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Aquí No Hay Pobrecitos: Decolonizing Bilingual Teacher Education in The U.S.-Mexico Borderlands

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ABSTRACT

This article describes bilingual teacher preparation at a public university on the U.S.-Mexico border. I examine colonizing language ideologies that are reproduced in the local schools and teacher preparation programs, and show how preservice teachers engaged in Participatory Action Research to counter negative ideologies about bilingualism and bilingual children (Flores 2013). Through the use of decolonizing pedagogies (Tejeda, Espinoza & Gutierrez, 2003) aimed at disrupting a cycle of linguistic and cultural reproduction, participants learned to question and challenge deficit views toward Mexican-origin and bilingual learners. Alternative pedagogies included language and literacy autobiographies, case studies of emergent bilingualism, and analysis of the local linguistic landscape. I show that decolonizing pedagogical tools are necessary for transforming persistent negative ideologies about Spanish and Tex-Mex that continue to silence many children and teachers in the region.

Four decades ago the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (1985) posed a question—How to research our reality in order to change it?—that sparked an approach to researching social problems known as Action Research (Reason & Bradbury, 2006) or Participatory Action Research (Fals Borda, 2006). Fals Borda's question continues to challenge educational researchers who work with diaspora, immigrant, and other minoritized populations. Because powerful interests have defined education as a field where knowledge is not produced, but rather transmitted from the top down, particularly in schools for the poor and marginalized, research is needed that contests marginalizing ideologies and practices in specific sites of educational practice. Participatory Action Research is "an inherently value laden activity . . . practiced by scholar-practitioners who care deeply about making a positive change in the world" (Reason & Bradbury, 2006, p. xxv). By foregrounding the voices of future bilingual teachers preparing to work with Mexican-origin students, I show how educational researchers and teacher educators can build bridges between research and teaching in order to better prepare minoritized bilingual preservice teachers.

This study was motivated by my experiences as a scholar-practitioner on the U.S-Mexican border. The teachers whose learning I describe were born and raised near the Rio Grande River, in the border states of Texas in the United States and Tamaulipas in Mexico. They attended local schools—often in both countries—before entering a bilingual teacher preparation program at a Texas public university located just north of the international border. Despite growing demand for certified bilingual teachers across Texas and the United States (Schmidt, 2010), most program graduates become teachers in the same communities and in some cases the same schools they attended as children. This closed system of bilingual teacher preparation—from students in local schools, to

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preservice teachers at the local university, and back to local schools as bilingual teachers—forms a cycle of cultural and linguistic reproduction that hinders learning beyond the negative anti-bilingual, anti-Spanish ideologies that characterize schooling on the border (Rippberger & Staudt, 2003). Because these ideologies and the practices associated with them are harmful to bilingual children, the study grew out of my desire to problematize with in-service teachers the forms of cultural and linguistic reproduction they had experienced. As an educational anthropologist and professor of teacher education, I wanted to know how teaching and learning at the university level could disrupt the cycle and, ultimately, better serve children in the region.

Fals Borda (1985) claims that socially conscious research must sometimes be "subversive" in order to disrupt unjust structural conditions. Some of the data I present here were collected as part of a federally funded project on teacher preparation that sought to improve the preparation of program completers in the region. That project, conceived in response to accountability demands that teacher candidates achieve higher test scores, allowed us to document the linguistic marginalization that Spanish-speaking preservice teachers had experienced. A key finding was that negative language ideologies expressed by bilingual teacher candidates were consistent with anti-bilingual pedagogies observed in local schools (Murillo, 2010). We learned that teachers in the region continued to reproduce ideologies of monolingualism and linguistic purism and that many future bilingual educators expressed the conviction that the main purpose of bilingual education is to transition linguistically diverse children into English-only schooling.

The present study addresses the "so-what?" question we asked following the previous project on teachers' attitudes towards Spanish literacy. After documenting bilingual teachers' experiences in the school system and their negative attitudes toward the languages they speak, what was next? To echo questions posed by Palmer and Martínez (2013): How can teachers on the border best be prepared to educate Latina/o bilingual learners? How can teacher educators transform these research findings into pedagogical action and activism in the classroom?

Thinking about best practices for educating the children living in this region of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands meant understanding the closed education system described above, "for while the educated person is culturally *produced* in definite sites, the educated person also culturally *produces* cultural forms (Levinson & Holland, 1996, p. 14, their emphasis). It meant creating pedagogies that would guide teachers' introspection and analysis of negative ideologies about speakers and writers of Spanish, Tex-Mex, and the roles those ideologies play in the reproduction of the cycle of linguistic marginalization. For these reasons, I decided to organize my teacher preparation classes for the explicit purpose of decolonizing bilingual teacher preparation.

