

# **Searching for Dignity through Antropoesía:**

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## **Centering the Voices of Minoritized Speakers in Language Education Research and Practice**

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**But how can I tell their story  
if I was not there?**

**Let them speak for themselves.**

**-Ariel Dorfman**

Antropoesía



Dignity

Teaching  
Research  
Representation



Gentrification

Immigration

English-Speakers

Bilingual  
Two-Way  
Immersion  
Program

Spanish-Speakers

*School-Choice*

*Immigrant Experiences*

# Immigration Experiences

## What we know...

- Latino immigrants face significant **structural inequalities** in the US - specifically along the dimensions of race, socioeconomic status, language, and documentation status (Olivos & Mendoza, 2009)
- Understanding this structural inequality is critical in schools that serve Latinx students;

# Immigration Experiences

And yet...

- **Deficit perspectives are common** in schools among educators, administrators, and other parents, with lack of visible participation from Latinx parents often misinterpreted as a lack of care or concern for education (Valencia, 2012; Valdés, 1996)

# Immigration Experiences

## What we know...

- We have a sense of the number of children in US schools who are either foreign-born or children of immigrant parents born outside of the US;
- We have a sense of which schools and school districts students attend;
- We understand that children will enter US schools needing instruction tailored to the needs of their emergent bilingualism;
- As a field, we understand how to support students' language and literacy development in a second language; and we know the kinds of dispositions needed from teachers to understand and teach bilingual students

# Immigration Experiences

**And yet...**

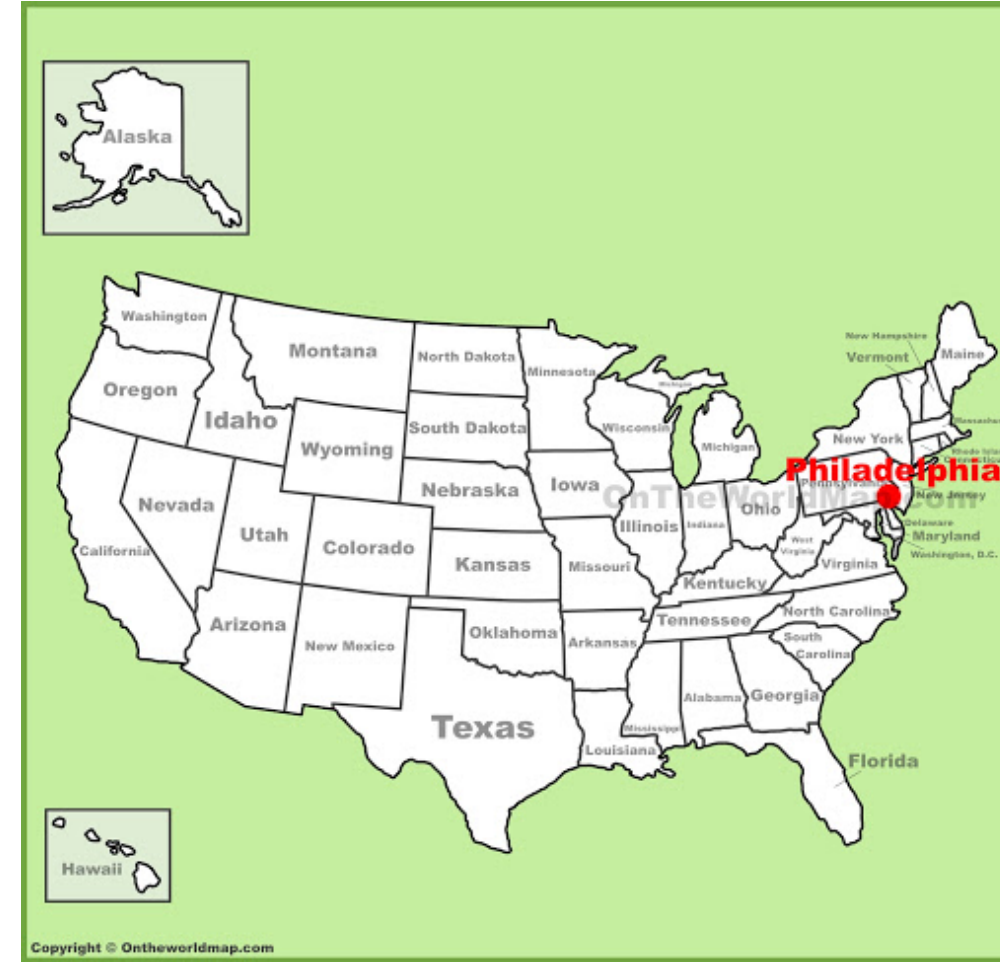
- We also know that a majority of teachers in the US might not be well prepared to meet bilingual students' needs (Lucas & Villegas, 2010);
- nor are they likely to understand the stressful experience of migration or how documentation status affects students and families (Gallo & Link, 2015; Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011)



