

*Contributions to the Sociology of Language*

87

*Editor*

Joshua A. Fishman

Mouton de Gruyter  
Berlin · New York

# Opportunities and Challenges of Bilingualism

*edited by*

Li Wei

Jean-Marc Dewaele

Alex Housen

Mouton de Gruyter  
Berlin · New York 2002

# Using descriptive inquiry to transform the education of linguistically diverse US teachers and students

*Ofelia García and Cecelia Traugh*

With the faculty of LIU/Brooklyn Teaching and Learning Department and Cypress Hills Dual Language Community School<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

Education in the United States in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be increasingly characterized by the polarization of two opposing trends. On the one hand, the linguistic heterogeneity of the school population is increasing. On the other hand, standard academic English is being used in standardized assessment as the only measure of school success and of the achievement of high standards for both children and their teachers.

In the 70s and the 80s, as the multilingualism of the country started to expand through immigration, the use of languages other than English (LOTE) by students and teachers in bilingual education classrooms was prevalent in the nation's schools (For more on bilingual education during this era, see Arias and Casanova 1993; August and Hakuta 1998; Baker 2001; Crawford 2000; García 1991; García and Baker 1995; Ovando and Collier 1998). But as the bilingualism and bidialectism of U.S. citizens started to increase, state education systems found ways of halting the use of LOTEs in schools, sometimes by passing strict regulations such as Proposition 227 in California that forbids the use of a LOTE in instruction, but most often by imposing that students and teachers pass high stakes standardized tests in standard English that require sophisticated use of decontextualized language skills. These high-stakes tests increasingly determine who gets promoted, who graduates from high school, who enters college, who teaches.

The focus on passing standardized tests and meeting high standards, always assessed in English only, has had a debilitating effect on the use of children's native languages in education. Bilingual teachers, fearful that their students will not pass the English-only assessments and that they will receive low marks on their teaching, increasingly teach in English only. Parents with children in bilingual classrooms have become fearful that their children will not be promoted or graduate. And college programs to prepare bilingual teachers, once

numerous and growing, have shrunk in enrollment, as the bilingual teachers fail standardized tests that put their existence in jeopardy. Bilingualism in schools in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is seen as a threat to the high educational standards of an “advanced” society.

This chapter first describes the increased sociolinguistic heterogeneity and socioeducational homogeneity of the United States and of New York City in particular. It then looks at how Descriptive Inquiry as an innovative research mode has enabled us, at this threatening juncture, to transform a university program to continue to educate urban teachers, most of whom are bilingual or bidialectal, and support the efforts of a dual language school to educate for bilingualism.

## 2. Sociolinguistic heterogeneity in the United States and NYC in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

The United States has become increasingly multilingual in the last decade. According to the 2000 Census, a language other than English (LOTE) is spoken in approximately 18% of all U.S. households. In states like California, New Mexico, Texas, New York, Hawaii, Arizona and New Jersey, well over 25% of the population live in households where a LOTE is spoken (NCBE Newline Bulletin 2001).

School age children increasingly live in LOTE-speaking households. From 1990 to 2000, the number of children ages 5 to 17 living in homes where LOTEs were spoken grew approximately 55%, making up a total of almost 10 million children (9,700,000). Children in Spanish-speaking homes showed the greatest increase from 1990 to 2000, an increase of 60%. Children in homes where Asian and Pacific languages were spoken grew by 49%. It is interesting to note, however, that the percentage of children living in LOTE speaking homes who also speak English well or very well increased to 86% in 2000, indicating a growing generation of bilingual North Americans. At the same time, the total number of school-aged children who are English language learners has increased dramatically, mirroring the growth of immigration in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (NCBE 2001).

The linguistic diversity of the United States reflects not only its multilingualism, but also the complexity of the English varieties spoken, both non-natively, as well as natively. The English spoken includes African American varieties, as well as the English spoken by the many recent anglophone immigrants – Indian English, African English, and West Indian English.

In New York City, the setting for the teacher education program and the dual language program that will be described, almost half of households (46%) spoke a LOTE in 1990 (García and Fishman 1997). From 1990 to 2000, the foreign born population increased from 28% to 40% (Lambert 2000). A half a million of these immigrants arrived in the city from 1990 to 2000 (Kaplan 2001).

