

Challenges for Latino Educators Crossing Symbolic, Cultural, and Linguistic Boundaries: Coming to Voice in Teacher Preparation with Competing Voices

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This article reports on a teacher education program's preparation of bilingual paraeducators during a period of conflicting educational reform of structured English immersion in Massachusetts. Drawing on nexus analysis of discourses (R. Scollon & S. W. Scollon, 2004), we discuss factors faced by Latino educators. These include competing discourses, historical institutional inequities, and boundaries circumscribing the interactions between university and communities. Through the use of a participant's text as a re-semiotized means of representing the new potentials that bilingual paraeducators bring to the field of teacher education, "cultural bumps" emerge and directions for teacher education are presented.

Key words: discourses, educational reform, para educators, professional education, university-community partnerships

In this article, we argue that preparing Latino educators in the current period of educational reforms requires an understanding of and openness to engage with

the multiple, competing, and often conflicting discourses among university faculty, future teachers, and education policymakers alike. The term *discourse* is used here to refer to both the interactional level on which people communicate with one another using cultural sign systems and the level of ideological alignments with broader patterns of societal values and beliefs that produce identities and power relations across time (Blommaert, 2005; Gee, 1999). This means that language is seen as action shaped by social structure that at the same time shapes social processes of interpretation, circulation, and production. If we, as teacher educators,¹ restrict ourselves to an English skills-oriented agenda to help future educators fulfill state licensure requirements, we place future Latino educators² in a precarious position with respect to the deficit discourses that dominate society today, for these discourses ultimately work to delegitimize the contributions of diverse communities, the very people whom the new teachers are expected to serve.

The Bachelor of General Studies (BGS) program for paraprofessionals and other educators was developed at the University of Massachusetts against a relief of current education reform discourses. By our alliance we attempted to develop instructional practices and discourses that are mutually transformative of ourselves as faculty and researchers in teacher education, of our participants' emerging voices, and of state education policy discourses. In this article, we first present how important contextual discourses of education reform affect Latino populations in Massachusetts. Next we present a framework to analyze our dialogic stance in relation to these multiple discourses. By outlining several critical moments in our project, we present the struggles, tensions, and achievements that have occurred thus far. Community resources have been marshaled in this program to prepare a predominantly Puerto Rican cohort of future teachers and to build outreach opportunities with the community. Through our own interaction with this network of teacher-educators, future teachers, and community, we seek not only to mediate the fragile relationships within it but also to learn from all of the parties involved in this joint undertaking.

Our community location is approximately one half hour's drive from the university campus. Approaching the building that houses the Community Education Project, one cannot help but notice the signs of urban renewal taking place in this

¹The four of us hold full-time tenure-track positions at our university.

²We recognize that the use of the term *Latino educator* here is problematic, but we wish to signal both those who have African, European, and indigenous heritage known as *Hispanics* as well as those who educate these groups. For this reason, it is all the more urgent that both educators who are themselves Latinos, as well as those who currently educate Latino children, work collaboratively to build new imagined futures in ever-diverse communities. In this vein we use the term *Latino educators* to designate both those of Latino heritage (indigenous, African, and European) as well as those who educate children with this heritage. We share the vision that what it means to be a Latino educator will need to be interrogated to be responsive to the current context of education reform

neighborhood located in the “flats”³ of Holyoke, Massachusetts, a city in which, according to the 2000 Census, 26.4% of the population is living at or below the poverty line (compared with 9.3% for Massachusetts as a whole). Sporadic economic investments are visible in small sections of this multi-zoned neighborhood, albeit on a small scale: One sees a mixture of small and large businesses, tenement houses, and factory warehouses. For two nights a week throughout the year, a small room in the Community Education Project becomes the University of Massachusetts’s BGS Program in Inquiry into Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Communities. Despite formidable challenges, we have prepared the university’s largest predominantly Puerto Rican cohort of future elementary educators in more than a decade.

Our goal for this program is to establish a vision that constructs hybrid community discourses involving resource negotiations at intellectual, emotional, and textual levels. These negotiations hold promise for engaging learners in dialogic processes, building upon students’ diverse cultural capital, and transforming the teacher education practices of faculty so that future teachers of diverse heritage use a broader range of conceptual tools.

NEXUS OF ENGAGEMENT: ALLIANCES IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION REFORM

When a collective is formed, its membership engages in activities that are united by a vision, a nexus of engagement. Of all of the relevant mandates affecting local school districts with large numbers of Latino teachers and students, the elimination of bilingual education has had the most dramatic impact.

In the spring of 2003, local school districts were instructed by David P. Driscoll, Massachusetts State Commissioner of Education,⁴ to attest to the oral fluency and literacy in English of all teachers who would be working in the 2003–2004 academic year. Many Latinos were deemed no longer qualified despite their lengthy successful service and tenure. They were replaced with English-speaking teachers, many of whom were unqualified and had never before taught English language learners. At the same time, future teachers were facing professional licensure tests: Students were now required to pass statewide high-stakes exams to

³The “flats” is the local name for the urban area heavily populated by lower income Latinos, predominantly Puerto Ricans. This contrasts with the “heights,” which is home to higher income groups, predominantly Whites (Irish, Polish, and French Canadians).

⁴A memorandum dated March 06, 2003, issued by the State Department of Education, stated that all superintendents and charter school leaders were “required to sign an assurance that all teachers in English language classrooms are literate and fluent in English, beginning with the 2003–2004 school year.”

graduate. Bilingual language learners were not exempt from the exams unless they had been in the state for less than 3 years.

