Critical advocacy and bilingual education in the United States

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Abstract

Comparing data from two ethnographic studies of bilingual teachers and their students in the United States, the authors present a cross-case analysis that illuminates how issues of language are inextricably linked with issues of race, class, and socioeconomic status. The authors show how portraits of teachers' practice help to examine some of the challenges urban, bilingual educators face including questions about teacher identity, bilingual proficiency, networks of support and activist training. Such portraits of bilingual practice shed light on the complexities that include and go beyond language and show the nexus where pluralist and assimilationist goals inform and contradict one another in public schooling. The authors suggest the current political climate places bilingual education at a new and challenging crossroads in the United States with opportunities to re-examine what bilingual education means within specific local and national contexts.
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1. Introduction to the field "Formerly" known as bilingual education

On January 8, 2002 Title VII, also known as the Bilingual Education Act, was eliminated as part of a larger school reform measure in the United States known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA). The law as of 2002, Title III, carried with it a new name, "Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students," and with it, new meaning. After 34 years, the word "bilingual" had been deleted from all government offices and legislation—a not so subtle message concerning the assimilationist, English-only orientation of the Bush administration. This

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name-change has not only come from the right. Advocates of bilingual education, largely from the political left, have also engaged in re-naming, passing over the politically charged, compensatory associations with "bilingual education" and choosing to re-name programs according to stated pluralist and biliteracy goals. In other words, rather than viewing instruction in a non-English language as a type of special-education, advocates have emphasized renaming bilingual programs to reflect goals to maintain and develop students' home language while adding English fluency. "Dual immersion," "maintenance bilingual education," "two-way programs"—these are just a few of the labels used to describe programs with additive rather than subtractive orientations (Lambert, 1980).

The re-naming phenomenon has been significant in many ways. First, in the way new names make the U.S. national identity split between assimilationist and pluralist goals even more clear (Schmidt, 2000). On the one hand the assimilationist goal follows a tradition of Americanization, maintaining the English stronghold. From an assimilationist's perspective, immigrants' shift to English, leaving heritage languages behind, is considered a necessary and beneficial sacrifice for immigrants' successful integration and support for national unity and security. On the other hand, a pluralist orientation finds unity within diversity (Giroux, 1994), seeking justice and equality for racialized language minorities amidst a history of oppression and exclusion. Additionally, renaming bilingual education to identify assimilationist (i.e."English only" or "English immersion") or pluralist goals (i.e. "two-way bilingual" or "dual immersion") draws our attention to explicit program structures and classroom instructional methods, identifying how languages are used in classrooms and schools, by whom, and for what purpose. Lastly, this re-naming allows us to ask fundamental questions about the degree to which "bilingual education" has to do with language and the extent to which exclusive discussion about bilingual education solely as *language* education overlooks larger political dimensions of bilingual teachers' and students' work (Darder, 1991).

As researchers in the field formerly known as bilingual education, we compare data from two ethnographic studies of bilingual teachers and their students. We also reflect on our own perspective on bilingual education. We examine some of the challenges that these two teachers in our respective studies faced in their careers as bilingual classroom teachers, teachers who ultimately left their positions in the classroom. These vignettes of bilingual teachers' experiences shed light on the complexities that include and go beyond language and show the nexus where pluralist and assimilationist goals inform and contradict one another in public schooling. The critical ethnographic approach we took for both studies was beneficial in illustrating these complexities.

Our analysis of two bilingual teachers' work leads us to argue for re-naming that explicitly discusses bilingual education alongside race, class, educational level and other political dimensions that have an impact on teaching and learning with bilingual populations. We argue that researchers in this field should take on the role of "critical advocacy," alongside progressive bilingual educators. In our two studies and in our work, in general, being critical advocates meant simultaneously identifying with and critiquing stakeholders within the field of bilingual education. We have been concerned that this stance should not appear as diminished support for bilingual education as an educational and social practice. The tensions between a researcher's documentation and her political support and critique are a part of what Eisenhart (2001) describes as the "muddles" of contemporary educational ethnography: how to provide a critical portrait of stakeholders who are part of a marginalized community? In our case, a critical portrait of bilingual education might be (mis)interpreted as making a case against its very cause—to support strong forms of bilingual education (Levinson & Holland, 1996). We subsume these under the general tension of being researchers as well as critical advocates for "strong forms" (Baker, 2001) of bilingual education

with biliteracy and pluralist goals. We come back to this point and amplify the discussion of this in the conclusion(s) of this paper.

