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Introduction

It's unfair to ask educators, overstressed and underpaid as they are in the USA, to moonlight as political activists. The last thing they need is distraction from their important work in the classroom. Yet, like it or not, for educators determined to do their best for English language learners (ELLs), advocacy is part of the job description.

How to teach these children has been among the most contentious – indeed, most politicized – issues in American education over the past three decades. External forces such as the English-only movement, misguided approaches to school reform, state and federal mandates for high-stakes testing, uninformed media coverage, resistance to civil-rights laws, and legislators' refusal to provide adequate funding continue to exert a powerful influence on what happens in ELL classrooms. Language-minority communities, by contrast, have limited power and resources to fight back; hence the limited responsiveness of policymakers. In this situation, it becomes imperative for educators to enter the public arena and do battle on behalf of their students.

Many are rising to the challenge. Throughout my career, I have worked with numerous educator-advocates who have invested time, contributed expertise, and taken risks to advance the cause of equal opportunity for English learners. This book is dedicated to them.

Political adversity is nothing new for our field. In 1985, when I joined the staff of *Education Week* and began reporting on bilingual education, the program was coming under concerted attack by the Reagan administration. Secretary of Education William Bennett (1985: 361) had recently branded the Bilingual Education Act 'a failed path ... a bankrupt course,' announcing an initiative to allow schools to use federal funding to support nonbilingual alternatives.¹ Bennett drew active support from a new movement to legislate English as the exclusive language of government. Although 'official English' measures usually exempted schools from the proposed restrictions, they signaled a growing paranoia and intolerance toward speakers of other languages.

To bilingual education advocates at the time, these developments seemed ominous – less because of their immediate impact than for their

symbolic assault on equal opportunity. Little did we know how far this campaign would go, and at what cost to children.

Back then, I knew next to nothing about ELLs and their pedagogical needs. Like many Washington journalists, I was attracted to bilingual education as a hot political story, a conflict that brought out ideological extremes as the country made a sharp turn to the Right. That it certainly was. As I learned more, however, I became fascinated for other reasons. Bilingual education also turned out to be important as a science story, featuring the latest discoveries in second-language acquisition; a story about demographic and cultural change in communities transformed by immigration; and a story about social justice, as minority parents organized to seek a better deal for their children.

Above all, bilingual education was what enterprising reporters are always looking for: a terrific *untold* story, a matter of national significance that was widely misunderstood. I'm sorry to say that, despite my efforts and those of a few other troublesome journalists over the past 20-odd years, this is largely still the case. The American public, press, and policymakers remain confused about what bilingual education is, how it works, and whether it's good for kids. Which makes the job of advocacy both difficult and essential.

When did I make the transition from 'objective reporter' to advocate for ELLs? It's hard to say. The former is, of course, a mythical character. All journalists, whether they like to admit it or not, have viewpoints about what's significant and why, as reflected by the facts they highlight or ignore, the quotes they select and contextualize, and the 'angles' with which they frame their stories. The best of them recognize that *fairness*, not objectivity, is the professional standard to strive for. It was my aspiration as well. While I worked for *Education Week*, my policy was to give all sides their best shot, to present everyone's views as accurately and effectively as possible. This is not to say that I gave them equal credence.

Indeed, it was hard not to recoil at the racism I encountered among some, though not all, English-only proponents. One of my first articles about ELLs involved the Education Department's claim that Bennett's policy reversals had generated 'widespread public support.' Hoping to better understand how members of the public perceived bilingual education, I stopped by and asked to read the Secretary's fan mail. Most of it, I found, had been generated by a group called US English, which was spearheading a campaign to 'defend our common language' as a way to overcome ethnic divisions and unite the country. Its members' letters were not so high-minded. Many of them featured comments like the following:

Please do not relent on your stand against bilingual education. Today's Hispanics, on the whole, lack the motivation of earlier immigrants. They seem to be complacent by nature and their learning is further delayed by the knowledge they can fall back on their native language. ...

Why do we have to change our culture and life style for people who claim they want to be Americans? They want all our privileges, but still try to run our lives like they were back home. No way! ... First Spanish dictates – maybe some day Chinese or Russian. ...

