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MIGRANT FAMILIES AND LANGUAGE:
"...The person who speaks two languages has double the value"

A report from the Documenting Migrants' Intergenerational Experiences with English Language Learning towards Improving Access, Multilingualism and Community Advocacy Project



The Research Team

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The research team includes 12 community- and university- based researchers. We are migrant adults and parents, children of migrants (both documented and deferred action recipients), international students and U.S.-born individuals. As co-researchers we recognize that our social statuses and positions change the way we engage and understand the world and our research. By bringing our different skills and lived experiences together we sought to contribute to a better understanding of the strengths and challenges of a small group of Latin@ migrant families and communities vis-à-vis language acquisition and sustenance.

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Letter from the Director, CHRIJ-MHRP

“Documenting Migrants’ Intergenerational Experiences with English Language Learning towards Improving Access, Multilingualism and Community Advocacy” is a participatory action research (PAR) project that sought to understand and respond to Latin@ migrants’ experience with English. Specifically the project sought to better understand their experiences (1) with and in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs and (2) in accessing community institutions (healthcare, education, etc.) in the Greater Metro Boston area. The project also studied the dynamics and challenges within migrant families in which children spoke English while their parents did not. The project was a collaborative effort between Boston College and two community organizations working with migrants.

Casa El Salvador (CES) and Women Encouraging Empowerment, Inc. (WEE) designed this PAR project in collaboration with the Migration and Human Rights Project (MHRP) at Boston College’s Center for Human Rights & International Justice. The community organizations identified their concerns and co-researchers from participating organizations have been involved in every step of the research process. We chose a participatory action research design to facilitate the engagement of all in this action-research journey. PAR seeks to generate knowledge “from the bottom up” and recognizes the different skills and resources that university-educated students and faculty can bring to community-based processes, towards facilitating the documentation and interpretation of their local knowledge. As importantly, through shared participatory teaching and learning processes the co-researchers can develop potentially transformative actions for change.

This PAR project sought to:

- 1) Understand the language barriers Latin@ migrants face in accessing community services,
- 2) Understand the implications of within-family-language-differences for family members’ wellbeing and integration into the community,
- 3) Understand the experiences of Latin@ migrants in accessing ESOL courses in order to adapt current offerings to better meet the needs and demands of this population, and
- 4) Take actions that inform policy, services, and resources for migrant communities.

This report begins with setting the context in which participating families live and work, that is, by reporting national and state-wide data about migrant families, English language proficiency, and access to resources and adult English instruction. We then introduce the two communities of which our community co-researchers are members – East Boston and Revere. This is followed by an overview of how we did our research, that is, our research methodology. Lastly, we divided the findings, that is, what we learned from the interviews, into three sections: Migrant Families, Access to Services and Resources, and ESOL Classes. In order to make the information more accessible, we created a Glossary of Terms used in the report. You can find more information on the research project here: www.bc.edu/humanrights/resources

We thank all participating migrants and their children who shared their experiences and concerns as they improve their English language skills and maintain the languages of their families of origin. We hope you will join us in improving the community wellbeing and access to needed services and resources discussed in this report.



M. Brinton Lykes

Director of the Migration & Human Rights Project

Center for Human Rights & International Justice at Boston College

Executive Summary

“MIGRANT FAMILIES AND LANGUAGE: ‘...*The person who speaks two languages has double the value*’ ” reports on the participatory action research process through which Casa El Salvador (CES), Women Encouraging Empowerment, Inc. (WEE), and Boston College Center for Human Rights and International Justice (BC CHRIJ), investigated migrant families’ experiences with English language learning in East Boston and Revere. This research project explores the extent to which families are able to access community services including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes along with the challenges encountered and strengths exhibited when family members do not speak the same language(s) fluently.

Previous research suggests that English proficiency is related to better economic opportunities and to health and educational outcomes for migrant families. However, recent fiscal policies implemented after the start of the 2007-2008 economic recession have constrained funding for ESOL services and other migrant-focused services. The effect of both federal and state policies has been a challenge for many migrant communities, including those in the Greater Boston area, where organizations such as WEE and CES had to rely on volunteers to accommodate the many people signing up for services.

Seeking to take action as part of the research process, CES, WEE, and BC CHIRJ worked together and co-created a research plan to learn more about migrant families that included Spanish-speaking adults who have taken ESOL, dropped out, and never-attended ESOL classes - as well as their adolescent children between the ages of 11 and 17. Participants were interviewed and findings iteratively analyzed by co-researchers.

Families reported that helping each other with language is a daily experience. Children interpret and translate for their limited English speaking parents and the latter help children learn or maintain Spanish. Adults and youth expressed both positive and negative feelings related to these family roles. Families valued English abilities along with Spanish abilities. Both adults and youth reported wanting to foster children’s Spanish skills mainly to facilitate communication with Spanish speaking family and friends, and to position children better when searching for future employment. Many families reported that they required Spanish be spoken at home to address this goal, and many families openly stated how much they valued bilingualism.

