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Exploring Instructional Practices in a Spanish/English Bilingual Classroom Through *Sitios y Lenguas* and *Testimonio*

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Abstract Drawing from Chicana feminist perspectives and Pérez (Living Chicana theory. Third Woman Press, Berkeley, pp 87–101, 1998) theories of *sitios y lenguas* (space and discourses) the authors reposition understandings of teaching and learning through a qualitative case study of a first grade Spanish/English bilingual classroom. Through analysis of field notes, interviews, and the teacher's *testimonio*, the authors examine how *sitios y lenguas* functions as a tool to identify ways that home languages and cultural backgrounds are valued resources for learning in one bilingual classroom. Findings show how theorizing classroom spaces (*sitios*) and the interchange of languages (*lenguas*) counters hegemonic discourses by providing a narrative that reclaims knowledge production of bilingual and bicultural communities (Anzaldúa in Borderlands/La frontera: the new mestizo. Aunt Lute Press, San Francisco, 1987; Darder in Latinos and education: a critical reader. Routledge, New York, pp 331–350, 1997; Villenas in Chicana/Latina education in everyday life: feminista perspectives on pedagogy and epistemology. State University Press, New York, pp 1–10, 2006).

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> I came to this country as an adult and brought with me a perfectly good language that I used to communicate with lots of people in my country of origin. When I first came, although I intellectually knew that in the U.S. people used another language, pretty soon it hit me, and hit me really hard,

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that if I wanted to access particular kinds of information, like presidential debates on TV, labels on packaged food, neighborly talk, news on the paper or conversations over the phone, I had to learn English. Did I think that I had to forget Spanish to speak English? No. That was a crazy proposition. I only had Spanish. If I threw that away I would have been left with nothing. I would have been looking at people moving their lips, listening to their nonsensical blabbing with an anxious feeling of frustration and impotence in my heart due to my inability to understand what was being said around me.
Carolina, excerpt from *Testimonio*

In this excerpt from Carolina's (pseudonyms are used for all names of participants, schools, and school districts) *testimonio* on being a Spanish/English bilingual education teacher, the notion of replacing one's primary language to acquire English was unfathomable, yet this notion continues to be an expectation for emergent bilinguals in the United States (Faltis 2013). Research has demonstrated that maintaining and developing students' home languages in school does not have a detrimental effect on their acquisition of English (Lutz 2006; Rumbaut et al. 2006; Tran 2010) however bilingualism and bilingual education are perceived and positioned as threats to English language acquisition and the integration of Latinas/os into the United States (Ruiz 1984). These perceptions, rooted in our national history and dominant ideologies regarding the superiority of English (Delgado-Bernal 1998; Bartolomé 2008), contribute to the double standard that values the foreign language learning of English speakers while devaluing the linguistic abilities of Latinas/os (García 2015).

Latina/o students in U.S. schools are considered one of the most vulnerable groups in terms of academic attainment (Gándara and Hopkins 2010; López et al. 2015). Across proficiency levels in English, the educational experiences of Latina/o students continue to be shaped by restrictive language policies (Menken and Solorza 2014) and curricular mandates that deny them access to their culture, language, and history throughout their academic lives. This article provides an alternative approach to understanding the education of emergent bilingual students (García et al. 2008) by utilizing Pérez' (1998) theoretical construct of *sitios y lenguas* [sites and discourses] to examine one Spanish/English bilingual education classroom. *Sitios y lenguas* expands our ability to identify the ways one teacher's instructional pedagogy builds on students' cultural and linguistic knowledge. In addition to classroom observations, we draw on the teacher's *testimonio* to further our understanding of interaction and learning in this classroom.

The purpose of this study was to understand the pedagogical and epistemological constructs in a Spanish–English bilingual education early elementary classroom through theories of *sitios y lenguas* (Pérez 1998) and to explore children's construction of knowledge across their developing languages. The primary research question guiding the study asked: What are the ways that *sitios y lenguas* emerged in this first grade bilingual classroom? Secondary questions include: What are the ways that young children identify, share, and build on their cultural and linguistic knowledge within *sitios*? What are the ways the teacher draws on students' developing bilingual expertise, *lenguas* and cultural backgrounds in her interactions with and instruction of her students?

This study adds to the field of bilingual education by providing an in-depth account of the relationship between teacher beliefs, pedagogy and elementary students' knowledge production. Specifically, it explores how bilingualism, language use and instructional practices promote engagement, inquiry, and language development. Examining the mechanisms that support learning highlight the effectiveness and possibilities in bilingual classrooms beyond language of instruction or program model (Slavin and Cheung 2003). This study also extends current research on Latina/o students in U.S. schools that draw on Chicana feminist theories to understand elementary contexts (Saavedra 2011). We argue that this theoretical construct promotes new insights regarding the structures and dynamics that impact schooling for Latina/o students.

Through discussions of their experiences within the U.S., Chicana/Latina scholars demonstrate the significant contributions to the understandings of Latina/o identity formation via Chicana feminist perspectives (Alarcón 1988; Anzaldúa 1987; Elenes 1997). These identities are constructed by stories that explain experiences and shape the way that people develop worldviews via historical, political and economic conditions, interrelated with race, gender, class and sexuality (Flores 2000; Latina Feminist Group 2001; Moraga 1983). In other words, by engaging their culture and language with intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality, Chicana feminists have politically defined a space for their own knowledge production (Córdova 1998; Delgado-Bernal 1998). In the next section we discuss how we access this theorizing for a deeper examination of language practices, cultural knowledge, and learning in a first grade bilingual classroom.

