

## Jamie Leite

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I learned Portuguese while living in Brazil as a young adult and quickly fell in love with all things Brazilian, including my Brazilian husband. I never imagined that the language would intersect with my career as a middle school English teacher, until one day in 2011 when I heard about a program called dual language immersion in Utah. The program was available in Chinese, French, and Spanish, and the rumor was that the state was open to starting new languages. My daughter was in kindergarten, and despite our sincere efforts, she refused to speak Portuguese and responded to us only in English. We felt we had failed as parents, but the news of an option for Portuguese in our local public schools gave me a chance for redemption. With the drive of a mother *guerreira*, I began fighting for a Portuguese program to begin by the time my daughter started first grade. After months of passing out flyers and searching for students, the first two Portuguese dual language immersion programs opened in Utah in 2012. Today, Utah has over 1,000 students studying Portuguese in six elementary schools around the state. I am proud that the program we have built provides students with the opportunity to become global citizens who appreciate the many cultures, languages, and people that populate this planet. At times, I am even a bit jealous of the experience that Utah's students have to learn academic content while gaining target language proficiency. I am especially thrilled to see Portuguese heritage speakers, like my children, connecting to their past in a way that raises their self-esteem and bonds them to their families. My daughter, who once pleaded with me not to speak Portuguese in public, now can't wait to speak in Portuguese every chance she gets. Like 1,000 other immersion students around the state of Utah, she is proud to be a Portuguese speaker. And because of them, I am proud to be a Portuguese language educator.



Jamie Leite is the Portuguese dual language immersion director for the Utah State Office of Education. She is responsible for developing curriculum, providing professional development, and overseeing six Portuguese immersion programs across the state. She works as program director for the Utah Portuguese STARTALK grant, which offers training for teachers and summer camps for students. As a member of the Utah immersion team, she helps with the administration of Utah's immersion model at the school, district, and state levels. Jamie also acts as the dual language immersion specialist for Provo School District in Provo, Utah. She holds a bachelor's degree from Brigham Young University, a master's degree from Utah Valley University, and is currently obtaining a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy from the University of Utah. Her master's thesis was a history of Utah immersion, titled "Mainstreaming Dual Language Immersion: The Utah Model for Replicable and Sustainable Language Education." In 2015, Jamie Leite and Raquel Cook published the chapter "Utah: Making Immersion Mainstream" in the book *Building Bilingual Education Systems: Forces, Mechanisms and Counterweights*, edited by Peeter Mehisto and printed by the Cambridge University Press. Prior to joining the Utah immersion team, Jamie was a classroom teacher for six years. She is the proud parent of two Portuguese immersion students.