

LEARNING, TEACHING, AND COMMUNITY

*Contributions of Situated and Participatory
Approaches to Educational Innovation*

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2005

LAWRENCE ERLBAUM ASSOCIATES, PUBLISHERS
Mahwah, New Jersey
London

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Critical Dialogue: Transforming the Discourses of Educational Reform

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It was an unprecedented moment in American educational history. The public, the state, schools, and universities seemed to be perfectly aligned behind a vision of educational reform encapsulated in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. The force behind this alignment has been a powerful coalition of business leaders, politicians, and elite universities¹ with the

¹The lineage of NCLB can be traced from the Governors' Summit of 1988, when national educational goals were developed, through Goals 2000 to the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) (Kudalevige, 2002). The National Center for Educational Accountability and National Alliance of Business joined forces in 2002 to support increasing student achievement and improving the competitiveness of the workforce. Also, President Bush appointed a communications task force to make sure that the administration's message about NCLB was being heard and to garner support from business leaders (Davis, 2003). Business associations throughout the United States have been working to support NCLB (the Michigan Chamber of Commerce is one example; see Sandy, 2003). NCLB draws on educational reform efforts initiated by the states (see Bolon, 2000, for a history of the conservative takeover of educational reform in Massachusetts). The participation of elite universities in NCLB has been through the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) and scientific-based research (SBR) movements. CSR has its roots in the 1983 RAND Corporation evaluation of Title I and policy report (Rohberg, Harvey, & Warner, 1993), which encouraged the federal government to expand the funding to include schoolwide rather than selective programs. Their suggestions were taken up by Congress in 1997, with the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR/D) program, a blueprint for NCLB (National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform, n.d.). The SBR movement developed through the National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board's review of educational research, leading to the National Research Council's activities and to the creation of the Center for Education's Committee on Scientific Principles for Education Research. Elite universities are well represented on these boards and organizations; many of the university representatives have never worked or learned in the kinds of schools that they are targeting.

money, expertise, and political power to force the nation's schools to construct an accountability system designed to control the outcomes of education, and persuade the voting public to support it.

From one perspective, this is an unholy alignment intended to increase worker production and serve the privileged without disrupting the unequal relations that undergird our inequitable society. From another perspective, the alignment has enabled educational reform to become a reality. Academia and business are providing their expertise in exchange for not having to provide remediation for their students and workers. Schools are aligning their curricula with standards and implementing high-stakes accountability practices in exchange for disciplined students and involved parents. The voting public is supporting reform in exchange for taxes going down, achievement going up, and *all* children following the rules so they too can benefit from the wealth generated by a productive workforce (Dobbs, 2004).

As teacher educators and educational researchers, we take a third position—that NCLB provides us with an unprecedented opportunity to engage in critical dialogue about the consequences of policies and practices for all children in ways that were all too rare before the legislation. Although supporters of NCLB rightly claim that its principles have emerged from negotiation among stakeholders, we counter that theirs is a dialogue of the elite from which many educators have been excluded. Moreover, the products of this dialogue (e.g., NCLB mandates) are monologic texts designed to close down debate ("no excuses") and discipline students—especially poor children—and their teachers and families. On the other hand, by disrupting previous policies and practices, NCLB mandates have made visible numerous children who had been rendered invisible in aggregated data. We believe that this provides an important starting point for critical dialogue. Our hope is that reforms emerging from a more inclusive conversation will enable diverse children to pursue their individual and collective dreams.

In this chapter, we describe an initiative for bringing multiple stakeholders into sustained and inclusive dialogue about the ideologies and practices of educational reform. Our goal is to illuminate and interrupt the discourses that close down genuine dialogue and to open up spaces for creating transformative practices. With grants from both NCLB and the now defunct Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA), we designed a project in which faculty from the Language, Literacy, and Culture (LLC) concentration in the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst work with stakeholders in western Massachusetts to comply with NCLB regulations, documenting our endeavors as we go. Our partners include teachers and administrators in three school districts with large numbers of "low-performing students," the families served by these schools,

and activists in communities surrounding the schools. Our location enables us to create spaces across institutional structures and to collaborate with stakeholders to construct dialogic texts that can be heard by policymakers, while also critically examining our own positions and practices. Our goal is not alignment, but dialogue that draws on and learns from diverse visions of educational reform. Our hope is that criteria for evaluating practices, policies, and performances will emerge that take individual and collective needs and desires seriously and treat them fairly.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CRITICAL DIALOGUE AS TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE

For a decade, our work has focused on transforming relationships among schools, communities, and universities through praxis-oriented dialogue and inquiry. Transforming extant relations through critical dialogue will engender partnerships strong enough to change institutional arrangements and material conditions shaping learning in our schools. This approach contrasts with the current monologic approach evident in NCLB, which assumes stakeholders must be forced to align with official best practices and authoritative meanings. A dialogic approach does not deny accountability or alignment, but rather insists that practices and meanings emerge from ongoing and inclusive dialogue among all stakeholders (Henderson & Hawthorne, 1995).