Chicana Feminist Perspectives and *Sitios y Lenguas*

Utilizing a Chicana feminist framework, we employ *sitios y lenguas* to reposition the voices of bilingual students and identify how students' home language(s) and ways of knowing converge and diverge from school discourses and expectations regarding knowledge and language. Pérez (1998) called for marginalized groups to claim their own spaces and languages: *sitios y lenguas* as a theoretical practice demonstrates how hybrid identities emerge, change and transform within discursive, metaphorical, and physical spaces. *Sitios y lenguas* challenges deficit descriptions of bilingual children's knowledge and language by (re)positioning their voices and experiences as viable forms of knowledge production (Hurtado 1998, 2003; Pérez 1998). The decolonization of students' experiences in schools is a necessary response to the ideologies and goals of assimilation that are deeply embedded in the history of public schooling in the United States (Spring 2012).

Assimilationist mechanisms, such as allowing only English in schools, were utilized to eradicate the languages and cultures of students and promote Americanization (Burdick-Will and Gómez 2006; Deyhle and Swisher 1997; Moll and Ruiz 2002; Sánchez 2002). Although educators and activists continue to fight for the preservation of languages and cultures from subordinated groups throughout the twenty-first century (Crawford 2007; San Miguel 2004), learning English remains the central goal of bilingual programs since the inception of the Bilingual

Education Act of 1968, a compensatory program that defined bilinguals as limited English proficient. While the Bilingual Education Act did not mandate English as the primary language of instruction for bilingual students, the lack of specificity regarding the use of students' home languages, particularly Spanish, positioned English learning as a problem that schools were forced to address (Gándara et al. 2004; Ruiz 1984). The passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in (2001) marked the end of the Bilingual Education Act and re-established an explicit focus on English through accountability measures conducted in English, replacement of the term bilingual with English language acquisition in federal documents, and annual assessments of English language proficiency (García et al. 2008; Menken 2010). This focus on English promoted the view that bilingual education programs were detrimental to the rapid assimilation of Latina/o students into U.S. social structure.

This complexity is indicative of schooling as a site of struggle, "where the broader relations of power, domination, and authority are played out" (Grande 2008, p. 236). Misperceptions and misunderstandings continue to exist regarding bilingual education program goals regardless of research that has shown that maintenance of the home language does not have a negative effect on students' English language acquisition (Lutz 2006; Rumbaut et al. 2006; Slavin and Cheung 2003; Tran 2010). Research studies have shown that additive models of bilingual education that strive to maintain students' home languages while learning English throughout the primary grades, (i.e. two-way immersion) are the most effective in promoting academic achievement and bilingualism (Collier and Thomas 2004; Diaz-Rico and Weed 2010; Lindholm-Leary 2001; López et al. 2015; Nieto 2001; Thomas and Collier 2002).

Chicana feminist scholars have produced theories to understand the education of Latinas/os and validate their knowledge production based on our lived experience and perspectives (Delgado Bernal et al. 2009). As a decolonial tool, *sitios y lenguas* resists hegemonic discourses (Hurtado 1998, 2003; Pérez 1998, 1999) such as English monolingualism (Delgado-Bernal 2001). This occurs through the identification of discourses that reposition Latinas/os voices and the locations that we inhabit, while also recognizing contexts that do not aim to erase biculturalism or distort Latina/o political identities as deficit historical representations. This identification and understanding re-centers marginalized voices and allows for the complexity in how Chicanas-Latinas/os use their languages and cultural knowledge for identity formation (Flores 2000).

We argue that *sitios y lenguas* as a decolonial tool and a site of struggle can exist within bilingual classrooms where *sitio*s are constructed as spaces that empower the student to become the subject and creator of their own knowledge. In these *sitios,* students' *lenguas* and bilingualism are cultivated and utilized as resources for such knowledge production. *Sitios* for bilingual students are critical spaces for building upon bicultural identities. As such, additive bilingual programs can become viable models for students to further develop cultural and linguistic knowledge. Identifying *sitios* led us to examine how instructional practices created opportunities for *lenguas* to emerge while *lenguas* reflected the ways in which the classroom participants engaged in counter narratives using their languages and voices to disrupt dehumanizing, distorted, and deficit associations of Latina/o students. This resulted in a greater understanding of knowledge production and the complex ways students'

languages and language varieties enabled them to communicate, learn, and create their own understandings. *Sitios y lenguas* as a theoretical lens re-conceptualizes the learning of bilingual children and the pedagogical practices of bilingual teachers.

Chicana Feminist Perspectives and Educational Research

Chicana feminist educational researchers have utilized *sitios y lenguas* as a framework from which to produce educational scholarship (De los Ríos 2013; Delgado Bernal et al. 2009). More importantly, Chicana feminist theories illuminate the ways in which marginalized students negotiate discursive, metaphorical and physical boundaries. In other words, they provide understandings of boundaries, physical or symbolic, that differentiate people into racial, economic, cultural and linguistic categories (Delgado Bernal et al. 2009). In the following sections we provide an overview of the literature that explores the education of Latina/o students and research that draws on *sitios y lenguas* and Chicana feminisms in educational contexts (Burstein and Montaño 2011; De los Ríos 2013; Delgado Bernal et al. 2009).

A study of first year Latina/o undergraduates conducted by Delgado Bernal et al. (2009) examined students' experiences navigating a largely white institution of higher education. The participants took part in a yearlong ethnic studies course, which involved mentoring Latina/o elementary students enrolled in a Spanish/English dual-immersion program. A Chicana feminist analysis of the undergraduates' learning illustrated the ways *sitios y lenguas* functioned as a powerful lens to understand knowledge production. Analysis showed the ethnic studies course served as a *sitio*, a critical space where the Latina/o students could explore their racial, cultural, linguistic, and economic positions within the institution. *Lenguas* [discourse] came in the form of challenging normative discourses around race, class, gender, and sexuality, social and educational equity. Both Spanish and English were used in the mentoring of the Latina/o elementary students to challenge dominant ideologies that held English as the only mode of communicating knowledge. Additionally, the mentorship of Latina/o elementary students by first-generation Latina/o college students nourished the university students' own connectedness to the Latina/o community. The authors challenge higher education institutions to create *sitios y lenguas*, or spaces of cross-cultural dialogue, to enhance our abilities to engage and participate in a pluralistic democratic society (Hurtado 1998, 2003).