Although no one can argue against accountability, defining it unilaterally and monologically can potentially impede diverse groups from graduating and eventually entering into postsecondary education. Accountability instead could have been met through professional development and by hiring more individuals with bilingual or multicultural strengths. We question the presumption that students are receiving a meaningful education under the current system. Because successfully completing postsecondary education is an important predictor of who becomes a teacher (Vegas, Murname, & Willett, 2001), having more qualified teachers from local communities naturally is a mark of an educational system that is working. Unfortunately, the discourse of accountability at the state level controls who graduates from high school but does not adequately address the question of how best to prepare students for a globally interconnected world or their local environment. Instead, we foresee an outcome under the current conditions whereby diverse students will be cut out of the formal educational pipeline for becoming future teachers, which will in turn exacerbate the problem of the reduced number of diverse students entering college and the scarcity of Latino teachers. We question how we can prepare Latino educators to be better qualified in terms of the values of the dominant discourses. How can we assist them to become more rhetorically astute and agile in working to shift how they are viewed? How can we position them to contribute more actively to educational processes in terms of both policy and instruction?

We limit our discussion here to the BGS program, as one of the ACCELA Alliance (Access to Critical Content and English Language Acquisition) projects operating in a “third space.”⁵ The BGS originated from our understanding that dominant discourses of “accountability to high standards” neglect the fact that urban schools have untapped cultural resources vital to further developing these multilingual and multicultural communities. Unlike the cycle of reproductive wealth/poverty, these cultural resources can be transformative (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Nieto, 2003). The BGS program is characterized by (a) participants engaging in a cyclical process of inquiry, data collection and analysis, and redesigning of practices and assumptions; (b) multiple voices; (c) the use of institutional spaces within the community for educational purposes that reflect both local values and university values; (d) the valuing of local contexts and investments; (e) critical examination of jointly constructed tensions, discourses, and practices;

⁵Third space is a poststructuralist concept (Bhabha, 1994) designating a fluid cultural moment in which two conflicting/dialectical positions are reconciled through dialogue to create an in-between location. This in-betweenness allows for the possibility of influencing conflicting positions from this middle ground. Thus, differences can be understood and new possibilities can be generated and claimed by both formerly conflicting sides.

and (f) construction and repositioning of hybrid practices that interweave the multiple and often competing discourses circulating through the system. Specific details of the curriculum can be found on our website. We now turn to identifying how we addressed conflicting discourses within educational reform.

MULTIPLE DISCOURSES IN CHANGING SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXTS: EXAMINING PAST INEQUITIES FOR LATINOS IN EDUCATION IN MASSACHUSETTS

We begin this section by explaining how local Latino communities have been underserved by examining a cycle of research that defines how historical context has influenced current understandings. Scollon and Scollon (2004) identified a concept called *mapping* that promotes “a broader understanding of the ways that times and places prior to our social action have brought their influence into the current situation and the ways in which this social action anticipates or presupposes outcomes” (p. 87).

In 1998, Catherine Walsh’s seminal article, “Staging Encounter: The Educational Decline of US Puerto Ricans in Post-Colonial Perspective” represented how policies at that time in a particular Massachusetts school district perpetuated inequality through complex forms of systemic colonization. Showing the pronounced differences in high school statistics on Whites and Puerto Ricans/Latinos across (1989–1995), Walsh wrote

33 percent of Puerto Rican/Latinos had attained less than a ninth-grade education as of 1990, compared to 11 percent of Whites, and half as many Puerto Ricans/Latinos as Whites have a high school diploma (30.6 percent as compared to 58.4 percent). (p. 226)

Institutional policies dealt greater punishments for minor infractions by Puerto Ricans/Latinos, and having fewer bilingual parent coordinators and interpreters resulted in many Spanish-speaking parents being unable to address issues as needed.

Although Walsh’s (1998) research presented multiple perspectives from students, parents, teachers, and administrators, their voices were reported anonymously and independently, exposing tensions in the often oppositional power relationships among participants without contributing directly to resolving those tensions. Thus, her research makes visible the disconnect between administrators’ perspectives of “accountability” and education for “all students” and parents’ and students’ experiences in the schools. Teachers were caught between their responsibility to parents and students and their responsibility to satisfy education reform mandates as directed by their superiors.

Even 6 years later, the gaps in underserved populations were acknowledged under No Child Left Behind, confirming the inequities identified earlier by Walsh (1998) and Noguera (1997) in urban schools. The ideology behind this recent legislation, however, coopts critical multicultural discourses of “educating all children” and has become monologic. How did this come to be? In the early 1990s the establishment of national standards set into motion subsequent legislation to undo multicultural education discourses about “education for all” by following ideas championed by Sandra Stotsky (1999).⁶ In 1999 Stotsky was appointed Massachusetts Deputy Education Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Planning to oversee reforms in teacher licensure requirements. She helped implement policies that required subject-specific courses for those entering into elementary and middle school teaching and helped set up professional licensure testing such that all future teachers needed to demonstrate prescribed skills in the areas sanctioned. By insisting on an interpretation of accountability as performing uniform dominant discourses, Stotsky claimed to raise standards supposedly lowered by multicultural educators and social justice curricula. Five subject matter areas had required testing, whereas health, arts, and physical education were excluded (Education Laws and Regulations 603 CMR 7.00). Teachers in our project reported increased levels of emotional or behavioral problems in their students that became the teachers’ responsibility to manage. These policies shifted attention away from broader inequities such as racism, poverty, and the barriers of “English only” to blaming the teachers and public schooling. Teachers were told not to “make excuses” or “talk about poverty,” effectively silencing teachers who bear witness to these influences in their daily interactions with students and families in the schools. They were asked to deny this reality and “get on with it.”

