

## TRANSCRIPT

## Introduction: Getting to the Core of the Language Demands in the Common Core is Essential for English Learners

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SPEAKER Richard Carranza

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JENNIFER O'DAY (INTRODUCTION)

All right. Well, now we're going to move into a topic that is very, very near and dear to my heart, as I'm sure it is to all of you. We educate in this state almost a million and a half English language learners, which is almost a quarter of our students. We also educate almost—oh, actually over a quarter of English language learners in the country. This is an incredibly important population for us to reach out to, to give access to the Common Core. And we have got two people with us who can speak to this from their perspectives. The first person is Richard Carranza, who I think some of you may know is recently named as the superintendent in San Francisco, continuing from being the deputy there for the last, what, three years? Yeah, three years as deputy. And we're very excited about Richard moving into that position, he is going to—he is going to actually have the honor of introducing Kenji, but I can't not say something about Kenji because I've worked with him for a long time. Right, Kenji? And Kenji has not only been researching and writing about English language learners and our approach to instructing ELs for decades but and looking at policies, looking at instructional practices, looking at the actual learning process. But he is now leading a group with Maria Santos in Oakland Unified School District, leading a group called Understanding Language, which brings together researchers and practitioners to really focus in on opening the Common Core State Standards for English learners.

So but Richard, I'm going to turn it over to you, and you can get started in this.

RICHARD CARRANZA Muy buenos dias. Good morning. Because we're in the Bay Area, zaoshang, (in) Chinese means good morning. Buenos dias a todos . . . (continues in Spanish).

So what I would like to do is ask how many of you just understood what I just said? In California that doesn't surprise me because it's a very multilingual state. Those of you—and I didn't want to embarrass you by asking you raise

your hand—those of you that didn’t understand a word that I just said: welcome to the experience of an English language learner in a classroom in America today. And think about the advantages that we all have in this room, where we all have at least a high school diploma, we all have at least a bachelor’s degree, a master’s, some of us PhDs. We have years of experience in academia, we’ve prepared, we know what pedagogy is, we know what good pedagogy is, we know what good instruction looks like. Yet by the simple fact that you didn’t speak the language that I happened to give you my first greetings with, you’re at a disadvantage. And it says nothing to your intelligence, it says nothing to your dedication to learning, it says nothing about who you are as a person, yet you needed to learn a language to understand what was being presented.

Now, I didn’t mean that as a sign of disrespect to anyone. I really am very happy to welcome you here to the Bay Area and thank you for taking this time to engage and delve into what we know is a very important topic, which is the Common Core State Standards and how they will transform the teaching in our classrooms in the coming months and years. But this issue of English language learners and I want to underscore the word *learners* because there is, there’s a red herring out in the public education debate. When we talk about English language learners, it’s often characterized as we’re talking about English language avoiders. Now think about that. Children don’t come to school not to learn what isn’t being taught. So when we emphasize the word that these are English language learners—and by the way, when I started kindergarten I didn’t speak any English. I was a Spanish-speaking student, not because my parents weren’t bilingual; they were bilingual. But they made the conscious decision that my brother and I would go to the public schools speaking Spanish, which they taught us because we wanted to be able to communicate with all of our family, and they trusted the public schools would do right by their kids, by their *mijitos*. And they would teach us English and make us bilingual students. Thank goodness, it worked. Some days better than others.

But this whole notion—and Jennifer quoted some very important statistics—when you think about California, one and a half million students that are English language learners and that is only going to grow. And when you only—and when you think about the fact that as California goes, the Country goes. That over a quarter of the English language learners in the United States reside in California, in our school districts, in our classrooms, with our teachers, under our leadership. Then it really does call to question for us, what we do in terms of providing the best environment for English language learners, not only to learn but to flourish, to become a part of the educational mainstream and what we consider to be good education in California and in the United States. I would propose to you, ladies and gentlemen, my colleagues, that the only way to do that is to pay attention to the systems and

structures that we have in place for supporting English language learning. And the Common Core provides us a unique opportunity to do just that. It provides us the unique opportunity to reexamine those systems and structures, the pedagogy that we use, what kids learn in the instructional core of what we do every single day, and how we build that scaffolding to support students that are acquiring the English language.

