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Advocating for English Learners: Selected Essays. James Crawford. Multilingual Matters, Clevedon. 2008 ISBN: 1847690726, Pp160.

Reviewed by Theresa Austin — October 07, 2008

If you had less than 200 pages to present a case that has been controversial for more than three decades, you would want to read James Crawford's text. A journalist who became increasingly an advocate for bilingual education, Crawford writes in an easy-to-access style that makes complex issues approachable and understandable. As his stature grew, through his prolific coverage of issues in the field of language policy, Crawford was asked to become the executive director of the National Association for Bilingual Educational. During the two years at its helm, Crawford's advocacy agenda was not fully embraced by several board members, resulting in his ouster. While this level of controversy was personal, the move allowed Crawford to lead another budding organization, the Institute for Language and Education Policy, designed to use research to inform policy making that affects English and heritage language learners.

The entire collection zigzags through a little more than a decade of issues surrounding U.S. language policies for educating immigrant children who are learners of English. The collection of essays from 1996-2007 compiles several previously-released commentaries, speeches, web articles, and his own testimony to Congress as well as several revised and new articles. Rather than ordering the collection chronologically, it mimics the recurrent controversies surrounding bilingualism: the dominant groups' lack of understanding of how second language is effectively learned for schooling, the persuasive yet distorted media coverage of these issues, the changing discourses used to support the use of immigrant children's primary language in public school, the inadequacy of measurements that do not take into account the wide range of learners' academic backgrounds and English language and literacy levels, and the lack of a powerful advocacy agenda by professional groups committed to educating this population. Overall, Crawford is consistent and forceful about the need for making advocacy a high priority for the field.

The book starts with an introduction that situates Crawford as a journalist awakening to the controversy brewing over bilingual education. As he proceeds to cover these stories, he gradually becomes inducted into an advocacy position. Out of his critical coverage of events was born a conviction that challenged established educators at all levels to do more, and pushed the professions of bilingual and TESOL educators to take up leadership in advocacy. It is this very advocacy that became controversial and compelled him to leave to found a new organization that would more vigorously take up the call. Throughout the collection, Crawford presents the dominant criticism of bilingual education efforts to meaningfully educate immigrant children for school success. He carries this out primarily through analyses of legislation, state data, the political actions of members of an organization called U.S. English, the aspiring California politician, Ron Unz, and the media's complicity. Crawford clearly presents the arguments of bilingual

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education opponents and even more carefully researches facts that overwhelmingly disrupt their positions. He asserts that this is the major responsibility of the media, one that was not lived up to during the critical periods of voting to restrict bilingual education programs. Crawford does not leave his critical eye fixed only on the opponents of bilingual education but also on those who support it. His understanding of the shifting political discourses indicates that advocacy also needs to shift but not lose sight of the integrity of its position on civil rights for the most vulnerable populations, that is, immigrants and their children who are learning ESL. The assemblage of facts, his accounts of first hand-experience, and his ability to make the complexities understandable make this a compelling book to read. A brief outline of what is argued in each chapter is presented below.

In the first essay, a policy brief, Crawford reviews the 2000 Census data and focuses on the construction of questions regarding language use in the U.S. Crawford demonstrates how the ambiguities in the wording of Census questions make the responses unreliable data and a disservice to understanding the U.S.'s diverse cultural and linguistic landscape. Crawford states, "It is disappointing that the census has no plans to revise the current questions on language, which have been used since 1980." The multiple ways in which the questions lead to both over- and under-reporting result in an inaccurate representation of the actual state of diversity. (See Leeman (2004) for a detailed analysis of discourses signaled by the historical perspectives on immigrants and their language throughout the census years.) The hidden cost is the actual loss of heritage languages resources that could contribute to the U.S.

Crawford chooses to place his editorial on monolingualism in the U.S. following these census data to show how attitudes about being multilingual are responsible for the abandoning of mother tongue through acculturation, a misunderstanding of what it means to become bilingual through instruction and provocation of the dominant group's fear. This chapter introduces two opposing organizations, English Only and English Plus, and the public's lack of understanding about bilingualism.