In a recent study, De los Ríos (2013) examined the experiences of high school students in a yearlong Chicana/o-Latina/o Studies course. She found that public schooling has been used as a tool for "Americanization" by limiting what ethnic studies courses recover, such as the counter historical narratives, perspectives, and epistemologies of the marginalized. Findings also indicated that the eleventh and twelfth grade students' participation functioned as *sitios*, discursive spaces created within the Chicana/o-Latina/o studies course where intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality and power were examined along with an historical analysis of the

self-determination of Chicana/o and Latina/o communities. *Lenguas* referred to the discourses around race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship status, in particular, their normative influences, which were discussed and challenged. De los Rios shows how the ethnic studies course and classroom space provided students with a better understanding of their hybrid identities and an awareness of how colonialism affects Chicanas/os and Latinas/os today. Students were able to "talk back" to repressive structures (i.e. racism and sexism) and "become stronger" in dealing with these issues at home and society at large (p. 68). In addition, through their dialogue they developed a sense of commitment to their community, which entailed their active participation in reimagining their daily lives and actions that "humanize, uplift, and honor others" (p. 70). Findings indicated that the course had a profound effect on students' sociopolitical and ethnic identities and sense of social responsibility demonstrating a need for a "humanizing effort" in re-conceptualizing the education of Chicanas/Latinas/os in the U.S. (p. 59).

In addition to contributions to educational research through examining student voice and engagement, Chicana feminist scholarship has guided research studies examining teachers' beliefs. Burstein and Montaño (2011) utilized Chicana feminist thought in their study of six veteran Chicana/Latina teachers and found that the teachers' commitment to teach Latina/o children stemmed from their political identities. Their classrooms were sites of learning where political and cultural productions of teaching and learning were challenged to transform the education of Latina/o students. The study used *testimonio*, personal stories that evoked their experiences challenging racism, sexism and oppression (Cruz 2012; Latina Feminist Group 2001; Pérez Huber 2009). Their experiences as Chicanas/Latinas provided the ideological clarity (Bartolomé 2008) that maintained their dedication to activism through teaching. The following factors further supported teacher activism: social networks, a Chicana and activist identity, shared commitment to students, and establishing friendships and *compadrazgo,* the co-parenting relationship that exists between parents and Godparents (Claeys and Muñoz 2014), with younger Chicana/Latina teachers. Teacher activism, in turn, informed their decisions to teach history and cultural heritage as well as to advocate for students.

Prieto (2013) utilized paired (auto)biographical dialogues (P(A)BDs), a process that allowed study participants to share their life stories through dialogue that was not directed by the researcher, and oral (her)story interviews to collect the *testimonios* of two bilingual education teachers. Through analysis of the *testimonios* of two Latina teachers, Prieto found four primary themes that informed the participants' work as *maestras,* bilingual educators who are engaged and committed to the social, cultural and academic development of their students. The themes Prieto identified were essential to becoming *maestras*; culture, language, *familismo* [honoring family and familial relations] and *sobrevivencia* [survival and self-sufficiency]. These interconnected themes reflected the *maestras'* development of a perspective that Prieto refers to as "*una conciencia con compromiso*—a process by which they understand, nurture, and develop their commitment to community" (p. 171). Prieto's study highlights how this process supported the *maestras'* increased awareness of their own perspectives and abilities to navigate the gendered and racialized spaces that silenced their voices and devalued their experiences.

Guardia Jackson's (2006) narrative inquiry of Luz, a Mexican–American bilingual education teacher, identified the significance of lived experiences for bilingual teachers' identity development. Informed by scholarship on figured worlds (Holland et al. 1998) and funds of knowledge (González et al. 1995; Vélez-Ibañez and Greenberg 1992), Guardia Jackson's analysis of in-depth ethnographic interviews led to the identification of how Luz's cultural and linguistic knowledge functioned as a source of motivation and a tool for navigating the daily realities of bilingual education and shaping her perspective on educational equity. Luz's commitment to supporting her students' Spanish language development was rooted in the positive feelings she held from learning and speaking Spanish at home along with the recognition that her Spanish language skills were valued in her schooling. Her deep understanding of the significance of the cultural knowledge of her students enabled her to enact a caring pedagogy (Valenzuela 1999). She was able to connect with students and families through a shared understanding of what it meant to be *bien educado,* well mannered, able to behave appropriately for a given context, show respect, and represent one's family in a positive manner (Guardia Jackson 2006; Valenzuela 1999).

Research on bilingual teachers' beliefs has shown the ways Latina/o teachers draw on their lived experiences with language and schooling to inform their work with Latina/o students. Sánchez and Ek's (2009) qualitative study on pre-service bilingual teachers' views related to immigration indicated that the pre-service teachers' lived experiences and identities as immigrants functioned as funds of knowledge (González et al. 1995; Vélez-Ibañez and Greenberg 1992). Which informed their understanding about immigration. While their personal experiences with immigration assisted them in navigating anti-immigration rhetoric, they lacked confidence to address the issues surrounding immigration with students due to uncertainty surrounding immigration laws. Sánchez and Ek (2009) emphasized the importance of providing coursework that enables pre-service teachers to reflect on the knowledge rooted in their lived experiences. As the work of bilingual teachers goes beyond the teaching of content, coursework should also contribute to the development of ideological and political clarity (Bartolomé 2008) and knowledge of students' rights related to immigration. This study illustrated the importance of pre-service teacher training to prepare bilingual teachers able to work towards creating safe and equitable learning environments for immigrant children amidst an anti-immigrant reform context.