In San Francisco, if you all remember your history and you think about educational policy of *Lau versus Nichols*, that's San Francisco, And here we are, what, almost 40 years later in San Francisco, we're still under the consent decree with *Lau versus Nichols*. So for San Francisco it's become a way of life for us, how we and what we do to address the needs of English language learners is so intertwined with what we do in terms of all learners that, I'll be very honest, unabashedly we consider multiple languages as an asset, and we start from an asset perspective and how do we build the native language while acquiring English as well. We truly believe in multilingualism; we just believe that one of the languages has to be English as well. And when you think about that mindset, you build the assets and you learn the English, but you build the assets, language assets of students. There's a world of opportunities that open up for our students and that open up for us in our schools.

Now, I would never presume to stand before you and say that we figured it all out. In fact, we struggle with it every single day, just like you struggle with it every single day. But if there's anything that I would like to leave with all of you very respectfully this morning is I'd like to leave with you the notion of how you felt this morning when I spoke a language that you perhaps didn't understand, or even if you understood the language you thought, "Well, why is he doing that? He is leaving a whole bunch of my colleagues out of the conversation. That is exactly what I felt like when I entered the kindergarten. That's exactly what our students feel like now when they enter our classrooms and don't have the scaffolded support to be able to learn the language.

So I salute you, I congratulate you, I welcome you to the Bay Area. I wish we could have brought you some sunshine, but that's okay, you can have some San Francisco fog and that's good too. But I think you're going to leave the two days armed with great information about not only what the Common Core and its implications have for our work in the future, but more importantly, this very important subgroup that is becoming more than a subgroup; it's becoming a major group of students that we have to be able to address their needs because as they go, our educational system in California and in the United States will go as well.

I want to leave you just one last statistic, and then I'm going to introduce my good friend and mentor Kenji Hakuta. But consider this: the Pew Research Institute recently did a study. And they predict—and they have done the

statistics and the numbers—think about this: every month for the next 20 years, 50,000 Latinos and Latinas will turn 18. Every month, 50,000. Now think about all the implications of that statistic. First and foremost, we assume they're coming through our school systems, so we want to make sure that 50,000 of those students—and that's just Latinos/Latinas—are well educated, are literate, are engaged civically, are engaged politically, and are able to make a contribution to our society. But when you think of the broader implications of that statistic, there's a political shift happening as well. And I don't know about you, but if there's 50,000 of anyone turning 18 every month, I want to make sure that they not only are able to read and write and do arithmetic, but they have a deep sense of why it's important to become engaged in the political process, and in the educational process, and quite frankly the democratic process that makes America what it is. So we have a tremendous, tremendous key to the future as educators by ensuring that our students are well educated and, in particular, our students that don't speak, that speak a language other than English at the moment.

So with that I want to thank you for being here. I want to thank you for coming. And it's my great pleasure to introduce someone who has absolutely been at the forefront of English language learner issues. And I mean this in a very good way, Kenji is not only a researcher, he has a very practical lens about how the research effects the practice. And as an example of that, I still remember a little over three years ago when I arrived in San Francisco Unified, my first week on the job, one of the first individuals that I met with that was not from the school district was Kenji Hakuta, who had come in from Stanford and asked to meet with me. And he sat, and we had a chat. I didn't realize it then, but what Kenji was doing is figuring out, okay, where is this guy from, what is his mindset, what's his framework, where's he going, and how much of a job do I have to do to get him on the right track. And I think we quickly found out that we're like peas and carrots, we have very much the same framework, we view language as an asset, we view systems and structures that support English acquisition as key to move these students forward. And I've got to tell you, it's been a joy to work with him ever since. You will often find him in a classroom, working with teachers. If you go to a gathering anywhere in San Francisco, he knows more teachers than he knows administrators. And that's important because, again, he is connected to the practitioners, those that are implementing, that are doing the work in the classroom. So it's with deep respect and great joy that I would like to welcome Kenji Hakuta, and have a great rest of the conference.