At the rate the Latinos (and nonwhites) reproduce, they, like the Israelis, face a demographic imbalance in a matter of a few years if we do not change several of our outdated laws. ... Make English the official language everywhere in the USA by constitutional amendment. (quoted in Crawford, 1986a: 20)

Intrigued, I decided to look more closely at this movement. Soon I learned that its founders espoused some rather extreme views as well. One told me in an interview that 911 services in other languages should be eliminated because they discouraged immigrants from acquiring English. What if that policy resulted in loss of life for those who don't yet speak the language? I asked. It would be their own fault, he responded. 'Everybody calling the emergency line should have to learn enough English so they can say 'fire' or 'emergency' and give the address' (Crawford, 1986b). Other English-only leaders wanted to outlaw the Spanish Yellow Pages, bilingual menus at McDonald's, and even post-operative instructions for hospital patients in languages other than English. So much for their claim to have immigrants' best interests at heart.

In opposing bilingual education, US English often employed rational arguments (which I duly reported) about 'socialization of the child into the American mainstream' and schools' need for options in pursuing that goal. Yet it soon became clear that pedagogical effectiveness was incidental to the group's main concern. It worried that government support for any type of native-language assistance sends the 'wrong message,' suggesting that non-English speakers no longer have a duty to assimilate. Even though bilingual education may help Latino and Asian children stay in school and graduate, US English (1987: 4) argued, the program is still unacceptable: 'If the standard of success in educating immigrant children is going to be "no dropouts, no academic failures," then frankly we can't afford immigration.' Better to let kids fail than give their language undue respect.

Another epiphany occurred when I set out to investigate the 'research controversy' over the effectiveness of bilingual education. After much

reading and interviewing, it finally dawned on me that there was *no controversy* among experts in second-language acquisition. Not that any of the researchers hailed bilingual education as a panacea; all stressed that language of instruction was just one of many variables that figure in school success. But they generally regarded well-designed and well-implemented bilingual programs as not only promising but preferable for ELLs, other things being equal. Not as a diversion from English, but as a better way to teach the kind of English children need for school, and an opportunity to develop fluency in the heritage language. The findings of Krashen, Cummins, Hakuta, Ramírez, and others seemed – at least to my layman’s eye – reasonable and well-supported by data. In addition, at a personal level, the researchers impressed me as both scrupulous about their science and committed to bettering the school experience for a group of students who had long been neglected.

To be sure, I encountered a few academic opponents of bilingual education. Yet they tended to come from fields like sociology or political science, lacking a sophisticated grasp of language acquisition. Such critics also had little knowledge of, interest in, or patience with the work of classroom teachers. Keith Baker, co-author of a major federal study questioning the value of bilingual education (Baker & de Kanter, 1981), proudly acknowledged his lack of background in the field, boasting – absurdly, in my view – that this made him a more objective interpreter of the research (Baker, 1997). Perhaps Baker’s limited pedagogical knowledge explains why he saw no problem in equating a bilingual French-immersion approach for advantaged, language-majority students in Canada with a monolingual English-immersion approach for disadvantaged, language-minority students in the United States. Indeed, his negative conclusions about bilingual education hinged on a refusal to make this very distinction – and a determination to ignore the contrary views of experts who had designed and evaluated the Canadian programs (e.g. Lambert, 1984).

Ad hominem attacks on supporters of bilingual education also gave me pause, suggesting the politicized nature of the opposition. One appointee to a federal advisory panel questioned the ‘independence and objectivity’ of researchers who received government funding to study bilingual programs. ‘Getting information from such sources,’ he said, ‘is like asking your barber if you need a haircut’ (Walberg, 1986). In fact, it was the critics who seemed to be profiting handsomely from their opinions. Baker and two others² together received more than \$180,000 to testify against bilingual education in a single court case (*Teresa P. v. Berkeley*, 1989); by contrast, the expert witnesses supporting bilingual education charged nothing for their time (Crawford, 1992).

It became obvious to me that, while bilingual education was a matter on which honest people could disagree, not all participants in the debate were honest brokers. The Reagan administration, in particular, took a ruthlessly ideological approach to ELL issues. It was clearly more concerned with promoting the themes of small government and cultural conservatism than with determining what worked best for children. Secretary Bennett (1985: 363) sought to wrap his attack on bilingual education in the flag, declaring: 'As fellow citizens, we need a common language. In the United States that language is English. Our common history is written in English. Our common forefathers speak to us, through the ages, in English.'

Another of Bennett's projects was an offer to release nearly 500 school districts from their *Lau* plans. These were agreements previously negotiated with the federal Office for Civil Rights (OCR), which included bilingual education as part of the remedy for their past neglect of ELLs.³ Since President Reagan arrived in 1981, denouncing 'heavy-handed' federal regulations, OCR had largely shut down its efforts to ensure that ELLs' civil rights were protected. My computer-assisted analysis of the agency's enforcement statistics found that school districts were nine times less likely to be monitored for *Lau* compliance under his administration than under the Ford or Carter administrations (Crawford, 1986c).

