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Principals as linchpins in bilingual education: the need for prepared school leaders

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This article reports findings from qualitative research conducted in 17 New York City schools to better understand why many school leaders – particularly principals – have recently dismantled their school’s bilingual education programs, as part of a significant citywide trend during a restrictive period in US language policy. A main finding is that principals, who are called upon to determine their school’s language policy, have not received any formal preparation to do so. New York, like most states, does not require any coursework on the education of emergent bilinguals for the certification of administrators. The school leaders we interviewed who had eliminated their bilingual programs hold limited understandings of bilingualism, linguistic diversity, and bilingual education. By contrast, principals who have maintained their bilingual education programs were found to be well prepared to serve emergent bilinguals and strongly believe in the benefits of bilingual education. They also advocate for bilingual education and protect their school’s programming choices in the face of English-only pressures. Based on our findings, we argue that principals are particularly crucial to the survival and success of bilingual education. What is more, we argue that all school leaders serving emergent bilinguals would benefit from specialized preparation to educate this student population.

Keywords: bilingual education; language policy; English-only; principal preparation; school leadership; educational leadership

Introduction

This article focuses on the importance of school principals in shaping the education of emergent bilinguals,¹ and highlights how crucial it is that all administrators be well prepared to educate this population of students. Based on empirical research conducted in New York City, one of the most multilingual cities in the world, our findings reveal how school administrators – particularly principals – wield enormous power in shaping a school’s language policy and the overall quality of schooling that an emergent bilingual student receives. While school principals are essential for bilingual education, we found that few actually receive the preparation they need to serve their emergent bilingual students. As is the case in the vast majority of states in the USA, school administrators in New York are not required to receive any preparation to educate emergent bilinguals in order to obtain state certification.

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New York City has a long history of educating bilingual students, yet the recent past shows evidence of greater restrictions on their languages in city schools. Indicative of its status as the most linguistically diverse city in the USA today, and arguably the world, New York City is home to an estimated 800 languages (New York Times 2010). Fifty-two percent of New Yorkers over five years of age (3,712,467 people) speak a language other than English at home, and 36% were born outside of the USA (U.S. Census 2009). In New York City schools, 438,131 children (41% of the entire student population) come from homes where a language other than English is spoken, with over 180 different languages documented in students' home language surveys.² Approximately 14% of all students are currently emergent bilinguals and entitled to receive bilingual education or English as a second language (ESL) programming, and 27% of the city's student population received these services upon initial entry into the school system (New York City Department of Education 2013). Since the 1970s, city and state policy statements have mandated that bilingual education be provided when there are 20 or more emergent bilinguals per grade who speak the same home language (Reyes 2006; Menken and Solorza 2014).³

In spite of the linguistic diversity of city schools and official language policies in support of bilingual education, there has been a dramatic decline in the provision of bilingual education programs in recent years. In 2000, emergent bilinguals in New York City schools were evenly divided between bilingual education and ESL programs⁴ (New York Times 2000). Since then, the proportion of emergent bilinguals enrolled in bilingual education has decreased to 22% while ESL enrollment has increased to over 76% (New York City Department of Education 2013).

The purpose of the qualitative research reported here was to better understand why bilingual programs are being eliminated in New York City schools, and what is required of school leaders who wish to sustain them within the current climate. Rather than having a powerful central ministry of education like that found in many countries, control over schooling in the USA is decentralized (Hill 2000). Accordingly, school principals wield the power in New York to determine the programming they will provide to their emergent bilinguals, and are required by city and state policy to provide ESL and/or bilingual education.⁵ Therefore, we focused our research on school principals who had dismantled their school's bilingual education program in recent years and replaced it with an ESL program. There were two main findings: first, the administrators interviewed identified the exacting pressures of assessment and accountability policies, and particularly the requirement that emergent bilinguals perform well on tests in English, as a main reason for dismantling their school's bilingual program. Second, we found that the school leaders we interviewed who adopted English-only policies in their schools hold no formal preparation in the education of emergent bilinguals, and thus have misconceptions about bilingualism and language learning, including the belief that home language instruction is an impediment to learning English. The first finding is published elsewhere (Menken and Solorza 2014), and in this article we report on our second finding. In addition, in this article we share data from interviews with leaders of schools that have sustained their bilingual education programs for more than a decade, to contextualize our findings and to better understand what it takes to continue to provide bilingual education within a restrictive language policy context.

Literature review

Bilingual education in the USA is highly politicized, and has become, as Ovando (2003) writes, 'a societal irritant involving complex issues of cultural identity, social class status,

and language politics' (14). The adoption of restrictive language education policies, which limit the usage of students' home languages in instruction, has characterized the US language policy landscape in recent history (Menken 2013). This is exemplified in the passage of anti-bilingual education mandates in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts seeking to altogether eliminate bilingual education programs in those states (Gándara and Hopkins 2010). Bilingual education in New York City, as in most contexts, is of course deeply affected by national debates over bilingual education, so the language policies that schools adopt must always be considered against this backdrop (Menken 2011).

Although there is much literature in educational leadership in general that identifies characteristics of a 'successful' principal (Leithwood and Day 2007; Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning 2011; Waldron, McLeskey, and Redd 2011), meeting the demands placed upon school leaders working with emergent bilinguals is far less researched or well understood – particularly principals of schools offering bilingual education programs, given the restrictive policy context. What is known is that many schools operate from a paradigm in which emergent bilinguals are perceived as more challenging than monolingual students (Cummins 2000; Brooks, Adams, and Morita-Mullaney 2010) and wherein there is an assumption that emergent bilinguals lack the social and cultural capital required for success in school (Rodriguez and Alanis 2011; Hunt 2011).

In reaction against this deficit paradigm, Rodriguez and Alanis (2011) point to the importance of applying Anzaldúa's (1987) idea of 'borderlands,' an area of constant negotiation of those on either side of the border, to the school leader. In the passage that follows, they describe how school leaders must defend bilingual education programs and their emergent bilingual students within the US context:

[School leaders] serve as advocates for those silenced by 'the hegemony of English' (Shannon 1995 [as quoted in Rodriguez and Alanis, 2011]) that perpetuates English as the sole language of academic instruction. They are risk-takers who ground their decision-making in instructional practices that serve all students as they resist the socio-political pressure to transition children into all English-instruction classrooms. (Rodriguez and Alanis 2011, 104)

This border epistemology instead asks school leaders to support social justice initiatives that give value to the home language and culture of their students, and to protect the act of learning two languages within the borders of the school (Rodriguez and Alanis 2011). In other words, principals, especially those working in restrictive language policy contexts, have added responsibilities for their emergent bilingual students.