For many, dialogue is collaborative talk about an issue or problem in preparation for taking action. Indeed, critics sometimes see it as a substitute for action. We see dialogue as acting directly on the social world. As with all language practices, people who interact with one another actively construct relations, identities, and ideologies. Whether they construct, reproduce, or transform existing relationships is an empirical question, but as long as participants are willing to remain in dialogic relationships, the possibility of transformation exists. Unlike other language practices, dialogue is a declared act of inquiry, not an act of persuasion with a view to achieving particular outcomes. This is not to say there can be no concrete outcomes, but just that participants do not assume the outcomes from the start. Moreover, critical dialogue implies that we reflect on the nature and consequences of the relations, ideologies, and identities that we construct in dialogue. Our goal, therefore, has been to maintain a dialogue with our partners, knowing that transforming relations and ideologies depends on continued interaction. Moreover, as relations and ideologies change, so do the questions on which our dialogue is focused.

The Nature of Language

Informing our concept of dialogue are theoretical ideas about the nature of language drawn from feminist poststructuralism (Luke & Gore, 1992), critical discourse analysis (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 1990, 1993; New London Group, 1996), interactional sociolinguistics (Castanheira, Crawford, Dixon, & Green, 2000; Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1993), postcolonial studies (Bhabha, 1996), social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Lemke, 1995), and social construction of intertextuality and dialogicality (Bakhtin, 1981; Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Smagorinsky, 2001). We summarize these ideas briefly here.

Language Practices Are Social and Dynamic. Language consists of social practices in which people act and interact to construct texts that index and construct their social identities, relations with others, and systems of knowledge and belief. Typically, stakeholders in education act and interact through mandates, news articles, movies, research reports, political speeches, and "war stories." These heavily mediated and time-tagged interactions enable them to "make up" the kinds of people they imagine others to be, in ways that cut off dialogue. For example, teachers may be constructed as "incompetent," parents as "incapable," children as "disabled," administrators as "authoritarian," teacher educators as "clueless," politicians as "untrustworthy." We are devoted to creating structures in which collaborative dialogue among stakeholders can open up the possibility for negotiating different kinds of relations, identities, and ideologies.

Language Practices Are Discursive and Political. Language practices are constituted within, and in turn constitute, discourses. Discourses are "socially acceptable association[s] among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting" (Gee, 1990, p. 142). These associations, taken up unconsciously and assumed correct in society, are lenses for viewing the world. They operate as common sense, and thus justify and sustain social inequities. Discourses function ideologically—either maintaining the status quo of social relations or contesting existing social relations (Lemke, 1995). So, for example, constructing the "other" as incompetent or incapable enables politicians to get more votes, teachers to feel more competent, children to have more fun, parents to maintain their dreams, administrators to justify their policies, educational researchers to publish more articles, and the public to pay less in taxes. To maintain dialogic relations, stakeholders must recognize how social and political discourses function and how they influence understanding and possibility. Without this recognition, it is difficult to stay in a dialogic relationship.

Language Practices Are Multiple and Contradictory. All instances of language use draw on the resources of multiple discourses and have multiple interpretations and outcomes. Competing ideologies constructed across and within discourses make conflicting claims about the social world. Although competing ideologies and conflicting claims are often represented as a problem for collaborative dialogue, Burbules and Rice (1991) suggested that difference is constitutive of genuine dialogue. If we claim to know the answers, then we are not engaging in dialogic and inquiry, but rather some other language practice.

Dialogue Is a Transformative Language Practice. Creating a structure for dialogue does not guarantee that dialogue will occur, much less transform relations. However, Sidorkin (1999), following Bakhtin (1981), proposed three devices that favor dialogue occurring in a setting: "First there needs to be a device for polyphony, second a device for cohesion, and third a device for breaking free from all of organization" (p. 112). The carnivalesque nature of the context, acting to free the dialogue from the limits of routine time and space (and perhaps discourses), mirrors the unpredictable nature of the "third space."

Third space is a newly created culture characterized by hybridity or differing points of view, unpredictability, and negotiated agency. Within the "third space" construct, hybridity emerges from multiple voices bearing different perspectives. In this space (which can be a material moment rather than a physical space), no voice claims authority or ownership, although individuals' unique expertise is recognized. Bakhtin's (1981) theoretical insight was that "the . . . hybrid is . . . the collision between differing points of view . . . pregnant with potential for new world views" (p. 360). Bhabha (1996) further theorized that hybrid agencies can emerge even under conditions of unequal status among participants when the inability to comprehend one another leads to negotiation and "the emergence of an 'interstitial' agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism" (p. 58). Bhabha's understanding of "third space" is suggestive of Freire's (1970/1997) belief that dialogue consists of both *reflection* and *action*, leading participants "to name the world" and, hence, to change it (p. 69).

Critical Dialogue and School–University–Community Partnerships

In recent school–university partnerships, dialogue is a central component of transforming, building, and sustaining collaborative partnerships. Partnerships suffer, however, when partners fail to discuss conflicts, concerns, and differences and when they find that dialogue makes visible negative realities such as unequal power, inflexible positioning, and silencing of voices (see Le-

vine & Trachtman, 1997). Despite difficulties, studies demonstrate that dialogue is possible when participants name perplexing issues, risk sharing and questioning individual commitments and beliefs, and maintain their stance as colearners in cogenerative dialogue (Eldredge, Iborn, Johnston, Maloney, & Thomas, 2000; Enciso, Kirschner, Rogers, & Seidl, 2000; Kerper & Johnston, 1997). Critical voices in this literature (Dickens, 2000; Murrell & Borunda, 1998; Valli, Cooper, & Franks, 1997), question whether the concept of partnership that has emerged in response to the national reform agenda can support the goal of preparing teachers to teach all children to high standards, and whether the partnerships that have been created are sufficient to enact the critical inquiry needed to change educational outcomes.

