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Supporting Bilingual Teachers to be Leaders for Social Change: *“I must create advocates for biliteracy.”*

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Abstract:

Teacher Leadership has been variously defined but generally understood as expanding teachers' visions beyond their own classrooms. Bilingual education teachers, working with emergent bilingual students in often marginalized situations and contexts, must develop a critical consciousness in order to embrace leadership identities. This requires engaging in critical reflexive practice, embracing their own and their students' cultural/linguistic identities, and locating allies to form a professional community. I share two experienced Latina bilingual education teachers' journeys to embracing leadership identities, drawing on interviews and artifacts from both during and following their participation in a cohort-based university master's degree program in bilingual education and teacher leadership. While data analysis occurred using a grounded theory approach, in the final stages Freire's Critical Pedagogies was embraced as a theoretical framework. Drawing on conceptions of conscientização, dialogue, and praxis, I offer a more theoretically and critically grounded definition of bilingual teacher leadership for social change.

Key Words: Bilingual Education, Teacher Leadership, Critical Pedagogy, Teacher Agency, Teacher Professional Development, Critical Consciousness and Teacher Education

Introduction:

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. ... 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 (Freire, 2000: 92).

Freire defines dialogue as “the encounter between [people], mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (p.88). If we are interested in transforming schools into spaces of liberation, it is essential to understand how teachers can embrace the roles of instructional leader and change agent. Bilingual teachers in particular play a central role in schools that serve bilingual communities. They are the bridges between children/families and the mainstream society. They have the linguistic and professional capacity to support children to succeed academically, and to advocate for children and their families within sometimes oppressive structures. Yet they are also sometimes marginalized themselves, as Latinx or language minoritized individuals, as the teachers of marginalized children, and often as teachers of color.

Leadership becomes urgent when we are struggling for justice. At the same time, the right to lead – the agency to embrace a leadership identity – can feel more distant when we are marginalized by the dominant society. While the field has begun to value and understand the role

of teacher leaders in working toward equity in schools, we still know very little about the paths of bilingual teachers toward leadership. How can bilingual teachers find a path to embrace “critical dialogue” in their professional lives? How can bilingual teachers support one another’s construction of selves as advocates, as critical thinkers with the power to “transform the world and the word,” and subsequently as leaders?

This article will share data from two teachers who took part in Proyecto Maestria, a federally-funded cohort-based master’s degree program at the University of Texas at Austin from 2007 to 2013 whose aim was to support the development of teacher leadership for certified, experienced bilingual education teachers. I will explore the questions: What is *bilingual* teacher leadership? And, how can we support bilingual teachers to become transformative leaders?

Literature Review: Teacher Leadership in Bilingual Education

A growing body of literature documents the potential of empowering teacher leaders for positive school change (Ackerman & Mackenzie, 2007; Hilty, 2011; Johnson & Hynes, 1997; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006; Lieberman & Miller, 2008; Mangin & Stoelinga, 2008). Researchers are finding that students benefit when teachers assume more responsibility for school operations (Barthes, 2007), initiate professional development and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Lieberman & Miller, 2008), and serve as positive role models for their students and peers (Crowther, F., Kaagan, S. S., Ferguson, F., & Hann, L., 2007). Teacher leadership models are beginning to envision teachers

enacting system-wide change through grassroots transformations of typical job duties (Boylan, 2016). Teacher leadership has been defined variously as (among other things): an inherent part of one's role as a teacher (Forster, 1997); a set of dispositions including inquiry, discourse, equity, authenticity, shared leadership, and service; membership in a community of practice that supports inquiry-based instruction (Lieberman & Miller, 2008); and in the words of one teacher, "initiatives by teachers which improve schools and learning" (Barthes, 2007, p. 11).

Not surprisingly, given the range of definitions for teacher leadership, there is need for more empirical work that specifically addresses teacher leadership preparation (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Sherrill (1999; 2011) offers a "set of expectations" for teacher leaders that includes specific skills to effectively manage the three "phases of the career continuum": Preparation, Induction, and Ongoing Professional Development. Zimpher (1988) similarly proposes a model for teacher leadership preparation defining knowledge and skills in five areas: needs assessment, interpersonal and adult development, classroom processes and school effectiveness, instructional supervision, and inquiry. Drago-Severson (2007) proposes a four-pillar approach to supporting teachers to become active leaders: teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) propose a model for preparing teacher leaders that involves posing a series of questions: "Who am I?" (a self-assessment of skills, dispositions, and identities); "Where am I?" (understanding local school and policy context); "How do I lead?" (developing leadership skills); "What can I do?" (creating an action plan).

