Bilingual Teacher Leadership:

*Teachers embracing Activism for Transformation and Social Change*

Deborah Palmer, Ph.D.

University of Colorado Boulder
Framing our Purpose...

Hope is rooted in men’s [and women’s] incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search – a search which can be carried out only in communion with others. Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it. The dehumanization resulting from an unjust order is not a cause for despair but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of the humanity denied by injustice. Hope, however, does not consist in crossing one’s arms and waiting. As long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight with hope, then I can wait.

Paolo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 2000, p.92
Overview

- **What does it mean to say Bilingual and ESL Teachers are *Activists* and *Leaders*?**

- **Why do bilingual and ESL educators at all levels need to be leaders and activists?**

- **How can - and how do - bilingual and ESL teachers engage as leaders and activists?**
The Proyecto Maestría Collaborative

- Federal DOE Title III National Professional Development Project: *To Increase the Quantity, and Improve the Quality, of bilingual and ESL teachers in Austin, TX Metroplex.*
- Collaborative project with Austin Independent School District
- Cohort-Based Master’s Degree Program in Curriculum and Instruction: Bilingual/Bicultural Education, with focus on Teacher Leadership.
- 15 months, June to following August. 36 hours coursework.
- 5 Cohorts, 54 experienced (at least 5 yrs) certified elementary bilingual education teachers, tuition paid, highly selective.
Proyecto Program’s Three Goals for Participants:

1. **Instill Critical consciousness and Assets-Oriented Orientation**
   - Funds of Knowledge, Community/Cultural Wealth, Critical Pedagogy, Language/Power

2. **Build depth of knowledge in foundations of bilingual education**
   - History/Policy/Programs/Research
   - Biliteracy Theory and Practice (*we taught bilingually*)
   - Culturally Responsive/Sustainable Pedagogies

3. **Develop Capacity for Teacher Leadership**
   - Coaching/Mentoring, Designing/Presenting PD
   - Working with administrators/district leadership
   - Engaging parents and communities
   - Professional networking regionally, statewide, nationally
The Study: 2008-2016

- Artifacts from classes I taught each of the 5 cohorts:
  - Teaching in Elementary Bilingual Classroom; Teacher Leadership for Bilingual/ESL
  - Weekly online reflections/discussions
  - Final projects and papers
- My (occasional) field notes and reflections
- Recordings of occasional events/meetings
- Post-graduation Interviews: individual and focal group (additional researchers Drs. Monica Valadéz and Blanca Caldas)
- Teacher names are pseudonyms.
Austin, Texas

- Fast Growing Metropolis: nearly 950,000 people
- Austin ISD: 80+ elementary schools, 60+ schools with bilingual education.
  - In 2007: Transitional Bilingual Education.
  - By 2013: Dual Language Bilingual Education
What is Bilingual Teacher Leadership?

What is Teacher Leadership?

“Teacher leaders lead within and beyond the classroom; identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders; influence others toward improved educational practice and accept responsibility for achieving the outcomes of their leadership” (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009, p.6).

What is special about Bilingual teachers?

Critical Consciousness.

*We have to be ACTIVISTS for SOCIAL JUSTICE in order to engage in leadership.*

- ...Bilingual teachers are intimately aware of the dominant society’s marginalization of their kids (and often themselves).
My goal, my desire has always been to work with teachers and contribute to the professional growth of the experts in bilingual education who many times are ignored. I have seen how so many highly qualified teachers are treated as if they are ignorant because they work with bilingual students and like them [their students], they are depreciated by the population that feels superior in all aspects of education. Most of the time it is those people who decide the type of program that is implemented in our schools and that affect our children.
Alondra, Cohort 5:
Native Spanish speakers have been discriminated in the past; I was discriminated when I was growing up and my students still experience a level of blatant discrimination at school. Enough is enough. If we do not stand up for our students, who will?
Why do Bilingual Teachers NEED to be Activists to be Leaders?

- **Leila, Cohort 1:** I think that we need to **insist on change on our campuses** in order to help all of the kids respect each other... I am inspired to move my school forward to ensure that our kids feel ownership and a sense [of] worth. Being a bilingual teacher is not easy, it requires more than just speaking Spanish, you have to be tough, professional and as the article states “develop a clear but flexible philosophy that helps you understand what you are doing and why, because you will be asked to defend it (Palmer et al., 2006, p.79).”