The literature suggests that the insularity of school-university partnerships and the lack of opportunities for preservice and inservice teachers to reflect on social inequities and cultural diversity detract from our ability to prepare teachers who are competent to teach diverse populations (Enciso et al., 2000). Some of the shortcomings are underdeveloped belief systems related to social issues and cultural differences, lack of political consciousness, and little experience in urban settings (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Murrell and Borunda (1998) suggested that partnerships easily become perpetrators of the racial and socioeconomic status quo and need to address the "underlying political questions that produce inequities in school" (p. 68). To avoid this, we must include families and community groups in partnerships and engage in dialogue that asks whether this is "the way we want things to be ... [and what we are] going to do about it" (Sirotnik, 1991, p. 252).

HISTORY OF OUR WORK IN LOCAL SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

In this section, we describe insights emerging from our ongoing work with local schools and communities that have positioned us to collaborate with them in responding to NCLB mandates. Although our work for the last decade might conventionally be described as discrete projects that engaged different players, time periods, institutions, and political conditions, the centrality and prominence of dialogic interaction in all these collaborations is the constant that shapes our current response to the challenges of NCLB.

Constructing Multicultural Language Practices in Research and Pedagogy

The initial project was undertaken in 1990 by Judith Solsken, Jo-Anne Wilson-Keenan, and Jerri Willett, an author of this chapter. This group worked together in Jo-Anne's combined first- and second-grade classroom, which served a culturally diverse and largely low-income urban community, to

construct and study classroom language practices that valued and built on the language practices and knowledge of the children's families and communities. To achieve this goal, they collaborated with members of the school's heterogeneous community by inviting students' families into the classroom to talk about their lives. The researchers envisioned hybrid classroom practices, a "third space" that drew on the language practices of home and school and helped members learn about, and value, one another. They also envisioned their reflective-teaching/action-research as a conscious hybrid practice where they could negotiate the differences and complexities of research and practice. Using ethnographic methods and textual microanalyses framed by sociolinguistic, critical, and poststructural conceptions of language, intertextuality, and hybridity, they systematically examined and reformulated classroom practices together.

An important outcome of this work was making visible the tensions and complexities involved in the ongoing negotiation of new classroom language practices and the indeterminacy of outcomes, leading to improved understanding of the challenge of enacting a culturally sensitive, critical pedagogy. In particular, they found that discourse analysis provided crucial support to their own efforts and to those of other teacher researchers examining and transforming language practices in their classrooms (e.g., Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1993, 1999). Insights from their work² provided the foundation for many different projects over the intervening decade, including the Springfield Learning Community Collaborative (SLCC), created in 1993.

The SLCC was a collaboration among 21 educators from five elementary schools in Springfield, Massachusetts.³ The aim was to redefine the relations between teachers and their children's families to support the development of children's literacy. SLCC teachers earned master's degrees through the project, critically examined their teaching practices, and developed partnerships with children's families to construct culturally sensitive curriculum, pedagogical strategies, and assessments. One of the highlights of the project was a 2-week summer workshop, the ultimate "third space," in which teachers, families, and children worked together to create and publish family stories for classroom libraries. In addition to working with families, the teachers also attended study groups to read and discuss books by Polakow (1993) and McCaleb (1995) to help them reflect critically on the meanings of their work with families. It was during this workshop that the teachers discovered firsthand the range of knowledge and skills that their

²See Solsken, Willett, and Wilson-Keenan (2000); Solsken, Wilson-Keenan, and Willett (1993); Willett, Solsken, and Wilson-Keenan (1998); Willett, Wilson-Keenan, and Solsken (2001); Wilson-Keenan, Solsken, and Willett (2001); Wilson-Keenan, Willett, and Solsken (1993).

³The project was funded by the Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation (the Davises are local businessmen) and the Federal Department of Education (through a F.I.R.S.T. grant).

"poor, undereducated, non-standard-English-speaking" parents offered, and parents began to understand that teachers also needed their help to do their jobs. The power of these experiences in changing home-school relations for these participants clearly supports Freire's idea that reflection with action is the engine of transformation.

Increased participation of families in SLCC schools was an indicator of project success in redefining relations among the teachers and families, and the teachers' research projects suggested that they were able to critically examine and transform some of their classroom practices. Nevertheless, the SLCC had little visible impact on the schools themselves (many SLCC teachers were transferred to new schools and positions) or on the district, which was in the midst of changing superintendents. This lack of visible impact was ironic given the project's recognition by the Annenberg Foundation as a Public Engagement Site, its commendation by the Davis Foundation, and its visibility through a Public Broadcasting System-Massachusetts Educational Television video aired on WGBY, a Massachusetts educational television station. With the threat of high-stakes testing programs looming on the horizon, it seemed doubtful that the teachers could sustain dialogic relations with their families, especially without the structure of the SLCC to support them. What was not evident at the time were the invisible rhizomes that would engender continued dialogue on home-school relations as SLCC participants became principals and cooperating teachers, wrote dissertations, and became part of various new institutional structures.

