

STUDENTS FROM THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF ST. CROIX: PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS¹

SUSANA C. DEJESÚS

UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO, RÍO PIEDRAS

1 Introduction

This article presents the preliminary phase of a larger investigation that will focus on students from the Dominican Republic who are now living in St. Croix, US Virgin Islands, and studying in the public school system there. The intent of this article is to explore questions and issues raised during preliminary field work and interviews in order to better focus the issues to be explored later. The larger investigation, in turn, is intended to compliment the work of colleagues from the University of Puerto Rico, who are studying the Puerto Rican Diaspora in St. Croix. As a companion study on the Dominican Diaspora, it will look at topics pertaining to Dominicans in the Virgin Islands, involving language and education – language acquisition programs, attitudes toward different languages, policy choices and student outcomes. In all, the investigation will touch on several inter-connected and overlapping areas including: the dynamics of language and power, cultural linguistics, and protecting minority languages.

Data for this initial study was obtained from official government sources providing background information regarding community and student demographics, student outcomes, educational programs and government policies. Site observations were made by the present researcher during a two week field trip to St. Croix in May 2008, during which time 25 interviews were conducted. Using these field notes and data, this preliminary investigation will set the context within which meaningful questions can be asked in the larger study. The 25 individuals who were interviewed included 3 public school teachers and administrators, who met with the researcher outside of the public school setting during their personal time; 14 community members, including 3 parents of school age children, 3 adult students of Dominican heritage from the University of the Virgin Islands, who had graduated from public school in St. Croix, and 5 government officials or members of community based institutions, who were

¹ This article is a revised and expanded version of a paper delivered at the 11th Annual Eastern Caribbean Island Cultures Conference: The Islands in Between, in Curaçao, on November 8, 2008.

interviewed as individuals, rather than as representatives of their institutions or the Policies officially endorsed by those institutions

2 Background²

St. Croix, like many other beautiful islands in the Caribbean, is a rich and complex mix of languages, cultures and ethnicities. The US 2000 Census (1) estimated it to have about 53,000 inhabitants. Crucians, who comprise the sector of the population with the deepest roots on the island, are predominantly the proud descendants of slaves who had been brought to St. Croix to cultivate sugar cane. They share a rich history of struggle for survival and rebellion against European slave owners. Their language, Crucian, an English-lexifier Creole, is also a testament to survival and adaptation, having evolved in the crucible of clandestine communication and necessity.

English is the official language of St. Croix and many Crucians speak Standard English as well as Crucian Creole as their first languages, with English being used in school, business and official matters and Crucian being used in less formal situations. English, and to a lesser extent, Crucian, are used either as a first or second language by the majority of the population of St. Croix, regardless of their ethnic background. The inhabitants of the island include a large population of “down islanders”, i.e., people from the Lesser Antilles to the south of the US Virgin Islands.

Down islanders bring with them their own creole languages and cultures. While they share much historically and culturally with the Crucian population, there are significant social and political differences, particularly since many have arrived without the benefit of documentation.

Into this mix come Spanish speakers, bringing another language and other cultural elements. Although the movement of human populations between Puerto Rico and St. Croix has been constant since pre-Columbian times, many members of the large Puerto Rican (also called Port-Crucian) community on St. Croix trace their predecessors to around 1927 when the US Navy began to confiscate farm lands in

² Information for this section was obtained from several sources including:

The US Census Bureau Report, Population and Housing Profile: 2000, for the Virgin Islands, www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/vsland/VIprofile.pdf, from The US Chamber of Commerce at www.usvichamber.com, from the US Library of Congress at www.loc.gov/rinternationa/hispanic/vi/resources/vi-business.html from Nations on line at www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/virgin_islands_us.htm from Hess Corporation (Hovenssa Refinery) at <http://www.hess.com/hovenssa>,

From *Fateful Encounters Salt River 1493-1525, a National Park Publication* (November 14, 1993); *Christiansted, National Historic Site* (publ. by the National Park Service, US Department of the Interior at www.vinow.com/stcroix/history), and from The US Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) and the District of St. Croix Department of Education.

Vieques, the *isla nena* of Puerto Rico, for use as a military training and bombardment site. St. Croix, a sister island in the same archipelago, was by 1927 also a US territory administered by the US Navy. In 1917 the US purchased the Danish West Indies for \$25 million dollars in gold. Previously, the Virgin Islands had been ruled by many other colonial powers, each of which brought its own cultural and linguistic influences. St. Croix was purchased by the Danish West India Company in 1733 from the French, and became a Danish Royal Colony in 1754. Prior to that, it had been ruled by the Spanish, Dutch, British, French, and the Knights of Malta.

The people of St. Thomas, St. Croix and St John (which together constitute the US Virgin Islands) were given US citizenship status in 1917, shortly before World War I ended. It is well known that the US had taken over Puerto Rico in 1898, during the Spanish-American War. But what may not be remembered is that in 1917 Puerto Ricans were also given US citizenship status. Thus, by 1927, when displaced farmers and sugar cane workers were looking for a new home, St. Croix was an attractive choice: it was close by, with a sugar economy, geography and political status similar to Vieques, and migration there seemed a relatively easy transition to make. This was especially true by 1929 and thereafter, when the economic depression heavily impacted the economy of Puerto Rico, and work on the *isla grande* was scarce. In the 1930s during and after the Great Sugar Cane Workers' Strike in Puerto Rico (which helped establish Don Pedro Albizu Campos and the Nationalist Party as a major political force) displaced sugar cane workers and their families continued to immigrate to St. Croix, and join the established community there. Currently, the Puerto Rican community and its descendants numbers about 40% of the St. Croix population, and has strong economic and social roots on the island. The 2000 US Census estimates that about 45% of the population of St. Croix is Spanish speaking, which of course includes both Puerto Rican and Dominican people. Census data further estimate that only about 1300 people from the Dominican Republic live in St. Croix, but this figure is hard to estimate accurately, since many Dominicans do not have the necessary documentation to reside legally in a US territory.