Literature about schools serving emergent bilinguals suggests that leadership in these contexts must make diversity central to the school's mission (Brisk 2006; Zentella 2005), instead of a problem to be overcome (Nieto 2002). Carrasquillo and Rodriguez (1998) identified school leadership as essential to the success of a bilingual school, based on their research in three New York City schools with bilingual education programs. The leadership components they found contributing to success include the following: bilingualism is supported by the superintendent's office, principals, supervisors, and school staff members; bilingual instructional materials are available; and, teachers are prepared and receive support from the parents and community (Carrasquillo and Rodriguez 1998).

One of the few studies to deepen understandings of successful leadership in a bilingual school was conducted by Hunt (2011), who examined three well-established bilingual programs in New York City. She identified the following as factors that

contribute to the schools' ongoing success over time: a unified and clear mission rooted in a schoolwide commitment to bilingual education, collaborative leadership in which staff feel respected, and flexible processes to allow for 'various voices to participate in implementing language policy, making decisions, and drawing upon a diversity of expertise within the school community' (Hunt 2011, 28). Both studies emphasized clarity and a unified mission supported by teachers and especially by administrators, which centered on a deep commitment to bilingualism, bilingual education, and diversity.

Recent budget cuts have left school leaders facing how to provide the same range and quality of services to children with a decreasing number of staff, as 'it is school principals as the front-line administrators who manage the scarce remaining resources' (Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning 2011, 2). Thus, a strong commitment to bilingual education is essential for a program's continuation, particularly when principals are fiscally required to choose which among competing agendas to prioritize.

Moreover, maintaining a strong bilingual education program demands leaders who are not only deeply committed to bilingual education, but also knowledgeable about emergent bilinguals and their educational needs (Brooks, Adams, and Morita-Mullaney 2010; Hunt 2011). For instance, they need to be able to support and oversee teachers of these students. Bilingual teachers in particular carry new demands, especially in the era of high-stakes testing and accountability, as they are now required to become experts in subject matter while using a range of assessments and teaching strategies in order to carry out current curricular and assessment requirements in two languages, all while navigating a complex sociopolitical landscape (Calderón and Carreon 2000; Menken 2008; Nieto 2003; Wright 2002). This requires the support of a 'strong principal' able to 'supervise and motivate to ensure quality implementation and improvement' (Calderón and Carreon 2000, 54).

Adding to the challenges that bilingual school principals face when working within the confines of restrictive language education policies in the USA and many places around the world today, principals who wish to implement and sustain bilingual education programs must be able to negotiate and resist the strong forces of top-down policies and external pressures, which typically impose monolingual instruction in the state or dominant language. They therefore cannot be mere 'soldiers of the system who carry out orders' (Shohamy 2006, 78). In their international exploration of language policy implementation, Menken and García (2010) describe how even the most restrictive language education policies are actually interpreted, negotiated, resisted, and ultimately (re)constructed in the process of their implementation by individuals at each level of an educational system – including school principals as key 'arbiters' of language policy implementation (1). This finding is supported by Cuban (1998), who found that even those educational policies that attempted to control implementation were negotiated at the classroom level and rarely applied exactly as policymakers intended.

There are several examples in the US literature regarding the crucial role of school principals in resisting state-imposed English-only policies (Combs et al. 2005; Gándara and Hopkins 2010; Gort, de Jong, and Cobb 2008) as well as the pressures of federal education reforms that promote an English-only agenda (Johnson and Freeman 2010; Menken 2008). For example, Gort, de Jong, and Cobb (2008) studied how administrators and principals in Massachusetts school districts that previously implemented bilingual education responded to a new statewide English-only policy being imposed upon their schools. As they write, 'Rather than simply implement a top-down state law, district- and school-level administrators in three focal districts actively constructed educational policy as they negotiated reform efforts and policy directives within their own context, personal

experiences, and knowledge base' (Gort, de Jong, and Cobb 2008, 61). As these authors note, the actions of the principals were guided by their knowledge about bilingualism and bilingual education. Therefore, even in the face of top-down restrictive language policies, some principals were able to carve out within their schools what Hornberger (2010, 562) terms 'ideological and implementational space for multilingualism' from the bottom up.

In our research about the loss of bilingual education programs in New York City schools (Menken and Solorza 2014), we document how school principals hold the power to adopt language policies that either expand or suppress the languages of their emergent bilingual students. In particular, our research examines the responses of school principals and administrators to the demands of *No Child Left Behind*, current federal education policy in US schools, which we found pressured school leaders to adopt English-only approaches:

The schools that we found continuing to run strong bilingual education programs within the current climate were those that have clear and cohesive language education policies in place that support bilingualism and that are led by principals who are prepared and committed to bilingual education. By contrast, the schools in our sample with unprepared principals were like reeds blowing in the winds of education reform. (Menken and Solorza 2014, 117)

Although the importance of school principals in language education policy is often overlooked, the research that does examine their crucial role suggests that school leaders have great power in shaping the education of emergent bilinguals. This is because programming decisions affect an emergent bilingual's language maintenance or loss over time, which in turn impacts their school performance as well as their future opportunities, and thus has a long-standing academic and emotional impact on students and their families.⁶

Methods

The purpose of this research was to understand why many school principals and administrators are dismantling bilingual education programs in New York City schools, and also what is required to maintain a bilingual education program within the current climate. Accordingly, the following research questions served to guide this study:

- Why have school leaders in recent years favored ESL programming over bilingual education programming?
- What are their beliefs about bilingual education?
- What is required of school leaders to maintain and sustain strong bilingual education programs within the current climate in which English-only approaches are encouraged?