There is also debate in the field as to what motivates teachers to assume leadership. Bernhardt (2012) maintains that teachers are motivated by moral commitments to their students,

while Forster (1997) contends that leadership is “a function inherent in their role as teachers and professionals” (p. 82). Dunlap and Hansen-Thomas (2011) propose that leadership can be fostered through professional development, while (Barthes, 2007) argues that, since all teachers can lead just as all students can learn, whether or not a teacher assumes a leadership role depends on teacher self-identification. Even as the field works to address the important questions of what teacher leadership is, how to prepare teacher leaders, and what motivates teachers to lead, much of this work is not centrally concerned with the challenges of increasingly diverse classrooms, or specifically with countering racism or bias, and very little of it works from a critical/transformational perspective.

Emerging from the field of teaching and learning (rather than leadership), social justice teaching or advocacy/activist teaching, does directly address the need for teachers to develop “ideological clarity” (Bartolomé & Balderrama, 2001), and to draw on specific educational practices through lenses like critical pedagogy or culturally responsive/relevant/sustaining pedagogies (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012). The social justice (or advocacy/activist) teaching framework outlines the importance of pedagogical practices that specifically address the needs of marginalized students. However, very little of it directly addresses the specific needs of *bilingual* students and teachers (see Barbian, E., Gonzales, G. C., & Mejía, P., 2017 for a notable exception). Because bilingual students and their teachers offer unique resources, they likely demand a very different set of leadership skills/dispositions. There is a need for research on teacher advocacy and teacher leadership that takes up specificity toward bilingual education.

A small body of research explores the actions of bilingual or ESL educators faced with complex and sometimes contradictory policy mandates, demonstrating that individual teachers have the potential to serve as buffers or conduits, supporting or undermining the implementation of policies in education, based to a large extent on their own ideological orientations (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007; Menken & Garcia, 2010; Palmer, 2011; Valdiviezo, 2009; Varghese & Stritikus, 2005). Bilingual teachers' decisions can greatly influence the opportunities for learning of students in their classrooms (Zuñiga, Henderson & Palmer, 2017; Menken & Garcia, 2010).

Finally, a few studies have directly explored bilingual teacher leadership, naming it as such (Dantas-Whitney & Dugan Waldschmidt, 2009; Holmes & Herrera, 2009; Palmer, Snodgrass Rangel, Gonzales, & Morales, 2014; Wiemelt & Welton, 2015). Wiemelt and Welton (2015) conducted a qualitative study of a successful school-wide implementation of bilingual teacher leadership – *Liderazgo*. They outlined three core ideas central to *Liderazgo*: valuing bilingualism/biculturalism, centering the knowledge of students and families, and caring for students. Holmes and Herrera (2009) described a teacher education program that sought to foster culturally responsive pedagogy and leadership skills for its predominantly bilingual, Latinx pre-service teachers. Palmer, et al. (2014), using a model of transformative leadership, investigated how a master's degree program for practicing bilingual teachers could promote critical consciousness and teacher advocacy. In all of these instances, there was success when programs were able to build safe communities, break down barriers to engagement for all participants, and support teachers to engage in authentic caring with the families and communities they serve. One study, Dantas-Whitney and Dugan Waldschmidt (2009), described a program that was less successful at moving its preservice teachers beyond reductionist views of bilingual education and

students; the authors acknowledged that structural issues with the program did not allow students opportunities to connect and reflect in a safe community.

There is a need for more research that directly investigates *bilingual* teacher leaders working in culturally/linguistically diverse schooling contexts. This analysis endeavors to offer a critically grounded definition of teacher leadership and to ask, essentially, what do bilingual teachers require in order to become powerful and empowering bilingual teacher leaders?

Theoretical Framework: Pedagogies of Hope

This study began as a grounded theory exploratory study (Strauss & Corbin, 1997) asking “how do bilingual teachers co-construct leadership identities in a master’s degree program with that aim?” However, during the analysis process it became clear that a critical pedagogy framework would support teachers’ experiences embracing leadership.

Paolo Freire (2000), one of the originators of critical pedagogy, places the power of the liberation of society in the hands of the oppressed, asserting that their struggle for freedom and the “completion” of their whole human selves is no less than the “great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (p.44). In fact, he argues, one of the “gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation” is the oppressed losing hope in its possibility. As in the quote that opens this article, Freire expresses a deep faith in humankind’s ability to transform the world. Since “humankind produce social reality,” Freire argues, we are charged with “transforming that reality,” (p.51) and quite simply, losing hope is not an option. Hope is an “ontological need;” it is “an existential, concrete imperative” (Freire &

Freire, 1994, p. 8). This hopeful imperative has profound implications for the work – and the outlook – of teachers (and parents, and students) in underfunded, under-resourced public schools serving largely minoritized emergent bilingual children, where hope can sometimes feel scarce.