As a consequence of being US citizens, large numbers of young men and women from both Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands are in the US armed services. Residents of the US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico cannot vote for the US President while living in their respective countries, but as US citizens they can, and definitely do vote, if and when they migrate to the US. In their own countries, citizens of both Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands vote for a representative to the US Congress, who has speaking privileges and membership on congressional committees, but no voting rights. The US controls imports, foreign relations and immigration, but people in the territories are exempt from paying US Federal taxes.

At this time, the US Virgin Islands is administered by the US Department of the Interior. Its economy is presently based on tourism, and the operations of an important oil refinery, Hovensa, “a joint venture between a subsidiary of Hess Corporation and a subsidiary of Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA)...[S]trategically located in the Caribbean.” (www.hess.com/hovens). In addition to Crucians, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, North Americans and people from the other islands of the Caribbean, there are a number of people from the Middle East, Europe and Asia living in St. Croix. However, the children of these communities typically attend private school, and therefore do not figure in this study.

3 Education and the Spanish Speaking Community

In spite of the presence of a large Spanish speaking community on St. Croix since the 1920s, it was not until more than 40 years later, in 1968, that the first bilingual program was established in the public schools. 1968 coincided with the same general period of time that the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA) was established in the US Department of Education, in response to demands for bilingual education by the Puerto Rican, Chinese, and other minority language speaking communities (Aspira Consent Decree, New York State, 1974; *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 US 563, 566, 1973).

142

In the US, the first bilingual programs established were transitional programs, which were designed to teach English and to transition children into the English speaking mainstream as quickly as possible. But, interestingly, according to the St. Croix Department of Education website, the first bilingual program established in St. Croix was a Spanish and English *Dual Language* program, a type of program which in 1968 was not common in the US. To this day, at least in the US, the most effective bilingual option is the Dual language model³.

By 1993, Dominicans were arriving in increasingly large numbers as immigrants (both documented and undocumented) to St. Croix, and this trend continues today. According to the Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) and the District of St. Croix Department of Education website, between 1993 and 1995 “*Transitional bilingual* education programs were established and implemented at all consolidated/targeted schools” in St. Croix. No explanation is given for this change in

³ For further information on dual language education, see: The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) www.cal.org, the National Clearinghouse of English Language Acquisition www.ncela.gwu.edu; Christian, 1996; Christian [et al.], 1997; Collier, 1992; Collier & Thomas, 1997a; Collier & Thomas, 1997b; Collier & Thomas, 2002; Collier & Thomas, 2003; Collier & Thomas, 2004; DeJesús, 1995; DeJesús, 2008; Genesee, 1987; Genesee, 1999; Hakuta & Díaz, 1985; Howard [et al.], 2005; Howard & Sugarman, 2007; Lindholm, 1990; Lindholm, 1991; Lindholm-Leary, 2005; Pérez, 2004; Pérez & Torres-Guzmán, 1996; Robledo Montecel & Danini Cortez, 2002; Soltero, 2004; Torres-Guzmán, 2002; Torres-Guzmán [et al.], 2005; Valdés, 1997.

policy from the Dual Language model to the transitional model. In fact, during the 1990s, especially under the Clinton administration in the US, Dual language was the suggested program choice for bilingual education, and was considered to be far more effective than the transitional design.⁴ These different bilingual program options and their implications for language preservation and development will be discussed, below.

4 Impressions regarding the Dominican Community

The majority of people in St. Croix who were interviewed as part of this preliminary study considered Dominicans to be hard working, highly industrious people, who tried to “live below the radar”. The word “industrious” was used by 12 of the 25 individuals, during their interviews. As a community, with large numbers of its residents living without the benefit of the documentation necessary for legal residence in a US territory, the general impression was that most Dominican people look for work in Spanish speaking business establishments, or try to establish small businesses of their own in order to live and maintain a quiet life. For hard working individuals, there are small business and employment opportunities in such enterprises as beauty parlors, restaurants, car repair shops, landscaping outfits and house and office cleaning services that offer work and a pay check. If a family is willing to live and work quietly, life in St. Croix can be quite good. There is work, education is free and medical or emergency room coverage is available when needed. The tremendous poverty of the Dominican Republic can be left behind, if not forgotten. Additionally, the climate of St. Croix is better than that of New York – another major destination of for Dominicans. As one governmental official admitted in his interview, so long as the individual is not arrested, and does not call attention to himself or herself, life in St. Croix for the documented or the undocumented family can be tranquil, and the lack of documentation is not a serious obstacle to economic stability and progress.

5 Educational Programs and Terms

As indicated above, education, in the US Virgin Islands, falls under the jurisdiction of the United States Department of Education, and its legislation, terminology, definitions and policies. During George W. Bush’s first month in office (January,

⁴ For this analysis and interpretation, the author relied upon personal experience as a Title VII Program Director, a Team Leader, and a Peer Reviewer for the US Department of Education, OBEMLA and OELA, from 1992-2004, and from Annual Performance Reports (APRs), Assessment Data, and Evaluation Reports submitted to and required by the United States Department of Education from 1998 to 2007. These documents are a matter of public record. For further information, please contact the author.