After the passage of Question 2,⁷ local school districts began the elimination of transitional bilingual education and the purging of Latino and other teachers as second language speakers whose fluency in English was questioned. A local middle school principal announced boldly over the public address system, “No speaking Spanish; it is against the law.” Multicultural literature books in Spanish were locked away and some discarded, despite the district having recently provided teachers with professional development to use these materials. Though the passage of Question 2 exempted teachers in bilingual education and foreign language classes from being required to demonstrate English literacy and fluency, it re-

⁶Stotsky has been credited as being “instrumental in developing not only new English language arts curriculum standards and tests for students, but also the new licensure standards for the state’s K-12 educators” (Clowes, 1999). She claimed, “We’re simply saying, ‘If you want to go into teaching, you’re going to have to have this kind of requirement and pass these kinds of tests.’ Weaker students will not choose this route. If they don’t think they’re capable of taking these kinds of courses and passing our tests to become a teacher, they should do something else.”

⁷General Law Chapter 71A was amended soon after the passage of Question 2 in November of 2002 and took effect at the start of the 2003–2004 school year.

quired all teachers in English-language-medium classrooms to be “fluent and literate in English,”⁸ pushing local school districts to eliminate bilingual programs in early 2003 and to test for fluency and literacy only teachers whose first language was not English. As a byproduct of defending the quality of English instruction, the cultural and linguistic resources brought by these teachers were largely ignored. Instead, English-speaking teachers were hired in their place, despite most of them being unqualified to support English language learners. As teacher educators, we were called upon not only to meet school districts’ needs but also to provide consultation for teachers facing challenges in their English language proficiency and for those teaching English language learners. Frequently in our courses we heard from teachers seeking advice on how to demonstrate their communicative proficiency in English, and many were frustrated by a lack of administrative support for meeting their learners’ needs.

As one might expect, the outcome of these policies has been disastrous. The Commonwealth has repeatedly labeled the local Holyoke school district as “underperforming” and placed it on the state’s list of failing districts. Yet the same policies remain in place, and many positions formerly held by bilingual educators have been eliminated by the district, in effect ending instruction in children’s first language in favor of sheltered English.

No Child Left Behind and Question 2 in effect worked to position educators, bilingualism, and multiculturalism as the “problem.” Also, in effect working against parental choice, more than 92% Latinos voted against Question 2,⁹ yet the voices of bilingual parents were ignored by the local school committees that enacted policies ending Spanish as the medium of instruction. Because their concerns were dismissed, the parents and community members of Holyoke wrote an open letter to the School Committee hoping to engage in dialogue through a newly established bilingual local newspaper, *El Diálogo Bilingüe*.¹⁰ Another significant contradiction occurred as national mandates demanded that education reform be based on “scientifically proven” methods. Massachusetts schools were now required to use the politically motivated method known as *structured immersion*, disregarding decades of research. Against this backdrop of contradictory discourses in educational reform, many Puerto Rican students are still encountering major challenges in schooling. With dominant discourses perpetuating values of a “good” education

⁸See <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/0327profreq.html> (downloaded 1/28/2009) for a March 27, 2003, memo from David P. Driscoll, Massachusetts State Commissioner of Education, to superintendents regarding English language proficiency requirements for teachers under Question 2: English Language Education in Public Schools.

⁹Gaston Institute Exit Poll Final Results Vote on Question # 2, December 2002, involved 1,491 Latino voters who were interviewed after exiting voting stations in Boston, Salem, Chelsea, Worcester, Lawrence, Holyoke and Springfield (Capetillo-Ponce & Kramer, 2006).

¹⁰On April 21, 2003, the newspaper *El Diálogo Bilingüe*, was established expressly to provide a forum for community members to raise issues ignored by other media and public institutions.

leading to good jobs, the “efficiency” discourse that encourages success by following a formula of uniform “best practices” in schools is not responsive to the particulars of the local context or global realities. This situation warrants closer examination to provide for meaningful education.

Diversity as an Economic Resource: New Collaboratives Needed Across Education, Health, and Economic Development Focused on Latinos

The demographics of diversity in Massachusetts, particularly in the Puerto Rican community, is helping to precipitate the formation of new collaboratives in the region that will exert new pressures on the education system. We understand our efforts to be contingent on these changes.

As of the most recent census, Puerto Ricans constituted 47% of all Latinos in Massachusetts (total Latino population 428,729)¹¹ and at 7% constituted the largest minority in the state.¹² In response to grassroots activism, a political base serving Puerto Rican communities is growing. In 2003, 2 out of 7 Holyoke school committee members were Puerto Ricans, and the school district school superintendent is a Latino. Community-based organizations are promoting consciousness-raising around *Hispanidad*, or Latino identity and empowerment as a political action.

The mobility of the Latino student population is often cited locally as an official reason for the need for uniformity in the school curriculum. If local schools were to train skilled multilingual students, they would contribute to the community’s growth by responding to migration levels. Researchers and policy analysts suggest that one way for struggling post-industrial cities to achieve economic renewal in an increasingly globalized, knowledge-based economy is for community businesses and educational organizations to bring together resources as a way of supporting locally responsive economic growth (Gebhard, 2004).

Ironically, teacher education policies in Massachusetts (e.g., No Child Left Behind, English-only mandates), which are increasingly aligned to K–12 reform, view the ability of teachers and students to strategically use hybrid language and cultural practices as a liability as opposed to a powerful social and economic tool (Gebhard, 2004). Not tapping these sociolinguistic and cultural resources could explain why the 2000 Census reported Holyoke’s unemployment at almost 7%

¹¹The 2000 U.S. Census also indicated the following: other Hispanics (19%), Dominicans (12%), Mexicans (5%), other Central Americans (5%), Salvadorans (4%), other South Americans (4%), Colombians (3%), and Cubans (2%).