What distinguishes New York City from other urban U.S. contexts is its linguistic complexity (García and Fishman 1997). In 1990 there were more than 1,000 speakers of fifty-two different languages, and one of five New Yorkers spoke Spanish at home (García and Fishman 1997). A decade later, the city’s largest group of LOTE speakers is still Spanish speaking. In 1999, Puerto Ricans account for 744,000, of whom 290,000 were born in the island. In a decade, Puerto Rican New Yorkers went from constituting 50% of the population to 37% (Navarro 2001). Dominicans numbered 387,000 in 1999, and the number of Mexicans quadrupled in one decade, reaching 133,000 in 1999. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union numbered 229,000 in 1999, while South Asians from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, more than doubled in one decade to 146,000 (Lambert 2000).

## 3. Educational homogeneity in the United States and NYC in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

The United States educational system has always distinguished itself by its lack of centralization and the absence of a centralized national curriculum. Educational policy has traditionally been set by each state’s Education department within federal guidelines. But the move towards high standards that are assessed through high-stakes standardized tests increasingly homogenizes educational policy and practice (AERA 2000). As schools step up their students’ preparation for standardized tests that determine whether the students will be promoted and/or graduate, and whether the school itself and its administration and teachers will be put on probation, instruction has become standardized (National Research Council 1999). The educational publishing industry and the testing industry are meanwhile making substantial profits in what has become a huge industry of material to prepare for and to take the standardized tests.

Upon admission to New York City public schools, LOTE speaking children are tested with a standardized test. Those who do not meet appropriate English language proficiency are categorized as English Language Learners (ELLs).

But it now turns out that these same ELL students are being asked to pass assessments for promotion and graduation that require English language proficiency.

English Language Learners in NYC High School must now pass a six hours exam in English, given by the State Regents, in order to graduate. It has been predicted that in 2005 when all the provisions of the new graduation policy will be enacted, there will be neighborhoods in New York City with few high school graduates. And after three years, elementary and middle school students who continue to be categorized as ELLs will be required to pass standardized assessments in English reading and writing in order to be promoted. Those test scores, bound to be lower in schools in which there are large bilingual, immigrant, and poor populations, are used to evaluate the school's performance in a public "Report card".

In this climate of higher standards assessed through English only, English Language Learners and bilingual and bidialectal students have become a liability. Teachers would rather not teach them since their standardized test scores are likely to be lower than those of native English speakers in wealthier communities. Schools would rather not have ELLs since the school's performance is going to be evaluated through the lower scores that English Language Learners will likely receive. But fortunately, education is compulsory until the age of 16 in the United States, leaving teachers of bilingual students and schools with large numbers of English Language Learners scrambling for solutions; and leaving those committed to bilingual education and to teaching English Language Learners unsure and doubtful that their students can be successful.

Higher education, however, does not have to find solutions to these problems and can simply deny access to students who fail to meet these high standards on standardized tests. The New York State Education Department has started requiring passing scores in new standardized teacher certification examinations, which many bilingual and bidialectal teachers fail to pass. The three written standardized exams – one in Liberal Arts and Science, the other in the area of specialization, and the other in teaching skills – consist of multiple choice questions that test ability to solve content-based problems embedded in reading passages, as well as a written essay. The New York State Education Department also requires that 80% of those graduating from teacher certification programs pass the examinations (NYS Board of Regents 1998).

There are differences in performance in the New York State Teacher Certification Examinations among different ethnolinguistic groups. In 1996 to 1997, the last year for which data was publicly released, 92% of white teacher candidates passed, but the pass rates of African Americans and Latinos was

only 50% and 47% respectively. One third of teacher candidates in New York City fail the examinations that qualify them to teach, as compared to one-sixth overall in the State (NYS Board of Regents 1998).

The high failure rate of bilingual and bidialectal students make them a liability for admissions in teacher education programs. Colleges, even those with policies of open admissions, have started to close the door on the very students who are deeply knowledgeable of language minority communities and their ways of using languages, literacies and cultures, and who are committed to educating children in those communities (García and Trubek 1999).