2. Doing critical ethnography in bilingual education

We situate ourselves among other scholars who assert the value of an ethnographic approach to building an understanding of the culture of schooling as it pertains to students and teachers who speak a language other than English. In their volume on the advantages of ethnographic research in understanding school reform and the contributions of an ethnographic approach, Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002, p. 12) write that, "people's actions cannot be understood without understanding the sense of setting in which the actions are situated, and reciprocally, the setting cannot be understood without understanding the actions of the people within it." The understanding of the culture of a school and the reciprocity of context and individual action can be illuminated through vignettes of practice, portraits that convey data gathered from day to day observations and interviews. Despite the current "scientifically based research" climate that discourages portraiture as an ethnographic enterprise (Moss & Lather, 2003; Shavelson & Towne, 2002) we apply this approach to ethnography to critically portray bilingual practice. Following the method of inquiry proposed by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) we have written two comparative portraits to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of educators' experiences in bilingual teaching positions. Our portraits are based on analysis of data collected through interviews, observation, recorded classroom discourse analysis and field-notes.

In Carspacken's (1986) exploration of critical ethnography, it is claimed that the purpose is to use the methods associated with ethnographic research, "to construct a tight methodological theory by making use of various insights from critical social theory" (p. 3). Much of the research that has used the term as well as the notion of "critical" in educational ethnography and other areas of education has been used to denote an oppositional stance to dominant ideologies (Carspacken, 1986; Luke, 1997; Pennycook, 2001; Trueba & McLaren, 2000). Cox (1990), cited in Shacklock and Smyth (1998, p. 2), writes that operating critically means to "open up the possibility of choosing a different valid perspective from which the problematic becomes one of creating an alternative world." In this paper, we highlight this position but also attempt to embed the term critical into being reflexive (Foley, 2002) as language education researchers and educators.

Critical ethnographies of bilingual education, in particular, have theorized the structural constraints which operate in the education of language minority children, while simultaneously focusing on possibilities for human agency and social change. According to Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester (2000) an individual's full biliterate development is only possible in learning contexts that shift power from favoring standard, monolingual norms to more equitably valuing all points along the continua of biliteracy, sanctioning bilingual and bidialectal norms that take into account where and how learners develop their language varieties and the content and media through which this development takes place. However, these authors argue that institutional contexts for learning too often favor standard, monolingual norms, those that emerge from a one language = one nation = one literacy paradigm. Similar views are echoed in other writing on bilingual and minority language education (e.g. Cahnmann, 2003; Heller, 1999).

One example of a full biliterate context appears in May's (1994) critical ethnography of a multilingual school in Auckland, New Zealand. May's study identified an institutional context

where the value systems and lifestyles of students of Maori and Pacific Islands origin were accorded equal status and prestige with full institutional alternatives (p. 192). While illuminating possibility, May's study also exposed ongoing challenges, what Apple (2000, p. 253) has called the "gritty materialities of daily economic, political, cultural and educational struggles of multiple, identifiable groups."

The essence of a critical, ethnographic approach to bilingual education is to simultaneously highlight possibilities while doing away with "naïve beliefs that educational practice alone can change social structure and unseat hegemonic ideology" (Edelsky, 1996, p. 2). For example, in the United States, there have been an increasing number of dual language programs which bilingual educators have generally supported. However, critical studies of dual immersion models have tended to expose how language hierarchies continue to operate even within programs that embrace social change (Freeman, 1998; Rubinstein-Avila, 2002; Valdés, 1997; Walsh, 1995). Support for critical ethnographies of bilingual education does not advocate return to the gloom-and-doom perspective that all actions are inevitably thwarted by structural inequality. Rather, critical scholars maintain an element of hope and possibility while simultaneously revealing challenges educators face when trying to implement programs for social change. This study points to the fact that more thick description is needed to understand how bilingual teachers experience and negotiate the tension between structural constraint and human agency in the classroom and school. The critical perspectives and methodologies of the two teachers in our studies and the professional environments they worked in allow us to explore the relationships between the larger societal discourses surrounding bilingual education and the local implementations of it in a reflexive way.