To answer the preceding research questions, both authors conducted interviews with administrators and teachers in what we term 'English-only schools,' defined in this article as those that have greatly reduced or altogether eliminated their school's bilingual program, and replaced bilingual programming with ESL.

Upon our request, the New York City Department of Education provided the Principal Investigator (Menken) with a list of schools that had within the past five years altogether eliminated their bilingual education programs and replaced them with ESL programs, or where they were in the midst of doing so.⁷ This list included the 25 city schools with the greatest loss in numbers of emergent bilingual students enrolled in bilingual education, so

Table 1. New York City schools included in our research sample.

	Elementary schools	Middle/Junior high schools	High schools
English-only schools	4	3	3
Bilingual schools	4	1	2
Total	8	4	5

to select our sample we chose the top 10 on the list. Of these, several schools declined our invitation to participate because of the sensitivity of our topic, so we replaced these with other comparable schools while ensuring the diversity of the final sample of schools in terms of demographics, size, structure, and location across city boroughs.

A total of 10 ‘English-only schools’ were included that are located in Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx.⁸ These included four elementary schools, three middle/junior schools, and three high schools (see Table 1). In three of these schools, some bilingual programming remained – usually a single bilingual special education class – as the program was gradually phased out, with the plan to close the remaining bilingual classes in the near future. The schools in our English-only sample, with the exception of one small high school,⁹ have the requisite numbers of emergent bilinguals per grade who speak the same home language to make bilingual education mandatory under city and state policy. In other words, they could offer bilingual education but have chosen English-only programming instead and, in so doing, go against what New York’s written policies require.

After gathering data from the English-only schools and conducting our preliminary analysis, we decided to add seven ‘bilingual schools’ – those that have maintained their bilingual education programs for more than a decade in the face of the pressures of testing and accountability. These bilingual schools were included to better understand the challenges and responsibilities of bilingual school principals, and specifically what is required to maintain a bilingual education program in the face of English-only pressures. Accordingly, we conducted interviews with administrators and educators who are involved in implementing bilingual education programs in the participating schools. Reflecting the reality that most bilingual education programs are at the elementary level in New York, the sample included four elementary schools, one middle/junior high school, and two high schools (see Table 1). The schools are located in Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. These schools offered dual language bilingual education and/or transitional bilingual education.

In the final overall sample, a total of 27 participants in the 17 schools were interviewed in depth, with some participating in follow-up interviews: 14 principals (including 2 acting principals), 7 assistant principals or supervisors,¹⁰ and 6 teachers.¹¹ Principals were the main source of interview data because, as noted above, in New York City it is ultimately principals who decide which language education program(s) will be offered to emergent bilinguals in their school.

The interviews in all of the English-only schools and in three of the bilingual schools were conducted in person, while interviews with educators from four bilingual schools were conducted by email. The oral interviews were semi-structured, and the email interviews were structured, both formats following a protocol. Oral interviews were recorded by digital recorder and transcribed. In a few instances, school leaders refused permission to record interviews due to the sensitivity of the topic, so in these cases

careful notes were taken, then cleaned immediately following the interview, and later coded and analyzed. Both oral and email interviews were coded and analyzed to identify prevalent themes (LeCompte and Preissle 1993; Miles and Huberman 1994). For analysis purposes, we entered all of our raw interview data into Microsoft Excel to facilitate coding (Meyer and Avery 2009). Codes were refined after initial data analysis, and revised accordingly. School policy documents and performance data were also analyzed to contextualize findings from the interviews. The findings reported here draw from the most prevalent themes that we found in our final data analysis, and draw mainly from the English-only school data, with data from the bilingual schools presented to contextualize those findings.

Findings

As noted at the outset, our first main finding, reported elsewhere (Menken and Solorza 2014), was a causal link between the exacting pressures of federal and local test-based accountability mandates – based on tests in English – and the elimination of bilingual education programs in New York City schools. Compounding what is a challenging context for schools serving emergent bilingual students in the USA, we report in this article how the administrators of the English-only schools in our sample typically have no formal preparation to educate emergent bilinguals, in that they do not have a background in either teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) or bilingual education. As is typical in the vast majority of US states, coursework in this area is not required for certification of principals in New York. As such, the administrators we interviewed who had eliminated their bilingual programs hold limited understandings of bilingualism, language learning, linguistic diversity, or bilingual education.

Related to this issue, a prevalent misconception among the English-only school administrators interviewed is that monolingual instruction in English will foster English acquisition and improve performance on tests administered in English. Accordingly, our findings indicate that they believe bilingual education programs fail to teach students English, and think poorly of their school's former bilingual teachers for using too much of the students' home language in instruction. School principals in our sample also believe that bilingual education programs are more expensive than ESL programs, or else blame programming costs to mask other underlying concerns. Taking all of these issues together, the administrators interviewed for this research show an overwhelming preference for ESL programs over bilingual education, with transitional bilingual education being the model most commonly targeted for closure.

By contrast, the administrators and educators in our sample of schools that have continued to provide bilingual education programs were found to be well prepared to work with emergent bilinguals and prioritize the students' needs as central to their school's mission. Interestingly, the bilingual schools in our sample typically meet the accountability requirements, which these educators attribute to their provision of bilingual education. Moreover, administrators running long-standing bilingual programs offer an important counter-example of how school leaders who believe in bilingual education and have formal preparation in this area can swim against English-only tides in order to provide home language instruction. These findings are detailed in the sections that follow, with the first sections focused on the English-only school leaders and the latter sections focused on bilingual school leaders.

No formal preparation of English-only school leaders: educating emergent bilinguals as a 'learning process'

A key finding from our research is that not one of the administrators who made the important decision to eliminate their school's bilingual education program was actually prepared to do so through a master's degree or even a course in bilingual education or TESOL. Some administrators in our sample directly stated that they felt at a loss when called upon to make appropriate programming decisions for emergent bilinguals, as in the following interview excerpts (note that here and throughout the following interview data presented, participants refer to emergent bilinguals as 'English language learners' or 'ELLs,' their official designation in city policy):

My background is in special education and literacy, I worked as a reading recovery teacher ... But I haven't had the training for this, this was an eye opener for me. I was in schools with far lower percentages of ELLs and getting here was daunting. It's been a learning process for me. (Ms. V, elementary school principal, interview transcript)

I have no ESL background, mine is in math. (Ms N, junior high school principal, interview notes)

In the first excerpt, Ms. V is open to the possibility that she might not be making the best choices for her emergent bilingual students. Ms. N holds no expertise in this area either, and later in her interview asked us if we would evaluate her programming choices.