2000) the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA), a major force in bilingual education and comprehensive school reform since the 1960s, was abolished. It was immediately replaced by the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA). Some regarded this as only a cosmetic change in title, but it represented an enormous shift in educational philosophy and funding priorities.

Also in January 2000, major educational legislation was enacted, and implemented in 2001, which is popularly known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The many requirements and conditions of NCLB apply to all states and territories including Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. Under NCLB standards of proficiency must be set, initially for English Language and Mathematics, and at a later time for Science and other subjects. These proficiency standards are measured by mandatory annual testing. The number of students reaching proficiency levels in each school and district is identified, and a required target is established for the following year, called an annual yearly progress (AYP) target. Schools or districts which do not meet the AYP target are first given warnings, and move through a process for three years, within which they must comply. If a school or a district fails to reach its AYP target for three consecutive years, it is then subject to drastic measures, including being restructured, being taken over by a new managerial entity, removing the Principal, and/or removing most or all of the staff.

144 These penalties are dreaded, and in some cases have created an environment of insecurity and fear, which has had many negative consequences. First, there is a rampant tendency of ‘teaching to the test’ which is so massive and widespread that in some venues test preparation for the spring exams begins in the fall term, and has taken up time slots formerly allotted to the so-called minor subjects, such as art, music and physical education. In some venues, test preparation has all but replaced instruction⁵. Second, a ‘slippery slope’ and ‘acrobatic’ definition of proficiency has evolved. Proficiency is defined individually by each state or territory, based on its own testing instruments. These testing instruments sometimes change, or are re-normed. Consequently, the level of achievement defined as “proficient” can and does become adjusted, creating a slippery slope of changing proficiency levels, which can be used to camouflage poor academic performance. Further, there is no required national standard, and therefore comparisons are difficult. While the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) administered by the National Testing Service, is a national exam, it is challenging. Some districts are reluctant to require it. “Given that most, if not all, states have adopted proficiency benchmarks well below (and sometimes substantially below) the NAEP standards, it is reasonable to suspect

⁵ For this analysis and interpretation, the author relied upon personal experience working in schools and districts under review, as a public school administrator in New Jersey and New York City (1990-1997), a faculty member of a university (1997-2000); and as an educational consultant and Executive Director of an educational CBO (1995-2007).

that this is true of Puerto Rico as well” (Rivera-Batiz & Ladd, 2006a: 199) and perhaps also true of St. Croix. Thus, since the standardized instruments are all different, and the standard itself can change, the concept of proficiency is highly flexible: what is considered below proficient in one venue might be considered proficient in another. In other words, despite being citizens of one country governed by the same law (NCLB) a student who is considered a proficient reader in Mississippi may not be considered proficient in New York (Rivera-Batiz & Ladd, 2006a; DeJesús, 2008). Third, a monumental testing and test preparation industry has transformed many educational publishing companies into testing services that create, norm and sell tests, test preparation books and test preparation programs (at a great profit!) to desperate districts and boards of education, who may be jockeying to find a test that is legitimate and acceptable, but which will not make their schools or school system look bad. In many ways NCLB has transformed the educational agenda in the US from curriculum and instruction to testing.

Another requirement under NCLB is the transparency of information regarding schools’ progress and proficiency. Every public school and district must have a “School Report Card” where demographic data and testing information can be found. The school district of St. Croix, one of two school districts in the US Virgin Islands, like other territories and states, has to provide this information to parents and on the internet, as a matter of public record. While national comparisons are difficult to make, comparisons can be made between schools, among cohorts and within a district, as all are subject to the same testing criteria. For this study, information regarding student outcomes in St. Croix was obtained from the School Report Cards, and is presented below.

6 Definitions

Currently, in the US, the preferred term for students from other nations who are learning English is *English Language Learners* (ELLs). However, the US Department of Education uses the older term, *Limited English Proficient* students (LEPs), considered by many educators to be pejorative, because it implies that students who do not know English are limited, regardless of how many other languages they may speak. The US Department of Education also uses the term Hispanic, rather than the current terminology, Latino/a. The US Department of Education, in its statistics and documentation defines as *Immigrant Populations* LEP students (ELLs) who have been in an English speaking school system (i.e. in the US) for up to 3 years. Under NCLB, during the first 3 year period, LEP or ELL students are excused from mandatory testing, and their student data is excluded from the school evaluation. Tests which evaluate proficiency in Reading or English Language Arts and Mathematics are

administered in English. After 3 years, students are no longer considered immigrants, and are required to take the state administered tests in English.

Research from the US and Canada regarding language acquisition has demonstrated that it takes more than 3 years to become proficient in a new language (Cummins, 1992; Cummins, 1999; DeJesús, 2008; Krashen [et al.], 1998; Lindholm-Leary, 2005; Torres-Guzman, 2002). Jim Cummins, a well known Canadian researcher and academic, has identified two levels of language proficiency: social proficiency, which is estimated to take between 1 and 3 years to acquire, and academic proficiency, which is estimated to take between 5 and 7 years to acquire. Success in school depends on the latter.

Thus there is a conflict between research and policy (based on US Department of Education guidelines), which affects all school districts, including those on St. Croix. On the one hand, research tells us that students who are learning a language, English or any other language, need more than 3 years – typically 5-7 years – to reach the proficiency levels needed for academic achievement, yet in most venues, the Department of Education requires students to be tested in English after only 3 years. Developmentally, the majority of students will not have fully developed their linguistic skills, yet their schools will be penalized even if the students are progressing according to expectation but have simply not yet reached academic proficiency in the new language. Steven Krashen introduced the concept of stages of language development, including the first stage, the silent stage, which may last 6 months to 2 years or more, depending on the emotional, cultural and political circumstances of the learner (Cummins 1992; Cummins, 1999; Krashen, 1982; Krashen, 1985; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001: 91-93). Under NCLB, many students who have not yet emerged from Krashen’s silent stage in English may be subject to testing in that language.

