

# **A Critical Foundation for Bilingual Education**

**Matthew David Smith**

University of California at Los Angeles, USA

**Arturo Rodriguez**

Boise State University, Boise, Idaho, USA

## **Abstract**

In this paper we weave lived experiences, those of a bilingual social studies teacher at a middle school in a large city in the Southwestern US, with critical theory/pedagogy and bilingual education. The purpose of this paper is to present an articulation of the practice of critical pedagogy in a bilingual educational context principally under the constraints of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and its counterpart Race to the Top. We seek to share a few approaches that Matt, a bilingual social studies teacher, initiated to mitigate the effects of an oppressive but official curriculum and to encourage and foster the development of critical bi-literacy among his students.

“In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was made flesh. It was so in the beginning and it is so today. The language, the Word, carries within it the history, culture, the traditions, the very life of a people, the flesh. Language is people. We cannot even conceive of a people without a language, or a language without a people. The two are one and the same. To know one is to know the other. To love one is to love the other.”

Dr. Sabine Ulibarrí, *El alma de la raza*, 1964

## **Introduction**

We do not intend to present an explicit policy critique instead we present the current often “dumbed” down bilingual curriculum mandated under No Child Left Behind as problematic for teaching language minority children. The history of bilingual education in the United States cannot possibly be summarized in these brief pages. What the authors will do here is present an overview of bilingual education in the US and New Mexico, successes, and painful setbacks up to the present.

We see bilingual education and critical pedagogy as distinct yet linked in several key areas. That is, in teaching and learning with linguistically diverse students the social, political, and economic context in which the education takes place has a direct impact on their lived experiences; such experiences are fundamental components in students’ formation as scholars and critical citizens. Thus, this paper is an attempt to bridge two fields that share a common history in U.S. public education.

Auto-ethnography is the guiding research philosophy for this paper (Anderson-Levitt, 2006), particularly Matt’s reflections on his bilingual social studies and literacy strategies classes in a period covering two years. The authors determined auto-ethnography was the most applicable research methodology for telling the story of a fusion between bilingual education and critical pedagogy. The critical observations were conducted by Matt, a participant observer; short dialogue references take the place of interviews or other qualitative data that might have been

collected. The fieldwork upon which this paper is based was the day-to-day teaching and learning between Matt and his students, as well as Matt's own development as an emerging critical educator in bilingual education. In a sense, the two years covered in this paper were the first concerted and informed attempt by Matt to implement critical pedagogy in a school under assault (economic exploitation, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). Information about the teaching here is taken from Matt's field notes compiled during the above mentioned two years.

In this paper we will further argue for a need to reimagine a critical foundation for bilingual education; that is if we are to work in solidarity with those combating the neoliberal co-optation that pervades public education in the US. In the following we link a brief history of bilingual education to the implementation of critical pedagogy in a Matt's bilingual social studies classroom, and a discussion about the importance of the role of critical educators in today's society.

### **Bilingual Education**

In 1912, New Mexico officially joined the United States of America and drafted a state constitution reflective of the linguistic diversity in the fledgling state. The Constitution of the State of New Mexico both prohibited the discrimination of Spanish-speakers and called for the explicit recruitment and education of Spanish-fluent teachers (<http://www.sos.state.nm.us/pdf/2007nmconst.pdf>). Up until the outbreak of World War I, German was instructed to between 4 and 7 per cent of the students attending US public schools. However once the war began German became an outcast language speakers of which lived under suspicion and ire in educational, social and professional circles. Subsequently, the State of Texas passed legislation that made it illegal to use anything other than English as the language of instruction in public schools (Crawford, 2004).

Bilingual Education in the US was made public policy under a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. Not an easy victory for those fighting for bilingual education, Title seven of ESEA was authorized in 1968. The provisions for supporting language minority students were set as amendments to the Bilingual Education Act after the *Lau v. Nichols* verdict of 1974. Soon after, scholars in the US began offering research-based programs in the areas of language acquisition, bilingualism and its intersection in literacy education.