Building on the scholarship presented above, we use *sitios y lenguas* as a framework to examine the ways in which *sitios* were established for bilingual students to engage in critical discussions where their cultural and linguistic experiences functioned as resources for learning. Through Carolina's *testimonio* we can see how a teachers' ideological clarity (Bartolomé 2008) is intricately connected to *sitios* that support emergent bilingual students' navigation of language learning and accessing of *lenguas* to make sense of challenging topics that have real implications in their lives (Sánchez and Ek 2009).

Instructional Practices in a First Grade Spanish/English Bilingual Classroom

Spanish/English Transitional Bilingual Education Program

The study took place in a mid-sized urban community in the Midwest with a growing native Spanish speaking population. Emergent bilinguals in the school district represented several language groups: Korean, Mandarin, French, Vietnamese, and Q'anjob'al with Spanish speakers representing the greatest number. The study took place during the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 school years. In year one of the study, 74.3 % of the student population for the school district was identified as low income and 13.5 % as limited English proficient. In year two, 81.1 % of students were identified as low income, 30 % as limited English proficient.

In response to the state requirement of a bilingual education programs when there were more than 20 students from same language group in a school district, a Spanish/English transitional bilingual education program (TBE) was implemented 10 years prior to the start of the study at one of the 11 elementary schools. The model for the transitional bilingual education program followed was designed to provide Spanish speaking emergent bilinguals with content instruction in Spanish from kindergarten to the third grade with increasing amounts of English instruction each year. All Spanish-speaking students in the school district who were identified as English learners were eligible for the TBE program. Students were identified by a home language survey and English language proficiency assessment screener administered when they entered the school district. Students who met the state requirements for English language proficiency based on the state approved English language proficiency assessment—were not eligible.

Although the program model specified Spanish instruction through the third grade, the underlying goal was to exit students from the bilingual program as early as possible. This meant that a greater percentage of English instruction was introduced in second grade and by third grade instruction was primarily in English. The increase in the amount of English instruction was related to the annual standardized testing that began in third grade. The state mandated standardized assessments were in English, so a prevalent sentiment in the school was that English language instruction needed to be increased to prepare emergent bilinguals for the tests.

Participants

The study was conducted in one first grade bilingual classroom across two academic years. Carolina, who self-identified as Latina, was the bilingual teacher for both academic years and a participant in the study. In year one, Carolina, and twenty-one of her twenty-two emergent bilingual students were the primary participants, as one student had recently arrived to the country and his parents did not want him to participate. Of the participants, 15 were girls, six were boys and 18 students were of

Mexican descent. Three students were of Guatemalan descent and had three languages spoken in their homes Q'anjob'al, Spanish and English. All of the student participants varied in their knowledge and use of English (Solano-Flores and Trumbull 2008). Secondary participants included the bilingual reading support teacher and the second grade teacher. In year two of the study, Carolina and her 24 students, all participated. There were six girls and 18 boys, 21 of them were of Mexican descent. Four students came from Guatemalan, Colombian, Peruvian and Puerto Rican backgrounds respectively. There was a range in English and Spanish proficiency, but all participants in year two were emergent bilinguals. Secondary participants included the teaching assistant and 13 sets of parents who participated due to their interest in being interviewed and availability.

Data Collection

This qualitative case study (Denzin and Lincoln 2003; Dyson and Genishi 2005) was conducted during the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 academic years. Drawing on ethnographic methods and Chicana/Latina feminisms (Villenas 1996, 2001), this case study examined the particular experiences of a Latina bilingual teacher and her bilingual/bicultural Latina/o students. The study responds to the question posed by Delgado-Bernal (1998) regarding "who generates an understanding of [Latinas/os] experiences, and how [their] knowledge is legitimized or not legitimized" (p. 560). This research addresses methodological, political and ethical issues in the study of early childhood education (Calderón et al. 2012; Delgado-Bernal 1998, 2001).

The primary data sources included: (1) descriptive field notes of classroom observations (Bogdan and Biklen 2003; Emerson et al. 1995) and (2) semi-structured and structured interviews (Merriam 2009). Secondary data sources included classroom artifacts consisting of student writing, still photos of classroom displays and reflective field notes (Bogdan and Biklen 2003). In the first academic year, Christina engaged in participant observation two to three times a week for approximately 1–3 h per visit, resulting in 64 observations. In the 2012–2013 academic year, Gabriela conducted observations three to four times a week for periods of 3–6 h, resulting in 77 observations.

Across the study, Carolina provided clarification and insight through weekly conversations. In year one of the study Carolina was interviewed through a semi-structured format (Merriam 2009) at the beginning and end of the study. In addition to the weekly conversations Carolina provided information on instruction and learning through five unstructured interviews across the school year. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students who were selected based on availability and interest in discussing their learning and experiences in first grade.

In year two of the study, 13 parent interviews were conducted; three semi-structured interviews with the teacher; one semi-structured interview with the teaching assistant and one semi-structured interview with both the teacher and teaching assistant. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim noting key events and occurrences relevant to the research questions (Dyson and Genishi 2005). Informal conversations with the classroom teacher continued throughout data analysis to provide insight and clarification in order to complete

missing elements in the analysis (Spradley 1980). For the purposes of this paper, we focus on the following primary data sources: field notes, transcriptions of audio recordings of classroom observations, interviews with Carolina, the classroom teacher, along with her *testimonio*.

Testimonio

While discussions with Carolina informed our sense-making across the course of the study, we felt *testimonio* offered a way to position the practitioner's voice alongside the research, furthering our collective understanding into students' language use and knowledge production as well as the instructional practices that honor *sitios y lenguas. Testimonio,* originally from Latin America, is a genre of personal narrative that is shared by a member of subordinated group directly or through a witness or person who can bring their *testimonio* to a wider audience. Through *testimonios,* individuals recount their experiences with oppression as a way of countering dominant narratives or perspectives, shedding light on injustices, and connecting with others who have endured similar challenges (Beverly 2005; Cruz 2012; Latina Feminist Group 2001; Yudice 1985). *Testimonio* has been adopted by Chicana feminists and used as a method of storytelling, sharing of one's own story to express personal experience from a marginalized space (Latina Feminist Group 2001; Saavedra 2011). According to Elenes (2000) *testimonio* is situated knowledge, in which universal perspectives of the subject are contested by centering the voices of the oppressed. We draw from Chicana feminist perspectives, Chicana feminist ethnography, and *testimonio* to explore students' learning and *lenguas* in a bilingual classroom (Delgado Bernal et al. 2012; Pérez Huber 2009; Prieto and Villenas 2012).