This disconnect between research and practice on the one hand, and educational policy on the other has put both schools and ELL students in an impossible position, which makes the normal operation of bilingual programs all but impossible. Since consequences are severe for schools that do not achieve the AYP target, and since ELLs are among the students most likely to fall below proficiency levels and fail to meet the AYP (even by year 4, when they are in the mainstream and no longer “immigrants”) enormous pressures are sometimes brought to bear on the ELL student. Some schools or districts attempt to disqualify ELL students or discourage them from taking mandated tests, by either suggesting that they stay home on testing days, or by sometimes trying to eliminate ELLs and ELL programs from the schools, so that the school-wide scores will be higher ⁶.

⁶ These are three examples personally observed by this researcher: 1) A principal of a large comprehensive high school in the New York-New Jersey Metropolitan area significantly reduced the number of English language

7 After 3 years

As indicated above, in the US system, after 3 years students are no longer considered “immigrants” and are typically mainstreamed out of bilingual programs and/or their test scores are included in the school cohort. By definition, they are no longer English language learners, even though most students still have much English to learn. After three years in an English immersion environment, many students, especially the younger children, have acquired language that is both socially proficient and accent free, but their language skills are not yet at the level of proficiency needed for academic success. To the untutored policy maker, these students sound like native speakers, and appear to function well in their new language, which is the justification for no longer providing them with native language support and instruction. But those familiar with the language acquisition process know that such students lack the deep linguistic base needed for high performance and academic success. What happens to these students?

8 Special Education and School Failure

Special Education is defined in the US as educational programs for students with particular physical or developmental needs, such as Language Delay, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), Cognitive, Organizational and Comprehension issues, and Mental Retardation. Special Education programs are often remedial and stream students to vocational training, rather than to academic training and higher education. Further, Special Education students are far more likely than others to drop out of school. The high dropout rate studied in one urban setting in the US was attributed, in part, to language difficulties,

learners and special education students by transferring them out of the school into GED programs. As a consequence, the school test scores improved dramatically. The principal was highly praised for making tremendous improvements in the school’s reading scores. Based on this record of accomplishment the principal was promoted the following year to a high city-wide position. There were no educational changes made in class size, program, pedagogy, design or curriculum in the high school which could have accounted for the dramatic reading improvement. 2) An elementary school principal in Manhattan eliminated the ELL program in the school, thereby raising the school-wide test scores. Because of this dramatic improvement, the school became the flagship school of the district, and the principal became identified with successful school reform. A short time later, the principal retired and, known as a school reformer, was offered a highly paid and prestigious school position in a neighboring state. 3) An elementary principal of a school located in a poor and working class Latino neighborhood was promoted to a major city-wide position, based on the dramatic reading improvement that occurred in the school. At about the same time, the school was cited in a report on the city-wide test as having the highest number of erasures (changed answers) of any school in the city, on the mandated city-wide reading exam. There was never an investigation regarding the possible relationship between the number of erasures and the dramatic increase in reading scores on the same test. The promotion went through, uninterrupted. The principal became a coach and city-wide administrator, and provided technical assistance to other schools in with low reading scores. These incidents occurred between about 1993 and 1998.

which the Latino students self-reported, and which became an impediment to their high school achievement or graduation (DeJesús, 1995; DeJesús, 2008).

Based on the interview data from public school teachers, administrators, parents and community members, Latino students in St. Croix make up more than 50% of the Special Education student population. This figure could not be corroborated, but if it is accurate, why is it so large? How is it possible that so many students from one ethnicity or cultural group have Special Educational needs? Why do so many Latino students in St. Croix schools have problems which do not surface in other venues and other countries? It is reasonable to wonder if the high number of Special Education diagnoses is masking language acquisition issues. If so, why are so many of the Latino students in St. Croix not learning language effectively? And, what can be done? These are some of the questions that have come to light as a result of initial field work and interviews, and which must be investigated more fully, in the larger research project which will follow the present study.

9 Language and Pedagogy

As indicated above, under the definitions of the US Department of Education, which govern programs for English Language learners in the US, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, bilingual programs are often limited to 3 years. The most common program option is the transitional bilingual program, especially since 2001, with the implementation of NCLB and the advent of the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA). As its name indicates, this program is designed to *transition* a student *from* their heritage language *to* English. In educational terminology it is considered a *subtractive* program, because it does not support or develop students' heritage language, but seeks to substitute English for the mother tongue.

By contrast, Dual Language programs, as the term is used in the US and the Virgin Islands, are *additive* programs, because instead of replacing the heritage language with English, English is taught together with the Heritage language, and both languages are developed simultaneously. English is added to the students' linguistic capacity without removing or replacing the native or heritage language. While the value of additive pedagogies seems obvious to many educators and policy makers outside of the US and its territories, for a variety of political, cultural and educational reasons it is an absolute given in the US system that the subtractive transition to English is the optimal strategy, and the majority of policy makers including many educators, especially those who are not involved in language acquisition, consider this patently unsound idea to be an indisputable truth. Many consider bilingual education to be a political ploy. They oppose bilingual or multi-lingual education which they consider to be in conflict with keeping the US an English speaking country. Not only does the

research on dual language and language acquisition indicate that the opposite is true, but in an exhaustive study of second generation students, it has been demonstrated that those who are fluent bilinguals and who maintain their language, culture and ethnic identity are more likely to graduate from college, make effective economic and social advances, and are therefore actually better able to assimilate successfully into the US mainstream (Portes & Rumbaut 2001). Dual language programs, as practiced in the US, can be designed around any two languages. Because of demographic realities, English and Spanish are the most common choices in the US, but there are Dual language programs teaching English alongside Korean, Japanese and Arabic as well. From the point of view of program design, English is *not* required. Any two languages can be selected, for example Spanish and Chinese, or Papiamentu and Dutch. What is required is that both languages be taught, supported and maintained simultaneously, so that the student concurrently acquires and develops both languages, is able to transfer knowledge from the heritage language into the new language without losing ground, and learns to think, read and write in both.