3. Comparative studies of bilingual practice

The first study (conducted by Cahnmann, 2001), "Shifting metaphors: Of war and reimagination in the bilingual classroom," was a study of how one bilingual teacher, Ms. María (All research participants and place names have been replaced by pseudonyms; first name pseudonyms reflect first names used by teachers with their students), and her 28 students formed a grass-roots gifted bilingual program at the 9th grade level. This study illuminated ways in which individuals, in context, took shared responsibility for nurturing a learning environment that embraced students' resistance as a form of participation in school. The second study (conducted by Varghese, 2000), "Bilingual-teachers-in-the-making: Advocates, classroom teachers, and transients", was a study of how four bilingual teachers formed a professional identity in various "spaces"—as they went through a 6-month professional development opportunity, through their classroom practices and school environments, and also through their discursive construction of their lives and work. Findings pointed to a complex web of influences including childhood, learning environments and past professional experiences as well as the contexts of the teachers' current school positions. Ms. María, the teacher that Melisa Cahnmann focused on for her study was one of the teachers who undertook the 6-month professional development program that was part of Manka Varghese's study, although she was not one of the four teachers Manka followed back into the classroom (researchers in this paper will, like the teachers, also be identified by first name).

Melisa began her year-long study of Ms. María's classroom because it was often cited as a place of best practice in the district. This study took place between September 1999 and August 2000 during the first year of a successful grass-roots effort to expand bilingual education from the middle school into the high school grades with the explicit goal of developing both Spanish and English literacy skills of the mostly low-income, Puerto Rican students. In all, Melisa recorded over 40 h

of classroom discourse, 10 h of interview data with students and Ms. María, hundreds of pages of field notes and collected numerous artifacts including student work, classroom assignments and school newsletters. The data were analyzed inductively and coded for themes.

Manka started her observations and informal conversations as a participant-observer in the professional development series in May 1996 through December 1997. Presenting herself in her role as an ESL teacher, she helped the professional development instructors and developed a friendly relationship with participating bilingual teachers. During this time, she took field notes of over 100 h of sessions, and collected documentation and teacher journals. She then observed and interviewed four teachers (three elementary school teachers and one middle school teacher) in their classrooms from January to June 1997. These teachers were chosen because they agreed to be part of the study and only six teachers completed the professional development series. Manka took field notes for 80 h of classroom observation (20 h for each teacher) and audio-recorded roughly 40 h of interviews (10 interviews of roughly an hour for each teacher). She then collected district archival documentation, and interviewed school and district administrators from June 1997 to December 1997. The data was analyzed by conducting a close reading of the entire set of fieldnotes and interviews, and writing analytic commentaries grounded in the data. These commentaries then served as the basis for codes and themes.

The studies shared a great deal in terms of the local and non-local contexts of their work, methodological approach, and the object of their concern: urban, bilingual teachers' practices. Our paper compares portraits of two teachers, Ms. María, a bilingual teacher at a middle school in Northern section of Eastern Town School District, and Ms. Elizabeth, a bilingual teacher at an elementary school in the same area. This section of Eastern Town was often referred to by newspapers and community residents alike as "the badlands"—an area that was overrun by drug-dealers, domestic violence, gang fighting, and prostitution. The majority of students in the schools where the studies took place were Latino, mostly from Puerto Rico, and from low-income families. This was in a region that had once had a flourishing manufacturing economy and in a city school district that had a long history of supportive bilingual education policy and programming, dating back to one of the first nationally funded bilingual programs in the country (Cahnmann, 1998). Thus, Ms. María and Ms. Elizabeth's bilingual classrooms were situated within a historical context where there had been (more or less) consistent support for bilingual education, at least nominally, to serve a community in economic decline and increasing racial segregation.

The teachers also shared experience in the greater non-local US policy context where there has been an increasingly conservative, vociferous and successfully activist anti-bilingual education movement. Throughout the late 1990s, when these studies took place, it became painfully clear to teachers in the studies that bilingual education was losing national political ground more quickly then ever before. The local and non-local historical, economic and political context had great impact on the individual classroom and school work that the teachers in both studies carried out.

We began studies of these bilingual educators with the assumption that bilingual language practices are influenced by the social context in which they occur, and the ways in which social variables (i.e. gender, class, culture, race, ethnicity, and power) intersect to shape inequalities (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 46). The work of these two Latina teachers, one originally from Nicaragua (Ms. María) and the other, a second-generation American from Cuba (Ms. Elizabeth), was influenced by a host of variables from the past and present climates of their lives. Drawing together key details from interviews, fieldnotes, and teacher journals, we build a comparative portrait of these two women, considering the commitments and contradictions experienced by stakeholders in bilingual education.