Most adult migrants who participated in the PAR process talked about problems and successes with accessing services. Children were more likely to report having no problem with accessing services, primarily due to their better English language ability. When families talked about having problems, the vast majority of problems (77%) are healthcare or school-related. Bilingual staff were reported to help families access multiple services, though this was described as limited by the availability of that staff. All adults reported wanting to learn English regardless of whether or not they had attended ESOL classes. For those who had taken classes, about half had attended classes at multiple institutions. Many adults reported wanting more conversation classes and more practice talking about personally relevant issues. Adults reported generally positive experiences in ESOL courses even though work and childcare made attendance challenging or impossible. Parents in classes reported English to be most helpful at the workplace or in parenting.

The report concludes with a list of recommendations for policy makers, ESOL providers, community institutions, such as health care providers and schools, and all community members. The recommendations support increasing funding for ESOL instruction to address the limited English speaking population, as well as addressing the key needs of childcare and workforce barriers for migrant adults. Secondly, it provides strategies for communities to detect barriers in access for migrant families, as well as provides concrete suggestions for timely translation and welcoming programs that can better enable families to access schools and healthcare. Lastly, the report recommends that institutions and community members alike place increasing value on biculturalism and bilingualism.

State of the Field: Migrant Families & Communities

In her recent report, “Investing in English Skills: The Limited English Proficient Workforce in U.S. Metropolitan Areas”, Wilson (2014) found that nearly one in ten working age adults is Limited English Proficient (LEP).¹ There are about 19 million individuals between 16 and 64 years old who are LEP, a great majority of whom are migrants. Previous research has found that English proficiency is considered a doorway to better economic opportunities, improved access to health care, and better educational outcomes for migrants and their families. However, insufficient funding, lack of infrastructure, and professional experience working with migrants have resulted in inadequate English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) class offerings.¹ Children of migrants are exposed to more English through schools and typically learn English faster than adults.¹ Thus, many families rely on their children for translation and interpretation, with both positive and negative impacts on children and families.

Limited language ability has been associated with lower wage earnings for migrants.^{2,3} Indeed, working-age LEP adults earn 25 - 40% less than English proficient adults.¹ English language ability has also been related to health access, with better English skills related to better access to quality health care.^{4,5,6} Parents’ English language ability has also been associated with poorer educational outcomes for their children.¹ Many migrant parents do not understand the U.S. school system and are intimidated to be involved in their children’s school.⁷ In contrast, higher English proficiency in migrant parents is associated with greater academic and economic success of their children.¹

Spanish-speaking adult migrants place a high value on knowing English and state the importance of English.⁸ However, results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy, found that of 10 million LEP migrants, 60% report they have never taken any ESOL classes.³ Several reasons have been identified: neither federal nor state funding for adult basic education, including English language classes, meet the demand,⁹ and English language classes receive less funding than other educational areas.¹⁰ Other barriers LEP migrants experience include: cost of the classes, inconvenient time and location, and responsibilities for the care of their families.^{1,7,11, 12}

Children in migrant families serve as interpreters for LEP family members in everyday English speaking interactions or when institutions fail to provide interpreters.^{13,14,15} “Immigrant families frame migration as a family project in which everyone shares responsibilities. The bargain is that parents sacrifice to provide better opportunities for their children and children are expected to study hard and help around the house.”¹⁵ Translation and interpretation are common familial responsibilities for children of migrants.^{16,17} Children translate and interpret in multiple settings, including normal every day occurrences and more specialized ones, such as in medical, legal, or public safety settings, which children describe as more difficult.^{14,18}

Even though excessive family demands for interpretation can distract children and affect their school performance or limit their time from engaging in other activities, children can grasp benefits from living in a migrant family. Children who are responsible at home have been found to develop a sense of responsibility and organizational skills that can help them at school.^{15,19} Moreover, children in migrant families have the opportunity to learn two languages and access two cultures.⁷ The literature defines “bicultural youth” as bilingual youth capable of moving in two worlds, switching language and identities according to the context.⁷ These youth suffer less stress and anxiety because they have skills handling stressors and accessing resources from both cultural systems; bicultural families report healthier outcomes than those families that have assimilated into the host culture, showing less conflict and better communication.^{7,17}

Where We Did Our Study

We did our study in East Boston and Revere, which are part of Suffolk County and the Greater Boston Area. Suffolk County has over twice the national average of migrants in the United States.²⁰ Census data confirms that the concentration of migrants of color with lower-incomes has increased significantly from 2000 and 2010 for both communities and that this trend continues to the present.^{20,21} Barriers to resources and infrastructure gaps contribute to tensions among different groups.