The third essay, a commentary commissioned in 1999 but revised in 2007, addresses how heritage languages are not being recognized as a resource to be "tapped" and proceeds to explain why and how. Crawford advocates building reading materials in heritage languages: "investing in public and school libraries in minority communities would be a feasible, cost effective means of enhancing such skills" (p. 27).

In the fourth essay, "Plus ça Change...", a 2004 editorial for a bilingual family newsletter, Crawford presents examples of the use of other languages as symbolic capital. Political leaders from both Democratic and Republican parties are both shown to draw on the use of other languages, albeit mistakenly, through their blunders and gaffes.

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In the fifth essay, "Concern or Intolerance: What's Driving the Anti-bilingual Campaign?", another commentary for a Southern California newspaper in 1998, Crawford puzzles through the Unz campaign that claims to "support immigrants." In essence he points out the reiteration of false reasoning and lack of scrutiny of facts when it is especially warranted. Among the falsehoods perpetuated is the purported failure of bilingual education. This leads to the scapegoating of bilingual education for all the failures of the educational system.

In the sixth essay, "The Bilingual Education Story: Why Can't the News Media Get it Right," a presentation to Hispanic Journalists in 1998, Crawford critiques journalists who did not "serve the voters or the schoolchildren of Californians" (p. 49). The time frame is the aftermath of California's Prop. 227, the proposition championed by Unz to restrict bilingual education and promote English-only in schools there. Crawford outlines the factors that were instrumental in the passage of this proposition and the media's coverage. Among the factors discussed in this essay are the anti-immigrant concern and fear exhibited by a populace largely uninformed about bilingual education, and thus "vulnerable to Unz's campaign of Big Lies"; Latino celebrities and average people's endorsements; and the opposition's lateness in responding through journalists to a need for educating the public, hence a failure to create a more balanced coverage. These arguments are repeated throughout the remaining chapters. But in this section, Crawford points his finger at the very nature of the news media that focuses on certain pollsters who basically "did not get it right." His clear prose points out the contradictions in the positions represented by the media about bilingual education that were left unexplained, inaccurately reported, or overlooked. Issues were thus conflated, and by the time of the vote, what was echoed were the Big Lies. Untruths were perpetuated because the media became the battleground for a war of sound bites (p. 45). Thus key facts were overlooked or treated as merely opinions, and fictions like the invented term "sheltered English immersion" remained more memorable.

In the seventh essay, "Ten common fallacies about bilingual education," written as an earlier ERIC Digest publication, Crawford lays out what appear to be the ten common persistent myths about language acquisition and immigrants. Readers can test their own understanding of bilingual education by reading this chapter.

In the eighth essay, "Agenda for Inaction," is a reprinted response to a journal article in 2002 where Crawford fully denounces the failure of established organizations to become more political despite the growing politicalization. He argues,

As a result, decisions on how to teach English learners are being made not in the classroom, but in legislative chambers and voting booths; not on the basis of educational research data, but on the basis of public opinion, often passionate but rarely informed. (p. 59)

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As part of misinformation, advocacy by the anti bilingual groups perpetuated a belief that bilingual education "had become a means of fostering ethnic identity at the expense of teaching English" (p. 61). As this position further politicized bilingual education, Crawford warns researchers that the advice not to become political is "a bit like preaching disarmament in response to invading Cossacks. Not a very effective tactic for the peasants" (p. 62).

In the succeeding essay, "Accountability vs. Science in the Bilingual Education Debate," written in 2002 as a policy brief, Crawford tackles the issue of evaluating English language learners under scrutiny by considering the arguments put forth by standardized testing results. His analysis uncovers widespread misuse of tests in a political context because they are perceived to be more credible than teachers. At the same time, Crawford notes that the language researchers with expertise are dismissed by newsmedia and politicians like Unz. Hence we see the impossibility of representing the accuracy of the achievements under bilingual education. Within the discourse of "no excuses" put forth by NCLB, standardized English test scores have been reported as evidence of gains under English only. Challenging this wisdom, Crawford closely examines the weaknesses of standardized testing for accurately measuring students' achievement. The variation in defining proficiency and the redesignation rates of students from one proficiency category to another manipulates the success rates rather than reflecting actual gains in proficiency. In closing, Crawford unravels the misattribution of Oceanside, California's test score rise to English only under Proposition 227. His discussion clearly show how decisions about "how to teach ELLs are increasing based on what is politically, not pedagogically effective."