#### 4. Descriptive inquiry in educational research

To protect the gains made during the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in educational access and the use of the child's native language in instruction, education programs, both at the university and the school level, have had to undergo transformations that enable them to continue their commitment to bilingual and bidialectal students, while increasing their rates of success in standardized tests. But meaningful change cannot be imposed. In the case of the university program and the dual language program that we describe below, descriptive inquiry as a research mode has enabled both faculties to work collaboratively to spur, support and imagine change. Descriptive inquiry has helped both groups create a generative tension between what could be two sets of warring values – those of heterogeneity and those of homogeneity.

Descriptive inquiry is a disciplined process of research in teaching and learning derived from the work of the Prospect Center for Education and Research (Carini 1993; Carini 2001; Himley and Carini 2000; Prospect 1986) and based on ideas drawn from phenomenology. Driven by story, image and detail, descriptive inquiry grounds itself in the works of both students and faculty and description of students and teachers. Through disciplined description, a group can collaboratively cut through generalities and abstractions, make the complexity of the lived reality more visible, and so enlarge understandings that can generate ideas for action (Traugh 2000).

The descriptive inquiry process that we have used in the transformation of the LIU/Brooklyn teacher education program and in the support of the Cypress Hills Dual Language School engages the entire faculty and staff over a long period of time in disciplined descriptive inquiry into language, texts, children's and teacher's works, and teaching practices. Each participant describes fully, working to withhold judgment or interpretation and to be respectful of the maker of the work, and of each other (Carini 2000, 2001). A chair pulls together the

main threads of the descriptions through the course of each session. The process enables the group to collectively learn new ways to talk with each other and to generate questions and ideas about the focus at hand. Over time, a body of knowledge about children, teaching, and learning is developed among members of the group.

Descriptive inquiry is multi-faceted, and inquiry groups chart their own courses depending on their interests and the questions they pursue. The processes, as described below, were developed by the Prospect Archive and Center for Education and Research (Prospect 1986).

- **Descriptive inquiry into language** engages the group in describing images, metaphors, associations, that the individual holds of a word and the ideas it embodies. Words are chosen by the chair of the group for the insights into the group's questions they may provide.
- **Descriptive inquiry into texts** begins with literal paraphrasing of each line of text, as each of the readers tries to gain deeper understanding of the author's words. It then moves to a more interpretative level, with each member of the group adding a layer of meaning. Texts can be ones written by teachers themselves, e.g., a mission statement, or articles or books chosen because of their relevance to the inquiry's focus.
- **Descriptive inquiry into children's works** requires that members of the group start out by paying close attention to detail and describing the child's work literally. After exhaustive literal description, the group moves to figurative descriptions.
- **Descriptive reviews of students** engages teachers in describing students fully under five headings – physical presence and gesture, disposition and temperament, connections with others both children and adults, strong interests and preferences, and modes of thinking and learning (Carini 2000). Parents are also often engaged in this process.
- **Descriptive reviews of teaching practice** helps a teacher, in the company of colleagues, take an inquiry stance to her/his work by asking a framing question and showing "the rough edges of work" through description (Traugh 2000). Colleagues grapple with understanding the perspective of the person presenting and imaginatively responding to the question.

The chair is responsible for writing and disseminating descriptive notes of the inquiry sessions. These richly detailed notes provide a valuable historical record of the development and the movement in the group and of the body of knowledge developed by the group over time.

As we will see below, descriptive inquiry has proven to be an important means of making a transforming and sustaining space for bilingual teachers and students as the education system has become more homogenized.

## 5. Transforming the education of urban and bilingual teachers

The Brooklyn Campus of Long Island University is a private university in downtown Brooklyn with an 80% minority student body, mostly poor and immigrant, and a mission of access. Although the university does not have an 80% pass rate on the New York State Teacher Certification Exams, the institution is committed to strengthening its teacher education programs to increase the likelihood that their urban minority students, most of them bilingual and bidialectal, pass the tests. One of us (García) has been the Dean of the School of Education since 1997. The second one (Traugh) is the Director of its Center for Urban Educators (CUE).

To transform the teacher education program, we all had to go beyond traditional academic discourse, discourse that encourages intellectual generalizations, answers, and solutions, and discourages questions that problematize and bring out complexity. We also had to cut through intellectual generalities and together understand the societal and educational challenges and imagine pedagogical and curricular solutions.

