

# Foreword

Growing up, I remember my Taiwanese immigrant mother telling me that her American graduate school professors counseled her to speak only in English and raise her future children to speak ‘perfectly accent-free’ English, if she wanted to give them (us) better chances of having successful futures. She was told by her professors (much like Laureen Chew and Lucinda Lee were told on the Washington Irving Elementary playground) that speaking Chinese (herself, and to us, her children) would hinder development of English language skills. My mom did speak English to me, and outside of my home I was constantly immersed in English growing up in a predominantly white suburb of Los Angeles. However, at home, Mandarin and Taiwanese Hokkien flowed freely among the adults (until my maternal grandmother passed away when I was 7) leading to my dismay when my mother indicated, as she was registering me for kindergarten, that everyone spoke English at home and that I only spoke English. At the time, Mandarin, Hokkien, and gesturing were the only ways that I could functionally communicate with my grandmother who helped raise me. My mother later told me that when she had enrolled my brother in school, honestly stating that the adults in the house spoke Chinese, he had been taken out of his honors English class to be tested for English proficiency (as was required by the state). She didn’t want me to suffer the same fate. My mother wanted me to learn Mandarin, even asking my estranged father to send basal reader textbooks with Zhuyin phonetic guides from Taiwan when I was in upper elementary school, but she prioritized my success in English as my chance at an easier life than she had with her ever-present access. However, by the time the textbooks arrived from my father, I had so internalized that speaking Chinese would make me stand out as different from my (white) classmates, who seemed so self-assured and popular, that I rejected her attempts to teach me and resisted any suggestion of attending a Chinese heritage language school on the weekends. Given that we were a 30-minute drive from the nearest heritage language school and that my single mother was not the biggest fan of freeway driving, she let it go, and my early childhood Mandarin proficiency all but disappeared after my grandmother passed away.

My mother herself passed away when I was in high school. With her passing, I lost the remaining positive associations I had with being

Taiwanese American. My limited knowledge of Taiwanese culture, Taiwanese Hokkien and Mandarin made me feel like I was ‘incomplete’, missing a part of myself that I had long rejected. Well-intentioned, but painful questions about where I was really from and compliments about how good my English was, reminded me that even though I spoke ‘perfect, accent-free’ (American) English, it did not afford me complete access to the dominant culture promised to my mother by her professors. I did go on to be successful, perhaps ironically, as an English Language Arts teacher and later a literacy teacher educator. Yet today, when I look at photographs my mother took of her years in Taiwan and early years in the United States and I see her handwriting in Chinese, I acutely feel the loss of a bicultural and biliterate identity based in my heritage culture.

I first learned about the *Lau v. Nichols* case when I was in graduate school studying English education in the San Francisco Bay Area. At the time, having never thought of myself as an ‘English Language Learner’, I thought it was interesting and important that such a significant Civil Rights Act was linked to a local Chinese American family, and that content and language support, including supplemental language instruction as student rights were relatively recent concepts. I appreciated the need to learn scaffolding strategies to support non-English dominant multilingual learners that I would teach, from newcomers in early English Language Development courses to ‘long term English Learner’ students in grade level English courses. Since I taught in majority immigrant communities, these supports for English acquisition were helpful teaching tools. I was grateful to the families involved in the Lau case for advocating that ‘language minority’ students (as they were sometimes labeled by the state during the time I was learning to teach) have access to the curriculum. I thought that this access was always conceptualized through English Language Development (or English as a Second Language) courses and strategies to scaffold (English) language acquisition, promoting conceptual understanding alongside the development of comprehension and communication skills in English.

I embraced language scaffolds as a student teacher in a high school newcomer setting and later as a middle school teacher to support multilingual learners in my English Language Arts classes. As a teacher educator, in my preservice teacher education courses, I turned the tables on English-dominant teacher candidates, often teaching an entire lesson on language scaffolding strategies in academic French. Many teacher candidates, who were not multilingual and sometimes came into the class completely unfamiliar with how to support English Learners, reacted with various levels of discomfort and coping strategies, from immediate disengagement, to attempts to use verbal scaffolds and their existing language systems to make meaning, to relying on strategies like gestures, objects and translation apps. This lesson often had a powerful impact on teacher candidates, multilingual and monolingual. Monolingual English speakers

noted that being placed in an experience where they were taught credential program content (i.e. content at a post-baccalaureate level) in a language they had an emergent (at best) understanding of, even for 20-30 minutes, gave them a deep appreciation for the effort of non-English dominant emergent multilingual students who are trying to learn grade level content in English for eight or more hours a day. Multilingual teacher candidates often recounted painful stories of language loss, a continued sense of inadequacy in relation to their academic English, or identified with strategies that could be used to support language development.