I also wanted to challenge perceptions, common at the focal university, that undergraduate students "cannot read" (or write) and that they are incapable of developing confidence with the academic literacies they need to become successful teachers. I was struck by the students' lack of confidence in their reading and writing abilities, and by their willingness to blame Spanish for difficulties they experienced as readers and writers in college. I asked colleagues how they addressed this apparent underpreparedness, and received answers such as, "You pretend you teach and they pretend they learn," and "Here you teach undergrad as high school and graduate as undergrad." Although disparaging comments by professors about the literate abilities of their students are not unique to border universities, I found them especially disturbing in the context of bilingual teacher preparation. While education in the United States is "a profession that regularly devalues and, in some cases, vilifies the characteristics, backgrounds, and contributions of minority teachers" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 246), it bothered me that students seeking to become elementary school teachers described themselves—and had evidently been positioned by former teachers (Rogers & Richardson, 2011)—as "non-readers" incapable of reading college-level books and articles. Such *inquietudes* (uneasiness) led me to question the ways reading and writing were being treated in the bilingual teacher preparation program.

I have titled this paper "*Aquí no hay pobrecitos*" (There are no victims here), an expression I learned from Blandina Cárdenas, a past president of the university, because it captures the high expectations educators at all levels should have for Mexican-origin students. High expectations are a defining characteristic of effective bilingual programs (Montecel & Danini, 2002), and I believe this *dicho* (saying) reflects the urgent need for decolonizing pedagogies with bilingual teachers on the border.

Theoretical framework

Here I outline the theories that oriented the study, beginning with notions of bilingual education as a colonizing and domesticating space grounded in linguistic purism. I consider bilingual education on the border from the perspectives of contact zones (Pratt, 1991) and hybridity (Anzaldúa, 2012), and conclude by suggesting that future bilingual educators run a gauntlet among competing and contradictory language ideologies and practices.

As Freire (2000) insisted, education cannot be politically neutral because educational structures, including teacher preparation, are grounded in and reflect, to varying degrees, dominant political and economic arrangements (Cole, 2010). Thus, as many have noted, the practice of bilingual education in the United States has not been free of the contradictions of advanced capitalism (García, Flores, & Woodley, 2012). In the case of teacher preparation, while the market requires bilingual subjects (Callahan & Gándara, 2014), the education system produces accredited teachers whose understanding of bilingual families, learners, and curriculum remains embedded in monolingual notions of language and literacy.

With exceptions, bilingual education in the United States has served as an instrument of cultural and linguistic domestication, and bilingual education and dual language programs are regarded as "colonizing" spaces by scholars of emergent bilinguals and schooling (Flores, 2013). Despite efforts to institutionalize bilingual education within the U.S. civil rights movement (Grinberg & Saavedra, 2002), monoglossic language ideologies predominate in the education of emergent bilinguals, and negative perceptions of Spanish and the abilities of bilingual learners jeopardize their educational success.

Along the border, bilingual education, including teacher preparation programs, continues to be a space that "celebrates sameness, cultural essentialism, one way of thinking, and *speaking*" (Braidotti, 2011, p. 10, my emphasis). Thus, while current scholarly discussions portray bilingualism as hybrid (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Alvarez, 2001), polylingual and polycultural (Gutiérrez, Bien, Selland, & Pierce, 2011), and dynamic (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011), and highlight bilingual practices such as codemeshing (Canagarajah, 2011), translanguaging, and code-switching (Garcia & Wei, 2014), practicing teachers in bilingual programs encounter and may come to embody the idea that languages are distinct entities that must be separated or "balanced" in order for children to succeed academically.

One of the main pillars supporting monolingual and colonizing practices within bilingual education is the notion of linguistic purism, the assumption that there is a correct way of speaking, reading, and writing (Farr, 2009). This view continues to inform curriculum in the school system in the U.S.-Mexico border region, despite the fact that many residents are fluent users of English, Tex-Mex, and Spanish in their everyday lives (Martínez, 2006). Preservice teachers here commonly believe that ways of speaking in family and community contexts are not suitable for schools, as reflected in comments such as "*aquí no hablamos bien ni en inglés ni en español*" (here we don't speak well in English or in Spanish; Murillo, 2010).

A powerful metaphor for understanding the tensions that characterize bilingual education on the border is to view them as being enacted in a "contact zone," a site of constant crossing of languages and cultural practices (Pratt, 1991) between two nations, in which unequal power relations motivate complex expressions of agency and creativity. Language occupies a central place in Pratt's theory of the contact zone. She notes, for example, that "Spanish is becoming a de facto second language" (Pratt, 2003 p. 2) in much of the United States, due to immigration from Mexico and other Spanish-speaking nations, and that, despite negative ideologies against speakers of languages other than English, people are learning to work in contact with multiple languages in every aspect of daily life (Pratt, 2003).

