed a constructivist theoretical perspective, viewing the participants as the study’s primary producers of knowledge (Crotty, 1998).

Data collection for the study included conducting five sixty-minute, one-on-one interviews with each participant. The interviews took place over the course of the participants’ first semester of college, during which they were both enrolled in a writing-intensive college composition course. In the initial interview, conducted at the beginning of the semester, the participants recollected and described their past experiences of language-use in general, and writing specifically, in both their Haitian primary schools and U.S. secondary schools. In four subsequent interviews, conducted at regular two-week intervals throughout the remainder of the semester, the participants described their experiences writing in their first-year college composition courses (see Appendix for sample interview questions). The participants’ composition course writing assignments served as artifacts to prompt discussion in each interview.

In alignment with the constructivist theoretical perspective, participant interview data were analyzed using Charmaz’s (2014) constructivist grounded theory. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to two rounds of coding. During initial coding, each line of data was given an original code describing the data. These codes emerged from the data themselves. During the second round of coding, initial codes were merged to form focused codes. Then, focused codes were then arranged into a novel grounded theory of the participants’ school language experiences. To ensure the validity of the theory, the researcher conducted a round of member checking interviews during which a condensed version of the grounded theory was presented to each participant in the form of a series of statements. The participants were invited to read and agree or disagree with each statement, then correct any statement with which they disagreed (see Appendix for sample member checking questions). Participants’ corrections were incorporated into the final grounded theory.

One important element of the resulting grounded theory included the participants’ views of their first language, Haitian Creole, and the role that it could and should play in guiding their reasoning and composing process of school writing assignments. The findings and discussion sections which follow provide a detailed description of this component of the larger grounded theory.

Participants

Although data were drawn from larger study containing a greater number of participants, the experiences of two participants, Rudy and Steph, are described below. Rudy and Steph were both Haitian-American Generation 1.5 students who, at the time of the study, were enrolled in their first semester of college. Rudy was an 18 year-old man from an upper-middle class Haitian family, and Steph was a 20 year-old woman from a working-class Haitian family. Both Rudy and Steph moved from Port-au-Prince, Haiti to South Florida after the 2010 earthquake. Rudy arrived in
Florida in 2010 and Steph in 2011. Before immigrating to the United States, both participants had attended private Catholic schools in Port-au-Prince from kindergarten until the end of middle school, and Steph had also attended one year of high school at a private Catholic school. When they arrived in Florida both enrolled in their respective local public high schools, Steph in the 10th grade and Rudy in the 9th grade. In spring 2014, Rudy and Steph graduated from their respective Florida high schools and enrolled in the local community college, Gulf College, in the fall of the same year. Both Rudy and Steph entered Gulf College with the goal of obtaining an Associate’s degree in nursing. As they began to work toward their educational goal, both were enrolled in similar courses, including a required first-year composition course, Composition 1. In alignment with this study’s constructivist approach, the findings which follow describe the participants’ perspectives of their language and writing experiences in school contexts.

Findings

Home and School Language Experiences in Haiti

During their first interviews, the participants were asked to characterize their first language, Haitian Creole. Rudy described Haitian Creole as “broken French” because the language “doesn’t have many rules.” In her interview, Steph explained that her father had told her that Haitian Creole “is a kind of a mix of French, Italian, German” and other languages that former Haitian slaves had learned from their masters, then combined to form a new language.

Rudy and Steph’s descriptions of Haitian Creole suggest that they did not hold the language in particularly high esteem. Nevertheless, they both stated that when they had lived in Haiti they, like other Haitians, had spoken exclusively Haitian Creole with family and community members. When asked if his upper-middle class family members had spoken French at home, Rudy replied, “No, they spoke Creole. . . . Pretty much everyone [in Haiti] speaks Creole, everyone, everyone.” Steph concurred that she had spoken exclusively Haitian Creole in her home in Haiti. She stated, “I spoke it [Haitian Creole] at home every day. . . because I was born with it.” Thus, although they described the language in somewhat negative terms, Rudy and Steph had both used Haitian Creole in nearly all communicative situations with family and community members in Haiti.