Freire frames education as a vehicle for the transformation and liberation of society, and describes teachers' roles as inspiring and supporting learners as they experience the natural human imperative to learn:

For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (Freire, 2000, p.72)

As teachers shift their understanding of their own roles in the classroom from transmitter of information to problem-poser and co-investigator in the above-described “restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry,” they necessarily embrace the liberatory power of education and acknowledge the oppressive nature of both society and the structures of schooling. Freire refers to this transformation process as *conscientização* (in the original Portuguese), or conscientization – also referred to as critical consciousness. This awakening to political or ideological clarity is key to teachers' urgency to develop leadership skills: they want to embrace empowerment for themselves and their students/parents/communities in order to help transform their students' world and thereby the larger world.

Through their day to day praxis, teachers with critical consciousness, or political/ideological clarity (Bartolomé & Balderrama, 2001) are in fact accomplishing this, giving us reason to hope that schools can be sites for pedagogies of hope and change. In this analysis of two teachers' reflections about their teaching and learning experiences in graduate school, I share several dimensions of this praxis/dialogue that emerged during their program: critical reflection as action in the classroom; co-construction of cultural/linguistic identities as they endeavor to build rapport and solidarity with their students and families; engaging in collective professional work and building a professional community of practice; and explicitly embracing identities as activists, advocates, and agents of change. Through the course of both co-constructing their experiences in graduate school with them and others, and then re-examining these experiences through the process of data analysis, these dimensions are how I (and they) came to define bilingual teacher leadership and to understand the needs and strengths of bilingual teacher leaders.

The Study: Data sources and participants

Context. The Proyecto Maestría Collaborative was funded by a federal Department of Education Title III National Professional Development grant (Palmer & Ortiz, 2007-2013). Our goal, to “increase the quantity and improve the quality of bilingual and ESL teachers in Austin, Texas,” led us to create a cohort-based 15-month, 36-hour master’s degree program. In total 53 teachers completed the program in five cohorts, fully funded. In collaboration with Austin Independent School District over the course of the grant period, we ultimately built a program that centered what I came to understand as three primary objectives: to build an assets-

orientation toward bilingual learners, to provide participants with breadth and depth of knowledge about the foundations of bilingual and ESL education, and to develop participants' capacity for teacher leadership. Leadership capacity building included practice with mentoring, designing/presenting professional development opportunities, working with administrators, engaging parents/communities, and professional networking. Importantly, at least several of the courses in the core sequence for teachers were taught bilingually, with Spanish used as a language for academic and intellectual discourse in the university classroom. This was a deliberate effort to disrupt the hegemony of English in higher education in the US that I believe contributed to teacher participants' transformative experiences during their master's degree.

While the above description represents the *ultimate* objectives and structure of the program, it must be clarified that these emerged as the program took form over the period of the grant, with each successive cohort receiving a more elaborated and refined experience than the previous. I came to understand these objectives and characteristics and to clearly describe them only after the project ended, in re-analyzing program documents and preparing a thorough description (Palmer, 2018). I provide the program's characteristics up front in this article primarily because it is not the focus of the analysis but rather the context within which these experiences took place.

Data collection. The study that accompanied this project was a grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1997) investigation with an exploratory aim of better understanding participants' experiences and their processes of developing and co-constructing leadership identities during a graduate school program that had that aim. Beginning with the first cohort, I and several faculty and doctoral student colleagues endeavored to collect data. We saved and organized reflections,

projects, and written assignments from courses. We carried out semi-structured interviews with some of the participants after they completed the program, asking them to talk about their life-histories; their reactions/responses to various aspects of the program; connections or disconnections they perceived between their professional lives and their master's coursework; their evolving understandings of teacher leadership; and their own processes of development as leaders. We also wrote and kept occasional field notes and recordings of events outside university courses, such as professional conferences, post-graduation group gatherings, and special moments when participants won awards or gave talks in the community. We included occasional observations or artifacts from teachers' own bilingual elementary classrooms, primarily when teachers invited us. Because the researchers were simultaneously managing and studying the program, data collection could not be described as thorough; however, all teachers' archived data from their classes were represented (anonymously) in the study, and a subset of teachers, generally those who were more reflective and interested in our questions, voluntarily participated more extensively in interviews and observations.

