Focus on Policy

Lilia I. Bartolomé

Understanding Policy for Equity in Teaching and Learning: A Critical–Historical Lens

Editors' Note: *This invited article, focusing on the case of English-only policies, helps education professionals understand the value of a critical–historical lens for analyzing and developing equitable approaches for initiating changes that will benefit all children.*

Each time that in one way or another, the question of language comes to the fore, [it] signifies that a series of other problems is about to emerge: the formation and enlarging of the ruling class, [and] the necessity to establish more "intimate" and sure relations between the ruling groups and the popular masses; that is, the reorganization of cultural hegemony.

—Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (edited and translated by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Smith, New York: International Publishers, 1971, p. 52)

Recognizing the unacknowledged yet pervasive nature of dominant-culture ideologies, the urgent need to clearly perceive and speak their existence, and their relationship to educational language policy is an important first step for understanding the origins of a particular policy as well as its current-day manifestations. As Gramsci expresses in the oft-quoted epigraph, the insidious nature of dominant-culture ideologies prevents educators from more accurately identifying and analyzing current educational policy challenges related to linguistic-minority students' language use in schools and the greater society. A solution to such a problem cannot logically be imagined until one has a firm grasp of the particular problem or challenge. In the field of teacher education, it is particularly urgent that teachers develop the ability to critically analyze educational policy so as to begin to develop comprehensive alternatives if necessary. As a teacher-educator, I write extensively about the urgent need for educators to critically appropriate teaching approaches and methods instead of blindly believing that methodology in and of itself will "magically" address the challenge of linguistic-minority student academic underachievement. Likewise, in this discussion on educational language policy, I encourage educators to assume a similarly critical stance in their understanding of how policy originates, and to ask themselves whether these policies need to be preserved or changed. My intention in this article is to critically deconstruct current state-level educational English-only language policies by situating them in broader sociohistorical and ideological contexts.

Too often, as educators, we tend to view policy as almost god-given and permanent, and not subject to examination or challenge. Worse yet is when policymakers hide behind a call for "scientific" empirical data as a means to exclude factors that expose the underbelly of poverty and social injustice. This was eloquently captured by Donaldo Macedo (in press) in a story about one of his students:

A former student of [Macedo's] who went on to pursue her doctoral studies shared with [him] recently that she was experiencing difficulties convincing one of her dissertation advisors to allow her to base her [policy] research on a Freirean theoretical model of inquiry. [Macedo's] former student was not frustrated because she was discouraged to adopt a critical inquiry framework in her research; [rather,] she was shocked because the discouragement she received—a form of subtle censorship—came from a Latina professor who claimed that she liked Paulo Freire's writings on social justice but could not see how his ideas could be incorporated into policies. This is where one can come to the rude awakening that ethnicity and race are no guarantee in the protection of subordinate students' rights to the degree that the color of one's ideology carries significantly greater weight than the color of one's skin in one's willingness to reproduce and be complicit with the White dominant ideology. Hence, one should not [be] at all surprised that a Latina professor would find Freire's ideas about social justice too subjective, and lacking, according to her, the necessary data that could "empirically support policy decisions that can convince policymakers." That is, how can one reconcile the political implications of social justice with the required objectivity of policy studies?

As the above example suggests, most policymakers expect teachers to blindly implement educational policies without question. However, experts such as Jackie Edmondson (2004) maintain that teachers need to regularly engage in critical analysis of educational policies. In doing so, they must inquire about the histories and ideologies that influence how and why they teach language and literacy in particular ways. Edmondson points out that critical policy study can serve to uncover and unravel the ideological underpinnings of educational policies (e.g., neoliberal business models of schooling that are indifferent to limited school resources and yet demand that school personnel and students focus on increasing and standardizing narrowly defined achievement outcomes). Edmondson recommends that we ask certain questions about policy that include: 1) where does the policy originate and what are its social, political, historical, and ideological dimensions; 2) who are the policymakers and what are their values and their reasons for initiating the policy; 3) what are some of the policy's consequences; and 4) what are the benefits and disadvantages of this policy for which populations? She reminds us that by answering these questions, we can more critically determine whether a certain policy is appropriate or not. In cases where policy is determined to be inappropriate, the critical analysis also helps educators to begin to imagine how to change the policy and which changes should have priority.