In "Hard Sell: Why is Bilingual Education so Unpopular with the American Public," a 2003 policy brief, Crawford traces the historical shifts in public opinion polls in three different states and how the rhetorical explanations for or against bilingual education shaped these opinions. Both the media and advocacy groups' negative and imbalanced portrayals of bilingual education are blamed for shifting public opinion. Crawford explores whether ignorance and/or racism are to blame for the dominant group's voters. Effective strategies used by politicians and media portrayed bilingual education as impeding integration and perpetuating favors for the largely Spanish speaking groups. Using test scores without giving their context of redesignation, Unz was able to repeat an inaccurate representation of bilingual education as a failed program. The battles fought in California's Proposition 227, Colorado's Proposition 31, Massachusetts' Question 2, and earlier in Arizona's proposition 106 (2000) shared similar messages due to the backers of Unz's strategies. Crawford identifies why, in all cases except Colorado, bilingual education proponents were defeated. The trumping card in Colorado played on racial bigotry and self interests to preserve bilingual programs for language minority children.

In an editorial column, "Has Two Way Been Oversold," Crawford explores the growing appeal of two-way bilingual programs, which serve only a sliver of bilingual learners and

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English-speaking children. He questions how children are classified as a major issue in measuring the success rate. He concludes that "by all indications, the two-way model is well adapted to meet those goals for academically "advantaged children, whatever their language background" (p. 99). His caution is a stance that again asks the fundamental question "does one-size-fits-all serve the varied needs of ELLs?"

The next essay, "Surviving the English Only Assault: Public Attitudes and the Future of Language Education," was written in 1996 as a keynote address to the professionals in Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. It is curious to note that although this essay was written prior to the battles already discussed in the previous essay, it fits in as a strange prediction in the flow of the book's narrative. Crawford urges responsible TESOL professionals to carefully examine programs serving immigrants, and he pinpoints a key issue in his statement, "the English-Only movement is not about promoting English" but rather about "restricting the use of other languages, scapegoating the immigrants for many of this country's problems, limiting the rights of language minority groups, and manipulating ethnic fears and animosities for partisan advantage" (p. 103). Crawford describes the budget cuts for programs that teach English to immigrant groups, various English-Only legislation, the misinformation that is perpetuated about the historical linguistic diversity of this country, the false threat of other languages, and the purported high costs and inaccurate information on how bilingual education works and how second languages are learned. Crawford lists how teachers can use their roles as credible advocates to mobilize communities at multiple levels to be proactive.

"Official English Legislation: Bad for Civil Rights, Bad for America's Interests, and even Bad for English," is a transcript of Crawford's testimony in 2006 to the US. House Committee on Education and Labors and the Sub-committee on Education Reform. Here he supplies examples of his work as an advocate in providing a well-reasoned position against adopting English as an official language. His arguments draw on the history of U.S. democratic principles, facts about the rate of immigration and the rate of Americanization that do not warrant such a policy, the chronic shortage of ESL instruction that demonstrates a real need, and school personnel's obligation to communicate meaningfully with immigrant parents, all of which are used to argue against language restriction to English only. He bolsters his case with other reports of "language vigilantism" across the U.S. that fuels "race hatred" and ignites ethnic conflicts, while English-Only is promoted as a goal to "unite Americans." Crawford also argues that the amount allocated by the National Security Language initiative to fund the study of critical languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Russian and Farsi is far too little. He presents a strong case for English Plus rather than English Only, stating, "Rather than treating bilingualism as a nuisance or threat, we should exploit our diversity to enrich the lives of individuals and foster the nation's interests, while encouraging ethnic tolerance and safeguarding civil rights" (p.123).