The 2001 reauthorization of ESEA brought with it vast changes in how language minority children are educated in the US. For example, the word 'bilingual' does not appear in the federal legislation; any students whose mother tongue(s) is/are not English are now classified as "English Language Learners." This rhetoric is the Bush Administration's commitment to a deficit lens through which public education is viewed. The mandated curriculum and pedagogy provides an education where phonics-based instruction, uncritical texts, and scripted programs are forced upon public school districts across the country; these costly programs that bill themselves as 'research-based' are nothing more than a resuscitated positivism in American public education. The authors' of NCLB claim, to having developed 'research-based' programs, is fodder for States turning a blind-eye to the needs of language minority students. At the time of this writing, President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have allowed states to opt out of certain provisions in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, yet the consequences of the legislation for linguistic minority students are felt across the country.

## **East Mesa Community and School**

Three public middle schools serve a predominately Chicano/Latino community in a Valley School District and neighborhood in the Southwestern US. Each school has an average enrollment of over 800 students yet this community has been systematically ignored by the larger district for many years. Indeed most of the building facilities have gone into disrepair. In their daily lives students and teachers contend with the following: worn-out air conditioners and exhausted heaters, asbestos build-up, leaky roofs, cracked and worn flooring and furnishings that have likewise fallen into disrepair. If this is what greets the community every day, what can be said of the pedagogy and curricula employed by the teachers?

When Matt Smith entered Apple Middle School for the first time (one of the three schools serving the community), he was greeted by custodial staff members who had graduated from the school ten years prior. The importance of this encounter is twofold: one, there was a sense of commitment to the youth of the community on the part of those who had gone through Apple; two, such employment was common only amongst Chicanos in the area. Many graduates of the local schools would return seeking menial work as groundskeepers, maintenance specialists, and local security officers. Given that Apple MS is a Title-I school, most of the local households in the area exist below the (artificial) poverty line. This is significant as it highlights the deep sense of civic responsibility in a school that has been dubbed one of the most neglected in the district. Indeed many graduates have passed on more lucrative opportunities within the city and elsewhere to contribute to the wellbeing of the youth in the area.

Matt's initial teaching assignment was to instruct bilingual 8<sup>th</sup> grade social studies (U.S. History 4 periods per day and one course entitled "literacy strategies"). The premise for the literacy strategies course was to remediate the students' levels of literacy as they were deemed too low by the school administration for their grade levels.

All teachers assigned a Literacy Strategies course were to instruct students on individual skills, what amounts to the filler material in reading education. Given Matt's experiences did it promote remediation? To the contrary, the scripted content dulled the students' curiosity; they became noticeably less excited in class. Matt could literally see their intellectual engagement diminish on a day to day basis. What then makes language and literacy among the most important activities our minds perform?

## **The Students**

There were approximately 125 students across Matt's U.S. History and Literacy Strategies courses. The students ranged from monolingual Spanish and monolingual English speakers to those having near bilingual fluency. The students beginning their final year of middle school were excited. But their enthusiasm was frequently stifled by the repressive state apparatus (Althusser, 1964). It arrived in the form of a Sheriff's deputy permanently assigned to Apple MS who frequently handcuffed students for "disrupting the educational process" and a security guard who also operated a Marine Corps JROTC program (without ever having been a US Marine).

It immediately became apparent to Matt then, the design of the school, many of the extra-curricular activities, and the oppressive standardized curricula were intended to funnel the poor and working class students into the military or trade skill professions.

The linguistic fluency and citizenship status of the student population varied drastically yet they shared several things in common. Some students had recently arrived at Apple MS, having crossed the border only days or weeks before. Many such students were only then solidifying their fluency in English. Other students who were born and raised within two blocks of Apple MS were in a similar linguistic predicament, being monolingual Spanish-speakers (or Spanish dominant) at a time when federal education policies encouraged the rapid acquisition of English. Student friendships often formed based on these identity lines.

A common thread across the linguistic and ethnic identities of the students was the income level. Apple MS served a poor and working-class community, the school's designation as a "low-income" educational site was accurate more than accurate. Not only was the family/household income among the lowest in the state, but the close-fisted financial deprivations committed by the district also compounded the prevalent social inequalities. Many students relied on free breakfast and lunch programs for their daily meals.

### **The School**

As mentioned above the school facilities of the East Mesa were often underfunded and neglected by the larger district. A local newspaper ran a story that compared the temperatures of the classrooms and those of two neighboring elementary schools with the temperatures of a local animal shelter and found that the animals had more comfortable conditions for dealing with the high temperatures. After publication of the news article the district then provided the East Mesa schools with temporary fans; they were still the only source of climate control two years later. Structural inequalities notwithstanding, the social studies curriculum (which included history, sociology, economics, and philosophy) were a dim attempt to institute control over the academic growth of emergent bilingual students.

