

# **Latino bilingual teachers: the struggle to sustain an emancipatory pedagogy in public schools**

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This study examines how socially conscious bilingual Latino educators, specifically prepared to teach underserved children, resist multiple layers of hegemonic structures. The participants are five beginning Spanish bilingual teachers who teach in urban and semi-rural elementary schools. The study explores how their resistance unfolds as they develop and become critical educators and how their presence in schools provides children with the potential to develop social consciousness. This participatory research design uses dialogue as a tool to identify the problem, to facilitate the emergence of voice, to construct new knowledge, and to take action. Several themes surface: (1) the isolation of bilingual teachers, (2) the manifestations of power relations among students, (3) the use of a culturally bound pedagogy, (4) the countering of hidden curriculum through critical pedagogy, and (5) development of identity and voice for both students and teachers. The participating Latino teachers linked their social consciousness with an emergent critical pedagogy, which sustained them as they encounter many obstacles in their new profession.

## **Introduction**

At the height of an ultra-conservative educational backlash against public education, bilingual education in particular, there exists a counter-insurgency among teachers. Bilingual educators who challenge the structures within schools invariably question unequal power relations manifested in: the hidden curriculum, attacks on bilingual education, hierarchical decision-making that limits academic freedom and pedagogical decisions affecting Latino students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds attending low-performing schools. This research examines how socially conscious novice educators, specifically prepared to teach underserved children, resist multiple layers of hegemonic structures. I explore how their resistance unfolds as they become critical educators and how their presence in schools provides children with a greater opportunity to achieve academically. These educators hoped to provide foundations for their students to develop into socially conscious adolescents. The purpose of the

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study is to gain a clearer understanding of how new teachers created *counter-hegemonic conditions—conscious acts of resistance to the dominant ideology*—in their classrooms.

This article is divided into two sections. The first part, *Becoming Critical Educators*, discusses a research project with five novice bilingual Latino students. I begin with the conceptual framework guiding the study and follow with the methodology, findings and discussion. In the second section, *Components in a Model Bilingual Program*, I suggest ways to frame bilingual teacher preparation programs to increase their potential to prepare competent, critical bilingual Latinos educators.

### **Becoming critical educators: conceptual framework**

This research is guided by the theoretical and pedagogical understandings in bilingual education (e.g. Ovando & Collier, 1985; Hakuta, 1986; Padilla *et al.*, 1990; Cummins, 1991, 1996; Ramirez *et al.*, 1991 Garcia, 1995, 1997; Gonzalez & Maez, 1995; Miramontes *et al.*; 1997; Brisk, 1998; Nieto, 2000), and in significant critiques and theories on the politics of language (e.g. Crawford, 1992, 1995; Delpit, 1995; Macedo, 1997; Ruiz, 1997; Dueñas-González & Melis, 2000, 2001; Ovando & McLaren, 2000; Delpit & Dowdy 2002). In addition, critical, social and political theories are examined as fundamental to understanding how they pertain to establishing power relationships in education (e.g. Gramsci, 1971; Giroux, 1981, 1983, 1988, 2000; McLaren, 1989; Darder, 1991, 1997; Apple, 1995; Dueñas-González & Melis, 2000, 2001), and to the conceptualization of hegemony as an ideological position.

#### *Theoretical and pedagogical understanding in bilingual education*

Three and a half decades of research demonstrating the advantages of bilingual education have not settled the question of whether bilingual education is beneficial for children whose first language is other than English. The central tenet of bilingual education has consistently been that school-aged children will have greater success academically if their language and culture are included in the curriculum and reflected in the daily interactions of their classroom (Ruiz, 1997). In 1968 the federal government passed the Bilingual Educational Act, which was added to Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This legislation legitimized the funding and implementation of bilingual education in public schools. The passing of the BEA legislation at the federal level meant that the United States government was shifting from a 'sink or swim' position held since pre-WWI toward the implementation of innovative language educational programs (Malakoff & Hakuta, 1990). The 1960s was a period of great unrest and resistance from People of Color and Euroamericans who sought peace, equity and civil rights for disenfranchised people in the US. Bilingual education was implemented to redress the history of unequal education that linguistic groups faced. At the time programs were not defined and goals were very broad; they ranged from language maintenance throughout elementary school to quick English transitional programs by second grade.

There are at least six major program models that developed over the years (Malakoff & Hakuta, 1990; Ovando & Pérez, 2000). They are as follows.

*Two-way Immersion Program.* This model includes both native language speakers of a language other than English and native English speakers. Both groups learn each other's language and have a rigorous academic program. The goal is biliteracy and bilingualism. In 1963, the first Spanish two-way immersion program was established at Coral Way School in Florida (Crawford, 1995). Immigrant Cubans with the support of the federal and state governments developed this exemplary program. This community insisted that their children needed to continue their cognitive development in Spanish while also learning English in a low-anxiety school environment (Malakoff & Hakuta, 1990). Unfortunately, it took until the 1980s before a few districts throughout the nation replicated this model. Currently two-way immersion is the model that bilingual educators seek to establish because of the promising results. Collier's (1995) research on second-language acquisition and specifically on two-way immersion found three primary predictors impacting student's academic success: (1) classrooms where cognitively complex academic instruction uses the students' first language and the second language throughout their educational experience; (2) instructional approaches based on cognitively complex learning strategies where interactive learning occurs among peers and between the teacher and students (e.g. discovery learning using cooperative learning strategies and an interdisciplinary approach to teach the curriculum); and, (3) changes in the sociocultural context of the school where bilingual education is viewed by the faculty, staff, parents and students as an academically accelerated curriculum model.

