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Project Title: ***English-Only?: Investigating Vocabulary Development In Latino Preschool-age English Language Learners***

In the United States today, literacy is a prerequisite for school success. Yet, many children living in or near poverty and children for whom English is a second language begin kindergarten with major gaps in their literacy skills, putting them at high risk for school failure. For these children, the achievement gap is well entrenched even before they begin their first day of school. It seemed evident to me, therefore, that to seriously address the achievement gap, we need to address the disparities in literacy development that occur among our youngest students. To that end, my dissertation research focuses on vocabulary development, a primary factor in emergent literacy, for preschool-age Latino English language learners (ELLs).

The critical question for my research is how vocabulary development can be most effectively supported and facilitated in this population. While there is general consensus in the research literature for the need to enhance vocabulary development – and literacy development in general – for preschool-age ELLs, researchers and policy makers alike continue to debate what constitutes effective literacy practice for these children. A particularly contentious issue in that debate is the role of the home language, i.e., how, and even if, the home language should be used to facilitate literacy attainment for English language learners. This debate is most conspicuously reflected in the English-only policies that have been adopted in some states.

The primary research objective of my dissertation, therefore, is to experimentally investigate the efficacy of a vocabulary development intervention for Head Start Latino ELLs, and more specifically, the effect of the home language when it is included in the intervention process.

Following my graduation from Harvard, I expect to attain a superintendency in Arizona, where effective literacy practice for ELLs is intensely relevant due to the large number of Latino ELLs and Arizona's English immersion mandate. The insights I derive from my dissertation research will help to inform curriculum and policy decisions I will make as a superintendent. Additionally, I hope that my findings will constructively contribute to the wider debate on effective literacy practice for English language learners, and thus add to the work being done by educators and researchers around the country to provide equitable and excellent education for all children.