Articles like this did not endear me to Bennett or his top aides, including Gary Bauer, William Kristol, and Chester Finn, who bombarded *Education Week* with complaints. Yet my editors remained unfazed. As long as I continued to get the facts straight and to represent all viewpoints fairly, they gave me their full support – and plenty of column inches each week (not to mention one 32-page special section; Crawford, 1987). This was an eventful period on the bilingual beat. For an enterprising reporter, the stories were abundant and, I have to admit, great fun to cover.

Lest I give the wrong impression, however, I should note that plenty of credit for this work belongs to others. Without excellent sources both inside and outside of government, most of whom must remain nameless, I could not have conducted my investigations.

One source I can mention is Jim Lyons, lobbyist for the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE), who first stimulated my interest in the field and provided valuable guidance in sorting out the issues. Lyons recognized the key role that media coverage plays in advocacy. He also understood that journalists must be supplied with more than heart-felt opinions; they need reliable tips, contacts, and documentation to produce stories that will make it into print or onto the airwaves. As a result, his organization benefited and so did my coverage.

NABE was unique among the education groups I had worked with. Its

leaders, several of whom were veterans of civil-rights struggles, saw themselves not just as teachers, administrators, or academics but also as advocates for children. In those days, NABE was more than a professional association; it was a movement for social justice. Although we didn't always agree on day-to-day matters, I couldn't help but respect the commitment, which gradually became my own.

Finally, the editors of *Education Week*, supportive as they had been, decided that enough was enough; it was time for me to move on to other beats. I chose instead to leave the newspaper to write books on bilingual education (Crawford, 1989) and the English-only phenomenon (Crawford, 1992). Language policy has been my specialty ever since. Becoming an independent writer also enabled me to become an activist, participating in numerous campaigns seeking to improve the lot of language-minority students. In the process, I have developed some ideas about advocacy for ELLs – how it has been done and how it could be improved.

The essays collected here are the result. They include newspaper commentaries, academic articles, speeches to education and journalist groups, analytical pieces for the Web, and Congressional testimony. If there's a common thread, it's my belief that we have a duty as advocates not only to engage opponents, but also to take a critical look at our own work. How else can we expect to cope with challenges that seem to grow more formidable each year?

Over the time I have written about ELL education, the basic conflict has changed very little. In essence, it comes down to a simple question: Should Americans honor the spirit of *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), resolving to address the unique needs and strengths of language-minority students and ensuring them an equal chance to succeed? Or should we content ourselves with one-size-fits-all approaches that treat ELLs like any other students, whether in the name of rapid assimilation, school accountability, or simple reluctance to invest in this population?

That said, it's also important to note a radical – and disturbing – shift in the policy debate, from whether to allow local flexibility in spending bilingual-education subsidies to whether bilingual education should be supported at all. By 2002, three states had passed ballot initiatives that effectively banned native-language instruction. In its place, they mandated a short-term, unproven 'structured English instruction' program for ELLs under most circumstances. That same year the federal No Child Left Behind Act began to require high-stakes testing, largely in English, as a way to 'hold schools accountable' for student performance, thus creating further incentives to abandon native-language instruction.

While the ELL population continues to skyrocket, the availability of

bilingual programs is on a precipitous decline. Yet the substitution of all-English approaches, contrary to promises by its enthusiasts, has yet to produce detectable gains in student achievement. Indeed, the best available research shows that ELLs are faring poorly in such programs. Nevertheless, in most states, pushing children into English as rapidly as possible is now the dominant trend among policymakers.

How this came about is a complex, fascinating, and sobering story. Among other things, it involves the country's lurch toward political conservatism, a growing hostility toward immigrants, and the desertion of liberal allies who once championed equal educational opportunity. It also involves the inability of ELL advocates to respond effectively to these developments. Our weakness was most obvious in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts, where tens of thousands of bilingual educators were unable to withstand the assault of a single wealthy individual who sponsored initiatives to impose English-only instruction. But these defeats were only the culmination of our longstanding failure to build public support for bilingual education.

Where did we go wrong? In a word: leadership. Activism by individuals, however inspired, has little chance to prevail on its own. A well-organized and well-thought-out response is essential. Otherwise, our potential strength is squandered by an inability to mobilize the talents and energies of those who want to contribute. Cynicism and defeatism replace bold efforts to do what's right for kids.