# Research Questions

- What is the experience of families, parents and guardians of school-aged children, who are Latino immigrants?
- How do these experiences bear upon the education of students developing their bilingualism within a bilingual program?
- What implications do they hold for educators and educational systems?
- And as researchers, how best do we represent these experiences and advocate for change?

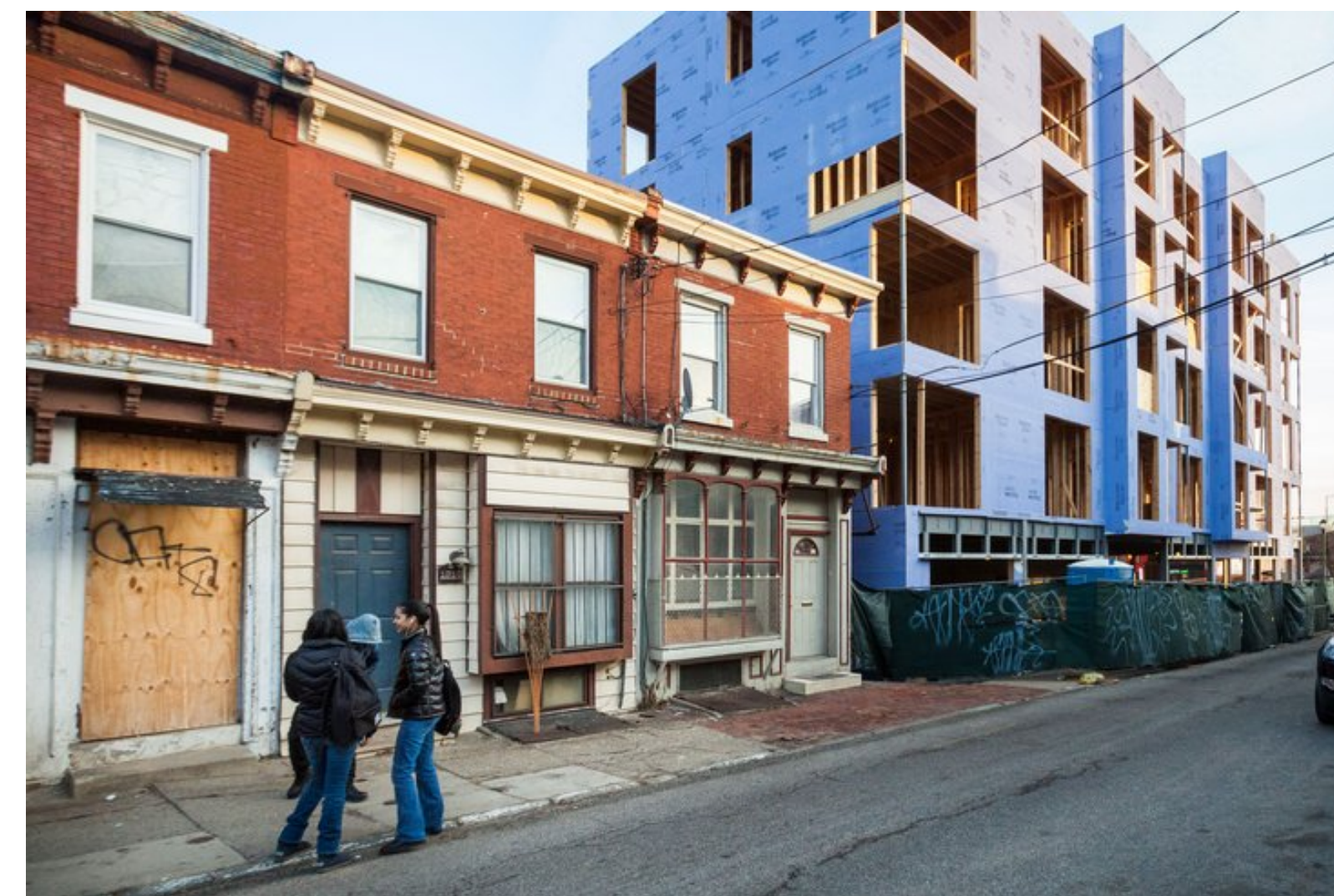
# Philadelphia



# Research Context

## Washington School

- K-8 public school in part of the city that was changing due to gentrification
- 43% of students in 2017-2018 labeled “English Language Learners” from Mandarin, Nepali, Indonesian, Vietnamese and Spanish linguistic backgrounds
- In 2014 started a Spanish-English TWI program with one cohort, and exclusively within the TWI program, there was a growing population of white students who come from households of college-educated parents



# Research Context

## Participants

- 1<sup>st</sup> cohort of kindergarten students in TWI program – 24 students
- 5 students were from English-speaking households – 4 of whom came from middle class households, college-educated parents in professional positions (e.g. non-profit director, software developer, lawyer)
- 19 students from Latinx Spanish-speaking households – from diverse countries of origin, including Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua and Venezuela, working in restaurant industry (kitchen cooks), as cleaners, or working in the home



# Research Methods

- 18 month ethnographic research study
- Participant-observation in the classroom, school & community events
- Audio & video recording in the classroom
- Informal and semi-structured interviews with parents, administrators and teachers
- **Data: 12 interviews with Latina mothers**



# **Antropoesía:** **A humanizing methodology**

# Poetry as inquiry

- Educational Research (Cahnmann, 2003)
- Anthropological ethnography (Maynard & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010; Rosaldo, 2018):
  - 1) as *ethnopoetics*, or the ethnography of oral poetics of others
  - 2) as poetic writing in ethnography, and as
  - 3) ethnographic poetry

# Poetry as method

Renato Rosaldo

- *Antropoesía* as "verse informed by an ethnographic sensibility" (p.105) and as a "process of discovery more than a confirmation of the already known" (p. 106).