East Boston

The neighborhood of Boston, East Boston (or Eastie), has 43,575 residents.²² It has been described as a community of migrants since the early 1900s. As of 2013, Eastie is 57.2% Latin@, including U.S.-born children.²²



Migrants - who were born outside the U.S. - make up 50.5% of the population in East Boston.²² Approximately 77.9% of those migrants identify as Latin@.²²



Over 18,000 people are LEP.²² Approximately 54.1% of households speak Spanish at home.²²

Revere

Revere is a city of 52,534 residents.²² Approximately 62.5% of Revere residents are White, 25.3% are Latin@ (up from 9.4% in 2000) and 13.9% identify as being in another racial/ethnic group.^{22, 23}



Migrants - who were born outside the U.S. - make up 31.2% of the population in Revere,²² approximately 56.7% of whom identify as Latin@.²²



Over 11,000 people are LEP.²² Approximately 23.7% of households speak Spanish at home.²² 48% of Revere High School students speak a first language other than English.²⁴

What We Did & How We Did It

As a participatory action research (PAR) process, this project recognized the knowledge of participating communities and created a research design with community participants involved in all stages of the process. It aimed to develop new understandings of questions identified by the community, to build capacities among all co-researchers, and to take collective action to support community wellbeing.

Twenty-one migrant families were interviewed (11 in East Boston and 10 in Revere) in order to explore the linguistic experiences of migrant parents and children related to family dynamics and to their access to social services. Specifically, we spoke with 21 adults who were parents or guardians (see Table 1) and to 20 youth (see Table 2) of the same families (41 interviews total). We used open-ended questions and pictures to elicit their stories and insights. After transcribing the audiotaped interviews, we identified common themes within and across interviews and then quantified the number of times each theme was mentioned (see [Content coding](#)). The process of detecting themes was done both inductively by looking at a sub-sample of the data, and deductively by studying related literature. Themes were summarized in a [codebook](#). The codebook was finalized by repeated coding of a sub-group of the interviews and conversations about how to interpret the findings consistently. The remaining interviews were then coded by trained coders. Community co-researchers helped in the interpretation of results, nourishing the analyses with their own experiences. Dissemination of the findings and actions were discussed among all co-researchers.

Table 1: Adult Interviewees (n=21)*

Age	Ranged from 28 to 58 years, with a median age of 45 years
Gender	19 female, 2 male
Country of Origin	El Salvador (10), Colombia (7), Guatemala (2), México (1) Peru (1)
Time in the U.S.	Ranged from 8 months to 27 years, with 14 living continuously in the U.S. for more than 10 years.
Years of Education	1 to 5 years (5); 6 to 12 (9); 13 to 16 (5); Over 16 (2)
ESOL class status	Currently in ESOL classes (12), dropped out of ESOL classes (5), and never attended classes (4).
Level of English	15 of 21 adults reported that they know little to no English.

Table 2: Youth Interviewees (n=20)*

Age	Spanned entire target ages of 11-17 years
Gender	9 female, 11 male
Country of Origin	United States (13), Colombia (4), El Salvador (2), Unknown (1)
Level of English	Out of 20 children, 1 reported speaking little or no English, 7 some, and 12 reported being fluent.

*One child whose parent had consented to his involvement in the project did not assent to participate and thus is not included in the sample.

What We Learned

Migrant Families

Our research project found that within Latin@ migrant families, family members speak and understand different levels of Spanish and English. Even though this varies by family, children reported feeling more comfortable with and speaking better English than their parents, while parents reported feeling more comfortable with and speaking better Spanish than their children (as shown in Figures 1, 2, and 3).

Figure 1: Self-Report of English Ability for Adults and Children

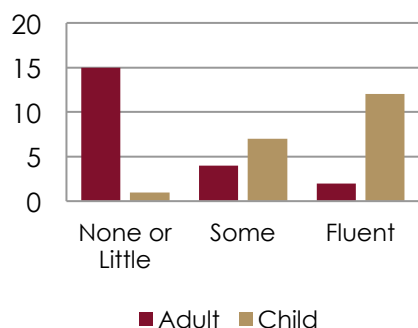


Figure 2: Self-Report of Most Comfortable Language for Children

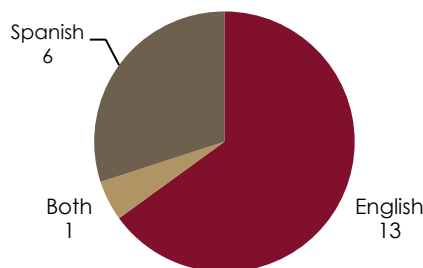
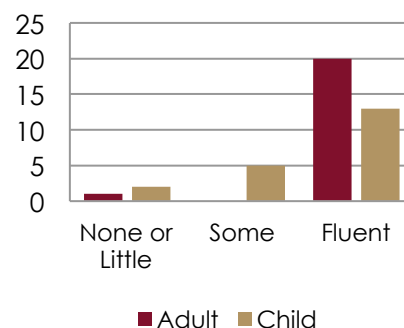


Figure 3: Self-Report of Spanish Ability for Adults and Children



Ten of the twenty-one families reported communication challenges within the family. This relates most to children not knowing enough Spanish to communicate easily with parents or with parents not knowing English well enough to understand or give advice to their children. A parent expressed: "Many times I talk to my child and he does not understand me or he talks to me and I don't understand him". Parents feel left out of sibling interactions, or children's interaction with peers, when these interactions occur in English. A parent said: "Sometimes they argue in English so that I cannot understand". Children feel that communication with parents will improve if parents learned more English or if they

learned more Spanish. *"I feel like I'd be more close with them, you know? I'd be closer to them cause I'd be able to express myself better, carry out longer conversations"*. Another child expresses: *"If my mom can speak English, it would be easier to tell about what is going on at school. Now I would just say 'fine'"*.