*Transitional Bilingual Program.* This program model is implemented the most often because the primary language is used extensively in the lower primary grades (K–2). The goal is to quickly transition children into English-language classes as soon as they attain a certain level of English proficiency. Students begin in homogeneous language groups, but are placed with native English speakers by second grade.

*Maintenance or Developmental Bilingual Program.* This model provides extensive instruction in the primary language throughout the elementary grades. English, taught through sheltered strategies, increases in instructional time as the students reach fourth and fifth grades. The goal is to firmly develop literacy in both the native language and English. Class composition is homogeneous representing the focus language. Teachers are most likely native speakers and have close contact with the students' parents.

*Submersion Programs.* These are mainstream classrooms where there is an absence of any special program design. Historically they are classrooms where non-English speakers either 'sink or swim'.

*English as a Second Language (ESL) Program.* Students are given specialized ESL instruction designed at their level of proficiency and generally provided by a resource teacher for a small portion of the day. Instruction in the native language is not available.

*Partial Immersion or Sheltered English Programs.* These programs provide sheltered ESL throughout most of the day. There is some native language support to clarify content subject matter. The native language support is provided by paraprofessionals.

In the most recent eight-year longitudinal by Ramirez *et al.* (1991), who compared English immersion (submersion), transitional (early exit) and language maintenance (late exit), extensive evidence showed that the most effective model was the language-maintenance or late-exit model. This study found that the longer students remained in a language-maintenance program, the higher the achievement growth curves. Two other significant factors contributed to the students' success: their teachers were mostly native speakers and Spanish-speaking parents were more involved in their children's education because they were able to communicate with the school personnel. Parents were able to understand the curriculum as well as the school social structure. This study was a major contribution to the field of bilingual education, which one would think settle the debate on whether bilingual education is beneficial.

The question then arises, why is there so much controversy over bilingual education? Unlike many other educational theories and pedagogies bilingual education is tied to an American history of xenophobia and anti-bilingualism. This deeply internalized belief posits that to be 'American' means using only one language (English) and accepting the dominant culture's norms and values. The very nature of bilingual education represents the embracing of diverse cultures and recognition of other languages as having significant and/or equal status in American mainstream institutions and everyday lives of people (Arce, 1998). Ovando and Pérez (2000) suggest that the tension in bilingual education involves complex issues of political power, cultural identity and social status. This is perhaps at the core of the controversy. To be bilingual in the United States creates the potential for the bilingual person to navigate in the sphere of resistance toward cultural and linguistic hegemony.

#### *Power relationships in education and the notion of hegemony*

Antonio Gramsci, the Italian political theorist, made a major contribution toward understanding power relationships between the dominant and subordinate classes. From the 1920s to the 1930s Gramsci developed the notion of hegemony as a way to explain the intricacies on how in a class society the dominant class shapes its worldview, then imposes its cultural and ideological positions on subordinated groups. Hegemony, as defined by Gramsci, exists in systems viewed as democratic where the dominant class exercises its will through non-coercive modes, by exercising control of the mores, ethics and values of the society as a whole. The dominant class is able, with the alliance of many interest groups such as intellectuals, educators,

unions, politicians and the media to articulate the norms by which other socioeconomic groups live (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci's interpretation of the state's role was that it served as an instrument to institutionalize and frame the discourse of politics and culture by defining the parameters of debate and excluding oppositional ideas. Presently the role of the state is not so easily defined as simply serving as an instrument of the dominant class because of the complexity of a more advanced capitalist structure. The impact of a hegemonic ideology derives much of its strength from the interest groups that reflect the values of an elite dominant class. Henry Giroux describes hegemony thus:

As the dominant ideology, hegemony functions to define the meaning and limits of common sense as well as the form and content of discourse in a society. It does so by positing ideas as natural and universal ... it refers not only to those isolatable meanings and ideas that the dominant class imposes on others but also to those 'lived' experiences that make up the texture and rhythm of daily life. (1981, p. 94)

An example of how hegemony penetrates the daily lives of society is evident in the political and financial growth of interest groups such as the US English-Only movement (Dueñas-Gonzalez & Melis, 2000). The primary goal of this interest group is to maintain a Euroamerican dominance in all facets of society (Crawford, 1992). They have re-ignited historical xenophobia toward immigrants. This organization has now shifted its tactics to strike the most vulnerable members of a society—our children. US English-Only organization has taken the lead in attacking bilingual education and bilingual teachers at a time when large numbers of school-aged children need bilingual programs and bilingual teachers. In 1998 California voters passed the anti-bilingual legislation 227 that called for the dismantling of bilingual programs. Ironically California leads the nation in the number of linguistically diverse children and youth under age 18. In 1990 there were 3.7 million school-age linguistically diverse children living in California, constituting nearly half of all children and youth in the state (Waggoner, 2000).