Researcher Positionality

We share a commitment to deepen our understanding of bilingualism and learning and for each of us bilingualism and schooling is a central part of our lives. The first author spoke Spanish as her home language as a child and learned English in school. In kindergarten, first and second grades she was in bilingual classrooms and received literacy instruction in Spanish. The second author grew up speaking Portuguese and English and had taught in Spanish/English bilingual programs for 10 years prior to becoming an assistant professor. The third author grew up in South America, spoke Spanish as her primary language, and learned English as an adult. She was an experienced elementary teacher in the community where the study took place and sought out opportunities to expand her knowledge. These connections and commonalities informed the qualitative study of Carolina's first grade classroom. While discussions with Carolina supported our sense making across the course of the study, *testimonio* positioned her voice alongside that of the researchers, providing further insight into students' language use and knowledge production.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began by identifying "key events" that aligned with the research questions (Dyson and Genishi 2005, p. 48), the conceptual framework of *sitios y lenguas*, and our collective cultural intuition (Delgado-Bernal 1998). Delgado Bernal's cultural intuition derived from Strauss and Corbin's "theoretical sensitivity," which implicated that ethnographers, for instance, "can come to the research situation with varying degrees of sensitivity depending on one's previous reading and expertise with or relevant to the data" (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 41) However, Delgado Bernal's cultural intuition extends the notion of theoretical sensitivity based on "personal experience to include collective experience and community memory, and points to the importance of participants' engaging in the analysis of data" (pp. 563–564).

Each source of data (i.e. field notes, interview transcripts) was examined by the research team (Merriam 2009) to identify ways that students' funds of knowledge (Vélez-Ibañez and Greenberg 1992) and home languages were used during instruction, in their knowledge production, and sharing of knowledge. From the identification of key events, several categories emerged: lived experience, family knowledge, popular culture, and social issues such as immigration and spirituality. After identifying categories, we re-examined key events to detect patterns in interactions and language use among all participants as well as the specific instructional practices the teacher used during the key event (LeCompte and Schensul 1999; Mertens 2010). We reviewed the categories and patterns individually and then shared with Carolina to ensure accuracy (Merriam 2009; Villenas 1996). The primary themes that emerged through data analysis were Disrupting language separation: Creating *sitios* for critical thinkers and knowers and *¡Maestra, yo sí se* [Teacher, I know!]: *Lenguas* and student knowledge production. We begin the following section with Carolina's *testimonio* to show the consciousness that allowed for *sitios y lenguas* and then discuss these findings, along with excerpts from her *testimonio* to show how *sitios y lenguas* were enacted in this bilingual classroom.

Creating *Sitios* and Accessing *Lenguas*

Testimonio: Becoming a Bilingual Teacher

Through Carolina's *testimonio* on becoming a bilingual teacher the underlying beliefs that established a foundation for *sitios y lenguas* in this bilingual classroom become visible, as does the critical consciousness (Freire 1970) necessary to create *sitios* within school settings that devalue students' *lenguas* in the name of curriculum, English language acquisition, and accountability. Carolina's thinking, as described in her *testimonio,* informed our sense making of *sitios y lenguas* by bringing forth her understanding of the process and cognitive benefits of language learning and critical awareness of how school-based programs and practices are shaped by deficit thinking and lack of value for bilingualism. In the initial excerpt at

the opening of this article, Carolina described how the thought of replacing Spanish with English was an illogical and unacceptable option for her. In the next section of her *testimonio* she discussed the approaches she experimented with as she began to learn English:

> Instead, I tried using Spanish and what I knew about the world in order to navigate in my new home. I looked for words that looked alike in both Spanish and English (cognates). I tried adding "a's" and "o's" to the ends of English words to see if they became Spanish words. I tried guessing what others might be saying according to the context of the conversation [and the paralinguistic features used]. …I tried mimicking English speech by saying Spanish words with an English accent. It was hard. English speaking people were in such a hurry when they talked. They fused words together making them a long train of indistinguishable sounds.

In the above excerpt from her *testimonio*, Carolina described the challenges she experienced trying to learn English and the strategies she used to communicate as a newcomer to the United States. Identifying cognates, searching for contextual clues, and shifting her pronunciation of words provided varying levels of support to communicate with others. As a teacher, these strategies became part of the practices she used to develop her first grade students' English and Spanish language skills. The strategies were often introduced in connection with students' own knowledge production as a way to help students see how what they knew in one language could help them when using the other language (DeNicolo 2014).

What was common sense for Carolina as a language learner and teacher countered prevalent discourse regarding the English language acquisition of emergent bilinguals. In another excerpt from her *testimonio*, Carolina illustrated how the language attitudes that position bilingualism as detrimental to English language learning fail to reflect the reality of bilingual and multilingual communities.

> People use what they know to make sense of new situations and experiences. However, when I sent my children to school in New York and California, I frequently got the advice "Stop, using Spanish with them," "They are going to get confused," "Speak English to them so they will become English speakers faster and do well in school."
> At that time, I was confused. "Was it really true that Spanish will slow down or impede my children's educational development?" "Was knowing another language going to hinder their ability to learn English and do well in school?"
> I had always believed that knowing more than one language was an advantage. I had known people who could speak, read and write in more than one language. In particular, my grandfathers could speak some Russian, and read and write Yiddish and Spanish. Many of my neighbors spoke Italian and Spanish (Or English, or German).