In 1998, with Traugh as consultant, the faculty and staff started to use Descriptive Inquiry on a monthly basis to study our own reality. Almost immediately, questions about the language differences of the teacher candidates emerged, questions that parallel the ones teachers in classrooms have about their own language minority students. For example, during the third inquiry session a faculty member offered an extensive description of her practice and raised an essential issue. The descriptive notes of that session record the faculty member's voice:

When I began teaching at LIU/Brooklyn, I was overwhelmed by the academic, social and personal struggles of my students. As a result, I did not know how to facilitate their intellectual development. In acknowledging their weaknesses, I also had to acknowledge my own. I realized how little I knew about teaching linguistically and culturally diverse students how to teach (...) My students need to be fluent in Standard English in order to be successful in college and in a career as an elementary school teacher. They also need to retain their pride and commitment to their native languages and cultures (...) I need to facilitate their entrance into Standard English, while I allow them to give voice to their own literacy backgrounds. (November 19, 2001: 5)

Collaboratively we grappled with how to pay close attention to the language and cultural differences of our teacher candidates. Through the process, we slowly discovered the strengths embedded in those differences, and we learned how to help students meet society's expectations without standardizing their intellectual development.

The inquiry sessions have generated tensions. However, through the questions it has raised, descriptive inquiry has enabled us to transform the pedagogy and the curriculum used to educate teachers, and, in the process, transform ourselves as scholars and researchers.

Since our bilingual and bidialectal students of teaching need intense language and literacy development, the new teacher education courses engage students in doing close readings of complex texts using descriptive inquiry of texts and words. To help the students read critically and write intensively, we've developed a transformative pedagogy that we have called "of the borderlands." In her 1987 book, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa reminds us: "In the Borderlands / you are the battleground / where enemies are kin to each other / (...) To survive the Borderlands / you must live *sin fronteras* / be a cross-road". Our pedagogical practices attempt to create a generative third space that joins faculty, students and their students in the shifting urban landscape. For example, students use double-entry journals to describe their multilingual and multicultural experiences alongside excerpts they copy from their theoretical readings. This is a way for students to grapple with large ideas as they construct meaning from their own particularity. This is also a way for faculty, mostly white and not bilingual, to gain a different access to the students' experience and thinking, and so develop deeper understandings of familiar traditional theories of teaching and learning and generate new ideas.

Alongside pedagogy, the teacher education curriculum has undergone major transformation. The traditional starting place of teacher education programs has been the foundational disciplines of history, philosophy, sociology and psychology of education. Through our descriptive inquiry work, the faculty shifted the starting place of the program to focus on the persons who are the object of the education, that is, the teacher and the children. This is done through two initial foundational interdisciplinary courses which also introduce students to the processes of descriptive inquiry, developing in the students the habits of mind of noticing, of observing and describing, of remaining "wide awake" to differences (Greene 1995). The entire curriculum has also been grounded in work in the work of schools and classrooms by requiring fieldwork from the very beginning.

We're in the process of developing an additional facet of the on-going inquiry into our program and the opportunities it provides into our students'

thinking and language. We are creating longitudinal collections of our students' work, and faculty are collaboratively engaged in descriptive inquiry into what these collections hold.

All courses in the curriculum address the teaching of diverse learners, including bilingual and ESL students. In an increasingly diverse country, *all* teachers, whether specializing in the education of English language learners or not, need to know about the interdependence of the first and second language in cognition and learning, to be ready to use the child's native language to further the child's thinking and imagination, and to know how to adapt instruction when teaching in a child's second language. In an increasingly interdependent world, *all* teachers need to encourage English speaking and LOTE speaking students to use other languages, other literacies, other sources, to seek plural and multiple sources of data and information to understand our complex globalized world.

Our inclusive vision has also had an impact on the way we educate specialists to teach English language learners. Besides taking specialized courses, these teachers, whether ESL or bilingual teachers, are now engaged in a year-long collaborative inquiry, along with other students of teaching, as together we enlarge our understandings of the complexity of *all* school children.

Descriptive inquiry created sufficient generative tension in the group, so as to open up spaces for creativity, imagination, and regeneration. And, it continues to support the faculty and staff as a new curriculum and new pedagogy is implemented, through the on-going development of ways of teaching and learning that will ensure that more bilingual and bidialectal teachers achieve New York State certification.