For this article, I draw on data primarily from two of the 53 participants, Lucia and Emma (pseudonyms), who participated together in the fourth cohort, from June 2011 through August 2012. I selected Lucia and Emma purposively, because they were exemplary cases who took an interest in the project, and about whom I therefore had collected extensive data. Also, because they were in one of the final cohorts, they had experienced a more elaborated version of the program. These two teachers thus allowed a good window into the findings from the larger analysis of the full data set (see Author, 2018, for a more thorough discussion).

Participants. Lucia, a fourth-grade math/science teacher during her program year, was an enthusiastic participant in the program. Lucia always seems to have her eye on opportunities. Even before completing her master's program, she participated in a curriculum development project headed up by several of my colleagues that guided fourth grade teachers and their students to develop and publish curriculum related to Tejano history (Salinas, Rodríguez, & Lewis, 2015). After graduating, Lucia became a dedicated teacher in another collaborative project, Academia Cuauhtli, a language and culture revitalization program that met on Saturday mornings at the city's Mexican American Cultural Center (Valenzuela, Zamora, & Rubio, 2015). Lucia recently changed schools and grade levels seeking new growth opportunities. She has also taught writing and English as a Second Language to adults at a nearby community college, an experience she relishes both for the rewards of working with immigrant adults, and for the extra income that allows her to stay in the classroom as a teacher while making ends meet and saving for her future.

Emma was an extremely organized kindergarten teacher with five years' experience when she went through the master's program. She was raised in a bilingual home in the border region, and had graduated from a university-based undergraduate bilingual teacher preparation program. She had served as a cooperating teacher for the university as well. After completing her master's degree, Emma changed schools and grade levels, moving to a school with a prominent dual language program. For a brief time, she and Lucia became team partners at fourth grade at this school. At this writing, Emma has completed her administrative certification and is in her first year as an Assistant Principal in a school with a large and flourishing dual language bilingual program.

Data sources. Data included both teachers' weekly online reflections during their fall and spring semesters taking master's courses at the university with me; their final projects from these courses; field notes from my interactions with them during and following their year in graduate school, including their participation in professional conferences; and approximately hour-long post-graduation follow-up interviews carried out in Spring 2016.

Analysis. Analysis, which was originally carried out with the entire data set, resembled a constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965). I moved among the different data sources and enhanced my collection of codes and sub codes, theorizing along the way, until I felt satisfied that they consistently and comprehensively reflected the full data set and that my developing understandings about bilingual teacher leadership were reflected in the teachers' experiences. With 22 primary codes (e.g. 'marginalization'; 'broadening perspective'; 'cultural/linguistic broker'), and a total of 16 sub-codes distributed under eight of the primary codes, I gradually grouped codes into the three major themes: critical consciousness/reflexive practice, community, and cultural/linguistic identities. I used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, to organize and code data.

Researcher Identity. Given the interactive nature of this research project, and the fact that I occupied multiple roles as program director, instructor, and researcher, my own positionality is crucial to ensuring trustworthiness. As a white, middle-class English-dominant elective bilingual Spanish-speaking woman in my 40s, I am in many ways an outsider to the realities of these two Latina bilingual educators. However, with 25 years' experience working in the field of bilingual education, I have a long-standing and deeply held commitment to the

education of emergent bilingual (particularly Latinx Spanish-English bilingual) children in US schools. Having begun my career in a heavily Spanish-speaking school in Northern California working primarily with Mexican immigrant families, I came to acknowledge both my own background of privilege, and the marginalization that my students and their families experienced. I have also spent time in Mexico and Guatemala and with Spanish-English bilingual communities in California and Texas. I continue to develop and deepen my critical consciousness in my work as a researcher, a teacher, and a committed activist for justice; this project has supported me in these endeavors.

Because I was the instructor for at least one course for all of the study participants and the program's director, I was aware that my positionality of status and power might influence participants. Because of this, I did not engage in formal data collection practices nor invite students to become participants in the study until after they graduated, and even then when possible I enlisted the support of other researchers, including doctoral students and project staff, who would have a more equal status with the participants.

Findings: Necessary Supports for Bilingual Teacher Leadership

The bilingual teachers in this project, on the path toward advocacy and leadership, articulated three broad areas in which their development/learning tied to their ability to effectively embrace leadership identities: engaging in reflexive praxis, embracing their own and their students' cultural/linguistic identities, and building broad professional networks. Across all

three areas, teachers articulated the central importance of developing critical consciousness, which drawing on Freire (2000), I define as growing understandings and acknowledgement of the systems of oppression that work in society to marginalize their students and their own work as bilingual teachers within schools.

Engaging in Reflexive Practice.