Schools are institutions that reproduce both the ideological beliefs and the cultural values of the dominant class on a daily basis. The function of mainstream schools is to limit the opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse students to see themselves as agents of social change. Students from disenfranchised communities most often do not view themselves as potential leaders in their communities' struggle for equality. Giroux describes how hegemony functions in schools. He states there are four areas that support hegemonic interests

1. selection of culture deemed as socially legitimate;
2. categories used to classify certain cultural content and form as superior or inferior;
3. selection and legitimization of school and classroom relationships;
4. distribution of and access to different types of culture and knowledge by different social classes. (1981, p. 94)

The decision to be a bilingual educator often places teachers in a 'counter-hegemonic' position; that is, when asked to acquiesce or mediate, they may choose to maintain a sense of personal, social and political integrity that may result in a form

of resistance and/or sabotage. It is important to note that bilingual education is not necessarily based on theoretical concepts that require challenging the power relations in a class society. According to Darder (1991), bilingual education, as an isolated construct, has failed to provide an alternative pedagogy based on a critique of power relations. For example, bilingual programs that focus exclusively on culture and language issues may work within the established hegemonic power structure since they do not seek to challenge the institution. A major challenge for bilingual educators is to critically reevaluate the limitations of maintaining traditional pedagogies that appear to benefit only some children. Bilingual educators have the potential to create opportunities for children to be bilingual, become biliterate and succeed academically while at the same time developing social consciousness. The longitudinal study by Ramirez *et al.* (1991) found that the instructional strategies in the three bilingual program models they reviewed were based on a transmissional approach in which the teacher provided explanations, questions, commands and feedback. Although the researchers stated that bilingual teachers in the language-maintenance (late-exit) programs made the curriculum comprehensive and accessible, all three models produced passive learning environments. This implies that bilingual education programs do not, in themselves, scaffold children's highest critical abilities or have as an intent the goal to raise social consciousness of the learners. In my own research on bilingual teachers, I have found that few have been able to create opportunities for students to engage in transformative educational pedagogy (Arce, 2000).

While bilingual educators as a whole have failed to break the power structures in schooling, counter-resistance exists at many levels. There are a growing number of teachers at the grassroots level who do not support traditional modes of teaching and learning. For example, I found socially and politically conscious teachers who viewed traditional schooling approaches as legitimizing the hegemonic culture and as such served to disempower teachers, culturally and linguistically diverse children, and their communities (Arce, 2000). These teachers shared that they were confronted with layers of restrictive policies and structures that impeded the implementation of a critical pedagogy or liberatory educational practices. One male participant shared how teaching was a lonely profession in many ways, but believed that teachers could reconceptualize their identity by connecting with other progressive teachers.

Teachers and students rarely comply with *all* policies and procedures of school structures. It is unrealistic to presume that all teachers or students respond as passive recipients of the hidden curriculum, accept the hierarchical mandates and comply with conflicting dominant cultural values and norms. Giroux (1983) proposes that although schools have a major role as transmitters for capitalist interests, they also serve as locations for opposition to the economic and political interests of dominant groups. Classrooms represent micro-communities where children and teachers construct meaning, challenge truths, negotiate events and produce knowledge on a daily basis. While teachers may accept and apply many hegemonic beliefs and practices in their classrooms, it is likely that they also display and perform oppositional modes of behavior.

Giroux (1983) places some forms of oppositional behavior under the theory of resistance. He defines this concept as recognition of a dialectical process that takes place when people mediate and respond to their lived experiences and the structures of domination. Dominant structures are never static or complete because groups act to either further legitimize dominant power or to resist it. While the theory of resistance seems like a logical framework to explain counter-hegemony it contains certain categories that go beyond the surface of oppositional behavior. Giroux categorizes resistance as having specific intent, consciousness, meaning of common sense and the nature and value of non-discursive behavior. He warns that one must not confuse all acts of opposition as challenging the dominant structures. Giroux states that resistance and acts of opposition must be rooted in its critical function toward uncovering emancipation. This is the thrust behind the theory of resistance; it must be measured to the degree that it promotes critical analysis, critical reflection and praxis. Resistance must go further than individual action; ultimately it calls for a collective political struggle around issues of power and social determination. When viewed as a concept to understand liberatory education, then bilingual teachers, parents and students can work, live and 'act out' with a sense of hope.

### **Methodology**

This study used a participatory research design. Participatory research differs from ethnography in that its intent is to transform social conditions, while the latter reports the way things exist. Park (1993) defines participatory research as a self-conscious way of empowering people to take effective actions toward improving conditions in their lives. These are organized efforts with an explicitly liberatory goal to make social changes.

Central to participatory methodology is the use of dialogue as a way to facilitate the emergence of voice and the construction of new knowledge (Freire, 1990; Park *et al.*, 1993; hooks, 1994; Ruiz, 1997). In this study, dialogue provided an avenue where the participants and the researcher came together to critically discuss, reflect and act on the problems being investigated. Dialogue ultimately led to gaining a critical perspective that served as an emancipatory experience for the collective group, which was then used to guide their practices in the classroom.

