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Legitimate professions are typically marked by extensive pre-professional training, a state-sponsored credential or license, and, perhaps most importantly, enduring efforts to advance professional knowledge. Because we strongly believe that teaching is a legitimate profession and should remain so, our paper addresses the topic of the professional development (PD) of teachers, specifically teachers who work in bilingual education. Although we focus primarily on the work of bilingual teachers in the U.S., we also bring in an international perspective. Our analysis is substantially informed by the view that bilingual education teachers must possess a critical perspective because they are often working against dominant political and social forces that seek to prevent the growth of languages spoken in marginalized communities.

Our purpose in this article is not an exhaustive review of the literature (impossible given the limited space), but rather an overview of selected works that serve to point out the advocacy role that bilingual teachers must play in order to promote the instruction they value. We will limit our discussion to PD for practicing teachers, although we understand that preservice preparation provides an important foundation for future professional growth and learning. We would point readers interested in more of an overview of preservice bilingual teacher education to an excellent volume (Flores, Sheets & Clark, 2010). Nor can we provide a comprehensive review of the work in PD for general service teachers, although we will build on a few key papers.

When outlining the current state of the professional development of bilingual teachers and articulating our vision, there are a number of definitions one must initially grapple with. The most immediate is what we mean by bilingual education. At the basic level, it means the use of two or more languages in educating students (Baker, 2006). In the U.S., this has meant a range of frameworks that include ‘weak’ forms such as transitional programs that focus on the transition to the dominant national language to ‘strong’ forms such as maintenance and enrichment programs – promoting two or more languages. In some countries the rationale for bilingual education includes the maintenance of the mother tongue while in others it has been mainly to promote the dominant language (English in many cases) as the medium of instruction. Although attitudes, frameworks and approaches at these different levels vary across the world (Garcia, 2009) most countries have struggled historically with their language policies and bilingual education in these countries has been heavily contested. Consequently, the nature of bilingual teaching has always been controversial and at the same time
instrumental in limiting or opening spaces for bilingual education. Therefore, we argue that the PD for and from bilingual teachers today is the building of capacity to promote policies and practices and help bilingual education survive in a hostile political climate.

Based on the evidence and the theme of our work, we turn to a review of the recent history of bilingual education in California, a provocative tale of the influence of politics and money that conveniently captures the overarching troubles facing bilingual teachers. In the mid-1990s, Ron Unz, a wealthy California business executive, began an expensive and self-financed political campaign to eliminate bilingual education, thus initiating the first pedagogical program/practice ever to be placed on a ballot. Using disingenuous data and other distortions (see Téllez, Flinspach & Waxman, 2005 for a review), he succeeded, at a minimum, in making bilingual education much harder to practice in California and several other states (Ovando, 2003). Bilingual programs, their teachers and their advocates stood little chance against Unz’s money and propaganda.

To our minds, no other evidence is needed to demonstrate the political explosiveness of bilingual education and why PD for bilingual teachers must be considered separately from all other teacher PD. After all, various constituencies have disagreed over educational programs that reached a much wider audience without ever making their way to a ballot. The so-called Reading Wars come to mind (see Pearson, 2004, for a review), in which the battle over phonics vs. “whole language” methods has raged on decades, but the issue has never been put to a general election.

And if the effects of state-wide ballot initiatives were not enough, bilingual teachers have had to respond to national political attacks on their work that have resulted in less funding. Prieto (2009) documents the US federal government’s retreat from bilingual education, which symbolically removed the word “bilingual” from the agency charged with helping “LEP” students gain proficiency in English. Formerly known the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs, established by Congress in 1974, a far more conservative Congress established the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) when No Child Left Behind was approved in 2001. And in a gesture far surpassing symbol, OELA immediately removed the vast majority of grants designed to enhance bilingual education and the development of teaching capacities for bilingual teachers. Prieto’s research documents the reactions of ten novice bilingual teachers in Texas to the lack of support for their programs (Texas still permits bilingual education) and even their own histories. The teachers in this study reported the impulse to use "pedagogies of the home" or cultural strategies as both teaching tools and important markers of professional identity but found their instincts rejected by the larger school culture.