Within the social studies courses, the mandatory text for the U.S. History course was a text written first in English and then translated into Spanish. The authors intended the information from each page in the English version to correspond with the numerical equivalent in the Spanish version. When the Spanish version required more space for the text than did the English version, the authors simply omitted entire paragraphs from the Spanish text. There was never additional information contained in the Spanish text.

The obvious consequences of using such texts were unequal access to information, the acceleration of English acquisition while diminishing Spanish fluency among the students. To Matt it seemed the official U.S. History textbooks would never provide the validation or recognition necessary to raise marginalized multicultural experiences from positions of subordination. By already shortening the Spanish language textbooks to present a page-to-page uniformity, the Author's limited the learning content. Furthermore the texts promoted a socialization in which the US was presented in an absolute glorious light, indoctrinating learners with a jingoistic version of history. Faced with this situation, Matt in a conversation with Arturo considered possibilities to remedy this situation.

Simple, he sought to connect with the students by designing lessons and activities that were based on their personal interests while supplementing the content mandated by the Public Education Department with the work of scholars such as Howard Zinn (2003), Ron Takaki (2008), Bill Bigelow (2006), and James Loewen (2007). In teaching his students Matt realized they were hungry for a curriculum in which they were presented as central figures, as those who historically and

academically mattered. Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the US* (2003) served as a terrific rebuttal and sharp counterpoint to the "sanctioned" curriculum. Ron Takaki's *A Different Mirror* (2008) presented a more accurate view of the U.S. colonization of the Southwest, an issue on which the students wrote extensively.

Matt also decided the curricular activities would be directed at getting the most out of the linguistic possibilities through creative writing activities, peer collaboration, and numerous reading opportunities that scaffolded (Vygotsky, 1978) the students' social and academic vocabularies. Indeed, Gibbons (2002, p. 14) elaborates how "Vygotskian theory...points to the significance of interaction in learning and...views dialogue as constructing the resources for thinking." Dialogue is thus an essential component in second language acquisition, literacy development, and the development of higher order thinking. As one component of critical pedagogy dialogue is pivotal in the formation of student learning, problematizing, and the transformation of oppressive conditions (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002).

### **Matt's Experiences in Bilingual Education**

Following a disastrous situation involving a culturally offensive activity from the Literacy Strategies' official curriculum, I made an executive decision to discard it and use sources written originally in Spanish. The students in my Literacy Strategies course all preferred Spanish, so I thought it best to establish with them a high level of Spanish literacy before they would be moved into all-English classes, as would be happening when they arrived at high school. Every student was intelligent but English was still a language that posed difficulties. The reading selections were intended to span various geographical locations of the Spanish-speaking world. Chapter one of Ernesto Che Guevara's *Diarios de Motocicleta* (2006) critically engaged the students; *Diarios de Motocicleta* (ibid) developed with the students in their reading of it an excitement to meet new people, cross borders, and see what existed around the proverbial corner. Given that many of my students were themselves immigrants to the US, they identified with the mystery, wonder, danger, and excitement of visiting new lands.

To vary the selection of classroom reading material my students and I walked with Federico García Lorca (1996) through the streets of New York and the hills of Andalucía, and shortly thereafter revisited the local Southwestern streets with renowned poet, scriptwriter, and motivational speaker Dr. Jimmy Santiago Baca (1990).

Ever aware of a possible surprise inspection by the administration, I took precautions to ensure that reading and discussion time with the students would be uninterrupted. Since I was consciously deviating from the prescribed curriculum, I knew what I was doing could incite the ire of the department chair, instructional coach, or administration. But I also knew what I was doing was best for my students. Encouraging the development of literacy in my students' native language would ultimately facilitate the development of literacy in their second language (Thomas and Collier, 2002).

In school districts across the U.S. however, students who speak languages other than English are exited from bilingual programs before they are actually ready for mainstream English courses. Programs that require 5-7 years of participation are often terminated a few years after their implementation, leaving many ESL students linguistically stranded in English-dominant schools.