Although they had used Haitian Creole as the sole language of communication with family and community members, in Rudy and Steph’s schools, all instruction, materials, and communication had been French. When describing her school in Haiti, Steph stated, “All the books, they are made in French. . . . We do everything [all school subjects] in French.” The materials and instruction at Rudy’s school had also been solely in French, and Rudy stated that all students had been “required to speak French at school. And if you didn’t, you would have to stay after school, detention and stuff if you got caught [speaking Haitian Creole].” In Haiti, Rudy and Steph had attended schools where French was the sole language of instruction and communication, and the use of Haitian Creole was forbidden. However, they had lived in homes and communities where Haitian Creole was the sole language of communication.
School Language Experiences the United States

When they enrolled in their respective U.S. public high schools, both Rudy and Steph were immediately placed in mainstream classes with English-speaking peers for all but one period of their school day. During the final period of the day, Rudy and Steph were provided English language instruction in an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) class. Rudy enrolled in ESOL classes until he was able to pass the state-mandated, standardized reading and math tests required for graduation from all high schools in the state of Florida. Steph, on the other hand, was removed from ESOL class after only a few months in the United States. Researchers estimate that it takes five to seven years for EB students to become proficient in academic English; however, Rudy and Steph were considered proficient in English in a considerably shorter period of time (Cummins, 1980). The data collected did not provide reasons for their quick exit from ESOL services, and the participants themselves had relatively little insight into their former high schools’ course placement decisions. Rudy and Steph simply indicated that they had taken ESOL classes, and once they stopped taking these classes, they spent the final period of their day in a mainstream English Language Arts class with English-proficient peers.

Both participants perceived their ESOL classes as a form of remedial education. When describing her experiences in her ESOL class, Steph stated, “When I first came [to the U.S.] I was in ESOL class. . . . A few months later they took me out because everything came so easy for me.” In characterizing his ESOL class, Rudy stated, “When I moved here I was in ESOL. We pretty much read just like easy stuff, just like simple books.” These descriptions suggest that Rudy and Steph perceived ESOL classes as intended for students who learned slowly or necessitated simplified materials; thus, in the participants’ view, enrolling in high school ESOL classes marked them as slow learners who necessitated simplified materials.

The notion that their proficiency in languages other than English was an obstacle to overcome was reinforced by advice from the participants’ high school ESOL and English Language Arts teachers, who encouraged them to avoid drawing on their multilingualism as a resource for completing school assignments. Rudy stated that his high school teachers had told him “many times” that when engaging in academic tasks he should “think in English, Rudy. Think in English.” In high school Steph was also encouraged to avoid using Haitian Creole as a resource in academic settings. She stated that her school experiences had taught her that, “If [a student] already knows Creole . . . [he should] stop using it” and “develop other languages.” In their U.S. secondary schools, due to their multilingualism, the participants were initially separated from their peers and placed in ESOL classes. Moreover, they were actively discouraged from using Haitian Creole as a resource for completing academic tasks.

Experiences Writing in Composition 1

During this study’s data collection period, the participants were full-time students in their first semester at Gulf College. Steph and Rudy were enrolled in different sections of a required first-year composition course, Composition 1. Every Composition 1 course at all public colleges and universities in the state adhered to several mandated course requirements, which included composing a minimum of four essays totaling at least 4,000 words during the course of the semester.
During their interviews, Steph and Rudy noted that they found the length and breadth of writing assignments in the course challenging, explaining that composing numerous essays ranging from 500 to 1,000 words was a novel task. In addition, they noted that the range of compositions they were required to write, including narrative, analysis, compare and contrast, and research essays was also new. Moreover, the participants remarked that they were completing these new and challenging writing tasks in English, a language in which Steph and Rudy felt they were still developing their proficiency. In her interview, Steph characterized herself as “still learning” English, and Rudy described his writing as having “mistakes that I won’t be able to realize. . . . since English is not my first language.” Thus, in Composition 1 both participants engaged in new writing tasks required to be produced in a language in which they had yet to achieve their desired proficiency.

**Composing Bilingually**

Rudy and Steph drew on their proficiency in Haitian Creole to varying degrees when writing assignments for their Composition 1 courses. In describing his composition process, Rudy stated, “When I am writing English I don’t think in English. . . that’s too much. I just think in Creole and then. . . translate to English.” Rudy acknowledged that his composing practices contradicted those promoted by his former teachers. He added, “I heard that if you think in another language it’s harder to write in English. But I don’t find it that way. . . .When I am thinking really deep, I try to think, sometimes in Creole and sometimes in English.” He concluded, “I just think it’s easier.”

As compared to Rudy, Steph drew less on her proficiency in Haitian Creole when composing Composition 1 assignments because she felt it was generally preferable to use English to guide her reasoning and writing process. Steph stated that she “forced” herself to the greatest extent possible to think and write solely in English. She added that she only used Haitian Creole to search for individual vocabulary words that she did not know in English, stating that when she was writing, if she became “confused by one word” she would “look at it in the dictionary.” However, she felt it was best to maximize her use of English during the composition process because she already knew Haitian Creole; therefore, she needed to “stop using it” in order to “develop other language(s).”

**Discussion**

In both Haiti and the United States, the participants experienced language-as-a-problem oriented policies in their schools (Ruiz, 1984). These policies seem to have had cumulative effects on the participants, ultimately shaping their views of their use of Haitian Creole when writing Composition 1 assignments.