- The process of antropoesía as that of ethnographic analysis: "Like an ethnographer, the antropoeta looks and looks, listens and listens, until she sees or hears what she did not apprehend at first" (p.107)
- The researcher does not use "participant's life to illustrate theory" but instead uses "theory to help us see more complexity in the life of the individual" (Wright, 2018, p. 464).

# Poetry as method

- As Wright states, poetry helps us "pause and deeply consider the words of participants" (p.464).
- Poetry "brings things closer, or into focus, or makes things palpable. It slows the action, the course of events to reveal depth of feeling and explore its character. It is a place to dwell...more than a space of quick assessment" (Rosaldo, p.105).

# The Poems

# Tú no sabes

Porque llego  
en un país extraño  
un país que

**tú no conoces**

**no sabes** ni donde están las calles

**no sabes** ni en donde vas a vivir

Es un lugar extraño donde uno **no conoce**  
Es como cuando van a empezar los niños en la escuela

**no sabes**

ni que escuela

ni como es por dentro

**ni sabes**

que es lo que tienes que hacer

Cuando ella empezó la escuela  
yo sufrí demasiado  
en el momento en que llega

**y no sabes**

ni hablar inglés.

# You don't know

Because I arrive  
in a strange country  
a country that

**you don't know**

**you don't know** where the streets are

**you don't know** where you will live

It is a strange place that **one does not know**  
It is when the children are starting school

**you don't know**

which school

nor how it is on the inside

**you don't know**

what it is you have to do

When she started school  
I suffered too much  
the moment comes

**and you don't know**

how to speak English.

# ¿Qué no entiendes?

Entonces yo fui ahí  
y me dijo la secretaria no,  
fui tres veces y me dijo no.

La verdad no fue nada amable  
la última vez me dice:  
*¿qué no entiendes?* dice

*hasta que tú no tengas tus papeles yo no te quiero ver otra  
vez aquí.*

# Don't you understand?

So then I went there  
and the secretary said no,  
I went three times and she said no.

The truth is she was not very polite  
the last time she says:  
*don't you understand?* she says

*until you have your papers I don't want to see you here again.*

# No entiendo tu inglés

Se lo voy a decir  
porque  
muchos papás  
se lo callan.