...honestly, if I think about it, before Proyecto Maestría I wasn't really that passionate about social justice issues in the classroom... I think that the program, you know, bumped it up a thousand percent (Lucia, post-graduation interview).

Critical consciousness, or ideological clarity (Bartolomé & Baldorrama, 2001), proved essential to bilingual teachers' agency to embrace leadership identities. It was crucial that they name and build the vocabulary to talk about the experiences they themselves had had confronting hegemony and marginalization within the dominant culture, and then that they identify the ways in which white supremacy influenced their and their students' everyday lives in public schools. This helped teachers to see why their role in the system – as advocates, working to interrupt English dominance and white supremacy alongside and on behalf of the students and families they served – was so crucial. Their awareness developed out of the intellectual, professional teaching practice of reflection (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Both Lucia and Emma articulated the ways that deepening their reflective practice supported their professional identities.

Lucia explained that the habit of engaging in reflective practice gave her the cognitive and emotional tools to manage failures along her career path:

Lucia: I think that's another thing that the project taught me is that we're *always learning*. So when I didn't get the [teacher leadership] jobs [that I applied for] instead of being destroyed, you know, 'Oh, I didn't get this. I'm not good enough.' I was mature enough to be, 'Well, I do need more experience,' you know, in certain things.'

Me: You were self-reflective about it.

Lucia: Right. Because of grad school. We reflected... we were always talking about learning, you know. That was a big theme. That was another thing that the project gave me. That... your growth doesn't stop. You should always be learning. You should always be growing.

For Lucia, situating herself as a continuous learner in ongoing dialogue with a larger professional field allowed her to be resilient even in the face of failure.

Not surprisingly, the teachers' thirst for continued growth carried far beyond the master's program. Lucia, in a post-program interview, explained why she decided to move to a different school, despite having built positive relationships at her current school:

Ultimately, I guess, for selfish reasons I wanted to be in an environment where I can *learn* from people. ... I feel like I'm at that point where I want to learn and so here [at current school] it's more, I'm the teacher, which is fine cause I'm teaching other people. ... But I mean, I want to learn from other people how to be a better teacher. And I really don't have that here.

Lucia and Emma recognized the potential of authentic professional learning to energize and motivate them. They saw the power and hope behind a critical pedagogy, and they did not stop

after they finished their master's degrees. They continued to seek out new opportunities to learn, to grow, and to contribute.

Reflection, however, was just the beginning; they articulated a transformative leap from reflection to *critical reflexivity*: the opportunity to reflect specifically on their own and others' experiences of marginalization in society. The impetus to act to change systems emerged from their acknowledgement of oppression. This was most clear when they connected their professional identities to their personal cultural/linguistic identities.

Cultural/Linguistic Identities. Both Lucia's and Emma's own narratives of their lives as students were telling in terms of the kinds of connections they felt to school and to teachers, and the kinds of disconnections they experienced. Their own schooling and early life experiences were a primary go-to source of information for what kinds of teachers they wanted to be. They would identify moments of connection in their own past as moments that informed them how to be as a teacher; conversely, they would identify moments of disconnection, microaggressions (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012), or particular difficulties, for guidance on how best to support their own students to have positive schooling and learning paths. As Emma succinctly explained:

I think having grown up in the [Rio Grande] valley [on the US/Mexico border] and coming from grandparents and parents who spoke Spanish and who are uneducated and who are migrant workers, I feel a strong connection to the kids and their situations and their stories. I feel like I can relate and have a deep connection with them and the families.

This connection led Emma to embrace leadership roles to allow her to support other teachers to become culturally responsive pedagogues.

Lucia volunteered her own life history in response to a question about what she had in common with her cohort colleagues. She explained, “the commonality with all of us was a passion for teaching,” and went on to explain “A big part of also the sense of community ... was finding our...” She seemed about ready to fill in “past,” but instead launched into a narrative of her own life history:

I wasn't born in Mexico. I was born here but just that whole Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), caught between two borders, you know, that's huge... that identity, because... I didn't really travel much when I was a child and grew up in this town that's all minorities [on the border]; so to me that's all I knew. That was my world. All these minorities where everybody looks... I feel like I'm in Mexico, but I'm not. And I grew up with all these Mexican traditions and meals, and customs. And my parents speak Spanish all the time to us ... And then I came to [university] and I was a business major and I was the only minority, and I just felt so out of place, very confused of who am I. I don't feel like I'm American because I don't feel very white in my complexion or in my customs, but then I'm not Mexican, you know, So, where do I fit? ...And I think the whole program helped me find where I fit into this world.