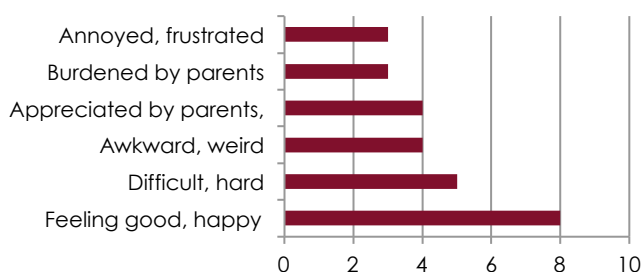
Despite communication challenges within the family, one of the main findings of our research is that family members reported the value and benefits of the bilingual capabilities within their families. Families reported helping each other out with language: children helped parents in situations in which English was needed and parents helped their children learn and maintain Spanish. Parents and children described maintaining Spanish as critical for them, because it represents family identity and it facilitates family communication, and also because having two languages was considered an important tool for the children's futures.

Children Helping Family Members with English

All children reported helping their parents with English in some way and all but two adults reported receiving help from their children. Children helped parents in different ways: translating for them, proactively teaching them English, helping them with pronunciation and ESOL homework, and assisting parents in different situations, including ordering at restaurants, writing parent's text messages, helping at work, and/or helping younger children with homework.

Children reported different feelings associated with this role (see Figure 4). Many ($n=12$) expressed positive feelings such as feeling good, happy, important, and appreciated by parents. However, others expressed negative feelings ($n=15$), such as feeling awkward, feeling that it is difficult to translate, feeling annoyed, and feeling burdened by their parents' dependency on them. Three children expressed mixed feelings, such as feeling good for helping parents but annoyed for being interrupted in what they were doing or for finding the task difficult. Parents expressed feeling bad or frustrated, dependent on children, ashamed or guilty for relying on their kids for help (see Figure 5). Many parents reported understanding how difficult it is for their children to translate because of language difficulties and the child's developmental stage, thus justifying the latter's resistance to translate. Some parents transformed their negative feelings into a motivation to learn more English. A handful of parents admired their kids' capability to learn languages and openly expressed their pride in them. Parents also reported feeling that it was easier for kids to learn languages than it was for them.

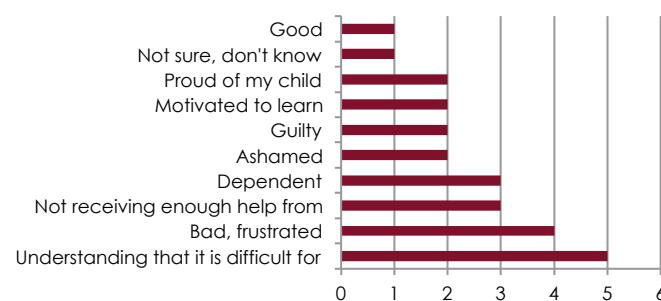
Figure 4: Feelings Expressed by Children



"I actually feel pretty happy about it, it makes me feel kind of important".

"It is hard for me because it is weird and I sometimes don't know the words".

Figure 5: Feelings Expressed by Parents



"They don't help enough, but I understand the age in which they are [...] It is me who has to solve the problem [of not knowing English]".

Several parents described their awareness of problems that may arise when relying on kids for help with English. Six parents reported that their children expressed some sort of resistance that they justified due to being tired or not having time when parents requested help. Parents also reported that children sometimes translated very superficially or incompletely. Four parents acknowledged that translation was difficult for children, which parallels the latter's feelings of hardship while translating for parents. Two parents stated that some situations are not appropriate for

children to translate, such as parent-teacher conferences when discussing sensitive issues surrounding a son or daughter. They noted that the content could change how the child translates or make the child feel sad.

Maintaining Spanish and Bilingualism

Maintaining Spanish was very important for the families in our study; children showed interest in Spanish and parents made efforts to teach or make sure their children do not lose this language. Indeed, all twenty children expressed wanting to learn or maintain Spanish and all twenty-one adults reported actively contributing in ways to help their children maintain Spanish.

Families expressed a variety of reasons for wanting to maintain Spanish. They noted that Spanish can facilitate communication among Spanish speaking family members and friends, including those living in the parents' countries of origin. They also described language as representing family roots, identity, and tradition. Spanish was also described as important for the future of the children, as families noted that having two languages –English and Spanish– would better position their children's search for future employment.