10 Reflection on Trilingual and Multilingual Environments

It is almost shameful that the discussion in this article merely revolves around bilingualism, and the acquiring of a second language, in St. Croix and other US territories. In the US and its colonies becoming bilingual is a struggle and an achievement. Becoming trilingual or multi-lingual is unheard of. By contrast, in many parts of the world being multi-lingual is the norm. Countries large and small educate their citizens to be bilingual, trilingual or multi-lingual, and they are literate in all of their languages, not just able to follow a conversation. Even in Puerto Rico, which values and appreciates Spanish as its national and cultural heritage, bilingualism is far from a reality, especially for the average person. In the public schools, instruction is in Spanish, and English is taught as a separate subject. Despite 12 years or more of English classes in the curriculum, the public schools do not produce bilingual students (Rivera-Batiz & Ladd, 2006a). The situation would be embarrassing, were it not so tragic.

While there are many factors contributing to the intransigent monolingualism in the US and its territories, one aspect is pedagogic. In the US and the Virgin Islands, the mainstream educational approach does not value bilingualism. Policy makers, who are often not educators, consider English to be not only necessary but also sufficient. Funds are rarely made available for, and policy rarely includes helping students maintain and develop their heritage language and culture. Without a strong foundation in the mother tongue, second and third language acquisition is difficult. Politically, in the US and the Virgin Islands, providing the instructional time to teach

and develop a language other than English is often seen as *robbing* time from mastering English, and becoming literate. Quite the opposite is true. Research has shown unequivocally that the stronger one knows the mother tongue (the heritage language) the faster and better other languages can be acquired.

However, as stated, policy makers do not emphasize the cultivation of languages other than English and there is little appreciation of the language acquisition process or research. While bilingualism is considered an asset from a pragmatic or commercial point of view, little value is placed on linguistic and cultural diversity by most of the English only majority, especially those who make policy. In contrast to US policy, consider the policy of the European Union, where students must be taught a minimum of three languages. In Holland, students have *the right* to be educated in their mother tongue, whereas in the US and its territories, students are stripped of their mother tongue by policy and circumstances.

11 Consolidated Target Schools in St. Croix

Given this US approach to language acquisition, the situation for speakers of Spanish in St. Croix is interesting. Since the 1990s, bilingual education has only been offered in certain schools, referred to as Consolidated Target Schools (CTS). In this category, there are 7 schools, 5 Elementary Schools – Pearl B. Larsen, Charles Emanuel, Alfredo Andrews, Evelyn Williams and Alexander Henderson – one intermediate or Junior High School, and one High School. The Pearl B. Larsen School, in downtown Christiansted, the largest town and governmental center in St. Croix, is regarded as an excellent school, based on interviews. The following data on student outcomes was obtained on the internet in the School Report Cards and presents student test results for Reading Proficiency in Grades 3, 4 and 5.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of students in the Pearl B. Larsen School, who obtained scores of Proficiency or Advanced Proficiency, and the Percentage of students who obtained scores Below Proficiency in three indicated cohorts: All students, Hispanic students, and students designated as English Language Learners. Note that in every category, the majority of students are *below* proficient.

Pearl B. Larsen School

Grade 3, 2004-5	Proficiency or Advanced	Below Proficiency
All Students	35.5	64.5
Hispanic Students	27.3	72.7
English Language Learners	08.3	91.7

Grade 4, 2004-5	Proficiency or Advanced	Below Proficiency
All Students	35.5	64.5
Hispanic Students	25.7	74.3
English Language Learners	0	100

Grade 5	Proficiency or Advanced	Below Proficiency
All Students 2004-5	48.9	51.1
All Students 2005-6	46.2	53.8
Hispanic Students 2004-5	40.0	60.0
Hispanic Students 2005-6	40.7	59.3
English Language Learners 2004-5	0	100
English Language Learners 2005-6	0	100

Figure 1 Reading Proficiency in the Pearl B. Larsen Elementary School, 2004 to 2006, Shown by Grade and Cohort, All Students, Hispanic Students, and English Language Learners.

This data points to some of the questions that need to be clarified in the larger study, to be carried out in the future. Why are the proficiency levels so low in all categories, but particularly low for the Latino (Hispanic) and English language learner cohorts? Given how proficiency is defined, as explained above, perhaps more students would fall below par if the NAEP exam were used. Further, there are discrepancies in these statistics between 3rd grade and upper elementary grades. Why in the Larsen School, did some English language learners in 3rd grade achieve proficiency or above, while in the 4th and 5th grades none were able to do so? How many English language learners were absent for these exams? How many of the Hispanic students are English language learners, or are there no overlapping students between these categories? As they are acquiring English, do students receive heritage language support, and if so, what kind and for how long? Following the usual practice of the US Department of Education, what happens to students after three years in the public school system? Are they placed in the mainstream? Do they receive heritage language support? What issues affect the schools in St. Croix regarding achieving AYP? How are English language learners and their needs involved in setting and achieving the AYP? These

are some questions which came to light during the preliminary investigation that will be analyzed in the larger study.