4. Portraits of bilingual practice

Ms. Elizabeth, worked in a school that was still developing its bilingual program. A novice teacher in her second year, she was called upon to be both a bilingual first grade teacher and a coordinator of an emerging school-wide bilingual program. In contrast, Ms. María was a veteran teacher with years of international experience in bilingual education and history of participation in revolutionary activities in her home country, Nicaragua. We begin with brief portraits of each teacher, following the approach proposed by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997). Each portrait is composed of key details and quotes drawn from our data. Following these portraits, we present a cross-case analysis of the multiple dimensions influencing teachers' bilingual practice.

4.1. Ms. Elizabeth

Ms. Elizabeth, a second generation Cuban American was strongly committed to bilingual education. After having spent time in retail and advertising she decided to pursue a career in education that was more meaningful to her own life experience, seeking out the school district to become a bilingual teacher. In an interview she stated:

> "I wanted to be a bilingual teacher because I believe that a child's school experience should be different than mine."

Often and with strong emotion in her voice, Elizabeth talked about being a minority and different from those around her when she was growing up. On many different occasions she repeated the story of when she was a child, and on the first day of school her teacher had told her that her name was Elizabeth and not 'Elisabeta,' as she was called by her Cuban American family at home. She continued to go by the name "Elizabeth," despite grief over her translated Spanish name and other ways she felt marginalized as a Latina child. In a written response regarding her childhood she stated:

> I think that this is when I began to feel that my family and I were different.

> No one else had a grandmother that lived with them. No one else's family spoke another language, and certainly no one had an accent.

She repeatedly made clear that bilingual education for students was a question of both linguistic and human rights. For example, a favorite saying of hers was "la lengua es el espíritu del alma," (language is the spirit of the soul) and her bulletin board carried the following messages: "ser bilingüe es nuestro orgullo," (being bilingual is our pride) and "quien sabe dos lenguas, vale por dos" (one who knows two languages is worth twice as much).

In terms of the bilingual program in her school, Elizabeth credited herself as being one of the forces that helped it stay at her school. During the course of time Manka spent at her school, Elizabeth was the primary resource that the other bilingual teachers called on for assistance—if they had an issue in their class or a question about resources, teachers would walk into her classroom to ask for her advice. Despite the fact that Elizabeth felt uncomfortable about her Spanish ability, she used Spanish exclusively with the children even though her students would sometimes tease her about the rare occasions she made mistakes in Spanish. For example, in one instance she said 'lepordo' instead of 'leopardo' for leopard. When Manka met Elizabeth initially at a general workshop for bilingual education, and, she was asked by the workshop leaders what her goal was for the workshop, she stated that one of her goals was to learn Spanish well: "I'm

also hoping to become more proficient in Spanish since my proficiency is somewhat uneven." In her next journal she also wrote:

> So I wonder what is the best way to continue and speed my acquisition of Spanish. This is of concern to me since I want to make sure that my students receive grammatically correct input from their teacher and accurate feedback as they test their first language.

Despite doubts about her own bilingual expertise, she initially took a leadership role in the bilingual program in her first year at Miller Elementary school. However, when the principal wanted to formalize it during the second year, Elizabeth held back. She did not trust the leadership at her school and as she put it, "I have a low threshold for bullshit." Moreover, she did not feel thoroughly prepared to be in this position and was confused by the contradictory messages she received regarding the school and district's methods and goals for bilingual education. For example, she commented on the irony that the school district supported her participation in a professional development program advocating a two-way late exit model of bilingual education, but two district coordinators gave her different advice. At her school she was told, "that our program would be what we wanted it to be," with classes for Latino students in Spanish only for the early grades. Elizabeth concluded this by stating, "I was thoroughly confused as I followed my students to the second grade" (written response). Moreover, Elizabeth expressed negative perceptions of the district and the difficulties she encountered in finding curriculum resources for bilingual teachers. Describing feelings of isolation and self-doubt, she said:

> I had to try to bring in an awful lot (of materials) which isn't easy for me, or not as easy, you know. And then, and there's a part of me that really I don't understand. This is what I believe in. I don't understand how it works in Urbantown and I feel very isolated here and I wind up feeling unsuccessful or at least questioning what my success will be cause I don't know what happens to these children . . . . . . so I'm constantly questioning myself and that really bothers me, it really bothers me. And sometimes I don't know that I want to stay in that, you know?

Her critique of the local context is in keeping with other critical bilingual advocates who attribute inefficacy in many bilingual programs to limited school and district support for materials, quality instruction, and extended access to literacy education in the child's dominant family language (Baker, 2001; Krashen, 1996).