Parents noted a desire that their children learn both English and Spanish. Seven children and six adults openly expressed that they valued and fostered bilingualism. A parent stated: *"I believe that the person that speaks two languages has double the value"*. Another parent expressed: *"Two languages, can you imagine"*? Two of these parents also said they would encourage their children to learn a third language. One child expressed feeling "smart" because he could speak two languages and another said that she was able to "amaze" others with this ability.

While parents want their children to learn English at school, they tend to practice, teach, and even enforce the use of Spanish at home. Nine families reported having some sort of norms at home restricting the use of English. A parent said: *"when we are all together, I forbid them to speak English; at home, only Spanish"*. Another parent expressed: *"When we all go to eat out, Mauricio tells me he wants to eat certain thing, I tell him: 'if you don't say it in Spanish, there will be no food'. So he tries and says it in Spanish"*. Our study found that parents experience a deep sense of obligation towards teaching Spanish to their children. Some experience it as a sacrifice: three parents reported that even though they would benefit from speaking English at home, they preferred speaking Spanish so that children will not forget Spanish.

While talking about the importance of Spanish, seven interviewees (four adults and three children) narrated stories about Latin@ children of friends or family learning English and forgetting or never learning Spanish. These stories seemed to play a role in motivating parents to reinforce Spanish-only norms at home and in motivating children to continue using Spanish. It is important to note that even though all children reported wanting to speak or to maintain Spanish, some children evidenced resistance to their parent's attempts to teach them or described feeling more comfortable speaking in English. Indeed, 65% of the children in the sample felt more comfortable with English and seven children reported speaking English with their siblings.

Discussion

Parents and children in these families experienced first-hand how language can allow or restrict access to different spheres and resources, including access to health, work opportunities, school systems, and other networks. Parents were limited by not knowing English well, but children were gifted with the possibility of knowing two languages and accessing two cultures. Families placed value on bilingualism –both English and Spanish– as a doorway to access better possibilities for their children and as a way of facilitating communication within the family. Families in our sample seemed to perceive the benefits of bilingualism and biculturalism described in previous research with bilingual migrants.

The value placed on bilingualism can be framed in the context of a globalized and increasingly connected world. Many of these families are transnational, that is, some members migrate and some others, typically grandparents, remain at home. Thanks to communication technologies, and airplanes, families are able to maintain ties across borders.

However, if children of migrants do not know their family language, transnational family ties will be difficult, if not impossible. Globalization can also explain the difference between this 20th and 21st century group of migrants who strive to keep their home language, and other migrants in the past who lost their home languages. Children of migrants in the past did not have as many possibilities to connect to their countries of origin, while children of migrants today not only can have the incentive of communicating with relatives but can also stay connected to other parts of the world. One child participant expressed this notion of globalization when he explained he wanted to maintain Spanish because he considered it a “practical [and] common language that is used by family and people around the world”.

Community Services & Resources

In both communities, families ($n=16$) talked about access to work opportunities, including the need to speak English well in order to secure better jobs. Though there are a variety of factors influencing access to good jobs, language was the primary factor discussed by 81% of the adult interviewees. About half of adult and youth interviewees specifically stated that English leads to better jobs.

When looking at maps produced using Census data, we discovered that even though East Boston and Revere had much in common, there were important differences between the two communities. Compared to Revere, East Boston’s ESOL classes and health services are offered in areas with a higher concentration of lower-income migrants of color that speak English less than “very well”.

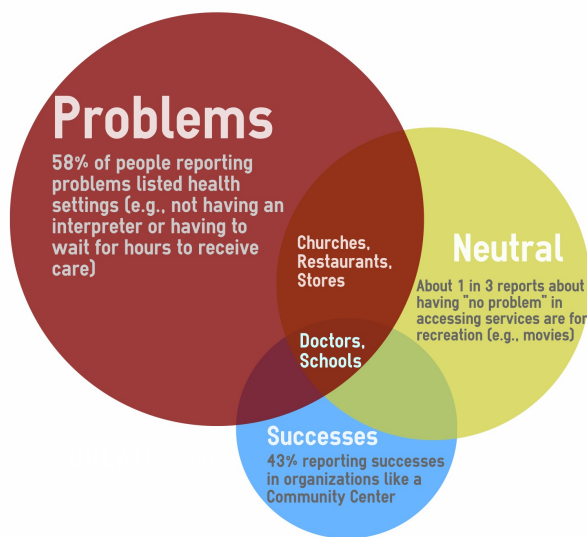
When telling stories about problems to accessing services, seventy-five percent of all interviewees ($n=31$) discussed problems with accessing services, with adults and youth reporting similar rates. Out of these families, 77% of interviewees share stories about healthcare or children’s school services. Figure 6 shows examples of the experiences families report. For example, in health settings, many families state that there are interpreters available, but the wait time is far too long. This is significant because healthcare is one place where adults seemed to rely more on English-speaking family members, such as children, partners, and friends. About 1 in 10 families shared stories about urgent situations that required an interpreter who arrived after anywhere from 2 - 11 hours of waiting. Some adults described making decisions to forgo treatment for themselves because of language barriers.