I knew personally that language was important to identity. I knew professionally that language was essential to understanding content. Still, I was missing a crucial connection. I did not fully appreciate the power of bilingual/ bicultural education to bridge and affirm cultural, linguistic, literate, and social understandings (even as the parent of children who have deeply benefited from bilingual/bicultural education programs), nor did I fully understand the political and social dynamics related to language equity as a Civil Right and bilingual/bicultural education programs. Intellectually all the pieces were there, but the connection that was missing was a connection to my heart, a connection that comes from seeing oneself in another's story.

Before reading *Lau v. Nichols and Chinese American Language Rights*, I recognized *Lau v. Nichols* as a critically important Supreme Court case that moved public school policy towards providing more equitable opportunities for non-English dominant families and students. For me, Lau was about access to English, the language of power, not about a fight for access to content through language, and as a significant opening for identity affirming and bridge-building bilingual/bicultural education. I did not know the stories behind the case nor the intent of the original consent decree. I did not know about the context of *Lau* within larger place-based and historically situated movements, in SFUSD, in the state and across the nation, movements which spanned decades. Knowing these stories and this context matters, just as my own stories, experiences and contexts matter equally as much as the policy that has shaped the opportunities available to me.

By centering the interwoven stories of key figures related to the *Lau v. Nichols* case through her use of narrative policy portraiture, Dr Morita-Mullaney humanizes and contextualizes language education policy in San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) and beyond, through the people who played critical roles in its realization, actualization and implementation. *Lau v. Nichols* as a decision established a critical legal precedent that would influence SFUSD language policy for multilingual students directly for 45 years (as well as language policy nationally for multilingual learners in important ways to this day). Yet, the story of *Lau* is compelling beyond these policy implications when one is able to see the way *Lau's* implementation and implications are situated within and

adjacent to larger social movements, including immigrant rights, Civil Rights (including racial and linguistic segregation), and school choice. Discriminatory education policy precursors towards Asian Americans in San Francisco predate the *Lau* decision by nearly 100 years and the debate over implementation of *Lau*'s remedies have continued, even five years since the sunset of its mandatory consent decrees. The narratives found within this book, and the choices, policies, documents and lives they are tied to, amplify not only the significance of the *Lau* case, but also its power to connect with larger audiences of parents, educators and teacher educators concerned with equitable educational opportunities, bilingual/bicultural education, curriculum development, bilingual teacher support, and with language policy implementation, interpretation and legacies.

Prior to the *Lau* decision, Dr Morita-Mullaney highlights the stories of students and teachers who were part of the emergent bilingual/bicultural Cantonese pilot program, done in conjunction with mandated integration through busing. As a parent of children who have been in dual language immersion programs, I was fascinated by the stories of bicultural exchange from former students (both Cantonese dominant and English dominant) which can be rare, particularly in 'status' (e.g. Mandarin) Chinese dual language immersion programs today. English dominant students who were bussed into the community spent time exploring a neighborhood that was only a few miles from them but was culturally a new world for them. Cantonese-dominant students from the Chinatown community got to visit places in the Bay Area outside of their community which previously felt exclusive to them. Both groups of children learned about one another, and the community's cultural assets as well as the larger Bay Area's cultural offerings were affirmed alongside one another. The connection between this early bilingual program to which Kinney Kinmon Lau did not have access, and his own education, through his first-grade teacher, Mrs Lucinda Lee Katz was fascinating. If the pilot program had started sooner, and Kinney had access to learn content through Cantonese, one wonders how the story may have shifted, and if another plaintiff would have emerged.