¹²According to data reported in the 2000 Census, Massachusetts has the seventh largest refugee and immigrant population in the United States. More than 12% of the state’s population is foreign born (compared with 11.1% nationwide): 32% of these residents were born in Europe, 30% in Latin America, and 26% in Asia. A third of those reporting that they spoke a language other than English at home (6.2% of all residents) reported they spoke Spanish at home.

compared to 4.5% statewide (undoubtedly worse today). The same census data indicate that 30% of Holyoke Latinos fail to complete high school compared to 15% statewide, and only 16.9% of Holyoke's population hold bachelor's degrees compared to 33% statewide. Clearly, by not cultivating successful multilingual students, schools are not building the type of workforce needed for the long-term economic growth of the local community. Our challenge was to design a program that responded to this need while dialoging with the prevailing political rhetoric. We needed to prepare teachers to build practices for successful multilingual students rather than allow the educational system to continue pushing out students who struggled to learn academic content through English.

NEXUS OF PRACTICE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK— CONTINGENT ACTION, RESEARCH, AND INTERACTION

To examine how discourses circulate to construct communities and how these discourses affect our project, run by teacher educators who interact as mediators of discourses between teachers, the state, and university, we use principles from nexus analysis developed by Ron and Suzanne Scollon (2004) to depict the life of our intervention project. Nexus analysis is an ethnographic strategy designed to build connections between local discourses and the contexts that produce and circulate these discourses. We use nexus analysis to analyze our project as an intervention aimed at developing more complex understandings and principles. We regard the role of discourses as significant in education reform, as they affect local cycles of activity, links, and the interactions among them. In their education reform project, Scollon and Scollon stated that "each project leads to re-definition of the central issues and that in turn leads to needing to undertake a new direction or set of projects" (p. 83). One of the first stages of analysis is "engaging the nexus of practice." In this stage, we find the significant problems, the actions, and the places in which they are located. In short, we seek to understand who is doing what, where they are doing it, and what cycles of discourse they are circulating. Next we navigate the nexus of practice by mapping the discourses as if they were semiotic ecosystems. This means that we broadly define the ways in which activity takes place in a particular context to see how language conditions and creates cycles that cause changes to become part of the historical body of the participants over time. Finally, we use discourse analysis to identify the connections between activity cycles to change our nexus of practice. We examine recorded interactions, dialog with participants and construct new courses of action." We include the tensions and struggles we faced for critical reflection and public scrutiny.

Description of Participants: Participant Voices Learning University Life in the Community—Empowerment, Not Business as Usual

Our recruitment efforts relied on ways of reaching constituents that drew on both institutional and cultural discourses operating in the local Latino communities. Two main groups of participants were recruited for the BGS program. The first group of 11 participants were enrolled through formal orientations and recruitment efforts in local school districts. Another 10 participants were recruited by word of mouth and local community center leaders, who proved to be a powerful social network that sanctioned our efforts and lent support to identifying and recommending other members of their communities. This diverse cohort of 21¹³ paraeducators and community educators was enrolled into the program called the Bachelor of General Studies program, “Inquiry into Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Communities Program.” Our program provided the opportunity to obtain a bachelor’s degree. With roughly 80% (17 of 22¹³) Puerto Rican, 1 Mexican, 1 Brazilian, 1 Polish American, and 1 French American in the group, we had a bilingual group whose ethnicities and work experiences would serve as resources.

The course of study was designed to help participants to become eligible for elementary teacher licensure. We expected that the participants would develop a greater network of support and have a better chance of successfully completing the program by taking courses as a cohort. As a newly formed cohort of future teachers, the paraeducators and community educators would engage in interdisciplinary inquiries led by faculty members in several disciplines at the University throughout the curriculum. Thus, our future teachers not only would learn to use disciplinary conceptual tools, but they would use these tools to build further collective knowledge about their communities. In this way, they could extend their cultural capital in dialogic inquiry with faculty.

Faculty from Education, Performing & Fine Arts, Humanities & Arts, and Social and Behavioral Sciences committed to this intervention project. The faculty all agreed to (a) help future teachers develop researcher identities and skills through critical inquiry projects done in their communities; (b) help them develop their academic literacy, which included development of four basic skills, particularly writing, plus participation in all kinds of literacy events; (c) and modify their pedagogy so that there would be room for questioning how the knowledge acquired in class could be used in their current and future classrooms. Though originally scheduled to take place in local public schools, this program was granted access to facilities located in several community-based organizations that committed to supporting this effort. Thus, we used the facilities at the Community Education Project described at the beginning of this article. Our community education partners offered ESL courses, adult and family literacy, and computer courses. Although the relationship between the two discourse

¹³22 were enrolled, the Brazilian passed away, leaving 21.

worlds of the public schools and the Community Education Program is often collaborative with regard to adult and family literacy and after-school programs, the two entities maintain divergent educational language policies. In the Community Education Program, English is not meant to replace Spanish as is required by the public schools but rather is highly valued as an additional resource.

Clearly various systems of values (Discourses) were operating as legitimate: The school district, headed by a Latino who was staunchly opposed to bilingual education and to the use of Spanish as an instructional medium in the schools, nonetheless supported a bilingual newsletter for communicating with parents.

In facing these competing discourses, one of our goals was to position our BGS participants to be able to contribute meaningfully to school decision making in dialogue with other teachers, administrators, and parents. As Ingersoll (2004) pointed out, teachers in urban schools who had greater collaboration with their colleagues and administration and who were granted decision-making power and responsibilities were less likely to leave school districts and more likely to see their efforts rewarded. Hence, building our participants' abilities to use their knowledge of communities in order to participate in official academic discourses would potentially offer solutions that build on primary discourses students bring into schools. For this to come to fruition, the community and the paraeducators would need to be prepared to engage in academic discourses for audiences that went beyond their face-to-face interactions. This entailed not only building interpretive systems for understanding texts but also producing knowledge through their own inquiries to use as evidence in proposing alternative visions of what teaching and learning can be.