Families discuss the difficulty of children acting as interpreters in their schools. Schools were described as providing some level of translation for meetings, but as one child noted, “...sometimes when there is no official reunión [meeting] or something like that, they don’t [have translators]. I have to translate, but when it’s like a meeting of parents, then the school has translators”.

Interviewees often reported that employees in restaurants and teachers at children’s schools could speak Spanish to a useful degree of fluency. In some cases, people reported that they go to places where English is not needed: “We only go to restaurants where they speak Spanish, so we don’t go to English restaurants. We go to restaurants around the corner, the...what’s it called, the Montecristo. We don’t go where English is spoken”.

Figure 6: Accessing Community Services and Resources

What are the problems, successes, and where is there no problem? ↓



When asked to tell stories about accessing services, adults and youth report similar rates of problems and success. Yet, when explicitly asked if accessing was a problem, youth were twice as likely to report that it was not. This may be because youth are typically interpreting for adults.

Circle sizes represent scale of reported experiences with accessing services: problems (red), successes (blue), and neutral (yellow). Text in circles illustrate one key finding for that experience. Intersections show locations where stories about access overlap (e.g., there are problems, successes, and neutral experiences for health settings and children’s school settings).

Discussion

Both communities demonstrated considerable resilience in identifying spaces where language did not prevent access to important services. Some of this success was achieved through leveraging youth's bilingual abilities, though some adults also actively choose environments where language was not a problem (e.g., Spanish-speaking restaurants). Though many families share stories where members do not speak English, several families reported having no problems accessing community services or resources in their daily lives. Nevertheless, interviewees identified key locations where access can be a problem for families, primarily schools and health settings.

Revere's population of lower-income migrants of color is comparatively newer than that of East Boston. Revere families are also geographically more distant from community services than those in East Boston. Changing demographics in Revere suggest that Revere families may be uniquely negatively affected by current state investments. Census data confirms the experiences of families we interviewed, that is, many participating families in Revere discussed needing to drive to access services such as hospitals and ESOL classes. Some of this may be related to the proximity between where interviewees live and where community services are located. This possibility seems particularly likely given the East Boston Health Center has multiple locations in East Boston, including a location that never closes, whereas Revere has only one hospital and one family clinic, both with limited hours on nights, Friday afternoons, and weekends. An alternative reason for families needing to drive may also reflect the different resources accessible to participating families. In terms of financial resources, Revere interviewees tended to work longer paid hours (71% worked at least 30 hours/week) compared to East Boston families (half do not work for pay). This may suggest Revere interviewees have both more financial resources and more scheduling constraints. Compared to Revere, East Boston interviewees tend to have lived longer in the United States (58% Revere adults lived in U.S. for 10+ years vs. 89% of East Boston adults), suggesting the latter may have access to more human resources, such as people who can help navigate community institutions.

East Boston, in general, has more migrants of color with lower-income and limited English than Revere. This suggests, in terms of adults' own English, East Boston adults may be more linguistically isolated than Revere adults. Addressing this need may be reflected in the higher concentration of ESOL classes in regions where lower-income migrants live, as noted earlier in the case of East Boston. Although providing classes where people most in need of English classes is important, interviewees mention that when accessing classes, few offer conversational and practical skills necessary to effectively engage with health and children's academic development, as discussed in the next section.

Box 1: Massachusetts Policy Situation

Environmental Justice (EJ) Policy from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) lists lower income, people of color, and households with LEP adults as key populations, and considers them particularly important for making infrastructure decisions that could improve their neighborhoods' quality. EEA considers the LEP population to be "linguistically isolated". Even though this term is important because it highlights possible struggles adults may have, it does not account for the access families may have through their children's bilingual and/or English language skills or through services available in Spanish. This challenges the implications of EEA's term "linguistically isolated."

ESOL Classes

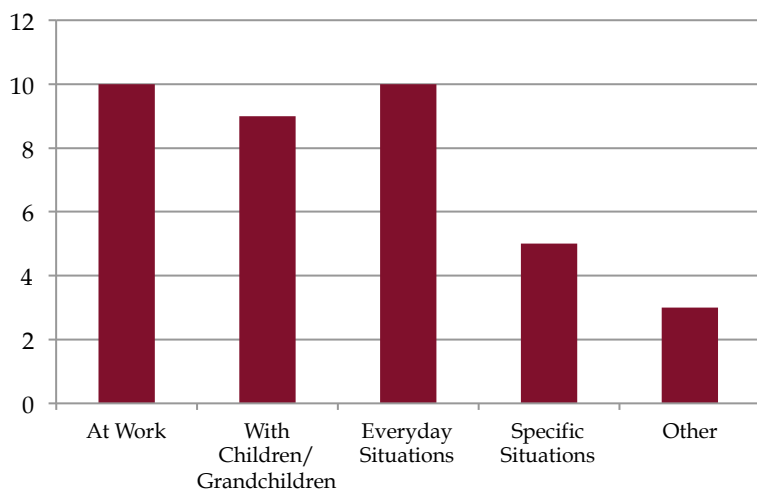
All of the adults interviewed, including the four parents who never attended classes, reported wanting to learn English. Those enrolled in classes, expressed that they would continue classes. All who have dropped out or never attended classes expressed interest in attending an ESOL class.