Towards the conclusion of my first school year, the girls' soccer team overcame dramatic challenges and won the city championship, a very difficult feat in

a city renowned for producing outstanding soccer players. Throughout the school year other teams and coaches complained about the girls' team. The team conducted itself on the field entirely in Spanish, this was disconcerting to the opposing teams, opponents who frequently taunted the girls with racist comments such as, "This is America, speak English," and "It's called soccer, not 'fute-bowl'."

I discussed the matter with their coach one day. She informed me the girls were very bothered by the taunts, some of them brought up using English instead of Spanish as the dominant language on the team. The coach was concerned that the ethnic identity of the girls would be damaged if Spanish were replaced with English. My response to the coach was supportive; I told her the linguistic taunts were racist, that the girls were being targeted because they were talented, and that for a team to be coached in Spanish would ultimately further support their developing ethnic identity.

Furthermore, I related, the students had little to worry about when it came to learning English; the true risk of living in the US is losing their fluency in Spanish. In the US, English is acquired as a consequence of living, working and being schooled here. The extra-curricular activities that were conducted in Spanish would promote the students' ethnic identities and self-confidence while supporting retention of their mother tongue, primarily Spanish.

At the start of my second year at Apple Middle School, I was invited to join a small-learning community pilot program. The small learning community was comprised of a language arts teacher, a science teacher, a math teacher, and myself, a social studies teacher. We would meet regularly to plan joint lessons, conduct meetings and mediations with students, and organize extra-curricular activities. The learning community's first goal was to solicit involvement from the parents and guardians. Next we held frequent meetings with the students who needed extra help. Once per month we organized conferences with all of the family members. Each meeting had a theme that was negotiated according to the parents' and guardians' concerns.

In the beginning of the year the small learning community decided to emphasize academic content along with student self-confidence. (The students were 6<sup>th</sup> graders, just beginning their middle school years). Under this guiding framework, the students were frequently writing and completing assignments in whatever language they preferred. Once the learning community and I assessed the students' academic proficiency, gentle nudges from the teachers helped to further scaffold their levels of fluency and literacy in the languages of instruction: Spanish and English.

For example, I would frequently ask students to write short stories involving the historical figures they were learning about. When students used invented spellings (Hayes, Bahruth & Kessler, 1998), only a few gentle suggestions were made. The purpose of making only a few suggestions instead of drawing attention to every error was to minimize the anxiety experienced by the students while maintaining their interest in writing.

The overarching purpose of minor corrections and gentle suggestions on spelling, grammar, mechanics, and so forth on student work was two-fold: one, to maintain a consistently low affective filter that would help students develop and acquire flow and coherency in written production; two, to develop an academic space in which students experience opportunities for success, confident growth, and a warm atmosphere far removed from the punitive judgments they experienced every day. Our space, hence, became a classroom for transformative education.

Teachers, we come to understand the development of reading and writing through our observations of students as they experiment and play with letters and

words, stringing them together as extended expressions. Invented spellings (Hayes, Bahruth & Kessler, 1998) thus serve as a catalyst for developing and honing written expression. With the condemnation of a student's invented spellings comes the teacher's manipulation of their development and autonomy for expression. In such a situation, the teacher's pedagogical responsibility is not to cause harm to the learner but rather provide the opportunities where any written and oral expression are welcome. That is not to say that such instruction lacks rigor or assumes a laissez-faire pedagogical posture, but instead is rigorous as it is constant in supporting a student's scholarly production and development. As the content begins to reflect the lived experiences and relevant interests of the learners, academic growth is exponential.

It was common in the school for monolingual English-speaking teachers, to ask bilingual students to assist monolingual students during lessons or in-group activities; this is not always pedagogically sound. The benefits of doing this are that English language learners can develop a kinship with their bilingual classmates and they can acquire a portion of the material presented by the teacher. The drawbacks however are that the English language learners are limited to the extent of the bilingual fluency of their peers, it is also likely the bilingual peer will acquire little of the lesson due to their attention being constantly diverted by the student they are providing the translation. Furthermore translation is difficult; it requires high levels of fluency in both languages, as well as close attention to detail.

And yet bilingual and bicultural fluency and biliteracy increased for many of the students. How did we accomplish this? The monthly parent-night meetings facilitated the relationships between families and teachers. This allowed the teachers to learn more about the unique funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez, 1992) of each student and to foster open communication and collaboration with parents and guardians. For many of the students, their bilingualism became an academic staple. Having multiple ways of announcing thoughts, ideas, and questions allowed for clarity of expression that is sometimes elusive in a monolingual mindset.