Related to the contact zone is the notion of borders as inherently hybrid spaces (García-Canclini, 2001) in which distinct national practices and forms of production and consumption collide, generating new practices and forms combining elements of previous arrangements (Lam & Warriner, 2012). Many border scholars were introduced to the power of linguistic hybridity through the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (2012, p. 77):

> For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castillian) Spanish nor standard English, what resource is left to them but to create their own language? . . . A language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both.

Growing up in small towns near where this study took place, Anzaldúa graduated from the university with a degree in English after taking mandatory speech classes she described as "accent reduction" for Mexican-origin students (Anzaldúa, 2012). She worked briefly as a preschool and high school teacher in local schools. Thus, Anzaldúa's conception of language hybridity is grounded in her educational experiences in the Rio Grande Valley and her writings on hybridity are essential for thinking about how to decolonize bilingual education on the border.

Future bilingual teachers running the gauntlet

Various metaphors have been used to describe the linguistic injustices experienced by Spanish-speaking residents of the U.S.-Mexico border, including "linguistic terrorism" (Anzaldúa, 2012), "language panic" (Martínez, 2006), and "linguistic humiliation" (Meyer, 2009). One of the cruelest forms of injustice facing Spanish-speaking students is that the outright denial of Spanish in schools, and the weak and truncated support for Spanish literacy that characterizes transitional bilingual education at the elementary level, expose students to ridicule for having a poor command of Spanish and later failing Spanish as a "foreign" language in high school (Murillo, 2015). Alejandro Lugo (2012) proposes the metaphor of "border inspections" to describe the multiple types of inspections residents experience, including literal border crossings, questions about the legitimate uses of Spanish/Tex-Mex/English, and interrogation of one's rights to reside and work in the United States. Similarly, Spanish-speaking children who are taught to read in English through sound-based methods ("phonics") are "inspected" for their ability to produce a particular prestigious phonology that many struggle to emulate. Another metaphor is that of "transition," referring to the end of Spanish language instruction and the onset of English-only instruction. In Texas, where home language instruction has been truncated by standardized testing in English (Palmer, 2011), bilingual teachers often refer simply to "the transition."

While compelling, none of the aforementioned metaphors fully captures the complex socio-linguistic and economic context in which bilingual educators on the border learn to teach and which subject them to dual discourses concerning their presumed academic deficiencies in both Spanish and English (Guerrero & Valadez, 2011). Here, teacher candidates undergo oral interviews to prove their English proficiency as a requirement for entrance into university bilingual teacher programs, and are tested in oral and written Spanish to satisfy Texas bilingual certification requirements. Ironically, while certification exams require future teachers to communicate in writing in Spanish (e.g., writing a letter to Spanish-speaking parents), future teachers are often discouraged and even prohibited from using Spanish and Tex-Mex during student teaching assignments. Such conditions form an ideological gauntlet that teacher candidates must navigate in order to emerge as "qualified" and officially sanctioned bilingual teachers.

In this unique linguistic and ideological context, the study posed two main questions:

(1) What happens when local ways of using language are made the focus of bilingual teacher preparation that seeks to decolonize?

(2) How does the use of local varieties of English and Spanish in teacher preparation enhance the development of "academic reading and writing" of future bilingual teachers?

University context and participants

The study was conducted at a Hispanic Serving Institution located a few miles from the U.S.-Mexico Border. Participants were simultaneously enrolled in two teacher preparation courses: a biliteracy class, taught in Spanish, and a reading class, taught in English. The biliteracy course focused on children's Spanish-English biliteracy development and on pedagogies to provide bilingual learners with meaningful literacy learning experiences in both languages. The reading course focused on cognitive processes of reading comprehension.

The bilingual teacher education program followed a block schedule, which allowed me to teach the same students back to back. In this way, I taught a cohort of 18 students in both courses in the fall semester, and a cohort of 18 different students the following spring. Of a total of 36 students, 34 were female and two were male, a typical gender distribution in the bilingual program. These relatively small classes allowed us to get to know each other well and to create the *confianza* (mutual trust) necessary for open and critical discussion and collective analysis of our collaborative work.

Method

I approached the study from two methodological orientations. Following Fals Borda (1998), Participatory Action Research methods guided exploration of how students' knowledge and beliefs about Spanish and English literacies informed the teaching of reading and biliteracy with bilingual preservice teachers. This meant inviting the students to believe that they had knowledge, and inviting them to consider the value of their own histories through what Budd Hall calls "the critical analysis of cultural production" (Hall, 2005, p. 3). To do this, we followed a process in which the scholar-practitioner leads participants in (a) creating a framework for "dialectic" transformations; (b) identifying methodological conditions where students and professors research; (c) systematizing points of action; (d) socializing the research findings; and (e) extending the influence of Participatory Research to the community (Vio Grossi, 1988). My role, then, was to provide conditions encouraging students to analyze their realities, express their concerns, and develop ideas that could be taken into their own classrooms. In this sense, the study presented Participatory Action Research as engaged practice, "not a neutral dispassionate act but an act of solidarity and active support" (Freire, 1987, as cited in Hall, 2005, p.3).