For Lucia, the identity work she and her classmates did throughout the program was intimately connected to her sense of both personal and professional belonging and community. It was through validating and acknowledging her own life history and her borderlands identity that she claimed a place in the professional community of bilingual teachers. In one of her spring semester online reflections, after reading the opening chapter of Freeman's (2004) *Building on Community Bilingualism*, Lucia remarked:

I very much related to Ch.1. On page 12, they reference the effects of bilingual parents rejecting their own native languages when speaking to their children. That's exactly what happened to me. I started to believe that I had to reject that part of me to participate in a monolingual world. It's unfortunate that a native language is lost after three generations in the US but I see that happening with my own family... I agree with Freeman that this change in policy and practice [to encourage heritage languages] needs to begin at the local level. It's ridiculous that we have a subtractive language policy for the primary grades then in high school it's OK to learn a second language. Freeman presents a strong argument for bilingual education. This chapter is one that I would reference in promoting bilingualism.

Lucia's response to the readings drew on her own experiences growing up in a Spanish dominant bilingual home, impacted directly by the phenomena she read about. Then she described how she would use this chapter in the future for her own advocacy work "promoting bilingualism."

For both Lucia and Emma, actively tying their professional to their personal identities became an empowering experience, moving them to action on behalf of the bilingual community. This process occurred within a community, which also proved crucial.

Networks/Community/Allies. In her post-graduation interview Lucia explained that Proyecto Maestria taught her that working in collaboration was better:

I think I was so used to working alone... so much that Proyecto showed me that, no, you need to work with your peers. Not that you need to, but you benefit more. You know, you can learn

more. You can grow more. You can share ideas. You can bounce things off each other. So, I think that having a community, that it's really important.

Overcoming the isolated and individualistic paradigm for teaching is a long-identified struggle (Lieberman, et al., 2008). It is commonly agreed that the field desperately needs to move from isolation to teachers working together in engaged learning communities. There was, however, an additional layer to the isolation described by the bilingual teachers in this project: marginalization, as teachers serving a minoritized community, and often as members themselves of minoritized communities. Thus, it is not surprising that repeatedly teachers came back to the cohort community and the larger networks they built as a result of their experiences, describing this as the most powerful aspect of their graduate school experience.

The relationship between Lucia and Emma, as well as the connections and relationships each teacher built during and after their master's degree year, illustrate this. Both teachers caught the contagion of collaboration: working in solidarity, learning about one another's histories, passions, philosophies, and pedagogies, realizing they were not alone. They found ways to carry these connections forward and continue to grow new professional networks. Lucia explained:

And that's the other great thing about the program, is that the connections, the friendship, the networking that I made are so strong, so powerful. The job [that I got to work] with Julieta [colleague from graduate school], the principal didn't even interview me. I mean, Julieta recommended me and so did the [district] science department because I teach with them a lot...

So just based on those recommendations, the principal hired me.

As she explained, Lucia benefitted from connections she made through the master's program (Julieta) and illustrated her continuous building of new connections (with the district science department). In an online reflection towards the end of her program, in response to readings about the pitfall of isolation in the teaching field, Lucia wrote:

Collectively we can demonstrate the power of including the teacher in the decision-making process [with policy-makers]. Teaching should not be an isolated profession but an inclusive one. Once I started to work as a teacher, I was surprised to learn that most teachers do work in isolation. My biggest growth professionally came when I began to teach Science Summer Camp. It was a professional learning community. All the teachers were so eager to plan and share together. It gave me hope and provided a framework of what a professional learning community looks like. Teaching there was equivalent to attending professional development every day!!

Lucia's experience breaking down the isolation of classroom teaching was energizing; Emma also described these connections as energizing and inspiring.

Emma explained in her interview that her cohort (which included Lucia) continued to meet for breakfast from time to time, sharing their ideas and their practices. They continued to learn from each other precisely because they were in such a range of contexts, and yet had had the opportunity over 15 months to develop deep relationships. She explained that going into the program, "I was interested in meeting different people at different areas in different you know levels, it totally pushed me to analyze what I was doing and do more." Describing her cohort colleagues, Emma said, "I don't think I've come across people as passionate or... hard-working

than the people I've met through the program.” She described the group's ongoing professional learning community:

We've already, we're trying to start something... we're meeting at the end of this month. Just projects that we talked about during the program and that now that we have a little bit more time we're trying to act upon them – and the majority has been showing up... I do definitely see us continuing because I think there was an emotional and a personal connection.