The small learning community I was a member of sought to build upon the knowledge and interests of all the students they served. Monolingualism was seen as something to be addressed (both for teachers and for students) but not through reprimand or submersion rather through constant caring and patient attention to students. The school community supported the notion of all Spanish days and all English days (days in which the teachers and students conducted their classes in one target language) as well as bilingual days, bilingual group activities, and heavy doses of the most important element for any teaching, *cariño*, a familial pedagogical posture intended to develop a sense of ontological clarity with the students.

## **Discussion**

So, what are critical foundations for bilingual education? What is necessary for bilingual education to be effective? How do we know when we have accomplished what we originally set out to do? For bilingual teachers, and teachers at large, our classrooms must be places where students desire to be. This is not accomplished through language discrimination but through embracing linguistic and ethnic diversity. Each student who enters a classroom already possesses a world of knowledge. This knowledge may be acquired through formal education, their prior years in "academic" settings; other knowledge will have been gained through what Henry A. Giroux (2004) calls "Public Pedagogy." Public pedagogy is the constant learning that takes place in situations removed from the traditional classroom, be they

family stories, cultural activities, multimedia barrages, or lived experiences of crossing and transgressing borders.

Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (1987) teach us that “reading the world” always precedes reading the word. What students know and how they know are assets to be cultivated and nourished. For those students who find themselves outside of the white male, Euro-centric mainstream, this means that educators must take the initiative to advocate for their presence in academic circles. This is crucial for students’ (and teachers’) socio-cultural identities and academic confidence. This can be accomplished through recognizing the inherent academic failure of the monolingual agenda.

The motives of all teachers and students reflect deeper feelings and attitudes, as well as prior experiences. In our experience, Matt and Arturo, some of the integral components for critical bilingual education are conditions, motives, and theoretical preparation. Conditions must be in place for the students to grow, learn, and thrive (McLaren, 2006). For speakers of other languages, this includes teacher patience, enjoyable academic activities, and the teachers’ ability to maintain a safe environment for all, this, as well as love, hope for the future, a fervent belief in today’s youth, and commitments to social justice are fundamental to any quality bilingual program.

Rigorous theoretical preparation is absolutely critical for teachers. The 1974 *Lau v. Nichols* decision was an essential component of upholding the civil rights of speakers of other languages. At the time of the decision quality research in bilingual education did not exist, this is no longer the case. There exists a wealth of literature that demonstrates the benefits of bilingual education. Furthermore, bilingual education prepares students for competence in a multilingual world. The longitudinal studies of Collier and Thomas (cited in Crawford, 2004) on immigrant students in the Fairfax and Houston areas have demonstrated that students who have acquired literacy and fluency in their native languages outperform their Monolingual English and English as a Second Language (ESL) peers who are attempting to acquire literacy in a second language before it has been acquired in their native language. For immigrant students, additive bilingualism is more promising than English submersion, ESL Pullout, or other attempts to coerce speakers of other languages into assimilating into the English-dominant paradigm.

Simply put, a standardized approach to forming a quality bilingual education program does not exist. The details for crafting a critical bilingual education depend on the student population and the larger school community. It is a fundamental necessity to lower the affective filter if students are to become bilingual. There are clearly approaches that fail to serve the best needs of the students. A deficit-model approach to teaching is at best condescending it will increase the levels of anxiety among students. When students are more concerned with the punishment that can accompany making a mistake, their motivation to participate will be diminished. The presence of *cariño*, humor, and the fostering of a love for reading and writing can undo much of the damage that traditional, uncritical, and abusive teachers have inflicted upon our students.

Abuse through coercive, reward/punishment pedagogical practices causes many students to vote with their feet and walk out, either physically or mentally and emotionally. Following a standardized curriculum that under-serves the intelligence of our bilingual and ESL students and callously presents their home cultures in dominated positions is to commit acts of intellectual, ethnic, and social violence. The history of violence in American education for speakers of other languages has been well-documented by Sandy Grande (2004), Joel Spring (2003) and Ron Takaki



(2008), among others. The pedagogy in such programs is unsound, their motives are vicious, and the results frequently devastating. English only was intended to “improve” the lives of the students, but as Donald Macedo (2000) reminds us, English is not the language of success in America. That acquiring English is the key to success in America is an outright lie that has been perpetrated against Native Americans and immigrants alike.