Because I wanted to create decolonizing literacy practices to contest dominant notions of bilingualism and biliteracy rooted in deficit thinking (Torres & Reyes, 2011), the second methodological orientation guiding the study was critical ethnography. I sought to document what it meant for teacher-researchers to go beyond describing a current situation and to promote a change for the better in a particular region. To construct a critical, pro-bilingual pedagogy based on the sociolinguistic situation of the Rio Grande Valley, I became a "mojado ethnographer" in a region where "illegality" is also a common discourse. As described by Enrique Murillo:

> Ethnographic inquiry is most appropriate when it places events and people in the social, cultural, and political history and contexts in which they are constituted. It can never be innocent nor neutral, since it is embedded in a political and moral process (2004, p.155).

As a woman from South America and speaker of English with a marked Colombian accent, I was also dealing with U.S. immigration on several levels at the time of the study. Like many of my students, I was applying for a change in immigration status, which involved reading and responding to multiple official texts and numerous interviews with immigration officials. I frequently walked across international bridges into and from Mexico and drove or took public transportation through border checkpoints. These experiences involved legal, linguistic, and laboral inspections (Lugo, 2012) similar to those facing many border residents. They helped me think with students about how to transgress linguistic borders in official spaces, to use Spanish, Tex-Mex, and English for teaching and learning, and to teach about reading and biliteracy as social practices.

Mojado ethnography also provided tools to challenge the rigid and prescribed pedagogies my students experienced daily, including prohibitions on mixing languages in instruction and the use of bilingual children's books; curriculum treating literacy as a disembodied, autonomous subject (Street, 1995) disconnected from daily life; pejorative stereotypes such as "Mexicans don't read or write"; and definitions of immigrants as poor, ignorant, and dangerous. In this way, I came to hold an empathetic view of local students instead of applying specific categories incompatible with their experiences and the complexities of the region (Rosaldo, 1993).

As a mojado ethnographer, I invited students to join me in transgressing the linguistic and pedagogical borders pervasive in bilingual teacher education. Mojado crossing allowed us to "work together . . . to draw upon the diverse resources and rich cultural histories of struggle, at the intersections of power, geopolitics, discursive practices, community and identity" (Murillo, 2004, p. 161). We thus engaged in pedagogical practices to encourage students to develop the "knowledge and skills essential for self-refection and collective action," to develop, in other words, a "border pedagogy" (Giroux, 1992, p. 28).

Data

The study featured complementary sources of qualitative data, summarized in Table 1: language and literacy autobiographies written by participating preservice teachers; case studies they conducted with a bilingual child; graphic organizers in which participants responded to course readings; linguistic landscape assignments; and field notes from Spanish-language tutoring sessions.

The data were also complementary with regard to modality. For example, the linguistic landscape assignment consisted of digital photographs of publicly displayed signs that featured messages composed in alphabetic texts as well as images. Likewise, the case study project included the students' own writing, along with examples of writing by children and photographs of books read during the project.

Data were collected in all three of the local languages (Spanish, Tex-Mex, and English). Participants were encouraged to write and speak in the languages of their choice. Students used mostly English in the reading course and mostly Spanish in the biliteracy course, with Tex-Mex used mainly during classroom discussions and cooperative learning activities. The use of code-meshing in writing (Canagarajah, 2011) was intended to develop among students dominant in one language the

Table 1. Summary of data.

Data source	Type	Modality	Collected by	Collected from	Primary language(s)
Teachers' life stories	Autobiography	Written (narrative)	Author	Participants	English and Spanish
Case studies	Multiple	Multimedia	Participants	Participants' families and friends (young children)	Spanish and English
Graphic organizers	Responses to assigned readings	Written	Author	Participants	English and Spanish
Spanish tutoring sessions	Field notes	Written notes on oral conversations about reading and writing	Author	Participants	Spanish, Tex-Mex
Linguistic landscape	Digital photographs	Multimodal (visual and written texts)	Participants	Community	Spanish, English, Tex-Mex

confidence to express their ideas in another, and also to model the use of multiple languages in bilingual classrooms. Throughout our projects and assignments, I wanted students to experience translanguaging as a linguistic resource (Ruiz, 2010) in the education of emergent bilinguals.