School-University-Community Focus Group

Inspired by the efforts just described, Cynthia Rosenberger, with a colleague from the university, initiated a focus group within a school-university partnership between Rodriguez Elementary School, a low-achieving school in Springfield, and the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The partnership was part of the Coalition for Teacher Quality and School Achievement, an umbrella organization funded by a Title II grant, supporting partnerships between six universities or colleges and public school districts in Massachusetts. One of the goals of the coalition was to create communities of inquiry and practice to inform teacher education. The focus group was a community of inquiry, creating a space for dialogue about the issues facing teachers and administrators in this particular urban setting. Eight teachers, three parents, two community outreach workers, two school administrators, and two university teacher educators participated in the group.

As a dissertation study, Cynthia examined the challenges and possibilities of dialogue in the focus group. She hoped to illuminate the potential of dialogue to complicate understanding and create new ways of thinking and

acting. Microanalysis of the dialogue uncovered the discourses, or social practices, that operated as taken-for-granted ways of viewing the world and illustrated how discourses operate as political texts, positioning people in relation to one another by assigning power and designating agency (Lemke, 1995). "Third space" served as a metaphor for the focus group and as a construct to explain how collisions of different points of view, or hybridity, have the potential to create new understanding and agency (Bhabha, 1996). We can picture "third space" as an arena in which multiple viewpoints, drawing on different discourses, collide. The potential for discourses to be negotiated and reshaped exists in the collisions. However, as the study showed, the outcome is not predictable and reformulating discourses is complicated. The mainstream discourses of home-school connections are well entrenched. Taking up these discourses feels natural and comfortable for teachers.

Early in the dialogue, school participants identified "parent involvement [as] key to bringing up scores and very much a missing part of what is happening at Rodriguez." How to increase family involvement became a continuous thread of inquiry. Discussions about family involvement in the focus group, however, were wrought with recurring tensions. Teachers' professional commitment to reach out and engage parents in children's schooling conflicted with the minimalist views they held concerning what parents were capable of doing and their own fear of the unknown. Three critical episodes from the study illustrate the resistance to and challenges of interrupting the mainstream discourses of home-school connections.

The first episode is captured in an admonition from Marta, a social worker who participated in the focus group: "I always think . . . teachers have to go—they have to see the home environment 'cause that tells a lot about the family." As an outreach health worker, Marta frequently visited homes in the neighborhood as she helped families connect with community service and health agencies. This kind of intimate involvement with families, commonly involving visits in the home, is integral to the discourse of social work (Poulin, 2000). Although visiting the homes of children has occurred and does occur in particular teaching contexts, the practice is not commonplace. Marta acknowledged that families would wonder why a teacher was visiting and might think, "Uh oh, something's wrong, somebody's called DSS [Department of Social Services] on me."

Hearing Marta's perspective, teachers bristled, feeling that Marta failed to appreciate the time and energy demands of classroom teaching. They raised questions about their own safety and families' levels of comfort were they to make home visits. They felt that Marta had positioned them as deficient, that is, not doing enough to cultivate family-school connections. In response, teachers constructed Marta and the other community agency worker as antagonists rather than allies.

The episode illustrated how teachers situated their work within the context of the school. Although participating parents said they would not mind teachers visiting their homes, they also were wary of some of the neighborhoods teachers would be entering if they were to make home visits. The perspectives of parents who feared DSS's intrusion in their lives might have further complicated the collision of discourses from social work and teaching, but these parents' voices were not present. The discourses around home-school connections remained rooted in parents coming to school events and helping children with homework. These two social practices are the focus of the second and third episodes.

The second episode involved participants' conceptualizations of family evenings. Teachers recognized that it was important for a school to create venues for parents to interact with teachers around their children's schooling. However, attendance at the annual fall open house was low. Teachers ascribed the lack of parent involvement to parents' lives, not to school practices. A teacher participant summarized families as "hanging on by their fingertips to stay afloat," having neither the time nor the additional stamina to come to family evenings at the school. Teachers defended the practice of posting signs, on the stairwell doors leading to the classrooms, that asked parents to leave their child there so that instruction could begin on time.

Nevertheless, one teacher's invitation to think about how to increase the number of family evenings evoked considerable discussion among participants. Participants suggested an array of possible events, including math and literacy nights, musical performances, and children's art exhibits. Although acknowledging the value of curriculum evenings and children's performances, Cynthia's colleague, Elyse, introduced the notion of asking parents for their ideas of "what makes for a well prepared teacher to teach their kids."

Teachers' responses reflected surprise and skepticism: "Ask [parents] what . . . they think?" They expressed concerns: Parents are not sophisticated enough to have responses; parents are too stressed to do anything but trust the school; asking parents to think about what they want for their children's schooling undermines parents' confidence and trust in the school. The dialogue reflected social scientists' assessment that we are "a culture in the grips of deficit thinking" (Hull, Rose, Fraser, & Castellano, 1991). The only favorable trait attributed to parents was "trust," which allows school personnel to feel comfortable maintaining the status quo and their hegemony over school practices. Elyse's suggestion, however, positioned parents as knowledgeable people with ideas to contribute about their child's schooling, drawing on the discourse in educational literature that positions families as subjects of their lives (Compton-Lily, 2003; Moll, Amnati, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Wilson-Keenan, Solisken, & Willett, 2001).