Thus far, this cohort has graduated 18 of 22 participants, as 4 left the program for personal reasons. The easy and familiar social setting contrasts with the typical university undergraduate setting in which nontraditional students who struggle to build a sense of community are quickly forced to drop out.

For the participants, the familiarity and informality of the setting created a learning community that appeared to have been a substantial factor in their academic progress. Participants stated, "I don't think I would have entered a program if I had to come to the university" (Norma), "It's [The university is] too big. I wouldn't have been comfortable here" (Mary Anne), and "It's like we have a family in Holyoke" (Denise). Although students traveled to the university for various reasons, many were employed full time at minimum-wage jobs; thus, distance was a major concern when deciding to invest their time in earning a degree. However, the bachelor's degree signified for many an assurance of higher paying employment, status, and security. The newly gained privilege of a promise of a university degree and a future as an educator was for several a chance to restart their careers.

Faculty Learning That Business Was "Not as Usual"

Among the university educators, several had worked together and were involved in other community service-learning projects. The 14 current faculty members

and 7 teaching assistants formed a more diverse group than our participants, with more than half consisting of faculty of color or bilingual faculty. Aside from Theresa and Doris, only two other faculty members and Agustin and Vanessa, and one teaching assistant, Jen, were given two course assignments. Moreover, Theresa and Doris created additional time for extended instructional contact with the participants outside of courses.

Building Academic–Community Hybrid Discursive Spaces

Building sustained coherent academic support on site throughout courses in the curriculum proved a humbling challenge. This effort required an extraordinary commitment from all participants. It was humbling because of the uncertainties in federal funding cycles and the fragility of these growing relations between the university and its community partners, all of whom faced economic uncertainty and changing priorities. On site our project assistant, Doris, worked closely with the future teachers as a tutor and with the faculty as an onsite facilitator. Both on and off site, Theresa, the project director, met with faculty and students, individually and in groups, to periodically dialogue about their progress in the courses, obtain resources, and build upon her insights to facilitate their learning processes. Faculty meetings and orientations occurred regularly each semester. Faculty made special efforts to build links to their regular university programs through a variety of activities such as inviting other faculty to attend student presentations or to guest lecture.

Faculty members also used community field trips to engage participants in analyzing representations of community and *Hispanidad* outside of the four walls of the community education center. Exhibitions at local museums and resources at community and university public libraries and nonprofit radio stations brought many participants into new environments. Three faculty members introduced technological resources that helped serve as tools for participants' inquiries and further learning. Throughout the curriculum, faculty members struggled to help participants build a critical stance with relation to community and academe.

Cultural Bumping—Whose Legitimate Futures?

Changes in state regulations for teacher licensure had minimal input from university faculty representing their respective disciplines. When we began, the state's position was that disciplinary knowledge was sufficient to educate future teachers. The faculty we worked with, however, recognized that expertise in the disciplinary area was not sufficient to prepare future teachers to make productive use of the materials in their courses. For most faculty, it was not easy to interpret how their areas could be taught in a manner that could meet the state's definition of their disciplines. Nor were many sure of how their disciplinary knowledge could be used to inform their elementary classroom instruction. Throughout the ongoing implementation of the

curriculum, Theresa and her graduate project assistant regularly scheduled meetings to discuss and plan with faculty how to meet the students' expectations to satisfy both the state's requirements and their respective course requirements within 30 to 35 credits. At the end of his or her course, each faculty member was invited to share the cohort's struggles and accomplishments; his or her instructional negotiations with the students; the progress of the students in the course; the modifications the faculty member had had to make to the syllabus to attend to the specific needs of a nontraditional, off-campus, ESL population of future teachers; and the challenges he or she had faced in teaching the course off campus. For many faculty members, meeting expectations placed by the state about what new teachers should and should not know about their areas was highly debatable and contested. Upon reviewing the areas included in the state's examination for teacher licensure, one faculty member in literature stated that "when teachers are expected to sit for an examination that reduces a field to questions that can be answered by multiple choice, the field is turned into a game of trivial pursuit" (Faculty meeting #3, April 7, 2004). Another was outraged by the conceptualization of American history and government that focused heavily on Euro-centric definitions of civilization and wanted to organize faculty and the public to register protests (Faculty meeting #3, April 7, 2004). Still another, a linguist, voiced dissatisfaction with the state's licensure examination definitions of grammatical items: "How the state defines grammar is very different from how we define language" (Faculty meeting #3, April 7, 2004).

If the faculty were to help participants become successful on exams that controlled licensure, the courses could not be taught in the usual manner. The discourses of their fields and the state policy's definition of accountability for these fields needed to be mediated. Just how to proceed unfolded individually with each off-campus instructional experience. As each faculty member taught a course, the state's regulations were interpreted in dialogue with faculty and the students' work discussed with an eye toward addressing both participant and faculty concerns. All faculty members were keenly aware of the importance of preparing the cohort both to meet the state's expectations and to serve the local predominantly Latino communities.

Initially, several participants questioned the relevance of particular courses included in the curriculum. One of the first courses challenged was Urban Sociology I. In this course, instruction modeled participatory education, which used a world historical view to examine how new members in communities respond to wider systems of oppression that influence the lives of communities. In Urban Sociology I, the principal assignment asked the participants to qualitatively map the (im)migrant's experience in Holyoke and the local areas by collecting oral histories.