Preservice bilingual teachers' language and literacy autobiographies

To become able to help bilingual children fully develop their literate abilities, future bilingual teachers need guidance to recall and reflect upon their own biliterate experiences. Life histories record our "collective memory of the past, a critical awareness of the present, and an operational premise for the future" (Quintero, 2009, p.10), and teachers' autobiographies "provide a culturally appropriate epistemological framework consistent with oral cultural traditions" (Kambutu, Rios, & Castaneda, 2009) that are prevalent in the region. Thus, at the beginning of each semester students wrote language and literacy autobiographies in which they recounted their own bilingualism and literate development in and out of school. Students wrote initial drafts, received peer and instructor comments, and incorporated written feedback on content and form before sharing final drafts in class. Below is a fragment from one student's autobiography, written in Spanish, my English translation:

> My teachers got upset with me for using my home language, but I reminded them of their [Hispanic] last names, and that I wasn't any different from them and I had my rights to use the language I wanted to. I'll never forget how most of my schoolmates would tell us we should go back to Mexico since we were so proud of being Mexican. In those years I used Spanish more, as a way of rebelling against the system in which everything had to be in English. One day a friend of mine had t-shirts made that said "I love Nuevo León," like the ones that say "I love New York." The day we wore them, most of us got suspended. We were told it was because we were in the U.S. and that we weren't supposed to wear a shirt that represented any country but the one we were living in. The next day, the students who felt more "gringo" wore t-shirts that said "I love New York," as a way of mocking us.

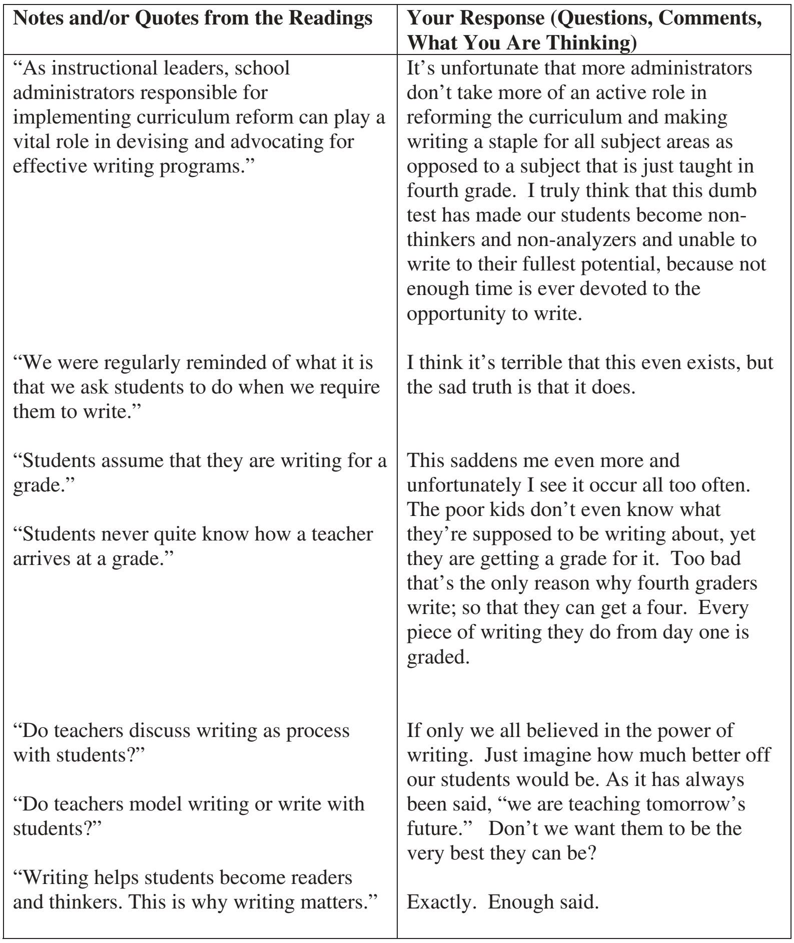
Writing and sharing autobiographies helped students reflect on the language ideologies that characterize schooling on the border. The autobiographies provided intimate examples of linguicism which students connected to theories of bilingualism and biliteracy presented in course readings. Perhaps most importantly, they stimulated discussions of how teachers can use personal experiences as bilinguals in school—both positive and negative—to help children become bilingual and biliterate.

Graphic organizer: Read, think, and write

Literacy can be a powerful tool of oppression but also for change that contributes to social justice (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Thus, reading, writing, and talking about literacy were central to our efforts to decolonize bilingual pedagogies. Both courses featured weekly writing responses to selected readings in which students transacted with texts by expressing their ideas and feelings about the authors' ideas. The invitation to disagree with authors of books and articles was a new experience for some. I adapted graphic organizers to guide students' reading and to provide a consistent format for expressing their opinions. An example of the "Read, Think, and Write" assignment is shown in Figure 1. In this fragment, the student author was responding to a reading from the book *Because Writing Matters* (Nagin, 2006).