La secretaria  
siempre está en su teléfono  
en sus cosas.

Venimos  
y ella no hace el esfuerzo  
de entendernos un poco.

Siempre si no entiende,  
tenemos que esperar  
que llegue alguien  
que hable español u otro idioma.

# I don't understand your English

I'm going to tell you  
because  
many parents  
they keep it quiet.

The secretary  
she's always on her phone  
doing her things.

We come and  
she doesn't make an effort  
to understand us, not even a little.

Always if she doesn't understand,  
we have to wait  
so that someone comes  
who speaks Spanish or another language.

# No entiendo tu inglés

*Cont.*

Yo creo que ella  
como secretaria  
debería poner de su parte  
para entendernos un poco.

Decirnos:

"Habla un poco más despacio  
para que yo  
te entienda".

No hacernos lo que nos hace  
porque eso  
para mí  
viene siendo parte del racismo.

Decir:

**"No entiendo tu inglés  
hasta que no lo hables  
como hablo yo".**

# I don't understand your English

*Cont.*

I think that  
as the secretary  
she should make more of an effort  
to understand us, even a little.

Tell us:

"Speak a bit slower  
so I can understand you".

Not do what she does  
because that  
for me,  
is part of racism.

To say:

**"I don't understand your English  
until you speak it  
like me"**

## Pero aquí se habla inglés

Me gustó la idea de que tuviera dos idiomas.

Me encontré con otra persona,  
le compartí que  
mi hijo ahí estaba  
y no lo miraron bien.

También decían que:  
no, lo tienes que cambiar,  
porque aquí estamos en un país  
donde se habla el inglés,  
no se habla el español

## But here we speak English

I liked the idea that he have two languages.

I ran into a person  
with whom I shared  
that my son was in the program  
and they looked down upon it.

They also said,  
no, you have to change him  
because we are in a country  
where you speak English  
Spanish isn't spoken here

# Pero aquí se habla inglés

*Cont.*

Pero yo me cerré a esos comentarios  
y le dije a mi hijo  
¿sabes qué hijo?  
Échale ganas,  
échale ganas  
y vamos a demostrar  
de que no estamos equivocados

porque yo pensé en el futuro, no ahora.

Y su futuro yo sé que depende desde ahorita.

# But here we speak English

*Cont.*

But I didn't pay attention to those comments  
and I told my son  
you know what son?  
Do your best,  
do your best,  
and we will show them  
we are not mistaken

Because I thought about the future, not right now.

And his future I know depends on what we do now.

## Un poema en cuatro partes/ Yo se hablar ingles y español

I.

Entonces empezó el primer día de clases  
y él aprendió bastante,  
con la maestra le gustó  
y yo me sentía feliz  
porque me fui dando cuenta  
la importancia de ver a otros niños americanos  
queriendo aprender hablar español.

Entonces como que eso me motivó,  
me hizo sentir orgullosa y decir,  
no, yo quiero que él aprenda a hablar bien bien español.  
Y ahora, cada vez que lo escucho  
y él dice,  
yo sé hablar inglés y español  
eso me hace sentir feliz.

## A poem in four parts/ I know how to speak English and Spanish

I.

So then he started his first day of school  
and he learned a lot  
with the teacher he liked it  
and I felt happy  
because I started to notice  
the importance of seeing other children  
American children wanting to speak Spanish.

So then that motivated me,  
it made me feel proud and say,  
no, I want him to learn to speak good good  
Spanish  
and now, every time I hear him  
and he says,  
‘I know how to speak English and Spanish’  
that makes me feel happy.

Un poema en cuatro partes/  
Yo se hablar ingles y español

*Cont.*

II.  
Y cuando a él le dicen,  
¿tú hablas español?  
y el dice, sí.  
Eso también me hace feliz.

A poem in four parts/ I know how  
to speak English and Spanish

*Cont.*

II.  
And when they ask him,  
You speak Spanish?  
And he says, yes.  
That also makes me happy.

# Un poema en cuatro partes/ Yo se hablar ingles y español

*Cont.*

III.

Pero a veces la gente  
como le ve hablando mucho español,  
y lo ve hablando clarito  
siempre me preguntan  
¿y porqué no habla inglés?  
¿y porqué no le enseñan inglés?

y digo  
no, él sabe hablar inglés,  
pero cuando él esta con una persona  
que habla español  
él va a hablar español.