Even the largest teacher professional organizations in the US at least have largely ignored the education of language learners and the PD of bilingual teachers, all the while advocating for multicultural learners and their teachers for decades (Téllez & Waxman, 2006). This is not meant to be a critique of the profession but rather to point out the general neglect of language issues. For many of us who work in language education, Crystal City (Trujillo, 2005) is just as important as Little Rock, but it has taken our colleagues a very long time to recognize it.

Given the unique conditions facing bilingual teachers, we wondered how existing
research on PD could inform our work. In reviewing the literature on PD for general teachers, we found several excellent papers that pull together what is known as “best practices” in teacher knowledge and growth. Each suggests that teachers' political engagement, or at least teacher agency or autonomy, must be included in teacher PD in order for genuine growth in pedagogical knowledge and skills. For example, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) suggested that strong PD (a) engages teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection that illuminates learning and development, (b) uses inquiry, reflection, and experimentation that are participant-driven, (c) is collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators and a focus on teachers' communities of practice rather than on individual teachers, (d) connects to and derives from teachers' work with their students, (e) is sustained, ongoing, intensive, and supported by modeling, coaching, and the collective (emphasis added) solving of problems of practice, and (f) connects to other aspects of school change.

We find that the work on PD for bilingual teachers to reflect these general principles but with specific emphasis on collective growth and knowledge, which is sometimes in opposition to non-bilingual teacher PD. For example, Calderón’s (2002) study reports the results from a national survey of 100 bilingual teachers regarding their specific professional concerns. Among these, they noted that (a) mainstream teachers developed misconceptions about the bilingual program, (b) bilingual teachers are treated as second-class citizens, (c) the transition of students from bilingual to mainstream classrooms is too abrupt and detrimental, (d) there are few opportunities for bilingual and mainstream teachers to discuss, plan, and address the needs of individual students after their transition, (e) mainstream teachers always blame the bilingual teachers if a student does not do well after transition, and (e) each year there are "silent and not so silent battles" over resources between bilingual and mainstream teachers (p, 131-132). The study also found that the PD specifically aimed at bilingual learners was not highly regarded by most bilingual teachers, who reported that the conferences they attended and the PD offered by the school district were often redundant and failed to provide a forum for their genuine professional concerns.

Calderón's work suggests that the general PD emphasis on collective action cannot be directly brought to bear on PD for bilingual teachers, who need two kinds of collective spaces: one for themselves and one with their non-bilingual counterparts. Similarly, Dalton and Moir (1996) share the design of a project providing professional development experiences for novice bilingual teachers and suggest that PD for bilingual teachers must be interactive, contextualized, and co-constructed.

The emphasis on collective PD might invite a comparison to recent nationwide efforts in the US. In fact, we find that many of the contemporary PD efforts offered by for-profit companies such as Solution Tree provide an excellent counter-example to the type of professional development we envision. These programs claim to be based on teacher empowerment and research-based practices when they are essentially a method to force teachers to examine data tied to state standards or a particular curriculum implementation in groups or “teams.” Talbert and others have been critical of this approach, and argue that it is not true to the core principles of collective learning.
her critique, Talbert (2010, p. 560) notes the hypocrisy in PD and its

...emphasis on individual teacher quality, curriculum implementation in each classroom, and monitoring of teaching fidelity undermines principles of collective responsibility and improvement. Teachers’ attention is focused on compliance rather than accountability to colleagues for developing new instructional interventions that work with their students.

By contrast, she argues that a truly professional learning team is guided and controlled by the teachers and a principle of collective trust. With web sites containing oversized text to links such as “Shop Products” (see http://www.solution-tree.com/shop/overview) these so-called PD programs contradict genuine teacher learning and growth. Our observations suggest that bilingual teachers have had to undergo corporate PD with no regard to their specific needs. The popularity of these programs is frankly is puzzle to us. They certainly fail to engage teachers but also fail to provide experimental evidence that their approach raises student achievement.