The awareness of the need to maintain and provide students with opportunities to develop their Spanish language skills was accompanied by an understanding of how language instruction and support was positioned in schools. The stigma attached to Spanish/English bilingualism and bilingual programs that were rooted in deficit

perspectives regarding the knowledge of Latina/o English learners, became evident to her as a mother:

> I got even more frightened when I understood the subliminal message behind "They are ESL students, they need help; they need special classes." At first, I thought that it was very lucky for my children to get extra help. However, soon enough my daughter and I got the hidden message: they were not "regular" students, they needed "special classes" they belonged to the "at-risk" group of students. What was I supposed to do to help my children? I did not want them to feel "less" than others. How could I help them understand that "different" was not "bad" but just "different" and may be "good"?

The questions that arose as Carolina began to understand the need for ESL along with the beliefs that accompanied the compensatory approach to linguistic diversity, stayed with her as a teacher. She consistently raised questions regarding the effectiveness and rationale for the bilingual program in her school district. This awareness and discomfort led to an intentionality in her teaching in direct response to the deficit views that she and her children had encountered in schools. Her intentionality to not devalue students or their languages and cultures was evident in the ways she organized her classroom and interacted with students. We found that Carolina's intentionality, along with her recognition of how language and culture are integral to learning led to the creation of *sitios* and students' use of their *lenguas* in her classroom.

Data analysis enabled us to see the specific instructional practices that Carolina implemented that supported the construction of *sitios* in this bilingual classroom as spaces where students' *lenguas* and bilingualism were cultivated and accessed for learning. Students' *lenguas* were the languages and voices that were accepted as viable mediums for learning, self-expression, and thinking in this classroom. We discuss the construction of *sitios* and use of *lenguas* through the primary themes that emerged through data analysis, along with connections from Carolina's *testimonio* to illustrate how her lived experiences and beliefs informed her practice (Sánchez and Ek 2009).

Disrupting Language Separation: Creating *Sitios* for Critical Thinkers and Knowers

We identified *sitios* as discursive spaces defined by the norms and practices that structured the discourse and participation of the members of this classroom community. We found these to differ from common forms of school based communication as instructional interactions in elementary classrooms tend to be organized based on the content area being taught and center on a curricular objective. In transitional bilingual education programs and other models of bilingual education it is common for each language to be used for distinct content areas or time periods. We found that the way talk was structured in Carolina's classroom created *sitios* that encouraged students to communicate their knowledge and understandings through their developing languages of Spanish and English. Through *sitios* students explored their individual and collective sense making of

the topics being discussed within and beyond the scheduled time for the related content area. The norms that Carolina communicated to students and that structured *sitios* reflected her understanding of the language acquisition process and the ways that emergent bilinguals and multilinguals benefit from hearing and using the languages they are learning. She communicated these norms and practices through her language choices, responses to students, and the opportunities she provided for students to talk about their thoughts and experiences across lessons.

S*itios,* in this classroom, did not solely represent a way of organizing instruction but a space created by specific ways of interacting, inviting participation, and using language. Through this space students' *lenguas* were received with care and appreciation. In examining how this occurred we identified four practices that led to the creation of *sitios*: use of translanguaging for learning; building collective understanding; valuing prior knowledge; and considering multiple approaches for solving problems. For the purpose of this article, we will focus on the first of these practices to demonstrate the interconnected nature of *sitios* and *lenguas*.

The first of these norms and practices; use of translanguaging (García 2009) for learning, meant that although the school districts' TBE program designated Spanish as the language of instruction for content instruction, Carolina positioned both Spanish and English languages as valid for participation in small and whole group activities as well as codeswitching between both languages. While some students came from homes where Q'anjob'al was also spoken, it was not common for them to use Q'anjob'al in the classroom, possibly due to lack of proficiency or difficulties forming linguistic connections between Q'anjob'al and Spanish. Disrupting language separation communicated a deep value for *lenguas,* normalized the use of more than one language for learning, and the uniqueness of each individuals' linguistic knowledge and opinions. This practice honored students' *lenguas* as a foundation for learning and a point of departure for building conceptual understandings. Through the following excerpt from Carolina's *testimonio* the intentionality behind her language choices becomes evident:

> Being a bilingual class, an important part of the instruction is in Spanish. I can use this language in which the majority of my students are proficient, to discuss hard concepts and promote critical thinking skills. In addition, I promote learning English. I introduce specific vocabulary, discuss cognates, and present grammatical features of the English language. I read books and share poems in English, and write a daily message in English every other day. …In my class, we understand that language is a resource useful for communication. Therefore, many times the choice of language depends on the activity.

In the above excerpt, Carolina explained how Spanish and English are central to teaching students academic content and that language use is context dependent. The example below is from a class discussion following the daily message, a short letter written by Carolinato the class that was read and discussed each morning. Spanish and English were used interchangeably to support students' understanding of academic content and learning of new vocabulary.

| Carolina | …and then it says here this word here, and I bet you don't know this word here but they use it a lot, forecast. |
| Elias | Forecast, what's that? |

Carolina: Forecast means …what they predict. You remember when you read you predict what is going to happen at the end? Well the weather people, the meteorologists like to predict, *les encanta predicir como va ser el clima* [they love to predict what the weather will be]. *¿Por qué ustedes piensan … que es importante predecir?* [Why do you all think … it is important to predict?] Predict what the climate is going to be, [the] weather? Why is this important to predict what the weather is going to be?

Tomás: *¿Porque, qué tal si tu vas al trabajo. y….es como que va caer nieve y tu ya no vas a llegar al trabajo?* [Because, what if you go to work, and it's like it is going to snow and you are no longer going to get to work?]