Some administrators we interviewed have also not received formal preparation to work with emergent bilinguals, yet have gained practical experience in positions where for years they have been called upon to make instructional and programming decisions that greatly impact emergent bilinguals:

I'm a social studies teacher, but most my career was in the Bronx before I became an administrator. I taught different types of ELLs, beginners, intermediates, and advanced. I saw both ways, ESL and bilingual models. (Mr. A, high school principal, interview transcript)

It's good you're talking to me, I was directly involved in closing the bilingual program. I've always been the AP [Assistant Principal]. Even though ESL was not my background originally it was the area I supervised right from the beginning in 1988. (Ms. R, junior high school acting principal, interview transcript)

Although these administrators do not hold formal backgrounds in the education of emergent bilinguals, they have gained practical experience and were the ones in their schools leading the decision to eliminate the bilingual education program. In their interviews, these leaders assert that their practical experience has given them the necessary expertise to move all emergent bilinguals into English-only instruction.

However, this belief – that practical experience alone is enough – was typically not shared by those we interviewed who have received formal preparation to educate emergent bilinguals, such as ESL and bilingual teachers, as exemplified in the following passage:

In some of these cases in the city, some principals have never been a teacher let alone have a specialty in bilingual. And yet they are willing to come and tell you that they are the experts ... [but] not understanding really the needs of language learners and not having a background or an expertise ... And it doesn't work. (Ms. Y, high school ESL teacher, interview transcript)

Ms. Y is a veteran teacher who has weathered the turnover of her high school from a bilingual school to an English-only school. In her building, the principal and assistant principal do not have a background in educating emergent bilinguals yet eliminated the school's bilingual program. Ms. Y feels that the school's monolingual approach is misguided and has been detrimental to her students.

Related to their lack of formal preparation, we found that the administrators in our sample of English-only schools often hold limited understandings about their emergent bilingual population or about language and linguistic diversity in general. This was true even of the administrators who had extensive practical experience working with emergent bilinguals, in that their practical experiences did not translate into increased understandings about bilingual education or emergent bilingual students. The following exchange between the principal (Ms. D), assistant principal (Ms. B), and interviewer (in italics) offers an example, in response to the interviewer asking which languages the school's emergent bilinguals speak:

Ms. D: Hmmm, basically Spanish. We have French, one or several Urdu, and this one boy speaks Fellaan? ... Fellani

Fulani?

Ms. D: I think that's how you say it, is it?

Ms. B: I think so. Fulani, Full. What is it? It starts with an F, right?

Farsi?

Ms. D: Farsi maybe?

Ms. B: Yes

Ms. D: Is it Fordu or Fars [laughing]? I am really confused. [Principal calls ESL teacher by phone]: What's the percentage of ELLs we have? Yeah. Ok. Ok. Right. And, you know the new child that just came in that speaks that um, different language, do you know what language it is? [Principal hangs up phone with ESL teacher and says to interviewer]: I think it's Farsi. Is that a language?

Yeah.

Ms. D: Ok. And it is 56% ELLs. (Ms. D, elementary school principal & Ms. B, elementary school assistant principal, interview transcript)

Over half of the students in this school are emergent bilinguals, yet neither the principal nor the assistant principal – who together decided to eliminate their school's bilingual program – were able to say how many emergent bilinguals they serve or which languages their students speak. It is worth noting that Farsi is actually a common language in the region of New York City where this school is located, and 26,000 residents citywide are Farsi/Persian speakers. This lack of familiarity with the languages of emergent bilinguals and linguistic diversity in general was echoed elsewhere, for instance by Mr. J, the principal of an English-only elementary school, who reported that his students primarily 'speak Spanish and African.'

Belief that English-only instruction will improve and accelerate English acquisition: 'you'll learn English quicker'

In our research, we found a lack of formal preparation to be associated with a number of misperceptions about bilingual education and second language acquisition, even among administrators with many years of practical experience working with emergent bilinguals. Administrators in the English-only sample of schools believe that English-only instruction will help emergent bilinguals learn English more effectively. Of particular concern to administrators is quickly improving the students' performance on high-stakes tests in English, in order to meet local and federal test-based accountability requirements. Ms. A brings this to life in the following interview excerpt:

The school used to have a bilingual program, so what factors do you think went into the decision to end the bilingual program?

Like having the bilingual program, [the principal] felt kids were not learning English as quickly as maybe they could have if they were in an English-only program ... But the idea that like if you're in an English-only environment you'll learn English quicker ... So there was that, and then I think also there was, I think there is a movement to not take, to say we don't have a bilingual program so that we don't get the students who want bilingual education. (Ms. A, high school assistant principal, interview transcript)

In this quotation, Ms. A indicates that her school's principal believed that students would learn English more quickly in an English-only program and that he did not want the school to provide bilingual education, as a way to discourage emergent bilinguals from attending. This is a trend we noted elsewhere in New York, as administrators closed their bilingual programs as a strategy to keep out emergent bilinguals, who are perceived as pulling down a school's overall test scores (this finding is detailed in Menken and Solorza 2014).

This viewpoint is not unique to the high schools, but was echoed at the junior high schools and elementary schools in our sample as well. In the following excerpt, Ms. E explains how her school had a very large transitional bilingual education program, which she closed out of frustration over the students' seemingly slow acquisition of English. As she states:

It had a huge bilingual program [laughs]. When I first started here there were approximately 12 bilingual classes, so it was a huge bilingual program. And at that point there was no ESL program, it was all bilingual, I guess what they call now transitional bilingual classes except nobody transitioned out ... I changed it to the ESL program. I felt bad, but it was important to force both teachers and students to speak in English you know during some point in their day. And I wanted the majority of their day. (Ms. E, junior high school principal, interview transcript)

Here, Ms. E notes that she opted for an ESL program to increase the amount of English instruction students receive, with the belief that doing so would accelerate and improve their English language acquisition.