Over time, this collision of discourses about how families are perceived resulted in two family evenings entitled "Let's Eat! Let's Talk!" At these evenings, families were invited to share their ideas about what worked and did not work for their children at the school. The invitation reversed the direction of communication between the school and families. Families were subjects and communicators, in contrast to the traditional positioning of families as recipients of information from the school. Parents demonstrated how capable they were of assuming subject positions, providing a plethora of feedback. One parent's comment was illustrative of how many ideas parents had to contribute. In response to polite encouragement to be conscious of the time while reporting from a small group, this parent laughed, "Oh, I thought I was the keynote speaker. You mean I can't have the mike for two hours?" (field notes, 11/30/00). The following day, a teacher who had often expressed deficit views of parents said, "I wouldn't have believed it. It far exceeded my expectations" (field notes, 11/30/00). Later, another teacher exclaimed, "Wow, those parents had a lot to say!" (field notes, 1/25/01).

In this episode, new agency emerged from the hybridity created in the dialogue group. The "Let's Eat! Let's Talk!" evenings emerged from the collision of views about family evenings and the degree to which parents of low socioeconomic and English-language status think critically about their children's schooling. That the evenings included dinner and child care reflected an understanding of families' cultural expectations and needs that had emerged in the focus group. Finally, parents showed that they did, indeed, reflect critically on their child's school experience and had concerns and suggestions to offer.

Still, participants in the focus group struggled with the differences they perceived between themselves and other families in the school. A third episode centered around the question, "Does school matter [to families who do not behave in ways teachers and schools expect]?" Although feedback from families at the "Let's Eat! Let's Talk!" evenings had strongly supported homework, teachers in the focus group expressed frustration with the low return of homework and what they perceived as families' failure to monitor homework. Teacher participants questioned whether school mattered for many of the families in the school.

Although parent participants in the group described monitoring their own children's homework, they also validated teachers' frustrations as they described other parents who "don't care . . . my sister . . . leaves at 7 o'clock in the morning and she come back 7 o'clock in the night . . . I can't—that's all she say . . . she not gonna do anything" (focus group, 1/31/01). Differentiating herself from parents who fail to behave in expected ways, the parent participant substantiated teachers' perceptions that families' life circumstances prevent the kind of participation teachers expect. As a Latino parent, she has taken up dual aspects of the mainstream discourse. She is in-

involved in expected ways with her children's schooling, and she interprets other parents' nonparticipation as their not caring.

A discussion about whose responsibility it is to provide children with the supplies they need to do their homework drew on the discourses of self-reliance and responsibility for others that Tocqueville describes in *Democracy in America*. Drawing on the discourses of self-reliance and responsibility for self in this society, participants believed that if school matters, parents should make the necessary effort and sacrifices to buy the supplies their children need to do their homework. At the same time, the discourses of compassion and responsibility for others caused participants to consider supplying children with homework boxes, thus sending a message to parents that homework is important. However, participants also questioned the assumption that parents can't provide supplies, which would be embedded in a decision to supply children with homework boxes. One participant suggested, "That could be a class thing too" (focus group, 1/31/01).

The principal, who grew up in Puerto Rico, contrasted the ways of thinking and acting in Puerto Rico and the United States: "In Puerto Rico, even the poorest person [buys] good backpacks and pencils and crayons. It's a show—who can get the best materials. . . . Yet we come here [United States], and . . . they have to be given everything" (focus group, 1/31/01). Through the use of *they* in the last sentence, Mr. Ortiz disassociated himself from those who "have to be given everything," and illustrated the class distinctions between the student/family community and the teacher/administrator community even when ethnicity is shared. At the same time, however, he had shared cultural knowledge and complicated the discussion by suggesting that parents are accustomed to enacting different standards in Puerto Rico. In another instance, Mr. Ortiz said, "I and the majority of teachers in the building do not participate in the same socioeconomic class as families of students in the school. . . . By being Latino I have no better insight when it comes to parents." Another teacher, struggling to figure out why children didn't have what they needed at home to complete homework, said, "I know that most of these parents have the money. It's a matter of what they value. They're buying their kids Nintendo . . . I don't think that they value education" (focus group, 1/31/00). Participants' multiple viewpoints complicated a discussion about parents' responsibilities toward supporting children's homework. Questions were left unanswered. The only action that ensued was that homework folders were ordered for all students.

Analysis of these episodes shows the striking absence of perspectives drawing on discourses outside middle-class ways of thinking. In the discussion of teachers' making home visits, the perspectives of families that feared a government agency's intrusion in their lives would have provided insights and perspectives not available to the existing participants. Like

wise, in the discussions about homework and who should be responsible for providing the supplies needed to do it, the perspectives of adults who do not enact the expectations of middle-class teachers was missing. Rather than being subjects in the dialogue, such families were positioned as "other" and became objects of the discussion rather than subjects. (The "Let's Eat! Let's Talk!" evenings were a notable exception.)

Class is a construct that, in addition to indicating income, lifestyle, values, education, and ways of acting and speaking, mirrors the social power available to and attributed to people (Gilbert, 1998; Kadi, 1996; Shannon, 1998). Because social power is so linked with class, including people who construct themselves and are constructed by society as lower-class as participants in a dialogue group poses a significant challenge. Class appears to produce chasms that are disconcerting and difficult to bridge. Excluding non-middle-class participants occurred easily; including them was discussed but did not happen.