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In his last five essays, Crawford analyzes the effects of the Bush Administration's No Child Left Behind policy on federal involvement in bilingual education. "The Bilingual Education Act 1968-2002: An Obituary" is a policy brief prepared in 2002 for the Language Policy Research Unit at Arizona State University. Here Crawford examines the increased federal spending provided for the English Language Acquisition Act as a tool to reverse the gains in bilingual education and stress skills in English only. He notes how the erasure of the word "bilingual" was cemented by the renaming of the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs as the Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for Limited-English-Proficient Students, as well as the change in the name of the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.

In "No Child Left Behind: Misguided Approach to School Accountability for English Language Learners," a paper presented in a 2004 forum sponsored by the Center of Education Policy in Washington, Crawford points out fundamental flaws in current assessment of ELL and identifies what could be done, citing research and proposing more valid and comprehensive approaches to inform the instruction of ELLs.

In "A Diminished Vision of Civil Rights," Crawford documents the effects of a discursive shift in the vision of accountability to learners that is limited to test scores. He identifies how this shift marginalizes poorer schools and restricts their curriculum to test preparation, increases the achievement gap, and produces a "diminished vision of civil rights." The effects, he argues, show little meaningful accountability and push students out of education while blaming teachers, learners and schools.

"The Decline of Bilingual Education in the USA: How to Reverse a Troubling Trend" continues the discussion of the effects of invalid high stakes testing, using California as the main example. Here the focus is on how testing in English enforces punishment if the scores do not rise. Hence the decline in bilingual education, the minimal increase in two-way education to serve larger immigrant groups, and the increasingly demanding annual progress indicators all point to a trend toward enforcing all English programs. Crawford's analysis show that "No Child Left Behind espouses the cruel fiction that ELLs can meet the same levels of proficiency as their English-speaking peers '*before acquiring English, the language of instruction in most schools*'" (p. 148). Consequently, accountability must be measurable not only in outcomes but also in the progress made to improve instruction that removes language barriers as required by the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (1974).

In the last essay, "Loose Ends in a Tattered Fabric: The Inconsistency of Language Rights in the USA," Crawford describes the legal future as dim for language rights in the U.S. While the proposal in Congress to designate English as the national language failed, Crawford outlines the history of federal tradition on language policies and the three guarantees for English language learners: *Lau v. Nicols*, the Educational Opportunities

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Act, and *Castañeda v. Pickard*, the federal court ruling that set the standards for compliance. Crawford's review shows that support for language rights is derived primarily from the protections of the Constitution, past legal gains through the courts, and the historical rights of indigenous minorities. However, with the Republican party having appointed federal judges for 18 of the last 26 years, Crawford predicts, "No substantial gains are likely to be won through the courts anytime soon" (p. 172).

In the end, after reading Crawford's text, one understands why the masses in the U.S. made such a huge mistake in negatively assessing bilingual education. The myths and misunderstandings are still with us, and Crawford accurately describes the somber future of language rights essentially being a struggle for civil rights: "when the political strength of Hispanics and other minorities catches up with their numbers, their civil rights are likely to be realized." He calls out to various groups and address what each can do to advocate for the fair treatment of immigrant education with regard to academic and language needs, including primary language instruction. Making these arguments across the collection of essays, not only highlights a careful analysis of the issues but models how to craft the message to the various audiences that need to hear it: the general public, educators, and legislators, etc.

One weakness of the text is one typically found in a collection of essays - the overall responsibility to build coherence among the essays lies with the reader. A brief foreword to each chapter could have identified the chapter with the period in which it was written and thus oriented the reader to the temporal deictics in the texts. This could explain why there is some redundancy with regard to arguments made about testing and challenges to particular politicians in the chapters. Aside from minor details, the lack of chronology or numbering of the essays, this text offers valuable insights on language policy in the education of immigrant children learning English.

Reference

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