Documenting the linguistic landscape

Like scholars who analyze publicly displayed texts to understand the local and globalized linguistic landscapes of particular multilingual communities (Blommaert, 2013), I wanted my students to appreciate the presence of local forms of text in our region and to consider their potential for developing meaningful literacy instruction with emergent bilingual learners. Extending the familiar concept of environmental print in classrooms, participants took digital photographs of publicly displayed texts around the neighborhoods and schools where they planned to teach. By analyzing and presenting these texts in class, students recognized that many billboards, announcements, and other signs associated with businesses, churches, and other institutions were written in English, Spanish, and Tex-Mex. An example can be seen in Figure 2, an advertisement stenciled on the wall of a local auto glass shop.



Notes and/or Quotes from the Readings	Your Response (Questions, Comments, What You Are Thinking)
"As instructional leaders, school administrators responsible for implementing curriculum reform can play a vital role in devising and advocating for effective writing programs."	It's unfortunate that more administrators don't take more of an active role in reforming the curriculum and making writing a staple for all subject areas as opposed to a subject that is just taught in fourth grade. I truly think that this dumb test has made our students become non-thinkers and non-analyzers and unable to write to their fullest potential, because not enough time is ever devoted to the opportunity to write.
"We were regularly reminded of what it is that we ask students to do when we require them to write."	I think it's terrible that this even exists, but the sad truth is that it does.
"Students assume that they are writing for a grade." "Students never quite know how a teacher arrives at a grade."	This saddens me even more and unfortunately I see it occur all too often. The poor kids don't even know what they're supposed to be writing about, yet they are getting a grade for it. Too bad that's the only reason why fourth graders write; so that they can get a four. Every piece of writing they do from day one is graded.
"Do teachers discuss writing as process with students?" "Do teachers model writing or write with students?"	If only we all believed in the power of writing. Just imagine how much better off our students would be. As it has always been said, "we are teaching tomorrow's future." Don't we want them to be the very best they can be?
"Writing helps students become readers and thinkers. This is why writing matters."	Exactly. Enough said.

Figure 1. Example of read, think, and write assignment.

This advertisement reads *"BIDRIOS Lo escribimos mal, Pero los Colocamos Bien!"* ["Windshields. We write it wrong, but we Install them Well!"]. It announces a service by making fun of a common source of nonconventional spelling in Spanish: the use of B rather than V in "vidrios" (auto glass or windshield). Students commented on the sign's orthography (use of lower-case and upper-case letters, punctuation, and fonts), as well as multimodal aspects of design, including the use of color, highlighting, and underlining. We discussed how the sign's author had positioned the text on the wall next to an electrical meter and fuse box, and used our knowledge of the community where the sign was displayed to speculate on its effectiveness in attracting clients.

Case study project

Following a key precept of Participatory Action Research as research to create change, students engaged in a case study project designed to help them learn about emergent biliteracy by observing bilingual children's reading and writing. Each student identified an emergent bilingual learner at or near the grade level they planned to teach, meeting once a week over the semester. Most chose children from their own families or someone they knew well from their social networks. Rather than direct instruction, we focused on creating environments in which children felt comfortable, so that the future teachers could learn by "kidwatching" (Owocki & Goodman, 2002). We provided bilingual books and other texts for reading and writing to allow children the freedom to read, write, and talk

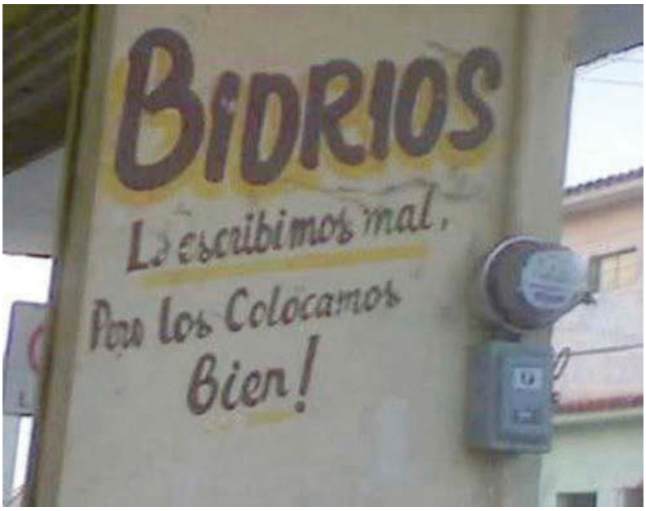


Figure 2. Example of a locally displayed text.

about any book, magazine, video game, or comic they chose. Students used double-entry journals to record observations about how children responded to reading and writing different kinds of texts and to make connections between ideas in course readings and what we observed case study participants doing with, and saying about, reading and writing.