### *Setting*

The study took place in two school districts in California. One is urban and one is semi-urban. The urban school district has a high percentage of linguistically and culturally diverse students. There is strong support for bilingual education. There are three main bilingual programs throughout the district: early exit transitional, late exit language maintenance and two-way immersion. The other school is in a semi-urban district that is rapidly becoming a suburb for professionals working in nearby urban centers. The bilingual model in this district was a two-way immersion program.

*Data sources*

In addition to dialogue, research instruments derived from ethnographic research design such as interviews and classroom observations, personal histories and interaction between the researcher and the children were also used to further validate the participants' perceptions of transferring theory to practice (Park, 1993). The initial data source included four collaborative dialogues. Guided questions were used as the basis for our dialogues during four weekly meetings. The dialogues raised questions around daily routines and school structures, reconceptualizing identity, developing voice, the hidden curriculum and its implications, counter-hegemony and critical pedagogy.

Classroom observations and informal collaborative conversations, regarding teaching practices, classroom and school conditions, between the participants and the researcher provided another opportunity to document how these teachers applied theoretical principles of critical pedagogy to actual classroom practices. I visited their classrooms (1 to 2 hours per visit) weekly for 15 weeks.

*Data analysis*

Participatory research works on the assumption that all participants fully support the purpose of the study, and that they thoroughly understand the intent of the study (Park, 1993). The research data are analyzed with the intent to discover the dimensions of the problem and find alternatives or oppositional strategies to guide the participants toward collective action. It is critical to share the interpretation of the data with the participants because the researcher seeks accuracy in relating the voices of the collective group. The qualitative approach to participatory research supports a more holistic data analysis because it is closely connected to the way the participants come to see and share their experiences, their critical reflections and their newly gained knowledge (Park, 1993).

*Participants*

The participants included five Spanish speaking bilingual teachers (three females, two males) who identified (personal political choice) as: Chicana (female), Chicano (males), Mexican (female, male), and Spaniard (female). All were new emergency credential teachers in their respective districts (four urban; one semi-urban); however, one teacher (Spaniard) had four years of prior teaching experience. They were asked to participate because of their expressed commitment to social justice and issues of equity. These teachers entered the profession with social consciousness, coupled with a history of community activism, a background in ethnic studies and with the goal to become critical educators.

*Participant profile*

A short portraiture of each teacher and a description of the classroom and the children are provided. Pseudonyms are used throughout.



Ana Maria, in her mid-twenties, identified as a Chicana political activist. She entered teaching with the intent to share critical knowledge with Latino students. This was her first professional job. Ana Maria was deeply committed to supporting self-identity and social consciousness among Latino students in public schools. She was a community activist who came to the realization that the Latino community could empower itself if its members used the resources available to the dominant culture such as the media, the arts and specifically education. She was particularly concerned with issues of racism and need to build solidarity among People of Color.

*Classroom/Students.* Ana Maria taught third grade ( $n = 22$ ) in a bilingual maintenance model in an urban school. All of the children were native Spanish-speakers. Most were born in the United States, all of their parents were immigrants and all were bused from the Latino community to a middle-class neighborhood. Most parents rarely attended school functions; some came only to the parent conferences and to the school's open house during the fall semester. Although we did not explore this topic, several of the school site teachers, including the participant, felt that Latino, Spanish-speaking parents did not feel welcomed by the administrator.

Marco, approximately 40 years old, identified as Chicano. Teaching was a new career change from being a photographer, artist and community activist. He felt a need to help Latino students reclaim their voices as a proud people with roots to indigenous cultures. His goal was to support their bilingualism and biliteracy in order to become future leaders in their community. He was deeply interested in issues around affirming self- and ethnic identity, developing voice and building community both in the classroom and in the students' community. Marco obtained a teaching position, much to his surprise, in a Spanish, two-way immersion program in the urban school district. He always thought that he would teach Latino students in a late exit program model.

*Classroom/Students.* Marco taught fifth grade ( $n = 20$ ) in a Spanish, two-way immersion. There was tremendous support from the administrator, most of the faculty, the school district and parents for this program. All except one Euroamerican student (12 Latinos and 8 Euroamericans) had been in the immersion program since first grade. The two-way immersion program was in the fifth year of operation when Marco was hired. Enrollment into any grade level was allowed for native-Spanish speakers, but English native-speakers were accepted into the program in kindergarten or first grade. An exception was made for two Euroamerican boys (one was in Marco's class) who were accepted in second grade because their parents lobbied extensively. Most of the English native speakers were high-progress readers and writers in both languages. However, a few of the Spanish-speaking students were struggling in reading and writing in both languages. The native Spanish speakers appeared to have difficulties as both English and Spanish texts became more decontextualized.