Such beliefs contradict recent research, which suggests that home language instruction is actually a critical resource in helping emergent bilinguals learn English, and particularly fosters their acquisition of language for academic purposes (Baker 2011; Cummins 2000; Goldenberg 2008; Krashen and McField 2005; Rolstad, Mahoney, and Glass 2005; Thomas and Collier 2002). Yet, this notion is counterintuitive for many

school leaders who are unfamiliar with bilingual education theory, and who instead favor English immersion (Menken 2013).

Belief that bilingual programs fail to teach English and negative perceptions of bilingual teachers: ‘kids were hanging onto the Spanish’

Many of the administrators in our English-only sample of schools conveyed a belief that bilingual education programs fail to teach English, and were very critical of bilingual teachers who they felt used too little English in instruction. The following are two quotations that exemplify this prevalent theme in our data:

The kids were learning totally in Spanish, transference wasn't happening, which was key to why they were having the bilingualism program. But kids were hanging onto the Spanish and not learning English, and I looked at that and said that's not working ... So we teach in English so they can pass [the tests]. (Mr. A, high school principal, interview transcript)

I do have a Chinese-speaking math teacher who is a remnant from the old bilingual program, but he was always a big believer in stressing the English. (Ms. R, junior high school acting principal, interview transcript)

In the first quotation, Mr. A explains his view that students failed to learn English in the bilingual program at his school, which is why he eliminated it. In her interview, Ms. R asserted her belief that the bilingual program at her school had provided too much instruction in Chinese, and the only bilingual teacher the school retained was one who used very little of the students' home language in instruction. What is created by quotations such as these is a portrait of bilingual education as a covert monolingual program, defiantly teaching only the home language of the students.

Administrators in English-only schools were particularly critical of bilingual teachers who used too much of the students' home language in instruction, and labeled them ‘bad teachers’ for doing so:

I understand that this school used to offer bilingual education.

They used to have a Chinese bilingual program that we changed two years ago [*rolls her eyes*].

You're rolling your eyes.

It was a staffing issue in that the bilingual teachers never spoke English to the kids, I would go in and the kids were only speaking Chinese. (Ms. N, junior high school principal, interview notes)

That too much time in bilingual education programs was spent on home language instruction, at the expense of English, was often attributed to the teacher's own English proficiency level, as in the following:

And I think one disadvantage of the bilingual program was that, in thinking of one teacher in particular who was more comfortable in Spanish and did all the instruction in Spanish ... It was a Spanish class rather than a bilingual class. (Ms. B, elementary school assistant principal, interview transcript)

[Bilingual education] doesn't work because the teachers in the program are not good, are not strong teachers ... [T]he fact is that they themselves need some kind of English language courses. (Ms. E, junior high school principal, interview transcript)

In these quotations, the administrators interviewed criticize bilingual teachers for failing to use more English in instruction, a failure they attribute to the teachers' lack of English proficiency. What is striking is how frequently we heard this argument from administrators. While it is possible that the teachers truly did not have a strong command of English, it is quite unlikely given stringent teacher certification requirements in New York and elsewhere, which demand high levels of English (García and Trubek 1999; Flores and Clark 2005). But even if this were the case, it is unclear why the program model itself was blamed, as the focus could then be on teacher quality rather than program elimination (e.g., if an algebra teacher was seen to have poor command of course content, the teacher would receive more preparation or else be replaced; algebra would not be eliminated). Given the administrators in our English-only sample of schools do not have preparation in bilingual education, it is also entirely plausible that the teachers were simply teaching in accordance with appropriate bilingual pedagogy regarding language alternation, but that the administrators' views stem from the fact that they are unfamiliar with it and/or unconvinced by the evidence in support of bilingual pedagogies.

Cost of bilingual education: misperception or pretext?

Many administrators in our sample of English-only schools blame the cost of bilingual education, which they (mis)perceive to be greater than that of running an ESL program, as the reason for eliminating their bilingual education classes. In our research, however, budget often emerged as a pretext rather than a credible justification for dismantling a bilingual program. Particularly, low enrollment in bilingual programs, inconsistent numbers of emergent bilinguals, and the hiring of staff were cited as deterrents from offering bilingual classes. The following case offers an example:

It's hard to sustain a program, 'cause we get paid per pupil. The teachers for that amount of students, so, I think it all came down to number of students and budgets. You know, it just couldn't be sustained. (Ms. B, elementary school assistant principal, interview transcript)

In this case, Ms. B attributes the dissolution of the school's transitional bilingual program to attrition, or changing demographics in the neighborhood, saying that the school could not sustain a sufficient number of emergent bilinguals to continue the bilingual program. Although Ms. B claims that the 'population was different back then,' in fact, emergent bilinguals currently comprise the majority of her school's population and 95% of the emergent bilinguals in her school actually speak Spanish. Thus, it would be possible for the school to continue to provide bilingual classes. In this instance, the assistant principal believed bilingual education to be more costly than ESL and thus untenable, when actual enrollment figures suggest otherwise.

The following interview with an administrator of a small high school in our English-only sample offers a further example.

I'm wondering what are the factors that had the greatest influence on your decision? It's the budget. It's the budget. It's the money. Money. Because we cannot afford to have bilingual programs when you have only 30 or 40 students.

It would be more expensive than having the ESL teacher?

It is more expensive. Yes

If you had more students who were bilingual in Spanish or French would you offer a bilingual program here?

No. (Mr. R, high school acting principal/assistant principal, interview transcript)

Although this school leader at first blames low student enrollment (and hence the budget) as the main reason for eliminating the bilingual program, later he admits that a bilingual program would not be provided even with more students to fill bilingual classes. In fact, at this school – like others in our sample – we learned that the administration did not want to attract emergent bilinguals, out of fear that their presence would pull down schoolwide test scores, so they closed their bilingual program. Beyond misconceptions over funding, ‘money’ in this case was presented as the reason, when in fact it masked other concerns.