12 Consolidated Schools, Parent Issues, Logistics and Practicality

In their interviews, some parents and school personnel expressed concern regarding the Consolidated Target School program design. From the point of view of logistics and efficiency, some felt it was more effective to concentrate the English language learners in one school. First, full sized classes could be created, instead of having small numbers of children on the same grade level spread throughout different schools. Second, books, materials and supplies could be shared and delivery costs and logistics would be minimized. Third, staffing assignments could be more effective. Instead of having a certified bilingual teacher in every school who has one or two bilingual classes, and teaches the remainder of their classes to mainstream students, there would be enough students to create a full bilingual program for each certified bilingual teachers. Thus, fewer certified bilingual teachers would be needed. This particular issue, staffing, will be discussed below.

However, despite these observations regarding efficiency, other parents and school personnel were concerned that if consolidated schools became predominantly Spanish bilingual programs, Spanish speaking children would need to be bused to schools far from their homes, a move which runs contrary to the ideal of neighborhood schools. If Crucian parents from the neighborhood declined to send their children to these consolidated schools, because they saw them as bilingual schools, and not as mainstream schools, the Crucian children would have to be bused to other schools, raising the question of voluntary choice in schooling, again in conflict with the idea of neighborhood schools – at a financial cost and perhaps a political one as well. In addition, a single bilingual facility would probably be underutilized since presently, there are not enough bilingual students to fill a school to capacity. This, again, would raise issues regarding the efficient use of resources and facilities. If schools became predominantly bilingual, how would class size be affected? Would vertical or multi-grade grouping become necessary? And, how would staff be required to transfer into or out of a bilingual school? This would affect seniority rankings among teachers, again with political consequences.

13 Attitudes toward Spanish – Language and Identity Politics

Many of the parents and community people who were interviewed had specific attitudes toward the English language learners and bilingual education. Some seemed

to consider bilingual education inferior, since they did not want their children to attend a bilingual school, even if their child was in a mainstream class. Two of the people interviewed during this field visit were teachers. One teacher expressed the view that the academic level of Dominican children was low, and that a bilingual school would not be viewed as a “good” school. For that reason parents might not want their children in the same building or environment. The other teacher, who happens to be a teacher of Spanish, felt that not only was the general academic level of Dominican students “low” but that the children also spoke Spanish poorly. When asked to elaborate, this teacher characterized Dominican Spanish in the following way: the ‘s’ sounds are dropped, especially at the ends of words; the ‘r’ sounds were pronounced like ‘l’s, (*teachel*, instead of *teacher*) and the endings in general were dropped. Interestingly, what was being described were typical patterns of Caribbean Spanish Speech. Puerto Rican Spanish has these same characteristics. Virtually all Puerto Ricans, in Puerto Rico and St. Croix, including professors at the university, doctors and lawyers, politicians and media celebrities speak with these characteristic Caribbean features. It would not be surprising, in fact, it is likely, that most Dominicans speak Caribbean Spanish, whether in St. Croix or in the Dominican Republic. Yet to this teacher of Spanish, Caribbean speech patterns were a sign of lower quality Spanish. It should be noted as well that Crucian has many of these Caribbean characteristics, quite naturally, as it is a language of the Caribbean.

These attitudes toward linguistic features touch upon issues of linguistic identity, language status and power. If the heritage language spoken by students and their families is viewed as being less desirable than an idealized Spanish, then would children be stigmatized for speaking their home and heritage language? What pressures would be exerted on the students to change? How would these pressures affect their sense of identity as Dominicans, or as “Santos” (the affectionate term used in St. Croix to refer to for people from the Dominican Republic) or most importantly, their identity as teen-agers, going through the crucial developmental stage of finding themselves?

14 Attitudes toward Crucian and English

Similarly negative attitudes are also expressed by teachers and others toward the use of Crucian. A Crucian man, who was also a teacher, decried the poor performance of his students on the mandated standardized tests, and attributed this poor performance to his students’ predilection for speaking Crucian. Despite his own self-identified enjoyment of using Crucian, and his positive identity as a Crucian, he worried that his students would not be able to make the transfer from Crucian to Standard English as he could, when needed to do so. He thought that the speaking of Crucian would

become an impediment to their future success. As for himself, he did not feel that his own ability to move comfortably between the two languages was a problem, nor did he see it as a model for what his students could also achieve. Why? Was his concern regarding the speaking of Crucian, really the reflection of a perhaps unconscious and possibly unexamined attitude about something else pertaining to Crucian and English? A telephone interview conducted with an individual from a government office/community organization (who was speaking as private person, rather than as a representative of the organization or office) also was revealing regarding attitudes toward language and identity. The individual was using a type of English without a Crucian accent. When discussing the Dominican population on St. Croix, which this individual characterized as “industrious” the person made a contrasting comment about Crucians, who, according to this individual, were not industrious, and not willing to work hard. The individual went on to comment, “they [Crucians] can’t even say a decent sentence in English. They can’t even speak it correctly”. Language has no literal relationship to work or a work ethic. The comment revealed unexamined attitudes associated with language, power and identity. What are precisely some of these unexamined attitudes, and how wide-spread they are, will be another focus of the larger study.