Isabel, in her early thirties, identified as Mexican. She was born in the US and was entering a second profession. She went into teaching to increase Latinos' success in

education. She was very confident and firmly believed that given the ‘right conditions’ greater numbers of Latinos could achieve higher levels of education. She believed that the traditional Latino family was the backbone to keeping children motivated to stay in school and become responsible adults. Isabel was also a native Spanish-speaker who went through the process of learning English as a second language. She felt a strong sense of empathy for bilingual students who were learning English.

*Classroom/Students.* Isabel taught fourth grade ( $n = 24$ ) in an urban bilingual maintenance program. All the Latino students were bused in from the Latino community to another linguistically diverse community. Parents rarely went to the school because it was far from their community. The children were a homogeneous group of Latino, native-Spanish speakers. They made strong gains in English literacy throughout the year even though the standardized tests did not reflect their strengths. Although the students were demonstrating gains in Spanish during the first semester (based on informal assessments students were below grade level, ranging between second and third grade literacy levels, except for two boys who had high Spanish-literacy levels), these were not sustained because the school administrator and faculty decided to transition to more English instruction by January. This decision was not based on any consistent formal assessments, simply a response to the pressures imposed by the district to raise test scores. Most of the students were fluent in English oral language. There were only four students at beginning English proficiency levels. These students required most of the curriculum in Spanish. The other students received both English and Spanish instruction in literacy and the content areas at third or beginning fourth grade level, but increased to more English instruction. Isabel used many sheltering strategies (e.g. use of explicit modeling, meta-cognitive strategies, hands-on activities, lots of visuals, focused language prompts and guided instruction) in both Spanish and English.

Pilar, in her late twenties, identified as a Spaniard. She emigrated to the US from Spain seven years ago. Although Pilar was fluent in English, she did not always feel confident speaking. She made every effort to understand the history and struggles of Latino people in the United States. She considered herself politically progressive. Pilar felt it was very important to lay a firm foundation through a comprehensive literacy program for young children. This teacher saw herself as a strong advocate for native language maintenance in public schools.

*Classroom/Students.* Pilar taught first grade ( $n = 20$ ) in a late-exit, language maintenance program in the urban school district. Most of the children lived in the surrounding ethnically mixed neighborhood. All were Latinos, homogeneously grouped. They were all born in the US and their parents were immigrants. Although the children's parents did not volunteer in the classroom, they generally assisted their children at home. The school sponsored a home literacy program that required families to spend 15 minutes per night listening to or reading to their children. The majority of instruction was in Spanish. Unfortunately, they had a negative learning

experience in kindergarten. Based on my interview with the principal, the kindergarten teacher had not put much effort into teaching the children. Literacy assessments were given to each student in August and September by Pilar. She used the district-adapted Spanish observational survey assessments (concepts about print, vocabulary writing, letter identification and running records for reading). Only three knew some letters of the alphabet and one knew most of the letters in Spanish. In addition to their low academic development entering the first grade the children initially had difficulty in adjusting to the classroom norms. However, through Pilar's excellent management system and high academic expectations, students accelerated academically and socially. The most dramatic shifts in their growth were in December and May as evident from their journal-writing samples and informal literacy assessment results (e.g. running records, vocabulary tests, phonemic awareness assessments and writing samples).

Diego was in his late twenties and identified as Chicano and Mexican. He was a first-year teacher being mentored daily by a veteran bilingual teacher. She was in his classroom for an hour to an hour and a half each day. Diego was a gentle person who wanted all children to have creative, nurturing and fun experiences in school. He felt a great sense of empathy for the Latino children in his school. He was progressive in his political ideas but had not participated in political activism. He wanted to enter into dialogues on critical education as it pertained to culturally and linguistically diverse students and teachers. Although his Spanish is quite fluent he did not speak Spanish as a child and had only learned it while in college.

*Classroom/Students.* Diego taught kindergarten ( $n = 20$ ) in a Spanish two-way immersion bilingual program located in a semi-urban area. Half of the students were English native-speakers; there was one Mexican American whose parents were not fluent Spanish-speakers, and one Arab American child. The other 10 students were all Mexican American with limited knowledge of English. Unlike the English native-speakers whose parents were all middle-class professionals, all the Mexican American students' parents were farmworkers, housekeepers or service workers. The local community was divided into two racial groups and by socioeconomic status. In the last 10 years, with the rise of the technology industry, this rural community faced rapid economic development. Prosperity was evident in the construction of large designer homes, single-family dwellings and the gentrification of the town.

## Findings

Embedded in a participatory research design is the use of dialogue to reconceptualize voice, and to construct new knowledge and praxis (Freire, 1990; Park *et al.*, 1993). These teachers sought to create new forms of social relations and pedagogical strategies as they simultaneously faced the multiple hegemonic layers of their school structure and policies. Five themes emerged from the nature of dialogue, field observation and collaboration between the five participating teachers and myself. They

were: (1) the isolation of bilingual teachers, (2) the manifestations of power relations among students, (3) the use of a culturally bound pedagogy, (4) the countering of hidden curriculum through critical pedagogy, and (5) the development of identity and voice for both students and teachers. These themes can also serve as key issues to consider as bilingual teachers strive to sustain their critical consciousness in public schools. Each is discussed.