(final spring online reflection)

- **Mariana, Cohort 1:** I hope we can keep our teachers because they are extremely hard workers and if we start guiding them to become leaders, I can’t wait to see what our school can do. **It is time for the Bilingual teachers to take over y que nos escuchen** [and for them to listen to us]. We have so much more to offer our Bilingual students. I hope this changes next year and our principal can really **appreciate her Bilingual staff and what we have to say about OUR STUDENTS!** I believe the only way we can accomplish this is by developing the staff’s weaknesses into strengths. **We need to EMPOWER all of the Bilingual teachers.** I hope I can do this next year. (final spring online reflection)
Emma, Cohort 4:

- In a bilingual setting it is very important to bring all on board in order to support and nurture the children into becoming successful and bi-literate young adults. The message for English only is all around us, so it is much more difficult. (Online reflection)

- Previously I thought I was a "good leader" because I was organized and able to move meetings along, relay information, etc. But I know now that I must do more. I must inspire others and educate my colleagues on culturally relevant lessons, literature, and practices. I must create advocates for biliteracy. I must mentor others to reach their fullest potential and reach as many kids as possible. (Post-graduation Interview)
How can bilingual teachers embrace leadership (and activism)?

1. **Reflexive Practice:**
   Leverage research. Be a public intellectual and a lifelong learner. Embrace inspiring theories. Think deeply about your work.

2. **Strong cultural and Linguistic Identities:**

3. **Strong professional network:**
1. Reflexive Practice.
Ground your teaching in inspiring ideas. Engage creativity. Leverage research. Think deeply about teaching and learning.
Give ourselves the tools to NAME the world, and thereby to CHANGE it...

Intuitivamente la mayor parte de nosotros lo sabemos y lo hemos sabido por mucho tiempo, nos lo decía nuestro instinto, pero muchas veces carecíamos de la palabra, del discurso, del contexto histórico para definirlo.

Intuitively the majority of us knows it, and we have known it for a long time, our instincts have told us, but many times we lacked the word, the discourse, the historical context to define it (Daniel, Cohort 4, on Leadership)
To NAME the world, and to Change it...

It wasn’t until I came to UT that I really started to realize, ‘Oh, my goodness! These are real things that I do in the classroom and they have a theory.’ So I started to put the theory to my practices instead of relying only [on] my practices. Because I started to think, ‘Oh, when I do this, it goes with Freire’s humanizing [pedagogies]... when I do this, it goes to funds of knowledge, and when I... So, I was like, ‘Wow! These things I didn’t invent. They’re real out there! (Natasha, Cohort 5, award acceptance speech)
Words have power.

Eustolia, cohort 1, final spring semester online reflection:

Personally, I see myself as an agent of change at this point, with the realization that my words have an impact on those within my surroundings.
George (Cohort 5):

“Going into [graduate school] I worried that what I would be learning might feel disconnected from my daily experience as a classroom teacher. On the contrary, I’ve found the broad scope of educational context we’ve been learning about to be directly tied to what I do as a teacher. Now it seems everything I read gives me ideas for research topics that I would like to pursue because they’re things that interest me in how they relate to teacher practice.”
Read. Engage in dialogue. Continue to learn and grow.

- Graduate school
- Study/Book groups at your school or district
- ?
Valuing and Using Home Cultural and Linguistic Resources in School

- Funds of Knowledge: Luis Moll (University of New Mexico)
### Table 1
A Sample of Household Funds of Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agriculture and mining</th>
<th>Economics</th>
<th>Household management</th>
<th>Material &amp; scientific knowledge</th>
<th>Medicine</th>
<th>Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ranching and farming</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Budgets</td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Contemporary medicine</td>
<td>Catechism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horsemanship</td>
<td>Market values</td>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>Carpentry</td>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td>Baptisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(cowboys)</td>
<td>Appraising</td>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>Roofing</td>
<td>First aid procedures</td>
<td>Bible studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal husbandry</td>
<td>Renting and selling</td>
<td>Appliance repairs</td>
<td>Masonry</td>
<td>Anatomy</td>
<td>Moral knowledge and ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil and irrigation</td>
<td>Loans</td>
<td></td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>Midwifery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>systems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Design and architecture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crop planting</td>
<td>Labor laws</td>
<td></td>
<td>Repair</td>
<td>Folk medicine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunting, tracking,</td>
<td>Building codes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Airplane</td>
<td>Herbal knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dressing</td>
<td>Consumer knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td>Automobile</td>
<td>Folk cures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tractor</td>
<td>Folk veterinary cures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timbering</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td></td>
<td>House maintenance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minerals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Folk veterinary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blasting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>cures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment operation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and maintenance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Naming and Sharing our Own Funds of Knowledge:

- Emma (Cohort 4, Interview): “we had dug back into our past, and why we’re here, and why we’re truly doing what we’re doing. It was amazing.”