Elizabeth saw herself as someone who was becoming increasingly isolated, especially after a hate mail episode where the six bilingual teachers in her school received anonymous hatemail in their school mailboxes, that read "SPIC"[2] or "Wanna-be SPIC" when addressed to a Jewish bilingual teacher (they suspected it was from another teacher in the school). Elizabeth, for example, had got a message telling her to 'go back to her island, and just because she didn't have an accent, it didn't mean she was not a SPIC.' Manka asked Elizabeth to type up descriptions of critical incidents in her career. One of the incidents that Elizabeth mentioned was this racist hate mail episode. She wrote:

> I really can't describe what effect it had on me. I went from being angry, to having nothing but pity for the anonymous author, to being truly afraid for the minority children at Miller who could be exposed to this type of message. I'd pass other employees in the hall, people

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[2] SPIC is a derogatory, slang term used in the United States to refer to people of Hispanic/Latino origin, perhaps from a nonstandard pronunciation of "(no) speak [spic] the (English)."

whom I had always smiled at and exchanged pleasantries with. Now I wondered if this person could be the one.

She felt suspicious of her colleagues' racism and monolingual English orientation—in fact, Elizabeth reported that one of the secretaries expressed resentment over having to support bilingual education with her tax dollars. She was dismayed that some colleagues believed students were better off if they did not read or write in their native language. In describing what she was encouraged and discouraged by, she mentioned, among other issues, the following:

> I was encouraged by fellow teachers who admitted to being ignorant or indifferent to the goals of bilingual education. Many of them, however, recognized that I had a job to perform under difficult circumstances and provided support and a place to air my griefs. I was discouraged by many of my monolingual peers who rejoiced in my lack of books and actually said it would be an asset to my students instead of a deficit.

The hate mail incident described above was anomalous but it brought out the sentiments felt by Ms. Elizabeth and her colleagues: they felt personally targeted and professionally misunderstood. The first time Manka visited Elizabeth, they ate lunch together in the staff room with other teachers, but, after this incident, there was never a time when Manka saw Ms. Elizabeth leave her classroom, unless it was to visit other bilingual teachers. In essence, Ms. Elizabeth had become, or felt she was forced to become, a prisoner in her own school.

Ms. Elizabeth eventually decided to take some time away from bilingual teaching. This decision was partly due to her growing disillusionment with the way bilingual education was practiced in the district and the negative way it was perceived by her mainstream colleagues. It was also due to a serious illness which she contracted towards the end of her second year as a bilingual teacher.

4.2. Ms. María

Ms. María's bilingual classroom was remarkable in many ways, but there was one feature that made it unique in all of Eastern Town and perhaps elsewhere in the country. In 1998, parents had successfully lobbied local political and educational leaders to expand Plena's 5th to 8th grade bilingual middle school to include bilingual services for students in the 9th grade. In 1999–2000, Ms. María taught the only bilingual 9th grade classroom at Plena Middle School, representing the only such grass-roots effort of its kind in the district. This bilingual program, like so many that have survived in the United States, had been successfully initiated because of vocal parent support, administrative assistance, and the self-confidence and activist spirit activism experience of Ms. María and a select group of her colleagues who shared the same bilingual goals and activist spirit as Ms. María.

Starting grassroots movements for social change was not new to Ms. María. As mentioned, María Bendler-Hernandez was born in Nicaragua where she received all her primary and secondary education, studying English as a foreign language. Her parents first sent her to Eastern Town in the sixties to get her bachelor's degree in economics because they did not want her to get involved in the burgeoning Sandinista revolution. However, Ms. María did return to her home country as a journalist and adult literacy educator, an active participant in the Sandinista government.

Like Ms. Elizabeth, Ms. María was relatively new to teaching in Eastern Town's bilingual program, having taught 5 years in the district at the time this study took place. However, unlike Ms. Elizabeth, she had a 30-year history as a fluent bilingual teacher, and political activist. Her high competence in Spanish and English and dynamic leadership skills helped her secure a great

deal of authority in her dual role as teacher and administrator of the 5-year-old school-wide bilingual program she had helped to create.

Melisa often heard Ms. María describe her work in terms of never-ending struggle—"like swimming against the current" and "flying against the wind." She was constantly challenged within and outside her classroom, notwithstanding her many strengths. Within the classroom, her content area instructional goals were often disrupted by the disproportionate amount of emotional stress and physical danger in her students' lives, resulting in students' exhaustion, resistance, misbehavior, and absenteeism. For example, her 14-year-old student, Minerva, had her second child during the time of this study, reportedly a victim of incest. Her student Luis worked nights as a "body guard" to young drug dealers and often arrived tardy and exhausted to school. These are but two of the dramatic stories each student had to tell.