## 6. Supporting the education of bilingual and biliterate children

Educational scholarship and university-generated research has traditionally been either conforming to, or critical of, the educational system, but has paid little attention to noticing the child or the teacher-to-be as active learners and teachers in the making. Traditional scholarship on bilingualism in schools has rarely systematically studied works done in school by bilingual children and bilingual teachers as complex landscapes deserving of intellectual attention.

In September of 2000, one of the public bilingual schools in New York City, Cypress Hills Dual Language School in the East New York section of Brooklyn, received funding for staff development. They requested that LIU faculty become involved in this effort. Rather than traditional staff development activities, the two of us started collaborating with the school faculty and staff in

whole-school descriptive inquiry, a process that Traugh had used successfully in many other schools (Traugh 2000).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1998) have argued that the distinction between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge in teacher education has maintained the hegemony of university-generated knowledge by giving practical knowledge low status. This serves, they say, “to reify divisions that keep teachers in their place – the separation of practitioners from researchers, doers from thinkers, actors from analysts, and actions from ideas” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1998: 289). Descriptive inquiry has allowed us to set this distinction aside and so to start inhabiting a space of questions and possibility *with* bilingual teachers, *alongside* teachers, to be companions, as we remain attentive to the changing landscape of their bilingual classrooms.

The Cypress Hills Dual Language Community School was started in 1997 through the efforts of a group of parents in the local community based organization. Parents, both Latino and African American, wanted the school to develop the bilingualism of their children, regardless of whether they were English monolingual students, Spanish monolingual students, or bilingual. Cypress Hills is the first public school to have a parent co-director who is bilingual, María Jaya-Vega, with a teacher co-director, Sheryl Brown, a bilingual Anglo. The school was reorganized two years ago with an innovative five-day cycle. Linguistically heterogeneous groups of children are instructed in one language for five days in a row, with the second language used for the next five days. Every five days the children switch language, classroom and teacher. Although the children are linguistically mixed, languages are strictly separated by classroom and teacher in the five-day language cycles. There are approximately 100 students in Kindergarten through second grade at the time of this writing, with a grade scheduled to be added annually until sixth grade. Twenty-five percent of the students are African American and 50% of the Latino children speak English only. All teachers, whether Latino or Anglo, are bilingual. As in all bilingual schools in an era of higher standards through English, there are questions and tensions about remaining accountable to the value of bilingualism and biliteracy that underlies their structure and practices.

Big ideas about bilingualism and learning started to emerge from the group itself immediately. The issue of language in instruction was raised not as a structural or administrative issue, but as an issue of language springing directly from the work of the child. And it was addressed by García not as the expert, but collectively through the teacher’s experience and the children’s work. In fact, the process called into question García’s expert knowledge of bilingualism, by confronting specific situations that did not respond to theoretical generalities.

For the third inquiry session, the English and Spanish first / second grade team, worked with Traugh in preparing a Descriptive Review of a Latino English-speaking first grader who presented challenges. In preparing their review, they realized, for the first time, that neither of them knew of the child’s work in the other language. The collective discussion that ensued after the review enabled the school’s faculty to share the different stories of the child they held, and the multiplicity of views and diverse images they had about him. They began to see him across languages, across disciplines, across grades, across home and school cultures, as a being in the process of making.

Emerging from our description of children’s work, the question of the effects the language of the class might have vis-à-vis the language dominance of the child and the work she or he produces was raised almost immediately. To pursue this question, we chose an English Language Learner for the next descriptive inquiry session. The two kindergarten teachers introduced a five-year-old girl who came to school “with no English at all.” The teacher of the English part of the kindergarten, described her:

X is definitely a talker in Spanish. She follows stories really well and has a lot to say about them. She is very outgoing (...) She is very interested in learning and seems very happy with things. Now she seems to be speaking a lot of English. (April 18, 2001: 1)

It is interesting to reflect on all this quote says about bilingualism in instruction and second language acquisition. Because of the teacher’s bilingualism, she knows that the student is a talker, even when she teaches in English only. It may be because the teacher is able to understand the child that the child also seems to understand the teacher’s stories when she tells them in English. The teacher’s bilingualism makes the child interested in learning and happy to be in the classroom. And in seven months, despite the fact that more than half of the time is spent in Spanish, the child is speaking English.