The education of a teacher is never finished. Teachers must constantly scrutinize their practice and re-invent their lessons to better support their student populations and communities. Freire (1985, p. 4) teaches us: “to study is not to consume ideas, but to create and re-create them.” Professional development that many districts offer typically amounts to a regurgitation of uncritical teaching practices aimed at marginalizing students while upholding the status quo. Some ideas on how teachers can continue to grow intellectually include pursuing advanced degrees and additional certification in areas that expand their thinking and aid them in pushing curriculum and pedagogy in new directions.

However, they must not limit their personal and intellectual development to the academy. Teachers as organic intellectuals continually devour educational, political, and social texts, revisiting central works as well as exploring new fields. As we turn to Gramsci (2008), we find the relevance of organic intellectuals in the field of education as more relevant (particularly as state governments seek to eliminate the collective bargaining rights of teachers’ unions). Teachers as organic intellectuals develop connections between their school communities and larger societal and economic problems. Gramsci’s insight into the positionality of the organic intellectual (teacher) is precise: “the elaboration of intellectual strata in concrete reality does not take place on the terrain of abstract democracy but in accordance with very concrete traditional historical processes” (pp. 11). Gramsci here refers to the praxis in which organic intellectual teachers engage. The theoretical preparation of an organic intellectual informs and helps shape the concrete actions he/she takes within the classrooms and the school communities, which then inform the critical reflections and further political actions taken by the teacher within his/her classroom and school community.

The political and economic assaults on education today call for a return to Gramsci’s notion of the organic intellectual as well as Marx and Engels’s critiques of Capitalism. As curriculum and instruction in public schools continues to be mandated away from complexity and toward functional simplicity, as the school to prison pipeline is greased with the sweat and tears of (primarily) poor and working class inner-city youth, as the education industrial complex further entrenches itself in Kindergarten-University settings, Capital becomes ever more burdening. Engaged in ongoing struggle, organic intellectual teachers resist the continued oppression of their students and school communities to bring about transformational changes to the concrete realities of their respective communities but also to develop with their students a certain critical agency that transcends quantifiable measures.

Critical pedagogy became the avenue for which I (Matt) was able to connect with and reach the students with whom I taught. After Arturo introduced me to critical pedagogy via Freire’s *Teachers as cultural workers*, I began to take on as well as develop a language and a lens that allowed me to justify using different approaches to bilingual literacy development. In recognizing the fallacies and injustices of high-stakes standardized testing and prepackaged curricula, I was also able to challenge them and justify my critiques. I was certain that if I had not risked criticism and reprimand from the administration and used a critical teaching approach, I would

certainly not have experienced the success that I did with a highly vulnerable and frequently dismissed student population.

In our classes my students and I asked questions such as: why are we being taught that Latin America is a place of subordination and economic exploitation to European and (anglo-) American will? Why are we asked to read culturally offensive stories that denigrate heritage? What is the risk of reading work produced originally in Spanish, and projecting our own unique voices and experiences in Spanish, English, and various mixtures thereof?

These questions and many others pushed a new consciousness that involved a healthy political clarity on issues surrounding language rights, economic exploitation, foreign policy, and claims of academic authority. Students came to realize the immense prior knowledge and the validity of their previous life experiences; what they knew and how they knew it became educational assets. Our critical space went beyond sitting in a circle and engaging in cathartic group therapy; the purpose of the space was to grow with informed and critical citizens that would recognize the oppressive micro and macro situations in our collective lives to seek to transform society.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, you cannot teach anyone anything. What we educators do is create the conditions in which students can learn (McLaren, 2000). We do this through informed consciousness of our own pedagogical devices and our commitment to challenging the dehumanizing situations in which our students may live. Coming from the Southwest, many of Matt's students endured oppressive border politics, class exploitation, homophobia, Islamophobia, racism, police brutality, and many other forms of oppression. Their challenges were presented in the class and frequently became the focal points of many discussions. Students felt safe enough to share their experiences in the presence of a teacher; when asked how many students had done this before with teachers, remarkably few raised their hands. The classroom the students shared with Matt became a safe space for students to be intellectually and emotionally vulnerable. What also separated our dialogue from cathartic, round-robin ramblings was the focus on possibilities for transforming the conditions in which we learn and live. For example, when a student presented an issue on gang violence, others would offer support via contacts through the school and the surrounding community.