Ms. María used her role as a national curriculum developer to address her students' lives through literacy. She wanted to expose students to grade-level English literature and connect the district's mainstream-centric curriculum to bilingual and bicultural texts students could relate to. Her efforts were frustrated at many levels. First, she had trouble finding a colleague willing to teach the English literature component. One of her colleagues, Ms. Marcela, an English-dominant Latina, was so against bilingual education and horrified at students' behavior, she ultimately stormed out of the classroom when teaching Romeo and Juliet, swearing never to return. Another English teacher agreed to teach Whitman, Stevens and other poets, but often reduced the content of her instruction to working on what she called "brain exercises," zerox copies in which students were to connect dots or complete syllogism exercises.

Ms. María aimed to supplement the English literature curriculum (that students' often perceived as alientating) with literature that embraced their bilingual, bicultural, and urban experiences. For her Spanish literature curriculum Ms. María was writing a nationally commissioned curriculum unit for Rosario Ferré's (1996) historic Puerto Rican novel, *La Casa en la Laguna/House on the Lagoon*. When the unit was almost complete, a representative from the publisher wrote to say the "content of the book was inappropriate for students" because of sexually explicit and violent scenes, and, for this reason, the guide would not be published in any language. Ms. María felt betrayed by what she considered a shallow multicultural literary agenda among publishing companies when they dismissed texts whose stories were vitally relevant to students' survival. She responded to the publisher with a letter where she listed the many issues in her students' lives, including the pregnancy of one of her students and the fact that she had been sexually molested by her stepfather. Ms María wrote:

> I fully and completely disagree with the idea that the book is not appropriate. I really do not know what you believe is appropriate for Latino students who attend our schools. I can tell you that, for the past three months, reading The House on the Lagoon has been an extraordinary learning experience for my students not only from the point of view of literature, but also from the point of view of values and Puerto Rican history. I believe this to be appropriate. Moreover, as I am sure you are aware, Latino writers in the United States, or writers in general, for that matter, who write about real life, happen to write about the issues that we in the United States, or in Latin America, face in everyday life. Unfortunately . . . children who are even younger than 14 have to face these issues whether we like it or not. I believe it is our duty as educators to help them face the said issues in the healthiest possible way.

The publisher responded to Ms. María's letter by indicating that they would reconsider their first assessment of the novel. However, when Melisa's fieldwork ended, the curriculum developers

had still not published Ms. María's curriculum guide nor was Ferré's novel listed as recommended literature for secondary students.

Beyond her classroom, Ms. María was often exasperated by the linguistic intolerance and racism that she and her students' experienced. She was frustrated at the district's compensatory orientation toward bilingual programming and suspicious of national campaigns to promote English-only instruction. She said:

> They want to restrict the program to students who "need" English, not to open it up to bilingual students who "need" Spanish—just to stay interested in school, to develop literacy that's meaningful to them. This [bilingual high school program] should be a college prep program for Spanish-dominant students. The trouble is, by 9th grade many "needy" students do not appear to be Spanish dominant because the forces that be have already forced the language out of them, ay!

Ultimately, she felt restricted by the limitations at the school and district level and decided to leave her alternative 9th grade program at Plena when she was invited to become principal of a new charter bilingual school in the district.

5. Discussion of the two portraits of bilingual teachers

These portraits of two bilingual educators working with Spanish-English populations in low-income urban areas, were constructed from data analyzed via a critical ethnographic lens. They illustrate some of the multifaceted tensions in bilingual education present in our studies. First, we discuss how these two cases disrupt the common misconception that bilingual education is solely about language. Second, we discuss the challenges regarding the bilingual proficiency of bilingual educators themselves. We also discuss the presence of networks of support foregrounding the ways they did and/or did not assist each bilingual teacher's values, developmental needs, and professional goals. We conclude with a discussion of critical bilingual advocacy in bilingual education and teacher preparation, which draws on the findings of our respective studies and echoes the approach we adopt in our work.

5.1. More than just language

During our fieldwork with Ms. María and Ms. Elizabeth we observed teachers for whom bilingual education was much more than teaching subject matter in two languages. In each case language was mainly a tool for the teacher's mission to provide for the linguistic, cultural and human rights of their students who were disproportionately exposed to high degrees of risk in their lives. For both teachers, bilingual education meant much more than teaching and learning in two languages. For Elizabeth, bilingual education was also a way to prevent the kinds of discrimination and misunderstanding she experienced in monolingual English environments as a child. For Ms. María, bilingual education was a means to provide linguistic support in addition to critical literacy support, using culturally contextualized curriculum to address vital issues of survival in her students' lives. Both teachers spoke of their own racialized and minority identities and related these to those of their students; both were also deeply aware of how racism and poverty played out in their professional contexts. In fact, issues of language were inextricably linked with race and class or socioeconomic status.