The teacher continued to comment on children’s language use:

It seems, in general, that the kids who are just speaking English love to speak English in my class because it is a new thing. The ones who are just learning Spanish, they can show off with the Spanish they know. It is funny to have the English speakers speaking to me in Spanish, and the Spanish speakers speaking to me in English. (April 18, 2001: 1)

This description shows a level of novelty and excitement in using the second language which traditional research literature has not commented upon. In a safe setting such as that of this dual language school where teachers and direc-

tors, whether Latinas or Anglos, are bilingual, everyone wants to speak the other language. Because the teacher is bilingual, kindergartners can “try” the other language regardless of the language of instruction.

The teacher returned to the child’s process in learning to speak and write English:

Her English is broken. Sometimes she speaks in English; sometimes she speaks in Spanish. Not in complete sentences. And, she copies. When Ms X came in and read, she copied what Ms X said. I think that is the way she is learning language. She is a mimic. It is the way she is learning. (April 18, 2001: 1)

The teacher described the child’s use of Spanish to fill in for the gaps that she has in English, a common language use in the borderlands, as Zentella (1997) has pointed out. And in much the same way we have written this paper, as we copy others’ words to make them meaningful for us, the child makes language meaningful for herself by copying.

After the presentation of the child, we took an initial look at her work from the English and Spanish class that the two teachers had collected. Our first collective impressions drew us immediately into language. The teacher who teaches in English is extremely interested in what the child is doing in Spanish. She questioned:

I wonder if you could say that in English, she is copying more. Like in November she copied the whole alphabet, and the alphabet was on the table. Later on, there are whole words that she copies. I don’t think I see much invented spelling in English. In Spanish, it is happening. (April 18, 2001: 2)

The group then decided to select one drawing done in the Spanish class for close description, given here as Figure 1. Members of the inquiry group first described it literally, noting the colors, the shapes, the numbers in the middle of the picture, the writing, how the figure was made, the pencil pressure in different places. After the literal description, the group joined in further thought, reproduced below from the descriptive notes:

- I am fascinated by the first line of letters – “me casa”. The first “a” looks like a “g” but it is supposed to be an “a”. The “a” at the end is fine, and the “a’s” she wrote below are fine.
- It is very interesting how she drew her house. I did a home visit, and her house is normal white, straight rectangular building, with stairs going up. She drew it more creatively.
- It seems to me like how someone would draw the Empire State Building, if they were on the sidewalk looking up.

- Does her house have a flag on the top?
- That’s where the “casa” and the “esqela” become the same thing. The school would have the flag.
- The teacher wrote, “¿Dónde está tu casa?” And she wrote, “Es cerca de la esqela”.
- The teacher then looked up her address and it was 239, so she reversed the first two numbers. (April 18, 2001: 5)

This kindergartner displays in her drawing the coming together of her house and her school. She draws it not only near it, as her words express, but as a blend of both worlds, as that third space which all children, coming to school for the first time, create for themselves to inhabit. But educators rarely stretch their school conception to embrace and contain that of the home and the community. And we’re left wondering what would have to be done to shape schools as to blend in the world of the home, a world which especially language minority children must connect to in order to make meaning for themselves. The Cypress Hills Dual Language School seems to be an effort in that direction.

The group then turned to a drawing that the child had done around the same time in the English class, given here as Figure 2. The group noted:

- We noticed the layering and the depth of that layering. There is layering up and down, for example, the shape of the big figure is layered and inside there is the layering of the patterns – the zigzag on the bottom, the repeated triangles which merge into the circles which merge into the crosses with the circles. Because of the erasure you have layering that is almost 3-D, the layering of what is kept and what is erased (...) (7).
- The words. All those female words – sister, her, she, daughter. Then, the “I” and something started and erased. Lines connect sister and her and her and she. The dot is really worked; it is not just placed. The parallels between the patterns in the writing and the drawing are very visible (...) It feels like there is a story here. One is so plain and one is so decorated. One seems crying and the other is so happy. The words don’t give us any hints about the story. Unlike the first piece where the words are connected to the drawing (8).