Spanish tutoring

Most students in the bilingual teacher preparation program were fluent speakers of Spanish from childhood, but few had been given the opportunity to develop strong literacy skills in Spanish in school. Understandably, many expressed anxiety about their ability to read and write in Spanish for academic purposes. This sense of linguistic insecurity seemed to increase the year before the study began, when the Texas State Board of Education placed greater emphasis on the written portion of the Spanish proficiency test required for bilingual teacher certification. In response, a colleague and I decided to offer Spanish tutoring sessions two afternoons a week. The official objective of the voluntary, hour-long sessions was to help the students improve their academic reading and writing in Spanish. In practice, we talked more about recovering ways of languaging (Garcia & Wei, 2014) taken from them in the process of monolingual schooling. We built upon students' funds of knowledge in Spanish by writing about familiar topics such as food, relationships, or funny experiences. Typically, students began by telling me a story. Next, students wrote their story, using Spanish as much as possible and inserting English or Tex-Mex when they were unsure of a word. Tutoring sessions took place in small groups over the course of the study.

Data analysis

Data analysis was guided by Weis and Fine's (2004) notion of "working method" in educational research with minoritized students. This entailed reading and rereading the field notes I took during the semester, always keeping in mind the ideological and structural conditions that work to minoritize or support bilingual learners in our research context. I also listened to and read carefully the students' language and literacy autobiographies, linguistic landscape assignments, and work done in Spanish tutoring sessions in order to identify recurrent events as well as ideas similar to and different from my own impressions. Throughout this iterative process, I was seeking ideas related to the research questions. I triangulated these different sources of data to find consistency or patterns.

Consistent with my desire to create a bridge between research and teaching for the purpose of better preparing minoritized bilingual preservice teachers, I provided extensive and systematic written feedback on students' work. While my primary intent was to promote students' "appropriation and development of their critical knowledge for the advancement of their educational and linguistic awareness" (Torres Carrillo, 2010, p. 203), the process of reflecting carefully and commenting on students' learning was also an important aspect of data analysis.

Findings

The first research question explored in this study was what happens when a teacher preparation program places local forms of language and literacy at the center of efforts to decolonize bilingual education. Three main findings emerged: greater attention to and knowledge of multilingualism in local texts; increased ability to incorporate local funds of linguistic knowledge in teaching; and interest in using culturally relevant bilingual children's literature, each of which I present in this section.

By studying the ways people speak and write in their daily lives, future bilingual teachers learned that environmental print and multilingual texts featuring Spanish and Tex-Mex should be considered legitimate resources for learning. Before our project, few paid much attention to the local forms of language represented in written form, or to the functions of such texts in advertising goods and services essential to the local informal economy (Richardson & Pisani, 2012). One student wrote about a sign for a restaurant close to her home, "This restaurant has been there for more than 10 years, but I never realized that they advertised their food in Tex-Mex." Another commented, "I always saw my church announcing Mass in Spanish, Tex-Mex, and English but I hadn't thought about this and its importance for biliteracy development until this assignment." By directing students' attention to the presence, form, and function of such texts, the linguistic landscape assignment sparked observations, discussions, and analysis that would have been unlikely using only bilingual education textbooks produced for the national teacher preparation market.

A second finding concerns the use of bilingual children's local linguistic funds of knowledge in border schools. Several course readings described ways teachers in other parts of the border used family and community literacies in literacy instruction, provoking much discussion. We were unable to put our ideas into action in classrooms, however, because students had not begun student teaching. Two semesters after the end of data collection, one of the students, then student teaching in a bilingual first-grade classroom, was excited to show me a thematic unit she had developed, "*Lo que leemos en mi casa*" (What we read at home), in which children created *árboles de lectura* (reading trees) to display the books, magazines, food labels, advertisements, and other texts that first graders documented in their own households. These visual representations of family literacies included children's drawings, digital photographs, and artifacts brought from home and included texts in Spanish and English. This example, which combined elements of the linguistic landscape and language autobiography assignments, illustrates the potential of incorporating family and community literacies in bilingual teacher preparation on the border (Murillo, 2010; Smith & Murillo, 2013).

Reading bilingual children's books by local authors motivated students' interest in the use of culturally and linguistically relevant children's literature. Savina, one of many students who had been unaware of children's fiction written by Rio Grande Valley authors, read books by Xavier Garza with her case study student. After the course, she attended a book reading where this local author read from his book, *Lucha Libre: The Man in the Silver Mask* (Garza, 2005). She proudly presented me with a copy of the book, signed by the author and bearing her own inscription, *"Con mucho amor y respeto. ¡Extraño sus reganadas!"* (With much love and respect. I miss your scolding!). This example from a student who had described herself as a reluctant reader at the beginning of the project suggests the power of using local bilingual literature in bilingual teacher preparation.