These cases represent what may be a tragic flaw in bilingual education as we knew it until 2002. Since its inception, bilingual education in the United States had largely been promoted to a

suspicious public as a compensatory program solely about language. However, as these vignettes of bilingual teachers' work demonstrate, language was far from the only or even the most vital characteristic of bilingual teaching (Varghese & Stritikus, 2005). Rather, a bilingual teacher's work has always involved taking on the host of social challenges that she and her students face. Promoting the 'language only' aspect of bilingual education may have seemed more palatable to the public than acknowledging an implicit social justice agenda, but it may also have served to obscure more important, compelling reasons to support bilingual instruction.

Clearly, a carefully explained rationale for bilingual education based on the logic of accommodating students' linguistic, cultural, economic, social, and educational needs is unlikely to have helped create a larger and/or more informed base of support. So, for those who are committed to developing a critical approach to bilingual education, what we believe to be more useful is an expanded conceptualization of language, an understanding of language as a component – the most important one – of symbolic capital and power that largely determines access to resources in society (Bourdieu, 1991). The legitimization of bilingual education requires policy that explicitly contextualizes second language learners' needs within the socio-cultural and economic context in which that language learning takes place. When a teacher like Ms. Elizabeth receives racist hatemail for working with more than one language in a public school, the moral climate of bilingual teaching is called into question. We now need to take the debate beyond language and address deeper issues related to assimilationist versus pluralist aims.

5.2. Bilingual educators' bilingualism

These vignettes raise other questions too about the relationship between identity and language expertise. Elizabeth's discomfort with her own Spanish abilities led her, perhaps ironically, to become a bilingual teacher with an expressed desire to prevent assimilation from erasing the identities and proficiencies among her bilingual newcomer students. Language proficiency among those who grow up bilingual in the United States, particularly Ms. Elizabeth's proficiency, calls into question our nation's largely monolingual thrust. Ms. Elizabeth, having grown up bilingual in the United States, is in many ways an asset as a bilingual teacher. However, as bilingual skills have been traditionally underdeveloped in US public schools, Ms. Elizabeth suffered considerable anxiety about her literacy skills in her heritage language. Practiced from a critical and pluralist perspective, bilingual education has been an attempt to redistribute access to quality education for all children as well as maintaining and developing their identity by using students' native language as well as English in the classroom in standardized ways. However, when bilingual education is delivered in Spanish (and sometimes solely in Spanish) by teachers who were never adequately trained and do not feel capable of functioning in academic Spanish themselves, then the quality of bilingual literacy instruction comes into question (Guerrero, 2003). Ms. Elizabeth is one of many Latinas who have grown up in the United States committed to bilingual education as a result of that experience having been withheld from them. We believe that teachers like Ms. Elizabeth draw our attention to the need to reassess and redefine what is meant by "full bilingual/biliterate proficiency" in settings where bilinguals often have unequal capabilities in both languages, depending on the domain in which each language was acquired and used.

5.3. Networks of support and activist training

Language competence is definitely not the only issue in terms of bilingual teacher development. The cases presented also illuminate the importance of collegial support and collaboration in highly

politicized roles where teachers act as advocates for communities that have been socially and economically marginalized. In terms of the immediate local context of their schools and bilingual programs, Ms. María appeared to have had more expertise, confidence, and institutional support (morale and resource-wise) in structuring the bilingual program than Ms. Elizabeth.

Different degrees of experience and political activist work may partially explain the different outcomes for each teacher—Ms. María becoming a bilingual charter school principal and Ms. Elizabeth taking time out from bilingual teaching. However, there are clear similarities in the lived experiences of the teachers in these two different institutional contexts: both teachers suffered from degrees of hostility from colleagues within and outside their school context. Additionally, both vacated their positions in transitional bilingual programs, pointing to the fact that journeys of stakeholders (teachers, students, etc.) involved with bilingual education cannot be purely characterized as successes or failures, as has often been the case. For example, in looking at these cases in terms of bilingual teacher retention, both outcomes could be seen as a failure, but in Ms. María's case, she moved to a position where she saw herself as being able to be more autonomous and to have more impact on Latino students.