In discussing the drawing, we learned that indeed the words had been copied from a typical ESL lesson on “her” and “she” as female. But the group was surprised that the child herself added the word I, which for her is female, suggesting that there is serious thinking in the copying and that original expression in writing in a second language is nicely emerging, “a feminist poem” as one of the teachers suggested. Another member of the group saw the child as a mathe-



matics thinker, as well as a language learner. She added: “There are math ideas in this work – patterns, shapes, pairings” (9). And then, we turned to language use again, as the use of the English word “me” for the Spanish “mi” was noted in the first drawing.

The Spanish kindergarten teacher explained:

I notice that they do that a lot. “Me” is a sight word. It has been a sight word all year. All the kids write “mi” as “me.” Only now have we started doing “mi” and they see there is another way to write it. This is one of the things that really interests me with the dual language (...). (April 18, 2001: 9)

It seems that despite the strict language separation of this dual language school, for this English language learner, inhabiting a space that merges home and school, home language and school language, literacy emerges for the first time as a system with overlaps, connections, coincidences, blendings. The child’s bilingualism and biliteracy, as well as herself, are in the making.

Descriptive inquiry has enabled the entire Cypress Hills school faculty to continue to find the intellectual and creative energy, passion and space necessary to continue their efforts to develop the children’s bilingualism in the face of mounting attacks. It has also provided a space and time that allows them to consider their teaching practice and school structures in the light of work of individual children. The descriptive inquiry process has also enabled the faculty to build relationship not only with children through their own work, but also with each other. The process has kept the complexity of teaching and learning, and especially of developing bilingualism and biliteracy, alive and visible in the face of standardization and homogenization.

## 7. Conclusion

This chapter describes the efforts educators in two settings are making to continue to support linguistically diverse teachers and learners in US schools. Specifically, this chapter discusses how descriptive inquiry as a research methodology has held the possibility of regeneration of one teacher education program and of deeper understandings of bilingualism and the role it plays in education in a dual language program. As such, descriptive inquiry as a research mode can be an important tool to regenerate bilingual teaching and learning, particularly in societal contexts that offer resistance. Descriptive inquiry is also important to keep difference and heterogeneity generative of educational opportunity in the face of global socioeducational forces which homogenize.

## Appendix



Figure 1.



Figure 2.

## Note

1. The following faculty members of the Teaching and Learning Department at LIU and of the Cypress Hills Dual Language School have been engaged in the Descriptive Inquiry sessions that are described in this chapter. As such, they’re collaborators in the development and writing of this chapter. For LIU/Brooklyn: Gurprit Bains, Rebecca Dyasi, Linda Jacobs, Carole Kazlow, Valerie Lava, Nancy Lemberger, Laurie Lehman, Sonia Murrow, Robert Nathanson, Klaudia Rivera, Judith Singer, Jessica Trubek, and Susan Zinar. For Cypress Hills: Laura Ascenzi-Moreno, Carrie Barnes, Barbara Rossi, Christian Denese, Shelley Rappaport, Marjorie Suárez, Irene León, María Jaya-Vega, Sheryl Brown.

## References

- AERA / APA / NCME  
1999 *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Education.

- Anzaldúa, G.  
1987 *Borderlands / La Frontera: The new mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute.
- Arias, M. and U. Casanova (eds.)  
1993 *Bilingual Education: Politics, Practice, Research*. Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education / University of Chicago Press.
- August, D. and K. Hakuta  
\* 1998 *Educating Language Minority Children*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- Baker, C.  
2001 *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. Clevedon/Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.
- Crawford, J.  
\* 2000 *At War with Diversity*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Carini, P.  
1993 Images and immeasurables II. Prospect Center Occasional Paper.  
\* 2000 Prospect's descriptive processes. In: M. Himley and P. Carini (eds.), *From Another Angle: Children's Strengths and School Standards. The Prospect Center's Descriptive Review of the Child*, 8–20. New York: Teachers College Press.  
2001 *Starting Strong. A Different Look at Children, Schools, and Standards*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Cochran Smith, Marilyn and Susan Lytle  
1998 Relationships of knowledge and practice: teacher learning in communities. *Review of Research in Education* 24: 249–305.
- García, O.  
1991 *Bilingual Education*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing.  
\* 1997 New York's multilingualism: World languages and their role in a US city. In: O. García and J. Fishman (eds.), *The Multilingual Apple. Languages in New York City*, 3–52. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- García, O. and C. Baker  
1995 *Policy and Practice in Bilingual Education: A Reader*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- García, O. and J. A. Fishman  
1997 *The Multilingual Apple. Languages in New York City*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