Corporate-style PD will only further disempower bilingual teachers, and yet this model appears to be the dominant mode of teacher “learning” in the US at the moment. But what of bilingual teachers across the globe? Do we find similarly ill-considered teacher PD? A cursory review of bilingual education worldwide finds some commonality with the US context, but the outlook appears to be more favorable for bilingual teachers, mostly because, unlike the US, the majority of national ministries of education favor multilingualism. Therefore, other nations tend to offer more federal support both in terms of structure as well as funding. For instance, in South Africa, a program known as Traning of Trainees program for educators (ToTSA) in multilingual settings in southern Africa (Benson & Plüddemann, 2010). ToTSA is the only program known to date that has addressed the need for building professional capacity among African practitioners and policy-makers working in multilingual education. Guided by the principle that mother-tongue based bilingual education is vital to national interests, ToTSA has done more than teach and train; “it has facilitated international networking and empowered participants to face the challenges inherent in their own contexts” (p.364).

In Bolivia, local educators at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels may themselves be opening spaces for multilingual education. One of the most interesting, promising, and potentially enduring developments in the Andes in the last few decades has been the master’s program for Indigenous students known as the Program for Professional Development in Bilingual Intercultural Education for the Andean Countries (PROEIB Maestria), founded by PROEIB Andes, the. Housed at the University of San Simón in Cochabamba, Bolivia, the PROEIB Maestria is a consortium effort sponsored by Indigenous organizations, universities, and ministries of education in six South American countries, with additional international funding from German Technical Assistance, UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, and others. Impelled by the vision and energy of Peruvian sociolinguist Luis Enrique López, PROEIB Andes and especially its master’s program have opened up spaces for Indigenous rights and Indigenous education surpassing even those initially envisioned in the Bolivian reform (Hornberger,
The European context provides an intermediate space between the examples provided above and those in the US (Garcia, 2009). The Council of Europe supports a plurilingual policy where there is support for majority and minority languages but not necessarily immigrant languages. The Council of Europe's (1998) Common European Framework of Reference for Languages emphasizes the "richness and diversity of European cultural life through greater mutual knowledge of national and regional languages, including those less widely used" (p. 2). This document acknowledges that a "sustained, lifelong effort" must be encouraged to meet the needs of a "multilingual and multicultural Europe" (p. 2). The document contains a section on "Teacher Training" which mandates that the ministries take "steps to ensure that adequate numbers of suitably trained language teachers are available at all levels so that where appropriate a wide range of languages may be taught" (Council of Europe, 1998, p. 6).

In general, the European model of bilingual education remains wedded to the teaching of dominant languages (e.g., French students learning English or German) but few have developed bilingual programs in Turkish or Maghrebi Arabic (Hélot, 2003). Such programs may be considered an attack on the historic prestige of the dominant European languages, which, at least in the case of France, have enjoyed centuries of advocacy as a language of "national identity" though of the “L'Académie française.” Most notably for our purposes, we could not find an example of PD designed specifically for "immigrant" language programs. Nor were we able to locate any specific European programs for increasing the number of teachers proficient in non-European languages. Thus, the common perception of Europe as advocating multilingual programs in schools (in contrast to the US approach) appears to apply only to the teaching of the languages of power. European educational systems remain resistant to teaching the languages of immigrants. We might anticipate that teachers who promote mother tongue instruction for immigrant students in Europe will face the same political battles of their US counterparts and must be oriented similarly for political action.