Edmondson's recommendation that we assume a critical-historical stance when analyzing educational policy reflects the work of Paulo Freire. In fact, Freire (1985) maintained that in order to solve an educational problem, it is necessary to first comprehensively and historically understand the problem—that is, to comprehensively *construct* the problem. The next step, after situating the problem historically, is to analyze it critically—to *deconstruct* the issue. The third and final step is to imagine alternative possibilities, to realistically dream about implementing more-humane, democratic solutions—to *reconstruct* the problem and develop potential solutions.

IDENTIFYING HEGEMONIC IDEOLOGIES THAT INFORM EDUCATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY

In order to critically examine current educational language policy, it is necessary to first identify dominant-culture ideologies or hegemonic ideologies that inform educational policies. *Hegemonic ideology* was defined by Antonio Gramsci (1935/1971) as the power of the ideas of the ruling class to overpower and eradicate competing views and become, in effect, the commonsense view of the world. Furthermore, "Gramsci emphasized the degree to which ideology is embedded at every level in society, in its arts and literature, in its education system and mass media, in its everyday language and culture" (Heywood, 2003, p. 8). He explained that it is precisely because of schools' and other institutions' success in perpetuating dominant ideologies and legitimizing the existing social order that vocal and well-funded groups, such as those supporting English-only legislation, need not deliberately injure, exclude, or denigrate people in order to shape policymakers' and voters' views. Instead, given their pervasiveness, cultural ideologies can often operate among participants in schools when, for example, they discuss and enact policies about the placement of children in English language learning classes. Because participants in policymaking may perceive the underlying policies to be legitimate and normal, and thus not open to challenges, they are very likely to accept changes in practices that will, in fact, make language learning difficult for

Some Definitions of Terms

• Ideologies

The concept "dominant-culture ideologies" refers to the worldviews and system of ideas that legitimize the power of a dominant social group or class in a society and that rationalizes the existing social order. Dominant ideologies are typically reflected in both the symbols and cultural practices of the dominant culture and shape people's thinking such that they unconsciously accept the current social order and belief systems as "natural," "normal," and "commonsensical."

• Language Policy

"Language policy" refers to the decisions made by government (federal, state, or local) through legislation, course decisions, policy, or the electorate to determine how languages are used in a society and in its key institutions.

—Lilia I. Bartolomé

children. Using this line of thinking, Terrence Wiley (1999) argues that current English-only policies are underwritten by views that he refers to as "monolingual language ideology." Although these views are based on the highly questionable belief that cultural-linguistic groups are deficient and need to be "decultured," they are touted by English-only proponents as beneficial and desirable for everyone.

COLONIALISM AND MONOLINGUAL IDEOLOGY: ROOTS OF CURRENT ENGLISH-ONLY POLICY

States such as California, Arizona, and Massachusetts have ushered in modern-day versions of non-English (especially Spanish) language prohibition language policies. I refer to these English-only mandates as "modern-day prohibition" because, historically, although there have been exceptional moments in time (the 1960s to the 1980s, for example) when languages other than English have been tolerated in schools and other institutions, the practice of forbidding the use of non-English languages has constituted the more-prevalent contemporary language practice in the U.S.

What we are currently experiencing across the nation, as in the past, is what Wiley (1999) refers to as the veiled (and not so veiled) racism associated with the

prevailing English-only ideology in the United States [which] not only positions English as the dominant language, but also presumes universal English monolingualism to be a natural and ideal condition. . . . [This] English monolingual ideology

sees language diversity as a problem that is largely a consequence of immigration, and it equates the acquisition of English with assimilation, patriotism, and what it means to be an "American." (pp. 25–26)

In order to comprehend the current xenophobic English-only movement, it is necessary to critically understand this nation's assimilationist and English-monolingual legacy, not only in terms of its application to past European immigrants, but also—and most important for our discussion—in terms of its application to indigenous and non-White linguistic minorities.