Emma's and Lucia's cohort maintained ongoing gatherings for at least a year past their graduation. The drive to collaborate and build networks of community manifested for Emma and Lucia in several ways, including arranging to team-teach at fourth grade at a dual language bilingual school. Here I will discuss two ways in which Emma's and Lucia's development of networks of community turned into opportunities for them to advocate for change. First, both teachers mentored other teachers as part of the master's program; second, they learned to develop and propose presentations that would take them to professional conferences.

Mentoring other teachers. Mentoring another teacher was an expectation of the Spring semester course of the master's program, and both Lucia and Emma embraced the assignment, using it to engage with transformation and change. Lucia explained in an online post toward the end of the semester:

For my mentor/coaching project, I was guiding [a kindergarten teacher on my campus] with some science planning and gave her some ideas and materials. She was so pleased. This type of sharing doesn't exist at [my school] but I hope to change that culture.

Actively reaching beyond the isolation of her own classroom, Lucia hoped to change the culture of her school.

Emma, too, saw the mentoring assignment as an opportunity to work toward change; however, as her online post in the middle of the spring semester demonstrated, this was not always a straightforward task. Her post began by asserting the importance of having all professionals “on board” in the effort to develop children’s biliteracy:

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.

She then described some of her colleagues’ (including one potential mentee’s) attitudes about bilingual Latinx families, tying her own very different reactions directly to her personal experiences growing up as a bilingual child:

I've had conversations with peers and some are so tired of the struggle, or tired of the lazy "culture" [of our students] 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.

Her own lived experiences were central to her comfort with her students and allowed her to embrace an assets-based orientation toward children and families. At the same time, this was a

challenge for her fellow teachers. Emma then reflected directly about considering coaching/mentoring one of these deficit-oriented teachers:

So when I think about having to coach someone who is different from me, it really makes me sit back and ponder. I have someone in mind that I would love to coach ... and know that it would be extremely difficult. What would make it easy is that she seems approachable and open to conversations and others' opinions. Could I turn her around by the end of the school year? No. I believe that it takes time, these teachers didn't learn to think the way they do in a years' time, it was their entire life building up to now. So coaching takes time, patience, and determination. In general I think that if you have good people skills and you respect diversity already in your everyday dealings, then you would be an excellent coach. With some guidance and initial coaching for yourself of course.

Emma did not offer any personal details about this possible mentee, but she did make clear that this teacher had expressed deficit perspectives about Latinx families. As a skilled bilingual teacher and advocate, and as a Latina herself, Emma knew she would be challenged by this mentee. She did not express high hopes about transformation, although the reflection did lead her to draw some conclusions about what was required for good mentoring: patience, time, determination, and "good people skills." Emma was involved in several official and unofficial mentoring relationships during her year in the master's program; it is possible she may have tried mentoring this teacher for part of the semester, and as she predicted did not make much progress with her. In any case, when she wrote a final reflection about the mentoring experience at the end of the semester, Emma described a different teacher: a young bilingual teacher who worked on

her grade level team, with whom she had been working closely as an official mentor since Emma had mentored her as a student teacher two years previous.

Emma's reflections about the challenges inherent in mentoring a teacher "who is different from" herself and holds deficit perspectives about families like hers, point both to some unique challenges for bilingual teachers becoming mentors, and to some of the assets bilingual teachers bring to the task. When she embraced her own cultural/linguistic identity and developed the skills to express these critical components of curriculum and instruction, she became a better mentor for it. She included in her mentoring not merely the kinds of guidance around basic issues of classroom management that so often dominate mentoring relationships for new teachers, but inspiring and important messages about centering students' identities in curriculum and instruction. Emma's final reflection of the spring semester, in response to a prompt asking how her definition of teacher leadership may have changed, expressed this expansion clearly:

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.

In an interview conducted a couple years after she graduated, she echoed the same distinction as she described how her mentoring had changed over time:

I mentor, I've always mentored. But now it seems different. You know, before when I mentored I was more focused on getting new teachers started with organization or understanding the curriculum, and now I incorporate so much more what I learned as far as being culturally relevant in what I'm choosing to do, and how I'm viewing parental involvement...not just the planning and the conferencing.

Emma described having integrated into her mentoring some of the core ideas at the heart of the master's degree program: funds of knowledge for teaching (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) and culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Beyond making sure new teachers could survive their first year, she now ensured that they learned from her some of these core principles that drive her teaching. The value of this for all the future teachers who work with her is undeniable.

For Emma, the need to expand her mentoring vision to embrace development of critical awareness, assets-based orientations, and culturally relevant pedagogies became clear because of her own experiences in schools. Such expansive and critical missions are in fact crucial for *all* teachers as they mentor or are mentored; critical consciousness and centering children's identities in school supports learning and success for students regardless of context.