In the beginning meetings of this course, Theresa was approached by three students, all Puerto Rican women, who reasoned that "classroom management," "lesson planning skills," and other skills were more important than learning about mass immigrations due to capitalism and other systems of oppression and collect-

ing oral histories. The tension produced by the paraeducators' appropriation of the state's discourses on "teaching skills" and the instructors' university and disciplinary discourses about systems of oppression caused the women to question their remaining in the program. Two even requested information about attending a program offered at a state college to get the needed skills. When Theresa and the instructors discussed how to address these concerns, they agreed that the discourse on skills needed to be contrasted with a discussion about the relevance of understanding communities. As the instructors moved forward with their intensive coconstruction and sharing of these histories, the participants' initial doubts about the relevance of their research were gradually replaced with emotional presentations and discussions of the histories of the struggles they had faced as immigrants. The struggle to discuss relevance and/or process was also faced by other faculty, both Latino and non-Latino. Faculty also faced tensions between their expectations and those of the participants, evidencing the contact of diverse discourses. These have come to be a valued source for learning to operate in the new cultural texts that were being constructed through the flow of discourses.

NAVIGATING THE NEXUS OF PRACTICE: HYBRID TEXTS AND CULTURAL DISCOURSES

Scollon and Scollon (2004) identified this stage of the nexus analysis as the point in which the researcher identifies and maps practices that are habitual or innovative. These include activity, use of time, space, and discourses that are present. Using this approach we can identify transformations of objects or actions as re-semiotizations. When we identify instructional activity in the BGS classroom as the site of the creation and consumption of academic texts, in this case narratives, we can examine how the discourses created in contact between faculty and participants are creatively drawn upon and interpreted by the BGS students. Clearly, these texts are produced in an academic economy in which grades are bestowed in exchange for student labor. Therefore, participants shape their texts to obtain the highest value possible. We also acknowledge that many mediators, including faculty, tutors, and family, may have helped to shape these texts, and thus it is problematic to say they have a single author. Nonetheless, we also accord grades to a single student and in so doing indirectly acknowledge a single-person author. Holding these thorny issues of authorship in view, we examine several selected texts penned by Norma, a "50+-something" mother of three children, to help illustrate how her re-semiotizations (texts) evidence these discourses in contact. We do so to reflect on how our activities as teacher educators are being taken up by our participants and to plan responsively.

Norma's texts were chosen for several reasons. As one of the paraeducators who has been in the program from the initial stages of the project, Norma has suc-

cessfully completed all courses. She has shared her work publicly in two educational conferences and has demonstrated characteristics that are being developed by most, if not all, of the participants, such as drawing on both her first and second language resources and displaying her identity through text production. Finally, as we are problematizing our actions as teacher educators and trying to develop the ensuing series of courses, Norma's texts serve as a means of critiquing our activity.

When she applied to our program, Norma completed a short essay answering several questions to gain entry into the program. Throughout her courses, Norma met periodically with Theresa to discuss her progress and how she saw her future. Norma also represented her inquiries in oral presentations, written reports, and technologically mediated texts. These texts consisted of a pre-admission essay, a future-oriented autobiographical essay, a past-oriented autobiographical essay, a migration narrative, and a position paper. These were analyzed thematically, as shown in Table 1.

As Norma progresses through her courses, her production of texts demonstrates a growing skillfulness in drawing on her lived experiences and using the discourses of the disciplines she is being apprenticed to. Her autobiographical reflection essay clearly demonstrates her appropriation of the "discourse of higher education." Her ethnolinguistic affinities are represented through depictions of Latino community realities in small-town Puerto Rico and multiethnic-multinational Latino communities in western Massachusetts. As we read her narrative in Text 3 we can hear the echoes of wider voices that reveal Latino realities of financial and linguistic barriers to health care (Falcón, Aguirre-Molina, & Molina, 2001) and discourses that circulate in the disciplinary fields that she has studied (sociology, critical literacy). Across the texts produced, Norma displays her identities through a complex portrait of herself as a loving daughter, dedicated mother, struggling student, worthy teacher aspirant, frustrated yet persistent health care advocate, and skillful translator and social analyst. In her migration narrative, she draws on all of these together in a thoughtful meta-narrative of how education and health issues are interlinked in her immigration. In addition to critiques of capitalism and racism, her analysis identifies the lack of representation of Latinos in science as one of the reasons why such poor health services continue. Science looms large across these texts because of Norma's interests in becoming a science educator and because of her attempts to address the basic health care of her family in communities where the quality, availability, and accessibility of services are limited. In the last text of this corpus, Norma responds to the issues of professional licensure and the measurement of a "qualified" teacher. She draws on her experiences of school observations and contrasts how testing provides a false image of who is qualified. This analysis of instructional quality versus quality as measured in gate-keeping events is further evidence of her recognition of the competing discourses of what constitutes a qualified teacher.

TABLE 1
Norma's Production of Academic Texts

<i>Text Number/Feature Genre</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Intertextual Links (Ideological and Material)</i>	<i>Self-Representation</i>	<i>Positioning</i>	<i>Language Use</i>
#1 Admission essay	Becoming a model for her own children and other Latinos	Genre of "safe" academic short answer writing Values of teaching profession	Struggling English learner with goals of betterment	Demonstrates her worthiness, character, and ability to gain admission	"To be a role model ..." English
#2 Reflection/ autobiographical essay PowerPoint slide on vision of future	Advocating and mediating Latino conflicts	Paraeducator life and Bachelor of General Studies university life	Aware of the tenuous possibilities of choice employment despite education and improved English Awareness of the impact on her children Mother first, then economically productive adult	Retells her persistence in power struggles as a mother, paraeducator, and advocate during dramatic economic changes	Need to undergo metamorphosis I did not know I was becoming an activist English
#3 Reflection paper Autobiographical essay	Latina's struggles with poverty in Puerto Rico	Author draws on her reading of Esmeralda Santiago's <i>When I Was a Puerto Rican</i>	Latina with strong family ties, particularly to father	Novelistic stance portrays nostalgic memory of better and noble times	Spanish and English
#4 Qualitative research Migration narrative Urban sociology	Linking migration related to health and education of family and self	Links to sociological Marxist critique: patriarchy, racism, and sexism encode her lived experiences	Aspiring student	Takes up a sociologist's stance to analyze family and community relations from an ethnolinguistic perspective	Spanish and English
#5 Argumentative writing	Need for better strategies and techniques for assessing prospective teachers	Contrasting values, her own experience, and the state's assessment practices	Witness to the failure of testing to indicate qualified teacher	Knowledgeable about classroom life and practices	English