At this point, it is important for us to admit that we are not alone in encouraging a political role for bilingual teachers. For instance, de Jong, Arias & Sanchez (2010) found that the restrictive language policies in several key states (e.g., California, Arizona, Massachusetts) have left many bilingual teachers feeling ineffective, unable to provide their students with appropriate, high quality language instruction. They further suggest that bilingual teachers have become demoralized as a result of “English-only” laws (cf. Proposition 227) and are now forced to offer a counterfeit education of language instruction, a condition which will naturally cause professional anxiety, burnout, and, in some cases, a retreat from the profession altogether. Katz (2004) points out these tensions as well. Like Cervantes-Soon and Valenzuela (2011), Dubetz and de Jong (2011) and Cahnmann and Varghese (2006) suggest that in the current US political climate bilingual teachers must enlarge their roles as community and school advocates. The volume edited by Brutt-Griffler and Varghese (2004) contains several works linking bilingual teacher identity to acts of resistance towards debilitating language policies.

Nearly 20 years ago, Alma Flor Ada (Ada, 1995) roundly admonished the preparation of bilingual teachers and their treatment once in their careers. After listening
to the experiences of several bilingual teachers, she maintains that bilingual teachers

…need to understand the societal forces that have influenced their cultural and linguistic identity so that they can stop passively accepting their circumstances and become not only agents of their own transformation but also leaders in the world around them.

We hope that we have firmly established the need for a political role among bilingual teachers, but we want to be careful not to conflate political action with legal action. In spite of our stance towards advocacy, we agree with González (2007) who argues cogently that lawsuits have lost their capacity to alter the landscape of bilingual education. He writes

What we do not have in our legal system is a way for cultural and linguistic groups to speak for themselves and themselves alone, without setting a precedent for everyone else. Because education is an intensely cultural endeavor, this is one of the greatest weaknesses of using the courts for these purposes.

(González, 2007, p. 42)

We suggest that bilingual teachers’ greatest political asset is their connection to their communities. Language teachers have a special relationship with their students and families (Téllez, 2010) and bilingual teachers must use their role as community leaders to advance quality language instruction. Of course, this task is made all the more difficult because many speakers of minority languages, in any nation, are immigrants, sometimes undocumented, and may lack the basic right to cast a vote.

And thus we conclude our paper with what might be a controversial assertion but one that further demonstrates the political intensity of bilingual education, as well as the need for political acumen among bilingual teachers. Prior to the “Unz” initiative in California, most school systems awarded bilingual teachers with a stipend beyond their regular pay. In some cases, these premiums amounted to more than $6000 per year, which was often greater than the stipend for earning a Masters degree. School districts typically justified these stipends by pointing out that bilingual teachers were in high demand and, though with less frequency, that their work was made more difficult because they had to teach in two languages, not to mention the challenge or working in program under constant critique. The shortage resulted in a bidding war among school districts in desperate need for bilingual teachers. At the time, many of us argued that the shortage was best solved by developing “pre-collegiate” teacher education programs designed to encourage and assist bilingual, Latino/a high school students to attend college, earn teaching certificates, and return as bilingual teachers to the very schools with shortages. Such programs, we suggested at the time, would have been less costly than the premiums and would have actually grown the number of bilingual teachers.

As the Unz initiative gathered strength and was placed on the ballot, the California Teachers Association (CTA), the National Education Association affiliate that has essentially controlled the Democratic Party in both the California Assembly and Senate
for the past 40 years, seemed uninterested. Although CTA officially opposed Proposition 227, their actions did not match their rhetoric. To wit, CTA spent a little over $2 million to defeat 227. By contrast, 5 years later in 2003 it would spend nearly $4 million dollars to defeat an arcane energy bill that would have made it more difficult for alternative energy projects to obtain state approval. Two years after 227 was passed, CTA spent over $26 million to defeat a school voucher initiative that had little support in the first place. A key strategy for unions is the collective bargaining agreement, and the stipends for bilingual teachers represented compensation outside the agreement. Did the union forsake bilingual education and its teachers because it opposed the stipends? We will leave it to our readers to decide.

Finally, we mention the anecdotal data reporting that over half of all teachers in the state voted for 227 as additional evidence that bilingual teachers and their program have been marginalized and maligned not only by the traditional enemies of bilingual education but also by their colleagues. Thus, our conclusion is that PD for bilingual teachers means learning how to fight for our programs with better data and shaper polemics. Politics as usual will not do.

References


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