Crawford (1998) believes the stated high cost of bilingual education to be one of the common fallacies of bilingual education:

All programs serving ELL students, regardless of the language of instruction, require additional staff training, instructional materials, and administration. So they all cost a little more than regular programs for native English speakers. (4)

Research has shown that ESL programs cost more because supplementary teachers are usually needed (Crawford 1998; García, Kleifgen, and Falchi 2007). A middle school principal in our English-only sample inadvertently supports arguments by Crawford (1998) and García, Kleifgen, and Falchi (2007), when she shares that the cost for the new ESL program in fact exceeded that of the former bilingual program:

[W]e group students together by English proficiency level ... This is a much better, much more expensive, but much better. It’s costing a fortune because we essentially have two extra, two additional teachers servicing them. (Ms. E, junior high school principal, interview transcript)

In this quotation, Ms. E notes that the ESL program she is now implementing is actually more costly than the bilingual program that preceded it.

Offering a counter-narrative to the discourse of budget in choices over school programming, the principals we included in our sample who have well-established bilingual programs in their schools dispel the idea that bilingual programs are more costly. As one states:

Well, you know what some principals will say, that it’s money. But it’s really not about money because like I always say to my colleagues, I hate to tell you, but the kids in the bilingual classes generate money. That’s more money [laughter]. (Ms. G, elementary school principal, interview transcript)

In this quotation, Ms. G is referring to the additional federal and citywide funding allocated to schools for each emergent bilingual they serve. She feels each program is equally costly, but with a good design and creativity bilingual education can be provided. Likewise, a principal of a dual language bilingual elementary school believes the core

issue is how principals choose to distribute funds within their schools. She concludes: 'So it's not really more expensive, it's just being creative' (Ms. P., elementary school principal, interview transcript). Creativity requires expertise and flexibility, as a principal must be able to allocate funds in the right places given the carefully assessed needs of students and teachers. Principals serving emergent bilinguals must therefore not only have the knowledge base they need to make the best possible programming choices for their students, but they must also know how to manage their budgets accordingly.

Preference for ESL: 'ESL is the priority'

Not surprisingly, in light of the data described above, the principals in our sample who eliminated their school's bilingual program display an overwhelming preference for ESL over bilingual education. This preference supersedes demographics or policy mandates, as shown in the following:

My preference is for a push-in or pull-out [ESL] over self-contained or bilingual education programs. This is because I have 366 ELLs out of 955 students, around 40%. (Ms. V, elementary school principal, interview transcript)

While the school where Ms. V is principal is linguistically diverse, the demographics regarding number of students per grade speaking the same home language do allow for the school to offer bilingual education. In fact, city and state policy officially require the provision of bilingual education at this school, but the official language policies are not being followed or enforced (for further discussion, see Reyes 2006; Menken and Solorza 2014).

Not everyone within the schools agree with English-only policies. In the following passage, Ms. Y shows her disagreement with the decision of her school's administration:

As far as they are concerned ESL is the priority and I have a big problem with that you know. Learning, language acquisition is different you know. I don't think that it is an appropriate course of instruction but I mentioned it so many times that I've been berated. (Ms. Y, high school ESL teacher, interview transcript)

In her interview, Ms. Y makes evident the school's sole focus is on ESL to serve its emergent bilinguals, a decision she suggests is due to her administrators' lack of formal preparation to serve this student population.

Summing up well what it seems many New York City administrators in our sample believe, Ms. E states her preference for ESL in the following:

So ultimately you think that ESL programs will teach English better than bilingual programs?

Yes, that's my personal opinion. Now granted I have no background in, I say this you know, my background is not in TESOL or any of that, but I do. That's my belief, my layperson's experience. (Ms. E, junior high school principal, interview transcript)

In this quotation, while offering the caveat that she does not have the formal preparation to make determinations such as these, Ms. E makes very clear that ESL will be the only programming option for the emergent bilinguals who attend her school. The data

presented in this section and elsewhere throughout this article all point toward the spiking popularity of ESL programs in city schools.

Contrasting examples of prepared bilingual school leaders and their beliefs in and about bilingual education: ‘teach to a child’s strengths’

Based on our preliminary analysis of the data from English-only schools, we realized it would be important to interview school administrators who provide strong bilingual education programs to understand why they have chosen to provide bilingual education and how they negotiate the same pressures faced by the other principals interviewed. In providing an opposing view, these administrators highlight important beliefs about language programming and the crucial role school leaders play in addressing the needs of emergent bilingual students.

A significant finding is that the principals of the bilingual schools in our sample all hold prior preparation as well as practical experience in educating emergent bilinguals, firmly believe in the benefits of bilingualism and bilingual education, and prioritize the needs of this student population in their schools. As a bilingual school principal clarifies:

We know one language will transfer to the other, that deeper home language will support stronger second language, and bilingualism will support deeper cognitive development ... Spanish is always validated and emphasized as an asset at our school. It would be very hard for me to do all this without training ... Because of my training I will always advocate for preparation in a student’s home language. (Dr. H, elementary school principal, interview transcript)

Dr. H has a doctorate in bilingual education and worked as a bilingual teacher for 13 years prior to obtaining her administrator’s license. In this excerpt, she clarifies the importance of her formal preparation in maintaining her school’s focus on developing students’ bilingualism and biliteracy, which she elsewhere in the interview describes as ‘cornerstones’ of the school’s mission.

Interestingly, the bilingual schools in our sample have also proven successful in meeting the test-based accountability requirements. The following is an example, in which a bilingual school principal describes her school’s success at making ‘adequate yearly progress’ (AYP) on the tests mandated as part of city and federal accountability requirements:

[M]y experiences and my teaching career, as a matter of fact, as a bilingual teacher ..., that experience and knowledge that I brought here ... I mean I make AYP every year in spite of the fact that I have 600 ELLs in the building, I’m still making AYP and I’m doing it because these [bilingual] programs work for these kids. If you have a good well-structured program it’s going to work and that transfer is going to take place and those kids are going to be able to move. (Ms. G, elementary school principal, interview transcript)

When she discusses ‘transfer’ in this quotation, Ms. G is referring to Cummins’ (2000) interdependence hypothesis, which maintains that skills students acquire in their home language will transfer to English. She has found support for this theory in her experiences as the principal of a school that offers bilingual education as well as ESL. She explains that her school successfully meets the AYP requirements and, elsewhere in the interview, states that the emergent bilinguals enrolled in her school’s dual language bilingual program are more successful than their peers in ESL.