After the *Lau* decision, SFUSD's reports tell one part of the story about Cantonese bilingual/bicultural education's (BBE) existence and its evolution, but also reveal gaps in access to these programs, particularly for emergent bilingual Cantonese-dominant speakers, many of whom received no language support while a large number of their English-dominant peers were bussed into their neighborhood schools (under the protection of school staff) to participate in Cantonese BBE. While who benefits and who has access to BBE remains a theme throughout the book, another important take away from this period is the resilience of those who made Cantonese BBE possible. Dr Morita-Mullaney's interviewees share stories of navigating multiple barriers to make bilingual/bicultural classrooms a reality. From designing specialized curricula for the program

when none was available to recruiting and retaining bilingual teachers (including building a language certification program at SF State), we see the impact policy has on people and the resources implementation demands. As a teacher educator who thinks deeply about both curricular design and the recruitment and retention of teachers, these chapters were so important in emphasizing the importance of local, contextualized knowledge (speaking back to one-size-fits-all boxed curricula which so often leave many students on the margins) and the challenge of equitably preparing and supporting teachers, particularly teachers from linguistically diverse immigrant communities.

Given that *Lau* focuses on the Cantonese speaking community in San Francisco, a traditional language majority community in SF Chinatown, but a minoritized/non-dominant Chinese language community (i.e. among Chinese speakers, for whom Mandarin is the status or dominant language), the book raises issues of ethno-linguistic power dynamics prevalent across many language communities, but often obscured or unknown by those that are not part of such communities. The overlap of the Lau Consent Degrees with racial integration initiatives in SFUSD, from busing to the SFUSD Diversity Index, also show somewhat parallel shifts from court-enforced equity-grounded initiatives based on Civil Rights principles to school choice initiatives which report racial (and linguistic) diversity but do little to affect racial (and linguistic) segregation, equitable access to educational resources, or to challenge existing dominant power structures. Within these paradigms, readers see how bilingual education (through dual language immersion programs) has become, in many cases, an ‘additive advantage’ that allows certain children to have more ‘marketable’ language skills, a far departure from its origins as a Civil Right initiative that allows linguistically marginalized children to have culturally affirming education that supports their access to appropriate curriculum.

Reading about this evolution of BBE brings me back to the heart and the stories of mothers. It makes me wonder what Mrs Lau would have said about the ‘boutiquing’ and gentrification of BBE and whether current forms of dual immersion actually fulfill her intention that her son have access to the curriculum through his primary language. I wonder how many children like Kinney still face exclusion ‘by lottery’ or have access only to limited support as they learn in their local schools. I also think about my mother, how her perspectives about her professors’ advice to her about only speaking English may have shifted (or not) given my own professional trajectory, and what she would have thought about my commitment to raising multilingual children. Her words that one day I would regret not learning Mandarin from her echo often in my mind. Finally, I think about my own mothering and the choices I’ve made and had the privilege to make in terms of bilingual/bicultural education for my own children, one of whom learned Mandarin in dual language immersion

programs and weekend heritage schools for nine years, and the other who is learning Korean (not one of her heritage languages) in a dual language program in our neighborhood school. I think about what it means to try to reclaim my own (significantly if not fully) severed language and cultural connection to my Taiwanese American identity through my multiracial children embracing the fullness of their cultural and linguistic identities. I think about ‘choices’ that I can and cannot make based on my socioeconomic status and access my children have (and have had) to (quality) bilingual/bicultural education programs. I also consider my lingering sense of imposter syndrome, having not had access to culturally and linguistically affirming (or public school-sponsored) BBE as a child. I wonder how my own development might have been different if I had not struggled so much to embrace my own cultural and linguistic identity and had external spaces that fully acknowledged who I am. I wonder how my perspectives of my professional identity and what was possible for me as an educator might have been impacted by having an Asian American teacher in my K-12 public schooling.

It is the reflection, connection and wonderings that this book prompts that make it so special. What is perhaps most striking about *Lau v. Nichols and Chinese American Language Rights* is its reminder that behind every policy, there are people, and that policies, like people, continue to evolve within social contexts that reflect both continuity and change. The power of this text is in the power of visibility as a way to continue moving towards linguistic justice. It is in the power of telling stories that touch our shared humanity. It is in the liminality of what is between the lines of policy documents and implementation reports and in the possibility of a future that can be more, based on a past that cannot be erased. These stories are much needed in this moment, reminding us that the language struggles of marginalized communities are Asian American struggles just as they are shared struggles with other immigrant communities, that Civil Rights is an Asian American issue just as they are issues for other marginalized groups, that solidarity and working through cross-racial tensions are critical parts of Asian American histories just as they must be for Asian American futures.

May this book help us move forward together, honoring and affirming our shared humanity, in all of its cultural and linguistic richness and diversity.

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