Permission for middle-class participants to objectify poor and working-class parents, or to "other" them, is part of the discourse of class, embedded in which is the privileging of middle-class knowledge and agency in relation to people of lower classes. Valerie Polakow (1993) described the distance and alienation represented by the terms *other* and *otherness*: "Otherness symbolizes the objectification-through-language and policy of those who are consigned to the margins of society" (p. 187). Reflecting on others situates participants in a position of power over others, in contrast to a position of power with others.

Moreover, the discourses held in common by participants who share class membership fail to get deconstructed. Limited discourses create often inadequate collisions and perspectives from which to deconstruct and interrupt mainstream discourses. The expectations of children having homework and of parents being involved were not questioned. The potential for collision of middle-class and other-class discourses—and hence, deconstruction of mainstream discourses and a radically new consciousness from which novel action could emerge—were missing. This experience suggests that interaction across class boundaries creates discomfort for those with power and privilege. Although teachers argued that time and energy did not permit home visits, analysis of dialogue throughout the time the focus group met leads us to suggest that teachers were also drawing on the discomfort associated with interactions across class boundaries.

Indeed, discomfort and vulnerability lie at the heart of our resistance to deconstructing discourses and disrupting the status quo. The partnership with Rodriguez would lead directly into the next project, and with it an opportunity to explore this resistance further. However, a number of concurrent events would shift the nature of the dialogue dramatically.

REFORM IN THE TIME OF ACCOUNTABILITY: NCBL, QUESTION 2, MTEL, AND MCAS

Before an audience of stunned Title VII (Bilingual Education) grant holders, Harry Logel, Program Officer for the newly instituted Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA), waved a red booklet and said, "Just as Mao Tsetung ushered in the cultural revolution with his little red book, so this little red book will usher in a revolution in education." The little red book was the publication of Title III of the NCLB Act: Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students. During this 2-day "National Training Institute," held just 1 month after NCLB was passed, participants would hear that the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs, OBEMIA, had become OELA; that Title III grants would replace Title VII grants; and that educators would be held accountable.

During the NCLB unveiling, bilingual educators in Massachusetts battled Question 2, an English-Only ballot campaign funded by California millionaire and bilingual education opponent Ron Unz.⁴ Rosalie Porter, author of *Forked Tongue: The Politics of Bilingual Education* (1990) and supporter of "structured English immersion," stumped for Question 2 in a campaign mirroring the Proposition 227 battle in California. The slogan "Help Children to Learn English" persuaded Massachusetts voters to eliminate bilingual education in November 2002.

Massachusetts educators were already suffering from battle fatigue as a result of the hijacking of their efforts for curriculum reform by conservatives in the Department of Education, appointed by Republican Governor William Weld. The Common Goals of Learning, a set of educational goals and interdisciplinary studies for all students assembled by committee with input from 50,000 educators and citizens, were adopted by the Board of Education in 1994 to guide curriculum framework development in all K-12 subject areas. Then, under Commissioner of Education David Driscoll, Deputy Commissioner Sandra Stotsky revised the Curriculum Frameworks for K-12 and Licensure Standards for Quality Teachers to incorporate more conservative values.

Math educators saw a shift from constructivist math to skills-based math; the World Language curriculum reverted to a Foreign Language Curriculum; Language Arts educators saw phonics and the five-paragraph essay crowd out literature-based reading and writing; and the battle over what counted as history raged for 5 years (Massachusetts State Department of Education, 1997-1999, 1999-2004). Many teacher educators were

⁴To get a flavor of this battle see <http://www.umass.edu/education/language/rights>, which archives some of the efforts made for and against Question 2 in Massachusetts.

appalled at the licensure revisions. In place of equity standards focusing on social justice and student rights,⁵ the revisions introduced four standards with a stringent focus on individual achievement and assimilation.⁶ This is not to say that multicultural and bilingual educators were against achievement or American civic culture, but they saw these changes as a way of dismantling multicultural programs in schools, a position detailed explicitly in Sandra Stotsky's book *Losing Our Language: How Multicultural Classroom Instruction Is Undermining Our Children's Ability to Read, Write, and Reason* (1999).

The revisions were quickly aligned to the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and the Massachusetts Test for Educators Licensure (MTEL), and the implementation of the assessment system was so swift that most could not prepare for these tests or even, as Education Secretary Rod Paige (2002) charged, "game the system." The inevitable low scores of unprepared test takers led to a barrage of headlines that constructed student teachers and children—and by association teachers, teacher educators, and administrators—as failures.

In addition to this, schools now faced the mandates of NCLB and structured English immersion (and the departure of many bilingual teachers who left in disgust and fear or were fired), draconian measures to punish schools with low MCAS scores, and crippling cuts in K-12 and university budgets, all of which led to massive reductions in services and increases in tuition and other costs. Newly elected Republican governor Mitt Romney supported Question 2, stringent accountability systems, and competitive education in the form of charter schools.

It was as this climate was building that colleagues in the Language, Literacy, and Culture Concentration applied for, and received, a Title III National Professional Development grant to create the ACCELA Alliance, a postmodern acronym that could mean either "Achievement of Critical Content and English Language Acquisition" or "Access to Critical Content and Equitable Language Acquisition." While this Title III proposal was being prepared, the new principal of Rodriguez asked, through Cynthia, for help in finding literature to support a proposal he was writing for state funding for a professional development program on English language learners (ELLs) for his teachers. We joined forces and the ACCELA Alliance germinated in the spring of 2002.