I believe that NABE, which deserves much credit for its early work, also deserves considerable blame for the field's decline. During the mid-1980s, NABE's advocacy proved so threatening to the Reagan administration that officials tried to put the organization out of business by banning the use of federal funds to attend its conferences (Crawford, 1986d). Two decades later, NABE (2001) was working closely with the Bush administration to win support for No Child Left Behind, a law that replaced the Bilingual Education Act, deleting all references to the goals of bilingualism and biliteracy, while creating high-stakes pressures to dismantle bilingual programs. For many ELL advocates, including myself, this position was symptomatic of how far NABE had strayed from its original mission. As a result, some of the field's most dynamic figures were deserting the organization, its membership was declining, and its finances were dwindling.

Then, in 2004, NABE's board of directors recognized the need for a new direction. It invited me to apply for the position of executive director. Though initially reluctant to surrender my independence, I considered the possibilities and decided to accept the board's offer. For years I had been urging bilingual educators to get more involved in advocacy, and here was

an opportunity to provide the kind of leadership I felt was needed. I could not, in good conscience, refuse.

Over the next two years, with help from a few board members, we began to revive the organization's tradition of advocacy. NABE energized its conference attendees to become politically active through presentations addressing the misguided features of No Child Left Behind. It assisted colleagues who were pressing state legislatures to provide adequate funding for ELL programs. It stressed activities to inform the public and policymakers about the latest research demonstrating the effectiveness of bilingual education. It championed the cause of heritage-language instruction, especially in Native American communities whose languages are endangered. And it highlighted the perverse effects of high-stakes testing, opposing Bush administration mandates to use invalid and unreliable assessments for ELLs.

These efforts ended abruptly, I regret to say, when a majority of the board voted to terminate my contract. Three board members who had strongly supported NABE's new direction resigned in protest.⁴ The reasons for the board's decision were never made public (nor were they privately communicated to me). But it's fair to say that they involved NABE's internal politics, which had created a constant distraction during my tenure, and the low priority that most board members placed on advocacy.⁵ Shortly after my departure, the organization curtailed efforts to shape policies for ELLs, just as Congress was beginning the process of reauthorizing No Child Left Behind. For the first time in its history, NABE relinquished an activist role.

Fortunately, the story does not end there. Leading members of the field, troubled by this turn of events, came together to create a new organization, the Institute for Language and Education Policy (2006), to promote research-based policies for English and heritage-language learners. The Institute has worked actively to fill the leadership vacuum, not only in advocating for bilingual education but also in opposing English-only legislation and in proposing ideas for overhauling the No Child Left Behind Act. I am pleased to play a part in these ongoing efforts. Naturally, I hope additional ELL educators will take up the cause. If we don't, who will?

Which brings me back to the aim of this book. It is my attempt to bring some clarity to major issues confronting advocates in the areas of language policy and politics, demographic change, second-language acquisition, bilingual education research, public and media responses to diversity, 'official-English' campaigns, minority language rights, and the impact of misguided accountability schemes like No Child Left Behind. The 18 articles collected here were written at various times between 1996 and 2007, and should be considered in historical context. Above all, I hope they will

stimulate discussion about what advocates are up against, where we have had successes and setbacks, and how we can do better for the children we serve.

Notes

1. Congress ultimately agreed, allowing the Reagan administration to divert up to 25% of Bilingual Education Act grants to support all-English programs (Hawkins-Stafford, 1988: §7002).
2. Christine Rossell of Boston University and Rosalie Porter of the READ Institute, a project funded by US English.
3. In *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), the US Supreme Court ruled that districts must take 'affirmative steps' to help students overcome language barriers obstructing their access to the curriculum. Where OCR found violators, it required them to improve services for ELLs. To Bennett's surprise, few districts responded to his invitation to renegotiate their *Lau* plans, apparently because most were satisfied with the bilingual programs that the plans had instituted (Crawford, 1986e).
4. Stephen Krashen, Josefina Tinajero, and Mary Carol Combs.
5. Stephen Krashen (2006) wrote in his resignation statement: 'Service on the NABE board has been frustrating. ... I understand that all organizations require attention to small, technical details and that this cannot be avoided. But the smaller the issue, the more interest this board took in it. The larger the issue, the less interested they seemed. ... There was a great deal of enthusiasm and energy for arguing about which hotel we would stay at, the size of the rooms we would get, and whether board members would get extra free tickets for NABE events. ... But I could not detect any interest in bilingual education among most of the board members or any sense of urgency about the problems facing us. One thing they were adept at: Political intrigue and tactics. With the removal of Jim Crawford as Executive Director, I see no hope for improvement of the situation.'