- Emma (Cohort 4, online reflection): I’ve had conversations with peers and some are so tired of the struggle, or tired of the lazy “culture” and want to go somewhere else. I on the other hand lived this way growing up, with parents that were migrants and were absent from a lot of school functions due to work. It’s not that they did not care, it’s that school is intimidating and they trusted that I was doing my job and so were the teachers. I guess that’s why I get along with parents and the kids so well (or because I’m happy and not bitter) is because I see some of me and my family in them. (Online reflection)

- Interviewer: “Do you think it was necessary to uncover who you are?”

- Gisela (Cohort 5): “Yes. Then it brings back why you became a teacher and why you wanted to teach with this population. What can you do to make a difference? It brings back the whole ‘you are here because...’ You know. The whole reason of why you became a teacher.”
Gisela (Cohort 5): Para mi fue eye opening cuando tuvimos la clase con Dr. Franquiz porque fue donde dije, “Ah, sí. Es cierto. Nosotros nunca tuvimos libros. Ah, sí, el catecismo.” Fue cuando empecé a ver esas piezas que tuve como literatura. Yo nunca había pensado en la lotería como literatura pero ya analizando bueno, si es cierto, crecí con la lotería. Eran como mis primeras palabras. Era el juego familiar y empecé a verlo de otra manera; y los cuentos de mi papá. Se la pasaba contando contándonos cuentos todo el día y aprendí muchas cosas académicas por medio de sus cuentos pero nunca pensé que me estaba enseñando algo.

For me it was eye opening when we had the class with Dr. Franquiz because that what where I said, ‘ah yes, it’s true. We never had books. Ah yes, catechism.’ It was when I began to see those pieces that I had as literature. I had never thought of Lotería (Mexican bingo-type game) as literature but looking at it closely, yes it’s true, I grew up with Lotería. Those were like my first words. It was the family game and I began to see it in a different way; and the stories of my dad. He passed the time telling stories all day and I learned many academic things by way of his stories but I never thought that he was teaching me something.
Cultural Competency for ALL Teachers

Raquel (Cohort 1):

All the things [my cohort colleagues] shared about their personal life taught me so much about bilingual education in this country it was so like... you went through this? and this is because they’re from different regions of Texas and they all had so many rich experiences and their perspectives as learners and bilingual students in Texas, it’s just so rich to me and more meaningful than going through several books of history... They’re nice to me and answered a lot of questions that I had in relation to the background of my students in their families, in their families’ history in this country. So I think it was just completely an eye-opening experience.
Cultural Competency for ALL Teachers

- Christine (cohort 3):
- I think a lot about like privilege and lack of privilege and I feel like you know I’m coming with my backpack of plenty of privilege so I want to step it up. I mean the sacrifices that these families make are so profound with the purpose of you know educating their children that I’ve got to be the best that I can be to really serve them and you know help them on their journey.
Home Visits (to learn about families FOK)

Natasha (Cohort 5, Online Reflection)

Yo pienso que es totalmente erróneo pensar que por venir de un trasfondo humilde y por tener experiencias diferentes, los niños son totalmente ignorantes.... Es importante tomar el tiempo para conocer a nuestros estudiantes y descubrir todas las riquezas que pueden aportar a nuestro salón. Debemos comenzar por aprender acerca de la cultura del país que provienen hasta la cultura que tienen como familia. Al leer a Moll se me confirmó mi deseo de visitar a mis estudiantes en sus hogares. Este año, a raíz de mis visitas a las casas de mis estudiantes, he visto los beneficios de conocer de dónde vienen nuestros estudiantes. Siento que abrí una ventanita por la que veo y entiendo algunas de sus reacciones, también he comenzado a establecer relaciones positivas con los padres y ver cómo los puedo integrar a las actividades y lecciones que tenemos en clase.