Carolina: *Claro si dicen, si dicen,* [Of course, if they say if they say] if they say that there is going to be a lot of snow like a … big storm, maybe, maybe instead of going to work I have to stay home okay or maybe if they say it is going to rain I am to take what so I don't get wet?

| Students | *¡Paraguas!* [Umbrella] |

Carolina: Yeah, I am going to have to take an umbrella with me and I am … I am not going to take my jacket with me because it is going to be like fifty today… so that is why …they have to forecast [to know] what the weather is going to be like, yeah.

In the above example, Carolina engaged in translanguaging, using Spanish and English to explain the meaning of the term forecast. Translanguaging refers to the way that bilinguals use their multiple languages to communicate and create meaning (García 2009). Through translanguaging, Carolina encouraged students to form connections with what they knew in other subject areas and what they had experienced in their own lives. By using Spanish and English and encouraging students to think of examples from their own lives, Carolina created a *sitio* which in turn engaged the students in problem posing (Freire 1970) and communicated to them that their *lenguas* were valued. The discussion practices of using both languages and forming connections enabled students to see the role their *lenguas* played in their collective knowledge production.

¡Maestra, yo si se! [Teacher, I know!]: *Lenguas* and Student Knowledge Production

Lenguas refers to the ways in which the classroom participants used their languages and voices as tools for learning, self-expression, and thinking. Looking at *sitios* and *lenguas* enables us to recognize the counternarratives that disrupt dehumanizing, distorted and deficit associations of Latina/o students. Carolina cultivated students' *lenguas*: primary languages, language varieties, and home knowledge as the medium and as an essential tool for learning academic content in her classroom.

There were four ways students' languages and voices were present in the classroom: (1) accessing home knowledge; (2) demonstrating alternative ways of knowing; (3) responding to questions; and (4) showing their understanding of linguistic structures through connections. We focus here on how Carolina accessed student's home knowledge to promote student's *lenguas.* Classroom examples and excerpts from Carolina's *testimonio* show the relationship between her beliefs about teaching, learning and the co-construction of *lenguas.*

Lenguas emerged in this classroom through Carolina's approach to inquiry-based learning where she encouraged students to examine their personal beliefs and thinking through questions. This was particularly evident during the daily read-alouds. This literacy event followed a similar process each day, the read-alouds began with the introduction of the text (i.e. title, author, illustrator), an explanation of the genre (i.e. fiction, non-fiction) and a picture walk that invited students to share their predictions of what the story might be about (Lane and Wright 2007). The manner in which Carolina used read-alouds created a critical space for students' cultural and linguistic knowledge to guide their learning. The transcript analysis of the read-alouds (in English and Spanish) indicated how Carolina modeled critical thinking by generating questions or alternative possibilities to explain a particular idea or phenomenon. She did not simply reaffirm what students knew, but helped them develop a schema in which to think further about a topic that was raised in connection to the reading. As these patterns of questioning were documented we began to identify ways in which Carolina went beyond text comprehension questions to ask critical questions that were relevant to their lives as Latina/o children.

Asking and answering questions was also a way for students to use their *lenguas* (language) to express their experience as Latinas/os. One aspect of their *lenguas* was the knowledge they developed at home. Carolina used *cuestionar,* a process of generating questions, to guide students to talk about what they knew from home. The questions led students to reflect and form critical connections with the topic at hand. Analysis of these moments showed that when critical connections with personal experiences occurred students' *lenguas* emerged, they voiced their beliefs and understandings. Through this process, Carolina provided an array of alternative ideas for students to consider when discussing home knowledge to further examine their own beliefs and understandings:

> What people bring to learning situations is important since learning means adding, changing, rejecting, or expanding ideas or concepts they already have. Learning does not happen in a vacuum. Learning happens to people who have had experiences and interactions that have shaped who they are, what they know, and how they feel.

Through her *testimonio* excerpt above, Carolina described her beliefs about learning, illustrating why she made time for students to form connections with their lived experiences. In the classroom excerpt below Carolina facilitated a discussion where she utilized the form of questioning, *cuestionar*, to engage students in their *lenguas* after a read aloud. Carolina had read an English text titled, Grace for President, (DiPucchio 2008) that recounts the experiences of a young African American girl who upon discovering that no girls had been class president, decided

to run for the position herself. Carolina began the discussion by asking students if they knew what was going to occur on November 6, 2012 and students responded that Obama was going to fight. This interpretation of an upcoming election led to a discussion of different meanings for fighting, such as debating. Without the teacher asking, students began to voice their preferred candidate for the U.S. presidency and the rationale behind their choices, as seen below:

Damian	*¿Maestra?* [Teacher?]
Carolina	*¿Damian?*
Damian	*Yo quiero que gane Obama para que mi familia no se vaya a México* [I want Obama to win, so that my family doesn't have to go to Mexico
Carolina	*¿Qué tiene que ver Obama con que usted y su familia se vayan a México?* [What does Obama have to do with you and your family going to Mexico?]
Damian	*Va perder y la migra va venir y se va llevar a mi familia* [He is going to lose and immigration is going to come and take my family.]
Student	*¿Pero si gana?* [But, if he wins?]
Damian	*Nos toca vivir aqui* [We get to stay here.]

Carolina used *cuestionar* by asking: "What does Obama have to do with you and your family going to Mexico?" This led the first-grade bilingual students to use their *lenguas*, drawing on what they had learned from their families and from their lived experiences about immigration and deportation. The students had developed an understanding in their homes and communities of the complexity of undocumented status and the importance of discussing social issues. This is an example of how within *sitios* students were invited to form connections with home knowledge and engage *lenguas* even when the topic did not appear to be culturally relevant. Earlier in the year, students had discussed an immigration raid that took place at a local Mexican grocery store. As was shown above, the possible repercussions of *la migra* for undocumented, immigrant families has material implications for them. Carolina mediated discussions where these real and serious issues were raised. Within these *sitios* students engaged with each other in creating understanding about the material realities that constructed their identities as children of immigrants. She used their home knowledge as a foundation for formulating new ideas and questions to understand their experiences and would often direct them to continue researching a topic by sharing their thoughts and class discussions with parents or by visiting the library for additional information.