OUR LEGACY OF INTERNAL COLONIALISM

Despite the fact that media, textbooks, and other mainstream sources of representation equate the experiences of non-White minorities with European White immigrants of the past, the reality is that past U.S. economic and political practices sought to systematically colonize indigenous and African-origin peoples. This history of internal colonization is still very much evident today. In particular, when we examine language policy in regards to domestic linguistic-minority groups, such as Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Mexican Americans in the Southwest, and descendants of enslaved Africans, we find that the sanctioned practice of linguistic suppression and cultural domestication has been the historical norm. One only has to consider the case of enslaved Africans, the first victims of repressive policies in America: enslaved Africans were forbidden to speak their native tongues or to teach them to their children under the threat of

brutal punishment. Furthermore, compulsory illiteracy laws were passed in southern colonies to prohibit them from learning to read or write. If we examine the legacy of Native Americans, we see that they too underwent horrific repressive policies that kept them separated from and subordinate to the dominant White culture. They were treated as dependent wards, had their lands taken away by Whites, and their children were forced into boarding schools—many of which were former military bases—where they were systematically stripped of their language and culture. Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the Southwest suffered similarly after the U.S. conquest of what used to be northwest Mexico.

This colonial legacy eventually merged into the English-only ideology that became hegemonic during World War I with the rise of the Americanization movement and the rampant persecution of speakers of German. However, in examining the origins of English-only ideologies, it is imperative to highlight the differences between the experiences of European immigrants, such as German and Polish immigrants, and non-White subordinated minorities. As Wiley (1999) explains, "despite the severity of the attack on the German language and the persecution of German Americans during WWI, there was no systematic effort to segregate them from Anglo Americans, as was the case for language minorities of color [such as Japanese Americans] in the years following WWI" (p. 28).

According to Ronald Schmidt (as cited in Wiley, 1999), the experience of linguistic minorities of color has been noticeably different from that of European immigrants in several respects:

1. Non-White linguistic minorities were extended the benefits of public education more slowly and grudgingly than were European Americans, despite the fact that they too were taxed for this privilege.

2. When education was offered to non-White linguistic minorities, it was usually done in segregated and inferior schools.

3. Non-White linguistic-minority groups' cultures and languages were denigrated by public educators and others. In addition, these groups were denied the opportunity to maintain and perpetuate their cultural heritage through the public schools.

4. Reflective of these visible forms of rejection and exclusion by the dominant group in the society, the education that was offered was exclusively assimilationist and functioned in such a way that instead of integrating the groups into the dominant culture, it subordinated and socialized them for second-class citizenship. (List taken and modified from Wiley, 1999, p. 28.)

It is important to reiterate that even though language policies aimed at European immigrants and non-White linguistic-minority groups can also be described as "assimilationist," in the case of non-Whites, they involved a systematic process and ideology of domestication rather than integration. Wiley (1999) explains as follows:

Even though language policies aimed at European immigrants and language minorities of color can be seen as "assimilationist," they involved two different kinds of assimilation, "behavioral"

and "structural," with different results for the population affected. Restrictionist policies directed at language minorities of color were designed to promote "acculturation," i.e., behavioral assimilation. Thus, these policies intended to promote acculturation with structural assimilation, and they represented a kind of ethnolinguistic "domestication" rather than "integration," since equal participation was not a serious goal. (p. 28)

Donaldo Macedo, Bessie Dendrinos, and Panayota Gounari (2003) similarly distinguish between assimilation for "domestication" and assimilation for "integration" in their discussion of "colonial bilingualism":

There is a radical difference between a dominant speaker learning a second language and a minority speaker acquiring a dominant language. While the former involves the addition of a second language to one's linguistic repertoire, the latter usually inflicts the experience of subordination upon the minority speaker—both when speaking his or her native language, which is devalued by the dominant culture, and when speaking the dominant language he or she has learned, often under coercive conditions. . . . Furthermore, the colonized's mother tongue—that which is sustained by his feelings, emotions, and dreams; that in which his tenderness and wonder are expressed; thus, that which holds the greatest emotional impact—is precisely the one which is the least valued . . . [The colonized] must bow to the language of his master. (pp. 80–81)

In fact, efforts to forcibly strip subordinated minority groups

of their culture and language, as described by Macedo, Dendrinos, and Gounari (2003), has constituted recent common practice in U.S schools. Patricia MacGregor-Mendoza (2000) chronicles this continued physical and symbolic violence faced by Mexican Americans in the Southwest. She also captures the sentiments and recollections of many people in that region of the country who clearly recall that the Southwest once belonged to Mexico, as exemplified in one woman's account:

If we tried to speak Spanish, our teachers would tell us, "Speak English, dammit—this is America." Well, one day, don't think I [didn't get] fed up with it, and I told her, "You're the one in my country; you should learn my language." You should [have] seen her face, she got so angry. She went to pick up a ruler and she hit me in the face with it. (p. 358)

Aída Hurtado and Raúl Rodriguez (1989) report similar findings, noting that over 40 percent of 500 Spanish-speaking Texas college students they interviewed said they experienced some form of recrimination for speaking Spanish while attending primary or secondary school.

One can only imagine the horrors experienced by Latino and other linguistic-minority students in state schools in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts today, where state laws prohibit the use of languages other than English, and where specific forms of English-only education—such as Sheltered English Instruction (SEI)—have been prescribed and imposed. In fact, teacher-researchers in Massachusetts have recently begun

to document the inequitable and substandard instruction and testing that linguistic-minority students experience in English-only settings. I assembled some of these teachers and worked with them to publish their findings (Bartolomé & Leistyna, 2006). For example, Berta Berriz (2006) describes her students' frustration at being "sadistically over-tested" in English on numerous occasions, and quotes one student's indignant question: *Cuántas veces les tengo que comprobar a ésta gente que no sé leer ni escribir en inglés?* ("How many times do I have to prove to these people that I cannot read or write in English?") The testing policy, however, did not merely arrive at the school intact. A process of decision making preceded the English-only testing mandates. Berriz explains how an English-only language policy was imposed: "[An] electorate, made up of primarily White non-users of bilingual education—who outnumbered urban voters of color—voted to end bilingual education, and thus voted to end equitable access to public education for linguistic-minority students" (p. 10).

Similarly, Margaret Adams and Kellie M. Jones (2006) discuss the results of two years of English-only language policy implementation in their school system. They explain that "[t]he most common implementation of SEI has been to place students in mainstream classrooms where teachers do not modify their instruction to make it more comprehensible to ELLs [English language learners]" (p. 17) and correctly argue that this type of "submersion" or "sink-or-swim" English-only instruction does not constitute appropriate English instruction, especially for beginning-level ELLs.

In their article, the two educators illustrate how English-only language policy has been used as a type of "ideological smoke screen" that purports to have the children's best interests at heart, when, in reality, what has been put in place is a system of English-only instruction that the children do not understand. This English-only method creates contexts where the students "are often relegated to an inferior status . . . , placed in lower-level ability groups, and taught through rote and discrete academic tasks that disregard the higher-order thinking skills that native English speakers are taught" (p. 17). Furthermore, when former bilingual educators' knowledge of students' native languages and home cultures are no longer deemed relevant to the academic project, a leadership power vacuum opens that White, English-speaking, monolingual teachers typically fill. This shift in power becomes apparent, as Adams and Jones point out, in differences between the school systems' prompt response to the 2002 English-only language mandate in comparison to the "foot dragging and resistance that occurred when bilingual education (native language instruction) became the law in Massachusetts back in 1971" (p. 16). The authors conclude by describing their efforts to re-insert the students' native languages and cultures into curricula and instructional methods despite the restrictions of English-only instruction.

Elizabeth Garza (2006) also discusses efforts on the part of teachers to positively impact or transform English-only language policy in one Southern California school system. In her research, she describes how a group of dedicated teachers built a quality bilingual Two-Way Immersion Program in their school as an alternative to English-only state-mandated instruction. Garza describes the program she studied as a two-way bilingual program "because students from both linguistic groups are learning each other's languages and cultures in an academically rigorous setting. Students are immersed in their second language, without translation, for part of their instruction. This works according to an instructional model that maps out exactly when each language is used. Two-way instruction . . . uses a variety of specialized techniques and strategies to help students understand while learning in a second language" (p. 27). Garza chronicles these teachers' strategies in subverting the school district's favored Sheltered English Instruction programs. She describes the district's conception of Sheltered English programs as

. . . compensatory in nature, designed to "remediate linguistic deficiencies" through instruction in English. . . . [U]nlike bilingual education programs that are able to teach grade-appropriate content in the native language, as a direct consequence of SEI's limited focus on second language acquisition and not on academics, most of the students in these programs systematically fall behind their English-only peers in subject matter areas. (p. 23)