Sharing Professional Knowledge: Becoming Professional Development Leaders. With practice, Lucia and Emma embraced identities not just as teachers of children, but as teachers of teachers. They carried this new identity into every professional experience, thinking about possibilities. Lucia, for example, learned in a class at during her master's program with literacy professor Jim Hoffman about a particular approach to thematic instruction called the iChart

(Hoffman, 1992). Lucia saw this as a powerful pedagogical tool; she immediately began to consider how to better disseminate it among her fellow teachers, as she explained in her interview:

I thought, ok, they should organize this better so that people can actually do it, you know, and have a training. And that's kind of one of my goals. I mean, ... I'm always thinking ahead, and I foresee, I would *love* to teach this iChart to the district, to teachers. I'd actually have a session and share this with teachers. You know, not *just* at NABE [National Association for Bilingual Education] and TABE [Texas Association for Bilingual Education], but the *district*.

It is intriguing that Lucia positioned the opportunity to present in state and national bilingual education conferences as “just”, while her own district – full of mainstream teachers, not “just” bilingual teachers – became an aspirational space in which to share this innovative idea. This could be because, with Dr. Hoffman's support, Lucia and Emma did in fact bring a presentation about the iCharts to the NABE conference in 2017 (and when she spoke with me about it, they had already put together their proposal), whereas she had not yet put together a presentation for the district. The idea of bringing presentations to state and national conferences had been new to both teachers when they began their master's program, as was the idea of developing and offering targeted professional learning opportunities to their colleagues at their own schools or districts. Their coursework required them to try their hand at both these tasks, thus demystifying the process. Lucia and Emma, therefore, had no difficulties in developing a proposal for the NABE conference. Lucia explained to me:

One project that we did with you of creating a proposal for a conference, I mean that was powerful. I mean, that was incredibly powerful! Because it was like, ‘Oh, it’s so easy! (laughs). Like, this is it? That’s it?’ And it was funny because when I was doing the NABE proposal [recently], submitting it, and I had a busy summer and I had asked Emma to join me and it was the date before the deadline and she said, ‘I don’t think you’re going to make it,’ and I was like, ‘No, I know what to do. Remember? We did it with Dr. Palmer. It’s easy.’ And I did. I think I might have submitted it a half hour before midnight. And I got... my proposal was accepted.

Because of their experience in my class, these two teachers were able to turn their insights and creativity into opportunities to share ideas with other teachers.

Yet Lucia in describing potential venues for her ideas about using iCharts in bilingual classrooms still appeared to position the idea of presenting to teachers across her district as more intimidating, or perhaps more important, than at a national conference. This holds echoes of Emma’s reflections about the overwhelming thought of trying to mentor a mainstream teacher, and the contrasting ease with which she worked with bilingual families and colleagues. Bilingual teachers, given their capacity to bridge home and school communities for bilingual children and their extensive additional training in language acquisition, biliteracy development, and culturally responsive pedagogies, certainly have plenty of expertise to offer their mainstream colleagues; it is unfortunate that they are not always perceived, or perceive themselves, to have this expertise.

Conclusion: Defining Bilingual Teacher Leadership

The experiences of Lucia and Emma, two highly motivated and prepared master bilingual education teachers, illustrate the tension-ridden nature of the process of embracing leadership identities for bilingual teachers even when they are poised and ready to do so. In order to support bilingual teacher leadership for equity and transformation, we need to build supports into our teacher preparation and teacher leadership programs. Universities and school districts should consider embracing the three core principles that emerged across the data in this project as central to supporting bilingual education teachers in their journeys into leadership: to help teachers develop reflexive praxis, to engage teachers in opportunities to explore cultural/linguistic identities, and to promote sustained professional communities and networks. These are crucial building blocks for teachers as they co-construct identities as authentic leaders, advocates and change agents.

These three core principles will help teachers develop the tools to frame their work as advocacy, and will support teachers to develop as change agents and leaders. For bilingual education teachers, accessing the courage to embrace a leadership identity seems *driven by* the need to advocate for students and families within a sometimes hostile and oppressive system of education: the struggle for justice. Teachers need to be the leaders in our schools; they are the professionals in the midst of the most important work the school does: the dialogue with students that leads to learning. Bilingual education teachers in particular provide a crucial support as the bridges between their non-bilingual colleagues and the increasingly linguistically culturally, racially diverse families and communities we find in our nation's public schools. A critical

pedagogy for bilingual teacher leadership – indeed, for *all* teacher leadership – necessarily supports professionalism, leadership, and agency not just for teachers but for their students and the parents in their school communities.

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