### *Isolation of bilingual teachers*

Every teacher shared how, once the day began, she/he could close the door and be left completely alone. Marco's comment was typical: 'All I need to do is close the door, I'm all alone to do my thing, but I really want to have dialogues about power and race relations in the immersion program.' None felt she/he could safely share her/his political views or visions of education with her/his peers. The bimonthly faculty meetings addressed school logistics, district mandates and occasionally offered professional development. Pilar's school site addressed concerns about ethnic isolation, how to involve Latino parents and potential inequities in student relations in two-way program models, but these issues were raised only in the bilingual faculty committee meetings. These teachers and their site administrator were designing a two-way immersion program for the following academic year. Ana Maria asked me on several occasions, 'How can I make them see that the problems these children face are perpetuated by the racism in the school and the whole structure of education?' Silencing their voices, as a coping strategy, gave rise to frustration and to some degree contributed to more isolation at the school site.

Diego, in particular, felt he was isolated from other progressive educators especially because he viewed the school culture as racist toward the Mexican community. He was torn by the fact that the staff and faculty were very warm and supportive of him, yet many appeared not to extend these same attitudes of acceptance toward the Mexican children and their parents. For example, secretaries were stern to the Mexican children for no reason other than their presence in the office. There was only one bilingual sign in the office that notified parents about immunizations.

### *Question of power among students*

While the urban immersion programs may appear to profess liberal and progressive ideas there often exists a deeply rooted class inequity among the students and their parents. Darder (1991) points out that bilingual teachers must openly challenge traditional views of fairness and equality because these notions divert the reality that Euroamerican students have entitlement and privilege that keep bicultural students marginalized. For example, Marco shared how the Euroamerican students constantly took a lead role in the classroom discussions and decisions. Marco believed that children know who has the power and that the dominant group acts it out. Marco stated, 'The *White* boys feel so assured of themselves like they can just run the whole class.' Diego refused to let the dominant culture prevail in his classroom community. He

made sure that the Latino children always had opportunities to participate in group discussions and was consciously aware of the need to include diverse voices in all classroom activities.

### *Culturally bound pedagogy*

The three upper grade teachers, Ana Maria (third grade), Isabel (fourth grade) and Marco (fifth grade) held classroom discussions on issues that were culturally bound so that the Latino students had knowledge status and were the experts. Marco shared how his class worked on an intergenerational theme with a focus on folk-wisdom shared by elders. The Latino students had many examples of how their grandparents or aunts and uncles guided them on family values to healing remedies. In this one example and in other discussions the Euroamericans students learned from Latinos. Since Marco identified with Chicano/Indigenas (Indian people in Mexico and the US) he addressed many issues about native people; in particular he focused on the collectiveness of these two cultures and the history of oppression in the United States. Just as he wanted students to learn about the atrocities committed on Native People and Mexicans he also wanted students to read and investigate the many acts of resistance and strength. Marco wanted to build Latino students' self-identity and to shift the potential of the Euroamerican students' view of Latinos and Native People as subordinate groups.

Isabel explored issues of self- and ethnic-group identity. When she reviewed the fourth-grade social studies curriculum she found that issues of family, Mexican/Latino culture and ethnic identity were not addressed in this grade level. It was assumed that fourth graders had to move to broader, more abstract topics, for example, studying about California. The role of Mexicans was mentioned in the text as a minimal obstacle to US expansionism. Isabel believed that guiding her students to examine their own family and community history would motivate them to learn about themselves and to develop skills in investigative strategies. She began her social studies curriculum exploring the immigration of their parents and their native country. The students engaged in critical discussions, conducted family interviews, read several children's literature stories on Latino families and wrote beautiful personal stories.

Ana Maria, perhaps the most politically developed of the group, wanted her Latino students to move beyond empathy for other People of Color's history of atrocities in the US and to develop solidarity with all oppressed people. This was a monumental goal for third-grade children, yet there were aspects that could become realizations. This bilingual teacher could not change their attitudes in a few weeks, but she firmly believed that using critical pedagogy that provided alternative and critical views would facilitate students' development of social consciousness. Ana Maria began teaching African American history not from a victimized perspective but from the perspective of resistance and resiliency. Students had received fragmented bits of information on the period of enslavement, and they thought this was a terrible act to do to people. The young children could not understand the many complexities. As a beginning teacher she did not yet have the skills to fully assess her students' prior

knowledge and how to make connections with new information. After meeting with me, we discussed possible ways to assess their prior knowledge and how to introduce the students to major African American figures such as Frederick Douglass, one of several African American figures in the history unit. Ana Maria began reading an excerpt from one of his essays. Then she posed an open-ended question, asking students to interpret what Douglass's message meant. The children were somewhat lost because the excerpt was above their zone of development. As the teacher realized they were lost so she summarized the excerpt and provided an open-ended question at their level of comprehension. The children were able to interpret that Fredrick Douglas was against the cruelty towards African American people. In another session the discussion on the same subject continued and I guided the students to do a character web on Douglass. The students identified his strengths and their impressions of his character. As the days went on they addressed many contributions made by African American people. However, Ana Maria shared throughout the dialogues that even though her students had gained new knowledge they still could not overcome their stereotypes toward African American people in their daily lives. This is a major problem in bilingual classrooms that do not have multiethnic student populations; children do not have opportunities to interact with children from other cultures. If educators want children to change their attitudes toward other diverse groups then schools must establish alternative schedules to integrate students with all their representative population. Integrated structured academic blocks should provide curriculum instruction that requires collaborative learning experiences.