- García, O. and J. Trubek  
\* 1999 Where have all the urban minority educators gone and when will they ever learn? *Educators for Urban Minorities* 1: 1–8.
- Greene, M.  
1995 *Releasing the Imagination*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Himley, M. and P. Carini (eds.)  
2000 *From Another Angle: Children's Strengths and School Standards. The Prospect Center's Descriptive Review of the Child*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kaplan, Fred  
2001 Tales from a multilingual melting pot. A babel of media finds many niches in New York. *Boston Globe*, July 25, 2001.
- Lambert, Bruce  
2000 40 percent in New York born abroad. *New York Times*, July 24, 2000.
- National Research Council (NRC)  
1999 *High Stakes: Testing for tracking, promotion, and graduation*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- Navarro, Mireya  
2001 Puerto Rican presence wanes in New York. *New York Times*, February 28, 2001.
- NCBE Newslines Bulletin  
2001 Census survey suggests greater linguistic diversity and English proficiency. August 21, 2001. (<http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/newslines/2001/0821.htm>).
- New York State Board of Regents and the New York State Education Department  
1998 *New York's commitment. Teaching to Higher Standards*. Albany, NY: New York State Education Department.
- Ovando, C. and V. Collier  
\* 1998 *Bilingual and ESL Classrooms. Teaching in multicultural contexts*. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Prospect Archive and Center for Education and Research  
1986 *The Prospect Center Documentary Processes*. N. Bennington, Vermont: Prospect Center Archive.
- Traugh, C.  
2000 Descriptive notes of inquiry sessions with TAL faculty. Unpublished manuscript.  
\* 2000 Whole-school inquiry: values and practice. In: M. Himley and P. Carini (eds.), *From Another Angle: Children's Strengths and School*

*Standards. The Prospect Center's Descriptive Review of the Child, 182–198.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Zentella, A. C.

\* 1997

*Growing Up Bilingual. Puerto Rican Children in New York.* Malden, MA/Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

## Questions for discussion

1. What is the contradiction between the sociolinguistic and socioeducational reality of New York City?
2. What is descriptive inquiry and why has it been effective in the transformation and support of teachers and students in the two programs described in this chapter?
3. What is the difference between traditional research on bilingual education and the work done by García and Traugh in the Cypress Hills Dual Language School? Discuss advantages and any limitations you might see.
4. What are the implications of an inclusive teacher education curricula? What are the societal and pedagogical advantages and disadvantages?
5. How is the model of bilingual education used in the Cypress Hills Dual Language school different from more traditional models? What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages?

## Coda

### Changing paradigms in the study of bilingualism

*William F. Mackey*

If one had sought the word “bilingualism” in any glossary of linguistic terms a half century ago, one would have found definitions like “the equal mastery, choice and use of two languages”. In the mid-forties, for example, a director of the Harvard University department of comparative philology had assigned research on bilingualism to doctoral students, resulting in a long and futile search which was later abandoned for lack of “bilinguals”.

#### 1. Bilingualism as a problem

It had become evident that each discipline in which the “problem” of bilingualism could be relevant treated it as a peripheral phenomenon. Articles could be found in the journals of abnormal psychology where the greatest concern was to find out how “bilingualism” affected the testing of intelligence. In the journals of education, the concern was with the correlation of bilingualism with backwardness in the basic subjects. Research results based on standard unilingual tests were unclear or contradictory. This was not surprising since all articles on bilingualism were not dealing with the same phenomenon. In journals of comparative philology, the existence of bilingualism was evoked to explain phenomena which could not otherwise be accounted for by the phonetic or morphological laws of language change.

It was the accepted view that language, as a basis for social communication, depends on the existence of linguistic signs and that these in turn depend on a system of mental representation. Such a system, best manifested in its written forms, must be the basis of all language study.

Predominantly, the written language embodied the repository of national culture, the history, laws, religion and lore of the nation, the only texts (new or ancient) worthy of study, as literature or philology. This was the received wisdom current in the forties. There were no departments of linguistics.