This point is reiterated by a middle school administrator we interviewed, Ms. K, whose school offers an English-only ESL program as well as bilingual education. Ms. K has worked as a teacher and supervisor in both programs and, in reflecting upon the performance and behavior of students in each type of program, described in her interview how students in bilingual education consistently outperformed their peers in ESL. She goes on to say that the bilingual education students ‘tended to be more cooperative and outgoing,’ ‘had higher expectations of themselves,’ and were more ‘motivated to progress’ (Ms. K, middle school teacher/program coordinator, written transcript).

A key commonality shared by all of the bilingual school administrators we interviewed is their deeply rooted belief that bilingual programs are viable and have proven long-term benefits:

[A]cross the board you teach to a child’s strengths, not to their weaknesses. If you have that philosophy then you are building on what a child brings to school. So if he’s coming in with another language, you are building on that strength, by adding to that child’s language capabilities. Because I believe in it, then I can follow through on that ... [I]f you do the program right, then you see that it’s additive rather than subtractive. That’s going to give you the results that all longitudinal research has proven, that when it’s implemented the right way, you get successful results. And honestly if other principals had enough knowledge about bilingual education, if they had a better understanding, I don’t think they’d be so quick to dismiss the potential of a group of students who are going to succeed. (Ms. P, elementary school principal, interview transcript)

Rather than operating from a deficit paradigm, the bilingual educators and administrators interviewed, like Ms. P, all begin from a strengths-based approach to working with emergent bilinguals. Ms. P explains how her faith in bilingual program design, fueled by the understandings she developed during her formal preparation in bilingual education, grounds her as she navigates a restrictive language policy context that encourages English-only instruction. Another administrator likewise explains how bilingual education ‘departs from a deep understanding of what [students] already know and how to facilitate learning based on those strengths’ (Ms. Z, elementary school supervisor, written transcript). Moreover, all of the participants from our sample of bilingual schools regard the language and culture of emergent bilinguals as a resource that is crucial to their learning rather than a barrier to their success (a point developed further in Menken 2013).

Ms. P goes on to express her frustration over other administrators’ ‘lack of understanding of language development’ and ‘ignorance.’

So you have an ESL [program] because you think that’s a quicker way. That’s a band-aid. That’s not really looking at the very core ... They don’t understand the transference of skills from one language to the other. And that’s why they’re not going to be successful because they really do think that by just giving them the ESL, it’s ‘I’m gonna ram the English down your throat.’ That’s archaic. (Ms. P, elementary school principal, interview transcript)

While Ms. P discusses an orientation toward language as a resource in the education of emergent bilinguals in her school, in this quotation she critiques principals who do not provide bilingual education, and attributes their choices to a lack of understanding of theories of bilingualism and language acquisition.

The efforts of bilingual school leaders to protect their language education policies: 'you have to have chutzpah!'

Our interviews with leaders of bilingual schools not only reflect their passion and knowledge about bilingual education, but also show how they make great efforts to sustain their bilingual education programs in the face of English-only pressures. We conducted a follow-up interview with Ms. P on this topic, in which she stated:

You have to know the pedagogy, and the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of what it is. If it makes sense you have to trust that with time it will happen ... And you have to have *chutzpah*.¹² Be tenacious in pursuing what you want. (Ms. P, elementary school principal, interview transcript).

Ms. P describes what being a bilingual school principal entails, and specifically how it involves understandings of theories and practices in bilingual education and the tenacity to advocate for the program. Ms. P has been a bilingual educator for 40 years, first as a classroom teacher and later as an administrator, and holds two degrees in the field. In her second interview, she notes how some principals fail to see the long-term benefits of bilingual education because they do not know the research or pedagogy proving its effectiveness.

Two teachers within her school discuss the impact of their principal on the school's dual language bilingual education program:

Ms. J: [Ms. P] believes in dual language. Her belief has kept us alive.

Ms. C: We need someone versed with dual language bilingual education and language. That's who we are. That's the reason why many dual language schools fail.

Ms. J: She does a good job at shielding us from what's going down. She knows how to pick her battles inside and out of school. (Ms. J & Ms. C, bilingual elementary school teachers, interview transcript)

The two teachers in Ms. P's building describe the importance of having a principal who is knowledgeable and passionate about bilingual education in order for the program to be successful. In this passage, the teachers speak about how their principal serves as a protector of the bilingual program, and how she advocates for it in her negotiation and implementation of external policies.

We found that the leaders of bilingual schools whom we interviewed work incessantly to challenge anti-bilingual sentiment and support teachers within a demanding climate of accountability:

Our bilingual program is in many ways protected from external pressures because if there are any potential policies that would hurt the school – parents and teachers are ready to work together to ensure it doesn't encroach on our program. (Ms. Z, elementary school supervisor, written transcript)

In this passage, Ms. Z describes how her school negotiates top-down policies defensively to protect their bilingual education program. When her school recently redesigned their curricula in an effort to improve schoolwide test scores, they were extremely careful not to reduce the amount of instruction students receive in Spanish.

The school leaders in our sample also frequently work with parents to cultivate their support of the bilingual program:

I think generally speaking, there is a backlash against bilingual education and I think that parents can feed into that, but I think it's a matter of educating them and helping them to understand the benefits of bilingual education ... But that requires a lot of advocacy, and belief in it, and unfortunately the emphasis is on testing and, you know, all the accountability is in students' performance in English. (Ms. L, elementary school principal, interview transcript)

As Ms. L clarifies, parents usually support the program if they understand its rationale, and she mentions how her school provides frequent workshops for families and 'family nights' to maintain their support for the program. Likewise, Ms. G (the principal of a bilingual elementary school) hosts seminars at her school about the benefits of bilingual education for parents and community members, involves parents in school leadership to maintain their support for the program (for instance by serving on the parents association), and regularly attends community education meetings to speak about bilingual education. In interviews, these principals and others also noted the importance of carefully maintaining and disseminating longitudinal student performance data to demonstrate the bilingual program's success.