I think it’s totally erroneous to assume that because they come from a humble background and have different experiences that children are ignorant... It’s important to take the time to know our students and discover all the riches that they can bring to our classroom. We should begin by learning about the culture of their country of origin including the culture of their family. Reading Moll confirmed for me my desire to visit my students in their homes. This year, because of my visits to the homes of my students, I’ve seen the benefits of knowing where they come from. I feel like I’ve opened a little window through which I can see and understand some of their reactions, also I’ve begun to establish positive relationships with their parents and to see how I can integrate them into the activities and lessons that we have in class.
Natasha (cohort 5, interview):

Ver la realidad que han pasado sus padres. Yo no los entendía. También no puedo negar que como puertorriqueña nací ciudadana. Vengo aquí, me miran con otros ojos que con los ojos que miran a los mexicanos, a los salvadoreños, ellos no son ciudadanos. Entonces, cuando yo empiezo a ver todas sus luchas te tienes que quitarte la capa, y quitarte el sombrero y decir, ‘Ud. tenga’ a los padres porque ellos han luchado por tanto para llegar aquí que ya de entrada el que ha luchado para llegar te demuestra que sus deseos son, por sus hijos y por ellos, de mejorar, de ayudar.

To see the reality that their parents had lived. I hadn’t understood them. I also can’t ignore that as a Puerto Rican I was born a citizen. I come here, they see me with different eyes from the eyes that see Mexicans, Salvadorans, they are not citizens. So, when I begin to see all the struggles you have to take your hat off, and take of your hat and say, ‘You sir, take it’ to the parents because they have struggled so much to get here that already coming in he who has struggled to get here shows you that his desires are, for his children and for themselves, to improve, to help.
Turn And Talk

How can you learn more about the family and community funds of knowledge in your communities?
Families/Cultural Resources for Teaching: Further Reading...


**BOOKS**


Families/Cultural Resources for Teaching: Further Exploration...

WEBSITES

- Rethinking Schools: [https://www.rethinkingschools.org/](https://www.rethinkingschools.org/)
- Caroline Sweet & Sandra Springer “Examining Border-Crossing Stories and the Immigrant Experience Through Literature in the Elementary Classroom” [sites.google.com/site/bordercrossingstories](https://sites.google.com/site/bordercrossingstories)
- Teaching Tolerance Classroom Resources: [http://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources](http://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources)
Families/Cultural Resources for Teaching: Further Exploration...

CHILDREN’S LITERATURE COMPILATIONS/LISTS

- Cooperative Children’s Book Center “50 Multicultural Books every child should know” [https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/detailListBooks.asp?idBookLists=42](https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/detailListBooks.asp?idBookLists=42)


- Pura Belpré Award Winners (ALA): [http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal/belprepast](http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal/belprepast)


*Build community.*
*Collaborate.* *Mentor.*
*Share.*
“What was the most important thing about graduate school?”

Gisela (coh.5): El saber que hay otras personas que piensan igual. Que tiene los mismos valores que tú y tienen experiencias muy similares a las tuya y aquí están y si te sientes, así como, no sé... aquí están. Eso es lo más bonito. Saber, que, pienso yo, que sé que le puedo llamar a Maya o le puedo escribir a Alondra o a Natasha y... [Knowing there are other people who think the same. That have the same values as you and have very similar experiences to yours and here they are and if you feel, like, I don’t know... here they are. That’s the most beautiful thing. To know, I think, that I know that I can call Maya or I can write to Alondra or to Natasha and...]

Interviewer: Que no estás sola. [That you’re not alone.]

Gisela: Aja. [uh huh]
You are not alone!
Not at my school...

George, Cohort 5, interview:
I always felt kind of on the outside... and my students too were kind of on the outside. And so, part of, you know, what was so great about Proyecto and this* too, is talking and being around other people that understand and have the same, I guess, orientation towards the students, and language and all of these things that, yeah, I wasn’t getting any more working at the school that I was working at.

*[current engagement with Academia Cuauhtli, a language/culture revitalization project with Dra. Angela Valenzuela in Austin]*

• ...That’s what I remember the most about it, the relationships we all made with each other and how much I certainly learned from everybody that was in there.
Conferences and Professional Communities:

- ¡BUENO!
- CU Boulder (or other) Graduate Programs!
- La Cosecha
  - Dual Language Education New Mexico (DLENM)
- National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE)
- Colorado Association of Bilingual Education (CoCABE)
- National Association of Multilingual Education (NAME)
- Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL, CoTESOL)
- Network for Public Education (NPE)
- Teachers For Social Justice (T4SJ)
- ?
Journals

- Rethinking Schools
- Radical Teacher
- Language Arts
- Instructional Leadership
- Language)( Magazine

Blogs

- Radical Teacher
  https://radicalteacherblog.wordpress.com/
- Educational Linguist
  https://educationallinguist.wordpress.com/
- Urban Teachers
  http://www.urbanteachers.org/news/
- A list of top teacher blogs:
  https://www.teachercertificationdegrees.com/top-blogs/teacher/

Podcasts

- Edutopia’s Best Podcasts for Teachers:
  https://www.edutopia.org/blog/best-education-podcasts-betty-ray
Bilingual Teacher Leaders Are...