Two adult students at the University of the Virgin Islands in St. Croix also expressed reluctance to speak Crucian outside of their circles of friends. As Dominicans, and speakers of Spanish, they were trilingual. One student said that she did not consider Crucian to be a “real language”. She felt it was not a fully developed language, like Spanish or English, because there were few if any works of literature written in Crucian. Nevertheless, she enjoyed speaking Crucian to her friends because she said it was informal, it made her feel close to her friends, and a part of the group. This was particularly important to this young woman, as she reported that in other instances she said she felt like an “outsider” at the University. The use of Crucian in less formal situations, and a more positive awareness of Crucian as a language are becoming more common. One professor at the University of the Virgin Islands was compiling a Crucian Dictionary with her students. She reported that her mainly Crucian students were excited about the project and eager to participate in it. She said they had lengthy and detailed conversations in her class regarding the specific meanings and nuances of meaning that certain Crucian words, grammatical structures, and phrases conveyed. When Crucian was given the status and respect of a “real” language, as in this Professor’s class, the students enjoyed it and were proud of their knowledge of it.

15 Conclusion

This initial investigation, based on data, field experience and interviews, is intended to set the context for a larger study of Dominicans in St. Croix and St. Thomas, and to help to focus some of the important questions and concerns to be investigated. To summarize, these concerns fall into the following categories:

- a) To clarify details and policies regarding the educational program in St. Croix for teaching English to Dominican students, including identifying whether or not, or to what extent, a goal of instruction is to help the students perfect and deepen their knowledge of their heritage language, Spanish, or to determine if the goals of instruction are only to teach English, and to supplant the mother tongue – as is typical of the US approach to language acquisition.
- b) To elucidate the language program options, the reasons for program decisions and policy changes, and to better understand the implications of policy for students and their families.
- c) To obtain accurate data, analyze and understand student outcomes for the three identified cohorts: All students, Hispanics, and English Language Learners, both in the Consolidated Target Schools and in other St. Croix schools.
- d) To identify issues regarding English language learning and Special Education in St. Croix, especially for Hispanics (Latinos), and to understand the relationship between Special Educational Services, Bilingual Program Options, Language Acquisition, and Language Development. To identify what, if any, disparities exist, and why.
- e) To elucidate the attitudes toward Crucian, Caribbean Spanish, and English which are held by different groups, including: Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Crucians, and speakers of English only. To draw parallels, if any, regarding attitudes toward so-called standard Spanish and so-called Standard English on the one hand, and Caribbean Spanish (for both Puerto Ricans and Dominicans) and Crucian on the other hand. To clarify and better understand the power dynamics among these languages, as observed by members of the different groups, and on the basis of an analysis of these dynamics, to find ways to help to preserve and strengthen the rich linguistic heritages and repertoires of the people of St. Croix.

It is therefore to be hoped that this study will make a contribution toward understanding the Dominican Diaspora in the Virgin Islands, the relationships among the diverse groups of people living there, and the linguistic and cultural wealth of the different communities who live, thrive, create and constantly re-create a pluri-lingual and pluri-cultural society on the beautiful island of St. Croix.

REFERENCES

- Aspira (1976). *Social Factors in Educational Attainment among Puerto Ricans in a US metropolitan area*, 1970. New York: Aspira.
- Barreto, Amilcar A. (2001). *The Politics of language in Puerto Rico*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Christian, Donna (1996). Two-way immersion education: Students learning through two languages. *Modern Language Journal*, 80, 66-76.
- Christian, Donna, Christopher L. Montone, Kathryn J. Lindholm [et al.] (1997). *Profiles in two-way immersion education*. Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- 156 Collier, Virginia P. (1992). A synthesis of studies examining long term language minority student data on academic achievement. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 16, 187-222.
- Collier, Virginia P. & Wayne P. Thomas (1997a). School effectiveness for language minority students. (NCBE Resource Collection Series; 9). Washington: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- Collier, Virginia P. & Wayne P. Thomas (1997b). Two languages are better than one. *Educational Leadership*, 55(4), 23-26, and on the internet at:
[http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=
http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/199712/toc.html](http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/199712/toc.html)
- Collier, Virginia P. & Wayne P. Thomas (2002). A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement. Santa Cruz: Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (CREDE).
http://repositories.cdlib.org/crede/finalrpts/1_1_final or
http://www.crede.ucsc.edu/research/llaa/1.1_final.html
- Collier, Virginia P. & Wayne P. Thomas (2003). The multiple benefits of dual language. *Educational Leadership*, 61(2), 61-64.
[http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=
http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/200310/toc.html](http://www.ascd.org/cms/objectlib/ascdframeset/index.cfm?publication=http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/200310/toc.html)

- Collier, Virginia P., & Wayne P. Thomas (2004). The astounding effectiveness of dual language education for all. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice*, 2(1), 1-20.
<http://njrp.tamu.edu/2004.htm>
<http://njrp.tamu.edu/2004/PDFs/Collier.pdf>
- Cummins, Jim (1992). Empowerment through biliteracy. In Josefina V. Tinajero & Alma F. Ada (Eds.), *The Power of Two Languages: Literacy and Biliteracy for Spanish Speaking Students* (pp. 1-17). New York: Macmillian/McGraw-Hill.
- Cummins, Jim (1999). Alternative Paradigms in Bilingual Education Research: Does Theory Have a Place? *Educational Researcher*, 28 (7), 26-32.
- DeJesús, Susana C. (1995). *The Attitudes and Opinions of Latino Parents Regarding Language Learning in English and Spanish*. Doctoral Dissertation, Columbia University New York.
- DeJesús, Susana C. (2008). An Astounding Treasure: Dual Language Education in a Public School Setting. *El Centro Journal, Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies*, 20 (2), 193-217.
- Dietz, James L. (1986). *Economic history of Puerto Rico: Institutional change and capitalist development*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dillon, Sam (2007). Scores Show Mixed Results for Bush's Education Law. *New York Times*, September 25, 2007, and at www.NYTimes.com
- Genesee, Fred H. (1987). *Learning through two languages: Studies of immersion in bilingual education*. Cambridge: Newbury House.
- Genesee, Fred H. (1999). *Program Alternatives for Linguistically Diverse Students*. Santa Cruz and Washington: Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence.
- Goodman, Kenneth, Yetta Goodman & Barbara Flores (1979). *Reading in the bilingual classroom: Literacy and biliteracy*. Rosslyn: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- Hakuta, Kenji & Rafael M. Díaz (1985). The relationship between bilingualism and cognitive ability. A critical discussion and some new longitudinal data. In Keith E. Nelson (Ed.), *Children's language* (Vol.5, pp. 319-344). Hillsdale: Erlbaum.
- Howard, Elisabeth R. & Julie Sugarman (2007). *Realizing the Vision of Two-Way Immersion: Fostering Effective Programs and Classrooms*. Washington and McHenry: The Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems.
- Howard, Elisabeth R, Julie Sugarman, Donna Christian [et al.] (2005). *Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education*. Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Krashen, Stephen (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Krashen, Stephen (1985). *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and implications*. New York: Longman.