Whether it was writing a new culturally relevant curriculum like Ms. María or starting a bilingual program in her school like Ms. Elizabeth, we frequently witnessed both teachers acting in isolation on their students' behalf or with small numbers of like-minded colleagues for support. We believe that, no matter what one's training might be, wider school, community and national support are required for bilingual education to exist and for bilingual educators to thrive. It is enough to fight battles on the outside, but when teachers are fighting antagonism from within their own school environment, the potential for burn-out is even greater. Support programs in the U.S. that facilitate the formation of bilingual teacher networks, such as the BUENO center at the University of Colorado (Baca, Bransford, Nelson, & Ortiz, 1994) and TELL (Teachers for Language Learners) at the University of Georgia (Cahnmann, Rymes, & Souto Manning, 2005), are key to the development and retention of bilingual leadership in education.

Moreover, all teachers, but especially those in bilingual education, need an understanding of the challenges faced by others in the school and district. These colleagues may even be supportive of using children's home or community language at school, but are fighting other issues, and may have appeared to compromise beliefs in strong forms of bilingual education in order to get institutional support for bilingual goals. Often, teachers may be judging a certain situation based on a limited perspective because they are not cognizant of the challenges faced by other stakeholders (e.g. the Principal at Plena Middle School who supported a compensatory rather than gifted model of bilingual education). Rarely do district administrators invite teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to join conversations about strategic accommodation, missing opportunities to build coalitions to achieve bilingual, pluralist goals. In sum, if bilingual teaching is fundamentally a job for those with thick skin, activist training, biliterate expertise and political savvy, then teacher preparation programs must be charged with the task of explicitly developing these skills. Site-based networks of professional development support could also be developed.

6. Conclusion

Our critical ethnographic approach led us to understand how bilingual teachers' practices could not be divorced from the racialized and economically disadvantaged contexts within which most bilingual teachers work. At the same time, it also led us to understand how the success or failure of programs in districts was often left in the hands of individual teachers. This is due, in part, to the lack of political and financial support for bilingual education in the United States.

Both case study teachers felt frustrated and, at times, let down by colleagues at their school sites, districts and in the curriculum publishing world. Ms. María and Ms. Elizabeth also at times felt abandoned by school administrators, left to fend for themselves. In both cases, the teachers experienced overwhelming and, at times, paralyzing obstacles to their enrichment bilingual goals. Our praise for these two teachers' courageous work must also be accompanied by a degree of disappointment and critique. For compelling personal and professional reasons, both teachers ultimately left positions at bilingual schools where their expertise, passion and caring were vitally important. Our critical ethnographic approach does not afford us the luxury of painting a portrait of success. Rather, these case studies identify recurring struggles encountered by bilingual teachers in the harsh reality of teaching in among low-income, urban populations.

This leads us to a central point regarding bilingual educators' and researchers' roles as critical advocates of bilingual education. Our findings lead us to recognize missed opportunities to be publicly honest and explicit about the shortcomings of working within the largely compensatory models of bilingual education that have been put in place in highly stressful and under-resourced school sites. We understand why critical bilingual advocates like Grinberg and Saavedra (2000) and Saavedra, Grinberg, Herr, Goldfarb, and Bentley (2000, 2002) were discouraged (even censored) from critiquing bilingual programs in case self-critique would be misunderstood and misused by the those promoting an English-only agenda as well as by bilingual advocates. However, now we see the current political climate in the U.S. as an opportunity for those of us in bilingual research to critically reflect on what elements of bilingual education may have gone wrong. As a result of our critical ethnographic approach to analyzing these cases and the trajectory of bilingual education in the United States, we do not believe that political changes during presidential administrations mean that the struggle to promote bilingual education is over. Rather, we take global examples of language planning as part of anti-colonialist struggles fought in India, Ireland, Canada and elsewhere as indicators that even partial victories for pluralism and linguistic rights entail long, challenging work over many generations.

With hindsight, critical advocates of bilingual education, like James Crawford (2000), ask: What could have been "mended" rather than "ended"? Our cross-case analysis, based on prior critical ethnographic research, provides us with a means to go some way towards answering this and other questions about the constraints and possibilities for bilingual education in the US context. We see this kind of critical, dialogic and comparative research, conducted with and for bilingual educators, as a way of identifying new directions for the twenty-first century. Future advocacy of bilingual education in the United States needs to be grounded in critique and dialogue about the limits and potential of bilingual programs as they existed prior to 2002.

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