The second question this study sought to answer was: How does the use of local languages enhance the development of academic reading and writing by future bilingual teachers? I identified two key areas: using a variety of academic literacy genres, and showing greater overall confidence in themselves as academic readers and writers. I learned that most students were accustomed to reading assignments in high school and university classes consisting of reading a textbook chapter, watching a PowerPoint presentation based on the chapter, and being evaluated through a multiple-choice quiz based on the PowerPoint presentation. Several students reported that they had never purchased or read a course textbook. Because the quizzes were usually online, many students simply got together with classmates to take them, often while viewing the PowerPoint on a separate computer.

In contrast, transacting critically with a variety of texts—analyzing and questioning readings, artifacts, and field notes collaboratively with classmates and the professor—was a new experience for many students. They found the Read, Think, and Write assignments (graphic organizers) especially challenging at first. Using these formats as sites of bilingual inquiry and communication, where students read in English and responded in Spanish, English, and Tex-Mex, enabled future teachers to become familiar with forms of academic reading and writing that require close engagement with texts. According to Luis Moll (2008, p. 1), this form of translanguaging, "reading in one language, writing about it in the other . . . helps students garner and combine valuable funds of knowledge from their environments for personal or academic use." This claim was supported through a practice later reported by participants who adapted the graphic organizer format (Figure 1) to prepare students for the language arts section of the state standardized exam. One student posted on Facebook that graphic organizers were more effective than benchmark practice exams because children found them less boring.

Although students noted the individual and collective effort these forms of reading and writing demanded, by the end of the semester many acknowledged that they had become stronger readers, writers, and thinkers about bilingual education and literacy. Students gained confidence in their ability to read and write academic texts in English and Spanish. One student, the first in her cohort to pass the state's Spanish literacy test for bilingual teacher certification, highlighted the importance of being able to draw on her full linguistic repertoire to develop academic literacy in Spanish:

> Now I understand the importance of being a good reader in one language and how it transfers to the other one. With the tutoring in Spanish I gained confidence in this language because I was allowed to use everything I knew in English. Also, I could remember and use all the Spanish I used with my *'buela* [grandma] when I was growing up.

Others expressed greater confidence in their abilities as biliterates. One student wrote, "If I hadn't taken these classes I wouldn't have discovered that I am a good reader and writer in both languages, but it took a lot of practice and not being afraid to do it." Another student, one of several parents in the study, reflected on the case study assignment:

> This class taught me so many things I did not know and was blind to in literacy. I was very lucky to have the privilege of working with my own daughter throughout this case study. I made my connections but I feel like I got so much more out of it. . . . I have a confidence I did not have before in literacy and will do my best to teach well my students and my daughter.

Discussion

Mexican-origin students from working-class backgrounds comprise the great majority of students on the U.S.-Mexican border. Historically, most have received a second-class education (Maril, 1989). Although the border is a zone of great mobility, the teacher population is quite stable because education is one of few sources of steady employment (Richardson & Pisani, 2012). Most preservice teachers in the Rio Grande Valley were taught by teachers who attended local schools and graduated from the local universities, and they expect to find jobs in the same schools and districts they attended as children. Once the exclusive domain of Anglo educators, the region's schools are now numerically dominated by administrators and teachers of Mexican origin. Changes in the ethnicity of the teacher force notwithstanding, shared characteristics among preservice bilingual teachers include a history of linguistic marginalization in school, monolingual literacy instruction, and a *pobrecito* (victim) mentality that has convinced many of their own deficiencies as readers and writers.

Conclusion

This study used Participatory Action Research in an attempt to subvert the colonizing role of language and literacy instruction in the region’s schools. Reading and writing were used as decolonizing tools to challenge future bilingual teachers of Mexican origin to rethink their school experiences and prepare them to better serve immigrant and linguistically diverse students. In other words, “students had to become literate about their stories, experiences, and the culture of their immediate environments” in order to read the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 47). Convincing students that their fears about reading and writing could be overcome through extensive reading and expressing themselves in all three local languages was critical to our learning in this process.

Meeting the need for more linguistically and culturally diverse teachers will require pedagogies that promote linguistic self-confidence, critical awareness, and deep content knowledge across teacher preparation. The findings suggest that teaching to decolonize bilingual education implies new kinds of pedagogical work by students and teacher educators. The participants in this study had many opportunities to discuss their ideas and devoted considerable time to reading, writing, and collecting and analyzing data, more than they were accustomed to in teacher preparation courses. As Participatory Action researchers, we engaged in building a community of teacher-learners capable of challenging deficit and prescriptive views of language and learning that many bilingual children encounter in school. It is my hope that these new educators will continue to develop decolonizing teacher identities as they begin work with the next generation of Mexican-origin students in the Rio Grande Valley.

Notes on contributor

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