**Language-as-a-problem Oriented Policies in Haitian schools**

In the participants’ schools in Haiti, language-as-a-problem oriented policies were in place at both the school and classroom level, and these policies mirror the findings of those who have studied the contemporary linguistic situation in Haitian educational institutions (Locher, 2010;
Although the students in Rudy and Steph’s schools spoke Haitian Creole as their first language, they were forbidden from using the language on school grounds, and Rudy and Steph indicated that children who did not comply with this policy were punished. Punishing Rudy, Steph, and their classmates for speaking Haitian Creole suggested that the use of their first language in an educational setting was a transgression so grave that it required disciplinary action. The participants’ schools’ policies requiring the use of the French language generally communicated to students that Haitian Creole had no role to play in an educational setting.

These school policies requiring French language-use gave rise to classroom practices that included providing all instruction and materials in French and requiring students to complete assignments in French. The provision of educational materials and instruction solely in French indicated to Rudy, Steph, and their classmates that there was a connection between school knowledge and the French language. Moreover, the practice suggested that the ideas communicated in schools could not be transmitted and acquired in Haitian Creole. The policies and practices privileging French language-use in Rudy and Steph’s schools framed the use of Haitian Creole as a problem and potential hindrance to the acquisition of school-based knowledge.

Language-as-a-problem Oriented Policies in U.S. Schools

After time in Haitian educational environments, where Haitian Creole played no role in students’ education, the participants immigrated to the United States, where language-as-a-problem oriented school policies and classroom practices were again in place. When they initially arrived in their U.S. schools, the participants were enrolled in ESOL classes where they were provided English language instruction in isolation from their English-proficient peers. Rudy and Steph regarded this instruction as inferior, and their experiences align with the findings of empirical studies of the quantity and quality of ESOL instruction in U.S. secondary schools (Callahan, 2005; Harklau, 1994; 2001). As a result of their perceptions of ESOL instruction, Rudy and Steph wished to join their peers in mainstream English classes. They felt that attaining the proficiency necessary to be transferred from ESOL to mainstream English classrooms signaled their readiness to study the same material at the same pace as their peers. Thus, according to Rudy and Steph’s views of their U.S. schools’ policies, their proficiency in Haitian Creole was again a problem to overcome.

Compounding school-level policies, in the participants’ U.S. classrooms, Rudy and Steph’s teachers enacted pedagogical practices that encouraged the use of English to the exclusion of other languages. These practices included providing instruction solely in English and actively encouraging EB students to “think in English” when completing school assignments. Such classroom practices framed the participants’ first language proficiency as a hindrance to success on classroom assignments.

Composing Bilingually

After attending Haitian primary and U.S. secondary schools that employed language-as-a-problem oriented policies and practices, the participants enrolled in Composition 1 during their first year of college. For Rudy and Steph, Composition 1 was a demanding course in which they were required to produce a large number of written English assignments. The participants’ first language could have served as a powerful resource to guide the participants’ Composition 1
reasoning and writing processes (Leki, Cummin, & Silva, 2008). Although the participants did draw on their bilingualism to varying degrees when composing, they both framed the use of Haitian Creole when writing in English as contrary to recommended school language practices.

In describing her writing of Composition 1 assignments, Steph spoke of “forcing” herself to the greatest extent possible to think and write English. This approach seemed to align with her belief that drawing on her proficiency in Haitian Creole when completing composition assignments degraded the quality of her writing and slowed her speed of English acquisition. As a result, Steph restricted her use of Haitian Creole to the translation of individual vocabulary words while writing in English.

Rudy’s approach to writing Composition 1 assignments differed from Steph’s. Drawing more heavily on his Haitian Creole proficiency, Rudy conceived of ideas in both Haitian Creole and English, then translated his ideas and wrote them in English. Although Rudy felt this composition strategy facilitated writing, he acknowledged that it ran contrary to his former teachers’ advice to “think in English.” Although Rudy and Steph ultimately approached completing their Composition 1 assignments differently, they both seem to have learned that it was considered desirable to both think and write in English when completing composition course assignments.

Rudy and Steph experienced their schools in both Haiti and the United States as educational environments in which they were actively discouraged from using their first language, Haitian Creole, as a resource for acquiring and communicating knowledge. The language-as-a-problem oriented school policies and classroom practices in the participants’ Haitian and U.S. schools were relatively consistent, continually framing the participants’ proficiency in Haitian Creole as a hindrance to academic success. After more than a decade of educational experiences in such environments, the participants, like the bilingual participants in previous social psychology studies, may have internalized a notion that drawing on their proficiency in Haitian Creole to complete school assignments ran contrary to recommended learning practices (Hamers & Blanc, 1982; 2000). As a result, although they used Haitian Creole when writing Composition 1 assignments, they did so self-consciously, stating that use of the language contradicted what they had come to understand as recommended academic practice.

