

Nieto Mother – Daughter Duo Discuss Bilingual Education and Engage with TKU Faculty and Students

Campus focus

Following her Tamkang Clement and Carrie Chair Lecture, Dr. Sonia Nieto, Professor Emerita of the College of Education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, returned on November 13 for a second talk, this time in collaboration with her daughter, Alicia M. López Nieto, Assistant Principal of Crocker Farm Elementary School. Their presentation, titled “English as a Second Language in a Western Massachusetts Public School,” offered an in-depth look at the history of English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction in the United States, as well as practical approaches currently implemented at Crocker Farm. The event attracted not only faculty and students from the Department of English but also Director Yi-Chun Lin and teacher-training students from the Center for Teacher Education, along with three bilingual program teachers from Wunhua Elementary School. The Cheng-Sheng International Conference Hall was filled to capacity.

Professor Nieto began by situating the topic within the broader context of U.S. immigration history and cultural diversity. As a nation built by immigrants, the United States has long faced the challenge of educating students who do not speak English as their first language. She traced the evolution of U.S. policy—from the early “sink-or-swim” approach to the bilingual education movement of the 1960s, and eventually to the landmark 1974 *Lau v. Nichols* Supreme Court ruling. The Court declared that providing identical education does not equate to providing equal education, thereby establishing the legal foundation for ESL and transforming educational support for English learners.

Alicia M. López Nieto then provided a detailed overview of ESL practices at Crocker Farm Elementary School, introducing student demographics, teacher collaboration strategies, pedagogical approaches, and support services.

During the discussion session, she posed several questions raised by ESL educators in Massachusetts, inviting audience members to share their perspectives on these issues. Dialogue focused on English language instruction in Taiwan, when students typically begin learning English, and special programs for immigrants learning Mandarin in Taiwan. Faculty and students from the College of Education participated in the discussion, sharing insights into Taiwan's current context for English learning. In addition, the English Department arranged a visit for the Nietos to observe bilingual classes at Wunhua Elementary School the following day.

In response to Alicia's questions, English Department Chair Jui-Min Tsai highlighted TKU's well-established Mandarin program, which enrolls nearly 1,500 students and is Taiwan's second-largest Chinese language program (following National Taiwan Normal University). The Mandarin program continues to provide adequate language learning support for international students, immigrants, and visitors.