Gisela (Cohort 5):

The way that I view my job, my profession, has evolved and grown. I used to have a very narrow view of what a teacher does (should do). My view involved little parent contact, and was mostly contained to what happened in my classroom and in my team planning. I don’t think I ever thought of issues of social justice, even though they exist at my campus.

My role as a teacher is bigger, I now realize. A teacher can be a leader. A teacher leader goes beyond his/her classroom. A teacher leader can touch not only the lives of his/her students and their families, but the lives of others. A teacher leader forms relationships with peers that are beyond superficial, by creating mentor relationships with peers, learning from them, and helping them in their journey. A teacher leader encourages his/her parents to become leaders, and advocates for them, when they face adversity in their attempts to do so. A teacher leader is well informed about what is going on at his/her school. A teacher leader is a learner.
I have personally grown as a leader this year with the mentoring of Proyecto. I have always known that I was a leader, but felt I was not knowledgeable enough to luchar for ciertos temas como la instruccion de dual, la participacion de padres y como debemos enfocarnos en el aprendizaje de los estudiantes (y no en el STAAR). Tomar los cursos de Proyecto me ha dado la **confianza** que siempre ha estado ahí enterrado. Yo siempre he tenido la confianza pero vivia en el mundo "de la maestra". Pero en el momento que yo senti que era hora de ofrecer **mi voz**, me di cuenta que realmente **tenía el respeto de mi directora y de mis colegas**. Yo creo que es importante tener una colaboracion saludable y honesta. A veces, la politica envuelve la humanidad en envueltos sin necesidad. Pero realmente, todos los maestros **estamos aqui para mejorar la educacion de todos los estudiantes**.

I have personally grown as a leader this year with the mentoring of Proyecto. I have always known that I was a leader, but felt I was not knowledgeable enough to fight for certain themes like dual language instruction, parent participation and how we should focus on student learning (and not on the STAAR state test). Taking Proyecto courses has given me the confidence that has always been buried there. I have always had the confidence but I lived in the world “of the teacher.” But the moment I felt that it was time to offer my voice, I noticed that I really did have the respect of my principal and my colleagues. I think it’s important to have healthy and honest collaboration. Sometimes politics wraps humanity up in circles unnecessarily. But in reality, all teachers are here to improve the education of all students.
Bilingual Teacher Leaders Are...

- Experts in the areas of language acquisition, biliteracy, culturally relevant pedagogies.
  - Resources for colleagues, principals, and community stakeholders
- Cultural/Linguistic bridges to our students and their families as they navigate the new (and often hostile) schooling systems
  - Vital to the lives and well being of our students and families
- Crucial Voices at All Levels.
  - Do not be shy to be heard!
Alondra, Cohort 5:

... At UT, I have been able to collaborate with other teachers in my courses to become better at creating Professional Developments that are helpful for other teachers. In fact, this was my first time ever presenting at NABE and at a Vertical Team District Staff Development. The first times were scary, but when I saw the impact I was making, I began to develop more confidence in myself.
How Are Bilingual Teachers Being Leaders?

- Engaging with PTA or other parent groups; organizing in their communities.
- Creating new and exciting curriculum; finding and working with new books and instructional delivery models; spreading their materials to other teachers via professional conferences and networks.
- Developing/continuing connections to university: hosting student teachers, collaborating with research projects.
- Becoming university-based teacher educators or doctoral students.
- Moving into district curriculum development leadership positions.
- Serving in leadership roles in local teacher’s unions and professional organizations for bilingual educators.
- Seeking administrative credentials and moving into official school leadership roles.
How are you already a leader?
How might you become one?

“Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot uneducate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore. We have seen the future, and the future is ours.” - Cesar Chavez, quoted by Emilia, Cohort 4, in her final reflection on leadership.

Hope is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

(Emily Dickenson, 314 or 254)
How are you already a leader? How might you become one?

Thank you - ¡Gracias!

Deborah Palmer
University of Colorado Boulder
debpalmer@colorado.edu