Also across Norma's texts, particularly in Text 5, the cautiously written English text that was one of the first written gives way to increasingly multi-voiced texts, texts that bring in more than one perspective and discourse. These subsequent texts judiciously use Spanish to capture the multilingual social realities that Norma navigates for her inquiries. Although traces of Spanish remain in Norma's English morphology and lexical choices, her growing ability to use these resources in English is undeniable. Michelle Hall Kells, Valerie M. Balester, and Victor Villanueva wrote about the varying levels of Spanish and English that bilingual communities maintain but that are not yet embraced by schools: "We know of their linguistic complexity, but we haven't yet found ways to translate this knowledge into classroom practices that aren't still founded on an assimilationist set of assumptions." Norma's texts reveal that "assimilation" does not capture the characteristics of her "voice." Norma contributes original texts that offer an answer—a hybridity that weaves ethnolinguistic textures that can be appreciatively consumed by English academic audiences yet does not lose her signaling of *Hispanidad*.

We can see this growing ability bumping against economic fluctuation that places in question the value of these newly gained practices. In her presentation at a national conference of teachers of English, Norma retold her encounter with a local principal (Austin, Viera, & Ortiz, 2004). The principal recognized Norma's growing abilities and encouraged her to continue studying. However, when it became clear that Norma was not preparing herself to remain a paraprofessional, rather a potential teacher for the school, the principal ended the conversation with "I can't discuss that with you at this moment." Later Norma related, "I was getting contradictory messages about continuing my studies. It was OK for me to study to be a paraprofessional but not OK to study to become a teacher." She reasoned that it would be a struggle to get her degree but that she was going to undergo "metamorphosis" to become a teacher. This theme also appears in Text 5, which questions how qualified teachers are identified through testing, and later texts that question her previously unchallenged ideas about standardized testing and health education.

We as teacher educators cannot change the principal's discouragement of Norma's aspirations. We are forced to recognize the limitations and uncertainties of even highly qualified teachers in obtaining employment without administrative support in school districts that lack favorable conditions for hiring. Norma's recognition of the gate-keeping practices in the form of teacher licensure tests makes it apparent that we need to prepare future teachers to jump over this hurdle. Paraeducators are vulnerable in a hierarchy of power relations that are gendered, ethnicized, class sensitive, and not readily open to public scrutiny or debate, stemming from anti-non-English sentiment, economic conditions, and so forth. The critical "voice" developed by Norma through her "reading" of the social world through her developing literacy did not prevent that voice from being devalued.

Norma's understandings of the irony of her situation and the ensuing tensions did prove to be productive in generating a desire to change the situation. Again we can

find textual evidence in her migration narrative, Text 4. Here we see inquiry and dialogue about the local condition as Norma's inquiry leads her to dialog about local social conditions. Her past experiences become reinterpreted as she positions herself as an agent who produces knowledge. Guerra (2004) refers to this action as crossing cultural boundaries to "expand ... attitude" (p. 15). *Transcultural* means transitioning between cultures and creating new cultures. *Repositioning* here also means learning to shape the self in cultural, linguistic, and intellectual terms to be able to critically participate as a member in shifting communities, in essence learning to be "rhetorically astute and agile" as evidenced through engagement with her principal.

Indeed this was faced in several interactions between faculty and participants in which cultural bumps occurred and led to participants re-inscribing their discourses when they came into contact with different discourses as they produced texts in English in each course. On the conceptual level, these texts immediately bring up complexities of what "community" means. In Norma's texts, "communities" are both fixed and fluid. She incorporates her children into a perspective of island life in Puerto Rico. Norma adds, "It does not matter who they marry ... they will be Puerto Rican." The integration of Central Americans as part of Norma's community is indirectly justified by the sharing of a common language, "Spanish," as well as the need for health care. The community-based organization is a broader organization that incorporates a multiethnic and racial population. For Norma, "community" is this larger entity that she clearly claims to belong to as well. In addition, Norma's use of disciplinary concepts and rhetorical features also puts forward a claim for membership in our academic community, adding her own creative twists and taking stances on local issues.

Strikingly significant is that Norma's concerns about health and education conflict with the state's five stated priorities in preparing future teachers. The written subject area tests for licensure as an elementary educator in Massachusetts exclude, among other things, areas such as health, art, and physical education. How "qualified" teachers demonstrate this area of health is not defined. Norma's text identifies how the need for Spanish-speaking health care personnel is met not by hospitals nor in the education of bilingual students who could be future care providers and professionals.

Norma's texts demonstrate that our efforts to educate teachers to serve local communities need to be checked constantly for their viability and responsiveness to local realities to prepare qualified teachers beyond how the state defines qualified.

NEXUS OF CHANGE: WHAT TO CHANGE IN OUR UPCOMING COURSES

Our program has helped many female paraeducators envision other possible futures in addition to motherhood or pink-collar jobs in the local economy. In offer-

ing other potential futures, we as educators aim to be critically aware of the multiple discourses that circulate in paraeducators' communities and that impact their choices. The teacher education program cannot be merely a checklist of courses needed to complete licensure. Rather, it needs to be a means of mediating future teachers' ability to make connections strategically and creating new ways of addressing conflicts that come from understanding the pressure of dominant discourses.