To address the linguistic reality, some Southwestern states have made considerable progress that few other states have matched. Likewise in other regions of the United States of America the oppressive English-Only Movement meets resistance from conscientious women and men who seek to pronounce a world in which language death itself becomes extinct. Consider, Robert Frost's poem "Mending Wall" (1914). Frost writes, "Before I built a wall I'd ask to know/ What I was walling in or walling out/ And to whom I was like to give offense." Walls (and trenches) that divide teachers and students hinder the students' development; disvalidation and dismissal of students' experiences and knowledge can (and will) cause irreparable damage. This final point highlights the necessity of a humanizing bilingual education; forced monolingualism, which is a veneer (albeit quite transparent) for racism, stifles the cognitive growth of our pupils. Bilingual educators engage a student population that is highly vulnerable to class exploitation, police brutality, and systematic neglect from those charged with upholding their human and civil rights. We must therefore

ask ourselves what we want for our own children, and then do everything possible to provide exactly that for each of our students.

**Author Details**

**Arturo Rodriguez** is Assistant Professor of Bilingual Education at Boise State University. Email: [arturorodriguez@boisestate.edu](mailto:arturorodriguez@boisestate.edu)

**Matthew David Smith** is a PhD candidate in Urban Schooling at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, University of California Los Angeles. Email: [matt75@ucla.edu](mailto:matt75@ucla.edu)

## References

Althusser, L. (1964, 2008). *On ideology: Ideology and Ideological state apparatuses*. London: Verso.

Anderson-Levitt, K. (2009). Ethnography. In Judith L. Green, Gregory Camilli, & Patricia B. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (279-295). New York: Routledge.

Baca, J.S. (1990). *Immigrants in our own land and selected early poems*. New York: New Directions Publishing Group.

Bigelow, B. (2006). *The line between us: Teaching about the border and Mexican immigration*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, Ltd.

Constitution for the State of New Mexico. (1912). Retrieved at <http://www.sos.state.nm.us/pdf/2007nmconst.pdf> on 7 October 2011.

Crawford, J. (2004). *Educating English learners: Language diversity in the classroom*. (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Bilingual Educational Services.

Thomas, W.P., & Collier, V.P. (2002). *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement*. Santa Cruz, CA: Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence, University of California-Santa Cruz.

Freire, P. (1985). *The politics of education: Culture, power, and liberation*. New York: Bergin & Garvey.

Freire, P. & D. Macedo. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the word and the world*. New York: Routledge.

Frost, R. (1914). "Mending wall." Retrieved at: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/15719> on 9/16/2010.

Giroux, H.A. (2004). Public pedagogy and the politics of neo-liberalism: making the political more pedagogical. *Policy Futures in Education*, 2(3&4), 494-503.

Grande, S. (2004). *Red pedagogy: Native American social and political thought*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, Inc.

Guevara, E. (2006). *Diarios de motocicleta: Notas de viaje*. London: Ocean Press.

Hayes, C., Bahruth, R., Kessler, C. (1998). *Literacy con cariño: A story of migrant children's success*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Lau v. Nichols. 414 U.S. 563 (1974); Supreme Court Decision.

Loewen, J.L. (2007). *Lies my teacher told me: Everything your American history textbook got wrong*. Texas: Touchstone Publishing.

Lorca, F.G. (1996). *Poema del cante jondo / Romancero gitano*. Madrid, España: Catedra.

- (1996). *Poeta en Nueva York*. Madrid, España: Catedra.

Macedo, D. (2000). The colonialism of the English only movement. *Educational Researcher*, 29(3), 15-24. Retrieved at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1176913> on 9/16/2010.

McLaren, P. (2006). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of bilingual education*. (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 132-141.

Smith-Maddox, R., & Solórzano, D. (2002). Using critical race theory, Freire problem posing method, and case study research to confront race and racism in education. In *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8, 66-84.

Spring, J. (2003). *Deculturalization and the struggle for equality*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Takaki, R. (2008). *A different mirror: A history of multicultural America*. New York: Back Bay Books.

Ulibarri, S.R. (1964). *El alma de la raza*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico College of Education.

Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: U.S. – Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. New York: SUNY Press.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. (14<sup>th</sup> ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Zinn, H. (2003). *A people's history of the US: 1492-Present*. New York: Harper & Row.