#### *Countering the hidden curriculum with critical pedagogy*

One major manifestation of oppositional behavior that made a difference was these beginning teachers' analysis of the hidden curriculum. Once they began to use discriminating lenses to review textbooks, they armed themselves with a critical perspective. Their curriculum for language arts and social studies took a different shape. Through our collaboration the upper grade bilingual teachers used the social studies textbook as a springboard for critique; they provided alternative reading materials; they guided intensive discussions with open-ended questions, probing students to search for more meaningful explanations. And they provided writing activities that engaged students by responding to critical issues. Students began to produce reflective writing responses to questions posed by their teachers and their classmates. Both students and teachers learned how to use the hidden curriculum by exposing its intent and offering an alternative perspective.

The upper grade teachers shared how they spent their first year constantly anxious because they were trying to cover the district-mandated social studies curriculum and fitting in bits and pieces of alternative multicultural materials. However, with the support of the group and their growing theoretical knowledge, they began to seriously analyze the textbooks and to reaffirm their own knowledge and ability to seek alternative resources. For example, Marco wanted to teach identity poetry. The language arts series did not even come close to serving his idea. Realizing that he had a number

of friends who were poets he called on an old friend, a Chicana poet who is now nationally acclaimed. This poet grew up in a similar urban Latino community and her poetry and short stories served as her voice of resistance. Marco's fundamental belief that Latino students need to share common spheres with Latino and other People of Color role models was validated by the powerful interpersonal connection between his old friend and his students. Once again he shifted the unequal power relations in the classroom where Euroamerican students had to cross over to the visual and spoken-word reality of Latino communities.

### *Development of identity and voice*

All of the teachers noticed that the Latino students in their classrooms had a demeaning perspective of their own community and a lack of knowledge of their own history within the United States. The students had already begun to internalize their role as subordinate to the dominant culture. This sense of emerging marginalization put a major responsibility on the teachers to find ways to break the subconscious levels of internalized oppression.

They focused extensively on providing opportunities for students to participate in dialogues that promoted and analyzed the role of bilingualism and their cultural history in the United States. They provided ongoing opportunities for students to learn about their past and present history. By exploring history, students began the process of reconceptualization of self and their Latino community. In addition, these teachers brought to the classroom their personal histories and experiences as Latinos growing up in a racist, hegemonic society. Isabel and Ana Maria shared the use of an affirming poetry structure style, 'I Am.' Isabel shared how this activity gave children opportunity to reflect and make positive self-affirmations. One child wrote:

I am a Mexican girl  
I wonder if I will learn lots of things  
I hear my friends calling my name  
I see happiness  
I want to learn so much  
I am a Mexican girl.

As their instruction took a more discerning approach guided by critical pedagogy, their curriculum planning incorporated reflective and critical questions that scaffolded Latino students' social consciousness in developing their voices and unfolding their self-identity. They used dialogue, culturally bound literature and alternative expository texts to engage students in dialogues where they could begin to see themselves as participants questioning injustices.

## **Discussion**

The dialogue process was inspiring because all the participants were able to describe the complexities of power within schools, challenge the hidden curriculum and critically reflect on the legitimization of norms and values espoused in schools, even

under liberal tenets. While all participants felt isolated from other politically conscious people, the interaction during the dialogue sessions broke the feeling of isolation. They were able to analyze its roots and purpose while seeking alternatives.

Although all the teachers were involved in critically analyzing their school's culture and their own teaching practices, Ana Maria, Marco and Isabel (upper grade) showed more concrete evidence of aligning theory and practice. It was in those classrooms where the teachers and I implemented instructional strategies that supported bicultural and bilingual students' development of critical analysis and reflection, while supporting the development of students' voices. Classroom topics ranged from self-identity to biculturalism in a racist society, issues of racism and critiques of textbooks. It is equally important to stress that Diego and Pilar (lower primary grades) also focused on developing a curriculum that promoted the development of voice and empathy, kindness and respect for others. The engagement of the students demonstrated that schools could be places where learning leads to social critique. All five bilingual teachers stressed language maintenance, acknowledged the aesthetic beauty of Spanish, and realized the value and the power of knowing two languages, especially when language is used to strengthen our communities.

This research supports the assumptions made by theorists who argue that critical educators can find avenues to resist ideological and cultural hegemony (e.g. Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1989; Darder, 1991, 1997; hooks, 1994; Delpit, 1995; Ruiz, 1997). These scholars point out that as individuals teachers may not be able to dismantle the power structures of schools but, through a collective political struggle, they can organize to gain autonomy and the right to provide liberatory educational experiences to children in their classrooms.