Together, the interview data shows how these school administrators continue to provide bilingual education in a climate where public sentiment values test performance over bilingualism. Although they face the same pressures that all principals of city schools do, administrators in bilingual schools respond to those pressures differently due to their strong convictions, their preparation, and the data they have gathered showing that bilingual education improves language acquisition as well as test performance over time.

Discussion and conclusion

Our research highlights the essential role of New York City school administrators in shaping language policies in their schools, as principals in particular wield tremendous power in determining programming for emergent bilinguals. As reflected in our findings, school leaders act as gatekeepers for reform policies, playing a vital role in their translation, interpretation, support, and/or neglect in schools (Basurto, Wise, and Unruh 2006). Accordingly, while one sample of principals we interviewed have allowed for top-down pressures from recent reforms to result in English-only programming in their schools, the bilingual school leaders in our sample were found to actively contest such external policies, advocate for bilingual education, and protect their school's programming from outside pressures that undermine their approach.

Through the literature cited above in combination with our findings, we argue that principals are particularly crucial to the survival and success of a bilingual school. We found that principals of bilingual schools must have a deep knowledge of and belief in theories and practices proven effective in bilingual education, a strong commitment to bilingualism and diversity, the skillfulness to resourcefully distribute the funding available to their schools, an ability to negotiate the system (known as 'DOE smarts'¹³), and the tenacity or *chutzpah* to resist external English-only pressures. Principals in bilingual schools are thus charged with creating 'emancipatory spaces for students, parents, teachers and other constituents' (Rodriguez and Alanis 2011, 76) wherein the principal, as a 'borderlander,' advocates for the legitimacy of language difference and

diversity as strength. The important role of school leaders is therefore worthy of further attention in educational research, in language planning and policy efforts, and also in discussions about the preparation of administrators in the USA and elsewhere.

Moreover, the responsibilities of school leaders in schools serving emergent bilinguals differ from those of other school leaders, as they must be prepared to make informed decisions about educating these students. Our research uncovers how many principals and/or other key administrators do not have the preparation they need to design and implement programming for the emergent bilinguals in their buildings. Therefore, as a starting point, we suggest here that leaders of schools serving emergent bilinguals receive specialized preparation to educate this student population.

Specifically, a practical implication of our findings is that the dearth of prepared principals in this area can be rectified through changes to state certification and licensure requirements. Because New York, like most states within the USA as well as other places around the world, has no specific requirements for principals to have formally studied TESOL or bilingual education, we recommend that the state mandate at the very least a course about bilingual education and bilingualism for all administrator licenses it issues to principals, assistant principals, and school supervisors. We extend this recommendation to the USA as a whole, in light of changing national demographics indicating one in four children is from an immigrant family and comes from a home where a language other than English is spoken; accordingly, all educators should expect to serve an emergent bilingual at some point in their career (Samson and Collins 2012). In addition, school systems need to seek creative ways to work with principals who are already certified and offer them the preparation their job demands. Moreover, as our findings demonstrate, school leaders need to be better prepared to educate emergent bilinguals and make decisions that will so greatly impact these students. While adding to certification requirements may not be enough to altogether reverse the loss of bilingual education programs, we are confident that this policy change would make a positive contribution toward improving schooling for emergent bilinguals.

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Notes

1. We use here García's (2009) term 'emergent bilingual' in lieu of 'English language learner' (ELL), the term commonly used in New York and other states. Both terms describe students who come from homes where a language other than English is spoken and who are entitled to receive language support services (either bilingual education or ESL) based on their scores on a statewide English language proficiency test. However, we prefer 'emergent bilinguals,' because it serves as a reminder that in adding English to their linguistic repertoire these students are becoming bilingual or multilingual, and thus English is not the sole linguistic outcome.
2. We suspect that this is an underestimate, as the linguistic categories are large (e.g., 'Chinese' and 'French Creole' are categories, each of which includes numerous languages and varieties).
3. For further information about bilingual education in New York City, including more detailed demographics, see the special issue of *The International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* guest edited by Menken (2011) entitled 'Bilingual Education in New York City.'

4. Although the incorporation of students' home languages in instruction is encouraged for all programming options, including ESL (García 2009), the medium of instruction of ESL classes is typically English only.
5. Specifically, local policies mandate that principals provide at least one of the following program models for their emergent bilinguals: 'free-standing ESL,' 'dual language bilingual education,' and/or 'transitional bilingual education' (see Menken and Solorza 2014 for a detailed description of current New York policies for emergent bilinguals).
6. Given our assumption that readers of *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* are familiar with the literature, we have excluded in our review a description of the strong research base demonstrating numerous advantages of bilingual education. Were we remiss in doing so, however, we suggest readers turn to the following citations as a starting point: Baker (2011), Bialystok (2007), Cummins (2000), Goldenberg (2008), Krashen and McField (2005), Rolstad, Mahoney, and Glass (2005), and Thomas and Collier (2002).
7. Each school in the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) must report information about their students officially designated 'English language learners' into the Automate the Schools' Bilingual Education Student Information Survey (BESIS). The list we received is based on analyses of BESIS data conducted by the NYCDOE.
8. None of the schools on the NYCDOE's list are in Staten Island. This is not surprising, given that Staten Island has far fewer emergent bilinguals than other boroughs, as emergent bilinguals only comprise 5.7% of the total student population there (New York City Department of Education 2013).
9. This small school was eligible for inclusion in our article because it is one of several new small schools created when a large high school was broken apart due to the city's 'small schools movement.' As detailed in Menken and Solorza (2014), like many similar schools across the city, this large high school used to house a very well-developed bilingual education program with many course options and an extremely large number of bilingual students enrolled, whereas none of the new small schools created after its closure and housed within the same building now provide bilingual education.
10. Some larger city schools have assistant principals focused on the education of emergent bilinguals, whereas others have teacher supervisors or teacher leaders who guide the instruction of emergent bilinguals.
11. Teachers were included to deepen our understandings of the effects of these recent policy changes. They provided a much needed perspective regarding the impact of school-based language policies on students, curriculum, and practice.
12. *Chutzpah* is a Yiddish word that means both 'audacity' and 'insolence' (though it does not have an exact translation into English). The word has made its way into mainstream New York English due to the city's large Jewish population.
13. DOE is the acronym for the Department of Education.

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