Garza's case study constitutes an ideal example of the type of critical analysis that committed teachers are capable of carrying out in order to come up with instructional programs

that more humanely and effectively meet students' academic and linguistic needs. Garza powerfully captures the teachers' efforts around two-way bilingual education research, parent outreach, teacher training and support, and "public relations" work with English monolingual colleagues and administrators over a three-year period to institute an empirically proven, successful, two-way bilingual program. As Garza points out, two-way bilingual programs may not be the "main avenue of resistance in English-only legislation, but for progressive educators who have the conditions necessary, they can provide the demanding, humanizing, responsive environment that all students should come to expect in any democratic society" (p. 26).

Not all school systems have sufficient numbers of native English-speaking students and enough fluent bilingual-biliterate teachers to recruit into two-way bilingual programs, nor can they strategically enlist the political support of higher-status, White, middle class parents in order to create the type of quality educational contexts that, although targeted primarily for White students, can also benefit linguistic-minority students. Garza provides a valuable set of strategies and structures that teachers can emulate in order to impact educational policy that they have determined is ineffective and pedagogically unsound. The teachers that Garza studied demonstrated the tremendous power of human agency when they engaged in critical policy analysis and then proceeded to transform language

policy and practice at their school site. These courageous teachers serve as role models for us all.

CONCLUSION

As progressive educators, we must not forget that our work with linguistic-minority students—most of whom are not White and come from low socioeconomic status backgrounds—is political work and not purely a pedagogical undertaking. We forgot this fact when we advocated for bilingual education as a purely technical issue, and defended it using arguments based solely on research findings and statistics. This clinical approach erased the human side of the issue, and ignored the richness of an identity steeped in language and culture—the identity affirmed by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) when she wrote: "So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language." Our argument calling for a language policy that promoted bilingualism should have moved us beyond test scores in English as proof of academic and linguistic success. Our position today needs to be rooted in ideological and human rights issues that will allow policymakers to measure the psychological and emotional trauma that is experienced when one's language is "yanked" away, rendering the speaker—as Anzaldúa (1987) so poignantly describes it—*deslenguada* (tongueless).

References
Adams, M., & Jones, K. M. (2006). Unmasking the myths of structured English immersion: Why we still need bilingual educators, native language instruction, and incorporation of home culture. *Radical Teacher, 75,* 16–21.

Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands, la frontera: The new mestiza.* San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

Bartolomé, L. I., & Leistyna, P. (Eds.). (2006). Countering the English-only assault [Special issue]. *Radical Teacher,* 75.

Berriz, B. (2006). Unz got your tongue: What have we lost with English-only mandates? *Radical Teacher, 75,* 10–15.

Edmondson, J. (2004). *Understanding and applying critical policy study: Reading educators advocating for change.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Freire, P. (1985). The politics of education: Culture, power, and liberation. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Garza, E. (2006). In the shadow of the Mexican border: Taking a radical stand. *Radical Teacher, 75,* 22–27.

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks* (Q. Hoare & G. Smith, Trans.). New York: International. (Original work published 1935.)

Heywood, A. (2003). *Political ideologies: An introduction* (3rd ed.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hurtado, A., & Rodriguez, R. (1989). Language as a social problem: The repression of Spanish in South Texas. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 10,* 401–419.

Macedo, D. (in press). Foreword. In M. Lavandez (Ed.), *Questioning our practices: Bilingual teachers and transformation inquiry.* Covina, CA: CABE Publications.

Macedo, D., Dendrinos, B., & Gounari, P. (2003). *The hegemony of English.* Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

MacGregor-Mendoza, P. (2000). Aquí no se habla Español: Stories of linguistic repression in Southwest schools. *Bilingual Research Journal, 24,* 355–367.

Wiley, T. G. (1999). Comparative historical analysis of U.S. language policy and language planning: Extending the foundations. In T. Huebner & K. Davies (Eds.), *Sociopolitical perspectives on language policy and planning in the U.S.* (pp. 17–38). Philadelphia: Benjamin Publishing.

Lilia I. Bartolomé is associate professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.