Es un poco molesto,  
que hay gente que  
piensa que debe enseñarles a los hijos más inglés  
y nos olvidamos de nuestra lengua.

# A poem in four parts/ I know how to speak English and Spanish

*Cont.*

III.

But sometimes people  
They see him speaking too much Spanish  
And they see him speaking clearly  
They always ask me,  
And why doesn't he speak English?  
Why don't you teach him English?

And I say  
No, he knows how to speak English  
But when he's with a person  
That speaks Spanish  
He's going to speak Spanish.

It is a bit bothersome  
That there's people that  
Think that we should teach our children more English  
And we forget our mother tongue.

# Un poema en cuatro partes/ Yo se hablar ingles y español

*Cont.*

IV.

Y enseñarle a él,  
el valor que tiene el ser hispanos. Eso.  
Y él se siente orgulloso de decir,  
yo soy americano,  
pero,  
soy ecuatoriano también.

Y a veces cuando le preguntan, ¿de dónde eres?  
Él dice, soy de Ecuador y de Estados Unidos.  
Eso me hace sentir orgullosa  
de que él sepa, que sus papás son de Ecuador  
y a él le haga sentirse orgulloso de eso también.

# A poem in four parts/ I know how to speak English and Spanish

*Cont.*

IV.

And to teach him,  
that, that, we...  
the value of what it means to be Hispanic. That.  
And he, he feels proud to say  
I am American, but I am also Ecuadorian.

And when they ask him, where are you from?  
He says, I am from Ecuador and from the United States  
That, that makes me feel proud  
that he knows that his parents are from Ecuador  
and that that makes him feel proud too.

# The poetry of Latina Immigrant Mothers

The struggle of not understanding the language or the institutions one is expected to navigate;  
the discriminatory experiences and encounters in attempting to do so;  
the English-only discourses that scare and pressure parents;  
the sadness of language loss;  
the hope- filled power of bilingualism and aspirations it brings;  
and the power and potential of a culturally sustaining bilingual education—all are invoked in these lines.

And indeed, to leave these human encounters and struggles under the umbrella code of “immigrant experiences” would be to miss the point entirely.

# Dignity

- “[D]espite its inherent and inalienable quality, dignity is a precarious social accomplishment” (Espinoza, Vossoughi, Rose, & Poza, 2020, p. 325-326)
- The experience of dignity is a social accomplishment that can be located in interaction and social space
- Educational dignity: "the multifaceted sense of a person's value generated via substantive intra- and inter-personal learning experiences that recognize and cultivate one's mind, humanity and potential."
- Dignity-affirming spaces, encounters, and interactions as those where ***one is seen and heard.***

# Dignity

- What does it mean to create **dignity-affirming spaces** for immigrant students and their parents and caregivers, who have sacrificed so much to be where they are?
- What does it mean, furthermore, to approach language education research and practice, with dignity as our guiding principle?
- How do we pay attention to the entire human experience while we attend to a portion of it, that which may be its most precious, that of its linguistic capacity for self-expression?

# No entiendo tu inglés

*Cont.*

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como secretaria  
debería poner de su parte  
para entendernos un poco.

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Not do what she does  
because that  
for me,  
is part of racism.

To say:

**"I don't understand your English  
until you speak it  
like me"**

# Implications for Educational Spaces

- Creating humanizing, dignity-affirming, multilingual spaces
  - This involves EVERYONE
  - This involves policies and practices for educators, administrators, and staff
    - and more importantly, the ethos and culture of a school/institution
- Centering the histories and experiences of multilingual immigrants
  - Creating space for languages and cultures, despite narratives and discourses on the importance of dominant languages

# Implications for Language Education Research

- Educational dignity: "the multifaceted sense of a person's value generated via substantive intra- and inter-personal learning experiences that recognize and cultivate one's mind, humanity and potential."
- Dignity in language educational research: Is the multifaceted sense of my participant's value and inherent dignity recognized during the research process? Is it evident in the way I choose to represent their experiences? Will they feel seen and heard in what I write and present? And more over, will others recognize their own humanity in them?

**While I am posing more questions that I can answer, I believe the place to start is to critically listen.**



Kiitos.

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