ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION PROJECT: Teachers’ Current Views and Accommodations about Heritage Language Maintenance

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The percentage of language and cultural minority students is increasing (Okagaki, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This reality emphasizes the need for elementary school general education teachers to become knowledgeable about students’ backgrounds so that they can mold instruction to meet all students’ needs (Bennett, 2007; Spring, 2007; Whitcomb, 2003). There is, however, little research about elementary school general education teachers’ views and accommodations about heritage language maintenance (a.k.a. multicultural and multilingual inclusion) (Goldstein, 2003). The purpose of this study was to examine how teachers view heritage language learning and how teachers accommodate to students who have a heritage language background.

A mixed methods study (n = 30) consisting of thirty surveys and ninety observations from general education teachers who taught in the 2010-2011 school year was used to examine elementary school general education teachers’ beliefs and accommodations about heritage language maintenance (HLM). Overall, the majority of teachers reported positive beliefs about HLM while exercising few accommodations in
the classroom. Only teachers’ subject area of specialization, school corporation, teachers’ indication of HL strategies, and six accommodations were associated significantly with the positive beliefs and negative beliefs about HLM. The results from this study provide support for teachers’ input about accommodations and institutional support. The significant associations between area of specialization, six accommodations, and beliefs about HLM suggest mixed evidence and require further exploration for other intervening variables. Further investigation of findings indicates teachers’ actual practices and multicultural experiences cannot be predicted based on teachers’ expressed beliefs. Design issues like the instruments used, the sample size obtained, and the observation schedule implemented may affect the results. Longitudinal research is needed to explore other contextual factors that could impact the multi-conceptual relationship between beliefs and actual practice for further research.