By entering into a dialogic process these bilingual teachers critically reflected on their situations as cultural and political workers. They took steps to change various elements within classrooms. These teachers do not pretend to have embarked in radical collective resistance that could force certain conditions to change, but their contestations have made a difference. They have reconceptualized their identity as intellectuals in the schools working with children who have historically received an inequitable education. In turn, these Latino teachers provided opportunities for their students, regardless of age, to develop voice and the beginning of political and social awareness. They felt there was much work to be done. For example, they were disappointed that Latino students still could not see their daily lives aligned with other People of Color facing the same struggles. The children empathized with other People of Color through historical events, but not in the present. In Ana Maria's third grade class, one boy told me the following, '*Yo me siento mal que los negros fueron esclavo, nadie debe ser esclavo, pero ellos ahora no son buenos*' (I feel bad that Blacks were slaves, nobody should be a slave, but now they are not nice people). When I asked the child to explain, he shared that on the city bus (public transportation) African-American young men would get on and create problems. The student did not elaborate on what type of problems. My interpretation is that the limited contact Latino students have with African Americans leads to stereotyping and fear. Clearly, bilingual educators must reevaluate the cultural isolation that exists in many bilingual



classrooms. Two-way immersions programs provide an avenue to break down ethnic isolation, but cautionary measures must be taken to recruit multiethnic groups, not only Euroamericans and Latinos or Euroamericans and Asian-language groups.

The changes these teachers underwent resulted from multidimensional experiences; however, the constant factor was engaging in dialogic retrospection with the researcher and the focus group, and aligning with other cultural workers (educators, community activists and artists) outside of their workplace. These participants would do well to seek other educators who support their vision; they must break their isolation. Bilingual teachers must find alternative ways to align with other bilingual and non-bilingual critical educators, to participate in their own and in their students' communities, and to engage with progressive professors in teacher education.

### **Components in a model bilingual program**

Bilingual education needs to be redefined, restructure, and grounded in critical theory and liberatory practices. In order for bilingual teachers to reclaim their advocacy for bicultural–bilingual students, essential conditions must exist in classrooms to maximize students' learning potential. The bilingual education teacher preparation programs have the unique advantage of having a larger proportion of students who by and large come from similar backgrounds to the children they will teach. It is the responsibility of bilingual university faculty to expand the parameters of the programs by designing a liberatory pedagogy based on critical theory that addresses cultural and linguistic students. The following are suggested ways to accomplish these objectives.

- *Special Institutes*: Preservice bilingual candidates can begin to embark on a collective vision by enrolling in specially designed one-week institutes focusing on native language and culture (e.g. literature, music, politics and current events pertaining to a bicultural community). The institute would build a foundation as they begin the credential program. In addition, they would begin to build a community of learners and foment a unified identity as bilingual teachers with a vision to educate our children.
- *Integrated Coursework*: The courses bilingual teachers take should support a vision that prepares teachers to develop critical lenses as they enter a school setting. The foundation courses—focusing on bilingual and second-language issues; cultural diversity in schools; and analyzing child behavior that is culturally bound and responsive—would be directly and consistently linked to the curriculum content method courses.
- *Collaborative Partnerships*: It is incumbent that bilingual education programs have collaborative partnerships with schools. These efforts would increase the numbers of exemplary placements for preservice teachers where they can see theory put into practice. The classroom teachers would assume the role of Cooperating Teacher. The university faculty and the Cooperating Teachers would meet periodically to review the student's progress.

It is incumbent that preservice candidates have experiences in classrooms where bicultural and bilingual children receive an excellent education. Assignment to a school site would be for an academic year in a bilingual classroom. The potential for expanding the concept of a community of learners is a vital aspect in this one-year classroom assignment. In such a scenario everyone gains, for example, the Cooperating Teacher becomes a mentor, but also receives additional assistance from the candidate. Clearly the benefits for the preservice candidate are numerous: learning from an exemplary teacher, receiving consistent feedback over a longer period, developing a relationship with students and their parents, and the gradual shift from being an observer with limited participation to the student teacher phase. The candidates also benefit by receiving feedback and evaluations from the Cooperating Teacher as they assess the candidate's developmental growth in the art of teaching. Lastly the children receive substantial guidance from two individuals in the field.

- *Teachers as Instructors:* An important area to consider for sustaining critical consciousness is to create opportunities for bilingual teachers in the field to collaborate with university bilingual faculty to teach credential courses and pursue postgraduate degrees. By creating a close network bilingual teachers have a stronger potential to continue developing their critical knowledge on issues of schooling as these pertain to culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

It is my belief that there are many ways to create a truly democratic educational system that provides excellent educational experiences for bicultural–bilingual students. We can begin by reevaluating how we prepare all teachers to teach underserved children. Bilingual education programs at the university level have the capacity to demonstrate how critical theory reveals limitations of the mainstream curriculum and of the structures in school. These programs must offer alternative pedagogies to critically analyze and change negative educational experiences, which impact the academic and social development of bilingual students. Only then will preservice candidates and bilingual teachers advance in developing a vision of an emancipatory education. The goal for the critical educator must be to transform schools and society away from non-democratic social, economic and political relations.

### **Note on Contributor**

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