Implications and Future Studies

Years of experience in school settings with language-as-a-problem oriented policies had lasting effects on Rudy and Steph, influencing their use of Haitian Creole as they undertook new and challenging writing tasks in a first-year college writing course. Rudy and Steph’s stories represent the experiences of two individuals, but these experiences may suggest a broader trend among Generation 1.5 students initially educated in postcolonial contexts, where students’ home and community language differs from that of school instruction. Generation 1.5 students initially educated in such contexts may arrive in U.S. schools viewing their first language proficiency as a problem in school settings, and the language-as-a-problem oriented policies of many U.S. schools may reinforce this view.

Future studies could explore the home country and U.S. school language experiences of Generation 1.5 students from a broader range of postcolonial contexts in regions such as Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Such studies could employ quantitative research methods to ascertain students’ levels of proficiency in their first language, the colonial language of school instruction, and English. After ascertaining students’ proficiency level in these
languages, qualitative research methods could be used to collect data pertaining to these students’ experiences of and willingness to draw on their proficiency in various languages to engage with and complete tasks in school settings.

**Next Steps**

Educators in the United States cannot change the language policies of other nations; however, they can take steps to advocate for language-as-a-resource oriented policies in U.S. K-12 and post-secondary educational institutions. Shifting the orientation of language policies in U.S. educational institutions is of particular importance because the numbers of students attending U.S. educational institutions from homes where a language other than English is spoken, including Generation 1.5 students, is steadily increasing (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). Schools and communities can take three important steps to embrace a language-as-a-resource orientation toward the linguistic resources multilingual students bring to U.S. schools. First, bilingual educational programs can be created and existing programs reinvigorated. In addition, all teachers can promote a language-as-a-resource orientation in their classrooms. Finally, educational and literacy resources in multilingual students’ home languages can be provided in school and community spaces.

The proportion of students enrolled in bilingual education programs has decreased over the past decades. This decrease is the result of some states restricting bilingual educational programs and all states requiring students to take high-stakes standardized tests, which are often offered solely in English (Zehr, 2007). The provision of high-stakes tests solely in English and restrictive laws concerning English-only education are not inevitable. Proponents of bilingual education must inform others of its benefits and advocate at the community, state, and federal level to change English-only testing practices, repeal laws restricting bilingual education, and increase the number of bilingual educational programs in U.S. public schools.

In addition to demanding an increase in bilingual programs, advocates for multilingual students must inform all educators that multilingual students’ first languages are never a hindrance to learning. Indeed, multilingual students’ first languages serve as important resources in the acquisition of knowledge and literacy skills in an additional language (Cummins, 1979). Thus, all educators, including educators who provide instruction solely in English, must encourage and support student use of multilingualism as an important tool for learning.

Even if bilingual educational programs are expanded, many multilingual students will still lack access to a bilingual program in their school. In the absence of bilingual education programs, advocates for multilingual children can promote the provision of multilingual educational resources in school and community spaces. In all communities, books and educational resources in multilingual children’s first languages must be provided in classrooms, school libraries, public libraries, and other community spaces. Making such materials available provides multilingual children resources to increase both their first language proficiency and academic knowledge. Moreover, provision of such materials provides a clear message to multilingual children that their first language has an important role to play in classroom, school, and community settings.

The findings of the present study suggest that continuously learning in educational contexts with language-as-a-problem oriented policies can have cumulative negative effects on students. Multilingual students have the right to be educated in settings where they are able to build literacy skills and content-knowledge in both their first language and the majority language. Thus, advocates for multilingual students in the United States must continue to fight for an increase in
bilingual programs in U.S. public schools. In the meantime, multilingual students in the U.S. should be educated in environments where pride and proficiency in their first languages are fostered.
Appendix

Sample Interview and Member Checking Questions

Interview 1

- Please draw a timeline of your education and mark the major events in your education.
- Please tell me the story of your education using the timeline you drew.
- Please tell me about two specific writing/reading tasks that you completed when you attended school in Haiti. (What was the assignment? How did you complete it? What was the result?)
- Please tell me about two specific writing/reading tasks that you completed in your U.S. high school. (What was the assignment? How did you complete it? What was the result?)

Interviews 2-5

- Describe this essay.
- What did you pay extra attention to while writing this assignment?
- What ideas, materials, strategies, resources, or past experiences did you use to write this assignment?
- What changes did you make from early drafts to the final draft?
- What do you feel you did well on this assignment?
- What would you like to change about this assignment?

Member Checking Questions

- Agree or disagree with and correct the following statements:
  - A bilingual student should avoid thinking in Haitian Creole when writing in English
  - The main reason for writing in Composition 1 class is to finish the essays and get a good grade
  - It is best to have an essay checked by a native English speaker before turning it in
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