Adult participants who were in English classes at the time of the interview or had previously dropped out of classes ($n=18$) reported a list of 10 different organizations where they had attended ESOL classes. The majority of these organizations were in East Boston or Revere. Approximately half of the adults reported attending two or more institutions where ESOL classes were offered, with multiple adults reporting going to two organizations for classes at the same time. Multiple adults attending classes in Revere reported also attending a conversation ESOL class located in East Boston. The latter finding may be related to adults living in Revere being farther away from ESOL services. The following section discusses the interviewees' experiences with ESOL classes. Table 3 provides recommendations to improve these classes.

Experiences with ESOL classes

As reported above the majority of adults in ESOL classes reported speaking little English. Most reported that ESOL classes were helpful in teaching them basic skills or English they could use in everyday situations. Eleven adults (52%) reported that the classes helped them at work, such as in better communication with their boss or clients, or being able to advocate for themselves at the workplace. Nine adults (43%) reported that learning English had helped them with their children or grandchildren, including being able to better understand and monitor their children, helping with homework, and increasing communication generally.

Figure 7: ESOL Classes as helpful



“It has really helped me with them [my children] because I understand more of what they say. Now, if they want to lie to me, they cannot because now I understand what they say”.

Five parents (24%) reported that English helps them with accessing specific institutions, confirming the above findings about access. All five of these parents described that classes helped them at the doctor's office, some describing an experience where they no longer needed to ask for an interpreter or to bring their child with them. One of the five parents also mentioned that ESOL classes helped them to communicate with their child's teacher.

While experiencing classes as helpful, many parent interviewees also expressed barriers to attendance. Looking more closely at the nine interviewees who dropped out of English class or who had never attended English classes, there were three primary reasons that adults gave to explain their actions: children, work, and cost. Many of the adults described needing to take care of their children or grandchildren. Secondly, some adults reported that their work schedules did not align with class schedules or that work was too far from classes. Lastly, some described the cost of ESOL classes, or their perception of the cost, as prohibiting their attendance at classes or their inquiring about classes.

Suggestions from parents to improve ESOL classes

We asked parents about their experiences with English classes and asked them in multiple ways about how English classes could be improved. Taking into account barriers that people listed, recommendations they gave, and the stories they told about English classes, suggestions for English classes fall into three major categories: Pedagogical, Content, and Structural. Four parents (19%) also reported that they had no suggestions and three of the four parents expressed that they were satisfied with the classes and had no suggestions to offer. Below are their suggestions:

Table 3: Suggestions from parents to improve ESOL classes

Pedagogical (11 parents)	Content (5 parents)	Structural (9 parents)
<i>Pedagogical refers to the ways in which people teach.</i>	<i>Content refers to the topics covered in class.</i>	<i>Structural refers to the suggestions about the ways classes are set-up, for example the need to pay for classes, the location of classes, etc.</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase the order and structure within the classroom, 2. Create a dynamic and familiar classroom environment where students feel that the teacher makes the class relevant to their experiences as migrants as well as creates a more participative classroom, and 3. Include more conversational practice in order to navigate everyday situations with English speakers from neighbors to teachers. Key informants differed in their perspectives about at what level and to what extent conversational classes should be introduced. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Include content relevant to participants' everyday experiences, such as learning about the educational system to know how to better support one's child, learning how to order in a restaurant or how to speak to one's boss. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Charge minimally for classes. Of those who described cost, they said \$50-60 was too high, 2. Invest in high quality teachers or offer training for teachers to increase their skills, and 3. Provide childcare during classes.

Discussion

These findings revealed two paradoxes within the data regarding adults and ESOL classes. First, the reasons that adults attend English classes— the workplace, economic wellbeing, and their children – are also the barriers many list to attending classes. Parents reported that English classes are helpful in the workplace facilitating better employment as well as enabling them to monitor or build better relationships with their children. Yet, they also reported work schedules or locations of ESOL classes, the cost of some classes, and needing childcare as well as having content relevant to their everyday lives, as barriers to attendance. The things that motivate people most to attend English classes are also the barriers, creating a paradox for ESOL providers in finding ways to offer their services. While providing childcare may appear to solve the barrier of children, the age and number of children, as well as the demands of parenting make the situation more complex for ESOL providers and parents. Moreover, while creative scheduling to accommodate work schedules of parents may address economic and workplace barriers, we found that those who listed workplace as a barrier had unpredictable or demanding schedules that were difficult to schedule around.