In our future orientations, we need to identify participants' expectations and work to realize these within our curriculum. The vision they have of a teacher who is qualified to serve his or her community can help them shape their own work toward becoming such a teacher. When we state that not just English and teaching skills are needed, we are also saying that "voice" is not enough. We need to not just create the space to help paraeducators voice their stances but also work collaboratively with competing discourses. The ease with which Norma picks up a discourse and works to make it her own makes us question whether there is sufficient space in our curriculum to even question the discourses we advocate. A stance such as this would work against re-inscribing hegemonic discourses that exclude new entering members into their communities and allows the possibility of building a third-space discourse. Indeed, keeping a critical perspective on the inclusion of new members constitutes an anti-hegemonic awareness of the cultural bumps entering members experience and documenting these bumps for established members. The "bumping" offers us the possibility to learn about which issues require joint thinking in order to propose action. In this case, this consciousness could build teacher education that is responsive to conflicting local and national discourses. Creating space for dialogue and critical reflection must be generative of new instructional practices supportive of constant rethinking of viable directions for instruction. In this way we do not fall into reifying our processes as "best practices," as is the current tendency.

In fact, an overemphasis of curricular innovation and organizational structure has been found to undermine the building of civic capacity and political leadership.

It is well known that reform funded by federal dollars disappears when funding ends. Therefore, we want to build a supportive community that is sustainable. For we as faculty to make our subject matter relevant to paraprofessionals' current lives and future projections, we need to help paraprofessionals learn to take key concepts, processes, and skills from these courses and use them to control that which they can control in their local communities. In doing so, they can create new resources to use to their benefit and that of their communities.

Lessons for Teacher Educators

Our BGS program proposes that participants learn academic performances not simply to comply with state regulations but rather to play an important role in at-

tempts to reposition paraprofessionals as learners from whom we ourselves can learn, as well as future teachers. In order to do this, our participants cannot just replicate existing discourses but need to contribute to them to be able to shape them. The health issues raised by Norma are curiously absent from the licensure exams for teachers in Massachusetts and are not adequately addressed in protocols for state-approved teacher education programs. In essence, teachers are being asked to do many things they are not being prepared to do well. Moreover, the state has not established criteria for “qualified” teachers in regard to understanding the very issues that affect children’s absence from schools. These health issues cause many children to be absent either because of their own sickness or often because they serve as interpreters for their family members because hospitals and clinics do not have staff with the linguistic and cultural resources to serve these family members. Often, teachers, unaware of these health issues and unaware of the responsibilities bilingual children have in mediating communication with health care providers, blame parents for children’s absences. Norma’s narrative teaches us that this gap needs to be addressed if qualified teachers are to be in local communities. Furthermore, Norma’s narratives reveal how the educational system needs to educate children to work productively in their communities by building upon their linguistic and cultural resources. Otherwise, children cannot be productive in meeting needs to transform their communities.

While we as teacher educators seek to strengthen our fragile nexus to para-educators’ lives in the classroom and in their communities, we will never know all of the problems that teachers will face or how to resolve them. But we certainly must take the following into consideration:

1. Conflicting discourses in the communities—Any effort to prepare non-dominant teachers requires building awareness of conflicting discourses and of teachers’ ability to take positions that strategically support their interests. Although Norma demonstrates her awareness of the ironies of her preparation in times of conflicting discourses, she is learning how to articulate this in her second language, English, in a way that is heard and considered by the administrators in her school.
2. Academic discourses—As faculty members of the university we have viewed education as the ticket out of poverty, actually fomenting mythical aspects of “Pepito Algier” migrant narratives that may help in many ways to build learners’ histories but at the same time potentially re-inscribe previous dominant discourses of “individualism” and “why can’t you/others do as I did” discourses. These discourses in turn can re-inscribe dominant power relations rather than promote reflective and transformative participation in building communities. Furthermore, similar to the appropriation of inclusion by English only advocates, any discourse can be used against other Latinos. Thus, we need to be cautious about re-inscribing cultural

models that reproduce discourses that do not permit fluid multiple memberships. Norma's ability to pick up and revoice discourses throughout her coursework demonstrates her agility but also her vulnerability to influential discourses around her. As teacher educators, we have a responsibility to be critical of the impact of our own discourses. What have we learned is that we can take roles to mediate the multiple discourses through open dialogue.

Opening the Dialogue: Our Projected Intervention

Prospective Latino teachers striving to enter into the profession must demonstrate their hireability under changing regimes. During the political upheavals of educational reform, Latino teachers face dominant discourses that position them against cultural resources from diverse communities, including the prohibition of the use of students' primary language (other than English) and pressure to assimilate from the dominant culture. Our critical examination of these tensions has taught us that by sustaining a stance that is open to their inherent dialectics, new possibilities for transformative teacher education can be forged to create new futures. Norma's growth as an inquirer and communicator of the issues that shed light on the quality of teachers needed as well as her preparation to meet these criteria teaches us that our dialogue with her has brought us closer to understanding what we can do to support her. Although we cannot predict all of the problems that teachers will face, or how to resolve them, we can help teachers build links to resources that can serve them. Through the ongoing efforts of our program we will identify which other areas our paraeducators deem important for qualified teachers to know about and incorporate ways in which these expectations can be shared with a wider circle of educators, administrators, and teacher educators.

This report has documented the struggles within a community of educators to build highly qualified, responsive teacher education. The nature of our interactions and courses and Norma's texts represent our learning to discursively construct alternative visions of what could exist. This practice projects Norma toward a profession that can be changed by her participation. We are developing a practice to see objections and conflict as the potential space for fostering inclusionary democratic principles in the face of constant education reform. Our responses to teacher education need to create space for a critical imagination. In essence, we ourselves need to demonstrate how prospective teachers can respond to competing discourses by putting on the line our learning with them through our successes, tensions, and struggles.

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