⁵One standard was "Uses effective strategies within the classroom and other school settings to address discrimination based on each student's race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic class or disability."

⁶These standards encourage students to "believe that effort is a key to achievement" and to "see themselves as members of a local, state, national and international civic community."

ACCELA ALLIANCE: SPRINGFIELD/HOLYOKE/ AMHERST PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP

With the support of Rodriguez in hand, the LLC faculty⁷ proposed the ACCELA Alliance concept to three school districts in western Massachusetts with linguistically and culturally diverse populations. ACCELA would collaborate in providing (a) a school-based master's degree program for inservice teachers focusing on teaching English language learners (ELLs); (b) a community-based bachelor of general studies program for paraprofessionals; (c) district-based meetings for administrators to critically examine institutional policies and practices focused on ELLs; and (d) a university-based seminar to prepare teacher educators, researchers, and doctoral students to work collaboratively with schools and communities on English language learning and teaching.

In our presentation, we stressed that many of the mandates and policies being imposed on the schools did not draw on current research on English language development, recognize the expertise of school practitioners, access community funds of knowledge, or address real challenges facing educators. We also emphasized that the mandated assessments did not provide practitioners with the kinds of data needed to support ELLs in the classroom. Moreover, the tactics used to gain political support for these mandates positioned educators, families, and learners as recalibrants rather than agents of change. Therefore, all participants in ACCELA would collect and critically examine data through collaborative and dialogic inquiry to better understand how policies, practices, and discourses were shaping learning and teaching of ELLs in local schools and communities. Drawing on these data and the diverse expertise and perspectives of participants, we aimed to jointly propose and critically examine practices, policies, and discourses to better support equitable teaching and learning outcomes for ELLs. We would archive the alliance's work on an ACCELA server, available to all participants.

The superintendents of all three districts agreed to join the ACCELA Alliance. Their willingness to be part of a project with an explicit research agenda and activist stance surprised us. We had been warned by colleagues in California that classroom doors were slammed in researchers' faces in the wake of Proposition 227, but we found the opposite. Not only did district administrators support our project, but more teachers than we could include wanted to participate. Community activists helped us recruit

⁷The LLC faculty include Theresa Austin, Meg Gebhard, Sonia Nieto, Pat Paugh, Masha Rudman, and Jorri Willett.

paraprofessionals and provided space in the community for classes. School of Education faculty agreed to teach off campus, follow the school districts' calendar, and meet biweekly to revise syllabi to meet the needs of schools. Faculty in the colleges of Humanities, Behavioral Sciences, and Sciences volunteered to teach inquiry-based courses in the community for inservice or preservice paraprofessionals.

Willingness to collaborate grew out of a need to comply with federal and state mandates, common frustration with losing a voice in policies and mandates that governed our work, and shared resistance to being targeted as solely accountable for the so-called poor performances of ELLs. Moreover, the rapidity with which districts and schools of education needed to transform institutional structures, prepare mainstream teachers to work with ELLs, and provide documentation for a new accountability structure was extraordinary (about 5 months). All this occurred during budget cutting so severe that the infrastructure appeared at risk. Many retired, changed jobs, or were fired, and those remaining found conditions intolerable. Accusations hurled at educators and the "no excuse" mantra chanted by politicians and government officials angered and cowed educators in western Massachusetts, but ultimately stirred them to action.⁸

Despite chaotic conditions challenging the ACCELA Alliance, its first year ended with the productive development of a conceptual framework and a collaborative infrastructure. We conceptualized ACCELA's programs as "third spaces" having common features: (a) Participants would engage in a cyclical process of asking meaningful questions, collecting and critically analyzing data, and redesigning practices and assumptions; (b) multiple voices would be part of the inquiry; (c) institutional spaces would be located outside of normal spaces so as to achieve at least a partially carnivalesque quality; (d) local contexts and investments would be valued; (e) our jointly constructed tensions, discourses, negotiations, mutual listening, text productions, and practices would be examined critically; and (f) participants would construct and propose hybrid practices that interweave the multiple and often competing discourses circulating through the system, which in turn would be subject to critical dialogue and inquiry.

At the time of writing (the spring of 2004), ACCELA is in the second of its 5 years and participants in all designated "third spaces" are moving forward with critical and dialogic inquiry projects. Inquiry in all these spaces includes examining and interweaving the "genres of power," "funds of knowledge,"

⁸Speaking at Lynch Middle School in Holyoke on January 10, 2004, Governor Romney claimed that educators had used poverty in Holyoke as the excuse for low performance and stated that from then on no excuses would be accepted. Though silent during the speech, many educators present heard that they were being blamed for what was beyond their control.

and a critique of the varied discourses shaping teaching and learning. In what follows, we briefly summarize what we have accomplished so far.