- Krashen, Stephen D., Lucy Tse & Jeff McQuillan (Eds.) (1998). *Heritage Language Development*. California: Language Education Associates.
- Krashen, Stephen D. website. "Misinformation in Chicago", October 7, 2007; "Rewards and Reading", October 8, 2007; "More Misunderstanding About Bilingual Education", October 2, 2007; "Contrast in Letters", October 10, 2007. <http://sdrashen.com>
- Lindholm, Kathryn J. (1990). Bilingual immersion education: Criteria for program development. In Amador M. Padilla, Halford H. Fairchild & Concepción M. Valadez (Eds.), *Bilingual education: issues and strategies* (pp 91-105). Newbury Park: Sage.
- Lindholm, Kathryn J. (1991). Theoretical assumptions and empirical evidence for academic achievement in two languages. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Science*, 13, 3-7.
- Lindholm, Kathryn J. & Zierlein Aclan (1991). Bilingual Proficiency as a Bridge to Academic Achievement: Results from Bilingual/Immersion Programs. *Journal of Education*, 173, 71-80.
- Lindholm-Leary, Kathryn J. (2005). *Review of Research and Best Practices on Effective Features of Dual Language Educational Programs*. (Draft Report). Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics. www.cal.org
- NAEP (2007). National Assessment of Educational Progress, Results, Puerto Rico, 2007, Mathematics, Commissioner's Report, Executive Summary. http://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/commissioner/remarks2007/3_29_2007.asp
- Negrón de Montilla, Aida (1971). *Americanization in Puerto Rico and the public-school system 1900-1930*. Río Piedras: Editorial Edil.
- Pérez, Bertha (2004). *Becoming biliterate: A study of two-way bilingual immersion education*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Pérez, Bertha & Maria E. Torres-Guzman (1996²). *Learning in two worlds: An integrated Spanish/English biliteracy approach*. (First published in 1992). White Plains: Longman.
- Portes, Alejandro & Rubén G. Rumbaut (2001). *Legacies: The story of the immigrant second generation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ramírez, J.D., S.D. Yuen & D.R. Ramey (1991). *Executive summary, Final report: Longitudinal study of structured English immersion strategy, early-exit and late-exit transitional bilingual education programs for language minority children*. (U.S. Department of Education Contract No. 300-87-0156). San Mateo: Aguire International.
- Rivera-Batiz, Francisco L. & Helen F. Ladd (2006a). Education and Economic Development. In Susan M. Collins, Barry P. Bosworth & Miguel A. Soto-Class (Eds.), *The Economy of Puerto Rico: Restoring Growth* (pp. 189-254). Washington: The Brookings Institution. www.brookings.edu

- Rivera-Batiz, Francisco L. & Helen F. Ladd (2006b). Education and Economic Development. In Susan M. Collins, Barry P. Bosworth, Miguel A. Soto-Class (Eds.), *Restoring Growth in Puerto Rico: Overview and Policy Options* (pp. 43-53). Washington: The Brookings Institution. www.brookings.edu
- Robledo Montecel, Maria & Josie Danini Cortez (2002). Successful Bilingual Education Programs: Development and the Dissemination of Criteria to Identify Promising and Exemplary Practices in Bilingual Education at the National Level. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 26 (1), 1-21.
- Soltero, Sonia W. (2004). *Dual language: Teaching and learning in two languages*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Torres-Guzmán, Maria E. (2002). Dual Language Programs: Key Features and Results. *Directions in Language and Education*, 14, 1-16. Washington: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE).
- Torres-Guzmán, Maria E. & Felix Etxeberria (2005). Modelo B/dual language programs in the Basque Country and the USA. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 8(6), 506-528.
- Torres-Guzmán, Maria E., Tatyana Kleyn, S. Morales-Rodriguez [et al.] (2005). Self-Designated Dual-Language Programs: Is There a Gap between Labeling and Implementation? *Bilingual Research Journal*, 29(2), 453-474.
- Valdés, Guadalupe (1997). Dual Language Immersion Programs: A cautionary note concerning the education of language minority students. *Harvard Education Review*, 67 (3), 391-429.
- Walsh, C. E. (1991). *Pedagogy and the Struggle for Voice: Issues of Language, Power and Schooling for Puerto Ricans*. New York: Bergin & Garvey.
- Wong Fillmore, L. (1991). Second language learning in children: A model of language learning in social context. In Ellen Bialystok (Ed.), *Language processing in bilingual children* (pp 49-69). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.