Forming Critical Connections Through *Sitios y Lenguas*

By creating critical spaces and encouraging emerging bilingual and trilingual Latina/o students to take part in sharing their thoughts, understandings, and prior knowledge, the students' experiences became part of the content for classroom learning. Engaging in this way allowed students to form critical connections

between school learning and home knowledge. Taking a common practice such as read-alouds, the teacher supported students' critical thinking and academic development through using students' experiences as the means for learning new content. Central to the co-constructed space was Carolina's perspective on young learners. Similar to Godinez' (2006) concept of *pensadoras,* Carolina viewed her students as *pensadores*, critical thinkers, knowers and problem solvers. She communicated her respect to them through her listening and her use of the formal you—*usted,* as seen in the transcript segment above. This excerpt from her *testimonio* demonstrates this further:

> I try to listen to my students when they offer opinions or comments. In this way I learn what they bring to the learning event. Afterwards, I reflect on what to do to help them reach the next level of complexity. Then, I expand or offer alternatives to students' ideas.

Carolina's desire to listen to her students, as she expressed above, was central to the creation of *sitios*. Our findings indicate that students' recognized that their *lengua*s and opinions were important to their teacher. Carolina's beliefs were reflected in the classroom culture (Sánchez and Ek 2009) and students' use of their critical thinking abilities to show their knowledge and work towards collective understanding with their peers.

Sitios were constructed through practices that vary from U.S. upper middle class norms for interaction between adults and children (Zentella 2005) and school based patterns of communication (Cazden 2001; Gutiérrez 2008) where the teacher asks students known answer questions as an indicator of learning (Mehan 1979). In this classroom questions were posed as a bridge to allow students to form connections with prior knowledge and lived experiences. The acceptance of students' choice of language and language form for participating also differs from expectations for language use in bilingual educational programs as the separation of languages is often an approach used in different programs (Cummins 2007). These language practices supported *lenguas* and the formation of critical connections within *sitios* while also demonstrating that problems were something to be solved together through risks, attempts, interjections and collective learning. They did not occur accidentally but were an outcome of her teaching beliefs:

> There are no bad ideas or bad kids. There is an array of ideas and a multiple number of choices. I understand that my role as a teacher is to widen their horizons, presenting new ideas and alternative choices. And teaching children to choose according to their own beliefs with the understanding that they, themselves, are responsible for their own choices.

Carolina's perspective and enactment of beliefs functioned to disrupt the majoritarian narratives regarding knowledge and truth by positioning Spanish as a valuable resource and expressions of knowledge as natural and necessary for learning. Examining the talk in this classroom revealed the discursive nature of *sitios*, as they were established through the norms and practices for discussions. The dynamic created through interaction in these *sitios* reflected the ways of knowing and funds of knowledge common to Latina/o households (González et al. 1995) that

encourage participation, humor (Carrillo 2006) and honesty in promoting collective learning and understanding. In this classroom it was through *sitios* that *lenguas* were accessed, built upon and heard *con cariño* [with care and affection], *respeto* [honor and respect], and joy. This was evident in the excerpt of the students' discussion of how their status as immigrants would be impacted by the upcoming presidential election and the teacher's use of the formal you.

A central aim of this study was to identify how the theoretical tool of *sitios y lenguas,* a critical lens informed by Chicana feminist epistemologies, allowed us to understand the relationship between instructional practices and students' cultural and linguistic knowledge in a first grade classroom. This understanding enabled us to identify the structural components that shaped interaction and participation. Language practices such as translanguaging contributed to the creation of *sitios* where students expressed their *lenguas* and took risks with language as seen in the discussion of the meaning of the word 'forecast'. *Sitios y lenguas* as a theoretical tool can support teachers and future teachers in examining the relationship between teachers' understanding of students' lived realities and how they structure discourse and participation in their classrooms (Clark and Flores 2005). Through the application of *sitios y lenguas* to a bilingual classroom, we were able to see how the decisions and choices the teacher made positioned emergent bilingual students' voices at the center of learning.

Carolina's *testimonio* allowed us to see how her beliefs and lived experiences related to bilingualism and language learning informed the discursive practices she enacted in a consistent manner (Sánchez and Ek 2009) and contributed to the co-construction of *sitios y lenguas* in her classroom. Her ability to be critically reflective (Flores and Clark 2004) allowed her to maintain an awareness of her own knowledge and continually use dialogue to learn from and with her bilingual students. From this position of awareness she was able to situate herself in her *sitio* and work with her *lenguas* to question and challenge how school policies and practices positioned Latina/o students and failed to incorporate their various forms of knowledge as resources for learning. These findings reflect scholarship on the ways Latina/o bilingual teacher pedagogies are intricately linked to their lives as Latinas/os in the U.S. (Guardia Jackson 2006; Prieto 2013; Sánchez and Ek 2009).

This study demonstrates that while bilingual program models may purport one approach to language instruction, there may be a benefit to variation in the implementation based on local language practices (Nieto 2005). Additionally, these findings indicate that *sitios y lenguas* are created when teachers not only recognize the fluid and dynamic way bilinguals access languages for communication (García 2009) but reflect on their own perspectives and strive to understand the uniqueness and complexity of their students' lives (Wilson et al. 2014). These findings show that, like Carolina, individual teachers may possess knowledge of bilingual education pedagogy that surpasses the expectations put forth by programs models. Applying the theoretical tool of *sitios y lenguas* to the elementary classroom functions as a lens for identifying specific ways that *sitios* are created and *lenguas*, language practices and cultural knowledge, are accessed. This holds particular importance for urban schools that serve students' representative of a range of cultural backgrounds and home languages as additional approaches to supporting

students' in navigating the multiplicity of factors that impact their school learning are needed. Through *sitios y lenguas,* students can build on complex linguistic repertoires to share knowledge production and co-construct new understandings across their developing languages.

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