Teachers in the MED Program

In their first course, teachers—half of the Springfield cohort from Rodriguez—developed research questions, using critical literacy analysis to unpack assumptions about learners and families. At the same time, they also unpacked the way that teachers and learners have been constructed by the media and politicians. Currently, teachers are analyzing classroom interactions and the oral and written text productions of their students, with data collection help from doctoral students and the theoretical lenses and tools acquired in courses on second-language acquisition and literacy. They are also starting to explore the possibilities of permeable curriculum (Dyson, 1993) under the current constraints of mandated curriculum. In the coming summer, they will explore community funds of knowledge and work to weave this knowledge into their classrooms, while simultaneously attending to the genres of power that they have learned about in courses. Next fall, they will design and enact curriculum, and examine their students' text productions to understand whether and how their weaving supports student learning and enables the construction of new practices that permit a greater range of subject positions for both students and teachers. Finally, they will present their findings to administrators and other educators.

Paraprofessionals in the Bachelor of General Studies Program

In the program's first three courses, paraprofessionals learned library skills, drew on personal narratives, and used presentation technology to author papers and presentations. They are currently creating narratives of their own experiences as bilingual language and literacy learners, which will be collected, published, and presented at an academic conference. As the courses progress, paraprofessionals will collect data in their communities to critically examine such issues as the digital divide, language use in the community and in families, and the impact of voting patterns on the lives of community members. At the same time, paraprofessionals will examine the genres of power shaping their lives (e.g., writing papers, taking literacy tests, writing job and graduate-school applications, preparing multimedia presentations), while using these genres to present their inquiry projects to multiple audiences, including teachers, parents, and administrators.

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University Seminars

Through the same inquiry cycle, UMass faculty and doctoral students have been examining the practices and discourses shaping both their own research and teaching⁹ and the research and teaching of teachers. Currently, we are seeking ways to insert participant voices from across the multiple third spaces into our courses, unpack our representations of teachers, administrators, and ELLs in our teaching and research, and support participants in presenting their work to their communities and the educational establishment. In addition, we intend to create ways for the multiple inquiry projects to dialogue with one another so that we can transform the structures that have positioned all of us so negatively.

District-Based Meetings

Administrators connected with ACCELA—superintendents, principals, and administrators of professional development and English language learner programs—have been helping us understand the contexts shaping their policies and practices. We are examining districts' strategic planning documents, which are also under state review because of their "low-performing" designation. Preliminary analyses have brought to the surface districts' struggles to comply with contradictory mandates—districts must cite "scientific research" to justify plans (when there is no consensus on what is "scientific");¹⁰ use mandated methods such as English immersion (when there is no supporting scientific research, however defined);¹¹ and use only "licensed teachers" to teach these courses (when none are available who meet the new regulations,

⁹Some of those genres include mandates, policies, and goals statements coming from the federal, state, district, and schools, such as MTEL Standards and Curriculum Frameworks, MCAS and MTEL high-stakes testing, International Technology Standards Institute (ITS) Standards, ELL Benchmarks, and policy documents (e.g., NCLB, MASS DOE, District Strategic Plans, School Improvement Plans). Some genres come from disciplinary research and professional organizations, for example, "scientifically based research" principles summarized on DOE web site (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). AERA (American Education Research Association), TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), NAME (National Association of Multicultural Education), NABE (National Association of Bilingual Education), IRA (International Reading Association), and NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English). "Funds of knowledge" include their personal and collective funds, including their own past and ongoing research, as well as those of the teachers, their learners, and the communities.

¹⁰Although there have always been debates about what is legitimate research in the academy, Bush administration policy put regulations and funds behind one particular definition. The backlash is from those whose research has been designated "illegitimate" (see Cannella & Lincoln, 2004). The historical debate is summarized in *Education Week* (Viadero, 1999a, 1999b, 2000).

¹¹Cummins (1999) pointed out, "The academic debate lines up virtually all North American applied linguists who have carried out research on language learning as advocates of bilingual programs against only a handful of academics who oppose bilingual education. None of those who oppose bilingual education has a background in the discipline of applied linguistics."

which are not yet in place). We will be tracing strategies that administrators use to comply with state policies and mandates, and examining how their policies and mandates are taken up, resisted, and transformed by teachers in the classroom. Drawing on inquiry projects throughout ACCELA, we will work with administrators to understand how their practices and policies constrain and support learning and teaching and to construct ways to present their analyses to Massachusetts policymakers. We also hope that our collaboration with administrators will mediate the presentations of teachers and paraprofessionals to administrators.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

We end ACCELA's second year with a sense of accomplishment but daunted by the challenges that remain. Institutional structures and chronotopes (Bakhtin, 1981) continue to make engagement in collaborative data sharing and problem solving difficult. Discourses continue to position educators and learners in negative ways and may eventually undermine the resolve that spurred us to collaborate in an open and dialogic way. Practices are oriented toward short-term fixes that are pressured by a "political timetable," not a "transformative timetable." Unless changes in performance as defined and measured by the ACCELA Alliance are paralleled by changes in performance as defined and measured by the current political order, it is doubtful that the long-term transformations envisioned by our alliance can survive.

What gives us hope is looking back over a decade of sustained involvement in critical and dialogic inquiry among the university, schools, and communities in western Massachusetts. The relationships that have emerged out of sustained dialogue and inquiry have survived despite the lack of institutional structures to support them, and have even strengthened in the face of institutional structures working to suppress them. Ironically, if we succeed in joining the larger dialogue from which we have been excluded, it will be because NCLB succeeded in undoing education as we once knew it, which will be for the better.

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