The second paradox is that the situations in which most parents expressed needing English were not listed as examples in how ESOL classes have helped most or as suggestions for content to cover in classes. Twenty-three interviewees (56%) expressed concerns with accessing medical settings or children's school, yet only five parents (24%) reported finding classes helpful in teaching them skills that were useful in these settings. This may be due to the large portion of our sample that reported low levels of English, and thus, those in classes have not yet gained the skills necessary to see an improvement in their English to enable interactions in medical or school settings. Yet, when asking for suggestions for classes, including what types of content would be helpful, only two parents specifically mentioned wanting to learn information that would help them with their children's schooling and none mentioned content that would help with medical visits. In fact, most replied "everything" which suggests that the specialized vocabulary for helping their children or going to the doctor's office is secondary to being able to learn basic English skills. Is it that these concerns with access are very salient when asking migrant adults when they feel they need to learn English, but not their primary concern when they are in ESOL classes? These paradoxical findings – that commonly discussed motivations for attending classes are also barriers, as well as, primary situations in which participants feel the need to learn English are not their primary suggestions for content within classes – makes us question how ESOL providers may structure their classes and/or their resources to maximize those whom they are able to serve (that is, the numbers served) while better attending to their needs.

Recommendations

1. ESOL instruction is key for the approximately 19 million LEP adults in order that they might access better economic opportunities and better contribute to their families, communities and the country in which they currently live. Better English abilities can also improve the health and educational outcomes of these families. Considering this, reverse fiscal policies put in place after the start of the economic recession, which restricted funding for ESOL instruction, and increase funding for ESOL programs beyond pre-recession levels.
2. Cities such as East Boston and Revere that have experienced increasing numbers of LEP migrants should accommodate to the specific needs of these populations. These communities should first map where LEP populations live, where services are provided and detect barriers to access.
3. Community institutions, such as health care providers and schools, need to provide multilingual staff and multilingual informational materials. These institutions should be sensitive to children acting as interpreters and seek alternatives when the information they are asked to translate could affect the child's wellbeing. Schools in particular should understand that migrant parents could be intimidated accessing schools because of their limited English abilities and the challenges they encounter in understanding and interfacing with the U.S. educational system. These limitations affect the school's interpretation of parental involvement and children's educational outcomes. Schools should create initiatives to welcome migrant parents, to explain the U.S. school system to them, and to clarify what is expected of parents by U.S. schools. Multilingual staff, as well as notifications and homework instructions in the family language, are critical to facilitate parental involvement.
4. All community members are challenged to understand the value of biculturalism and bilingualism. Bicultural families have been found to be healthier, have lower levels of conflict, and have greater commitment to help and support among family members.² Community institutions serving LEP populations should consider promoting programs to teach Spanish to children of migrants. Bilingualism could facilitate family communication and could position the children better when searching for future jobs.
5. Those offering ESOL classes should adapt them to the needs of the populations served, providing affordable classes and childcare. ESOL services could also be provided in the workplace to facilitate workers' access. ESOL providers should consider family literacy systems that incorporate both parents and children into the educational model and that are pedagogically relevant to the experiences of migrant parents and their children.

Glossary of Terms

Cohen's Kappa: A statistical estimate of agreement typically ranging from 0 (no agreement) to 1 (perfect agreement). Perfect agreement is rare; our team also used conversations and extensive note taking to make sure we "agreed" on the thematic codes through which we interpreted the interview data.

Codebook: A guide created to summarize relevant information needed to reduce the quantity of information or data gathered in interviews towards interpreting it.

Content Coding: A systematic method of analyzing written, verbal, or visual messages to describe and quantify the data.

ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages. Often called, "English classes".

Latin@: Individuals who identify themselves as from Latin America. The @ is used to combine the "o" and the "a" which signify male or female respectively.

Limited English Proficient (LEP): people that speak English "less than very well" i.e. "well", "not well" or "not at all."¹

Lower-income: Households with less than 65% of Massachusetts's median income.

Migrants: People born outside of the United States currently residing –in this project– within the United States.

n= : Number of members (adults, children, families, etc.) being observed.

Participatory and Action Research (PAR): A type of research that creates a partnership between community members and university researchers. Together, they develop a research focus that is aimed to address an issue or problem that comes from the community members' experiences. This research aims to build the capacity of community members, allowing them to be part of the entire research process. It seeks to highlight the knowledge of local communities, address local issues, and provide information that allows community members to take actions to improve their community.²⁷

People of color: People who identify on the U.S. Census as being not White AND not Hispanic.

Note on Translating Quotes: All quotes from interviews are in italics and have been translated from Spanish to English, as necessary, by members of the research team.

Note on Development of the Codebook: Starting with 20% of all interviews, five co-researchers used the codes to analyze the data, and came to consensus on all codes (*Cohen's Kappa* - .7, in acceptable range^{25,26})

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