

From LEP to Academic: Reflections on My Twenty Years in Title VII

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Abstract

The genesis of Title VII brought about significant changes in how children from diverse language backgrounds were perceived and acknowledged by the American educational system. Prior to Title VII, linguistically diverse children were basically neglected by a system narrowly focused on a monocultural and monolingual method of schooling which allowed for no linguistic or cultural differences among its students. This article is a reflective endeavor aimed at highlighting how Title VII affected one individual who has been in the field of bilingual education for over twenty years. Beginning from the perspective of a LEP child and continuing through her professional life, the author traces the impact of Title VII on language minority education. This perspective is tempered by the experiences and reflections encountered along the way.

It must have been 1963 or 1964, and I remember sitting at the kitchen table with my mother. She is helping me with a writing assignment. We are both frustrated and tired as my father walks into the kitchen and happily announces that he has brought us several pencils that the local bread distributors have given him. The good old Butter Crust Company! Those checkered blue and white pencils with red letters are great because of one special feature—they have no edges. Yes, they are round. My mother promptly sharpens two and gives them to me. I take them gladly. She says that she will continue with the two yellow pencils and will save the other round ones for me. She tells me that the edges on the pencils do not bother her. I'm glad they don't bother her because the pain that those edges cause my middle finger is almost unbearable. The blister on my small middle finger where the pencils rest is swollen and painful to the touch. My mother tells me that happens because my hands are small—not big like hers.

We continue writing, holding two pencils at once so that we can finish faster. "How many lines today?" my father asks. "She only got 250," my mother answers. "Yes," I reply, "I only spoke 10 words of Spanish during the entire day at school." Our interaction continues in the only language spoken at home, Spanish. My mother and I continue writing the lines that have been indelibly stamped in my mind—"I will not speak Spanish in school."

I had only spoken ten words in Spanish. Little did my mother know that those were the only words that I had spoken at school during the entire day. She also didn't know how miserable I felt. Just ten words. I

remember thinking that no one should have to feel this way. However, writing lines was not as embarrassing as being spanked. What really hurt more than my fingers and backside, however, was seeing what the teacher did after I turned in my lines. The teacher counted the number of pages, 25 lines per page per word spoken in Spanish. Then he just tore them right down the middle and pitched them into the trash can without so much as a thought as to how much time, work, and physical and emotional pain this exercise had caused.

This indifference was easier to understand when my teachers were Anglo because they didn't speak or understand our language. But this teacher was like me—a Mexican American. I knew he spoke and understood the Spanish language. How could he do this without realizing what he was doing or who he was hurting? Had schooling been that easy for him in the third grade? I also think of the agonizing effort my mother had to make in attempting to make her handwriting look like mine. She did this only to spare me some pain. I knew that she understood how difficult it was for me not to speak in Spanish.

I remember playing with my cousins from Mexico and asking them if they had to write lines similar to mine when they spoke Spanish in school. They laughed at such an idea. I asked my mother why it was considered bad to speak Spanish at school and why I had to write lines. I told my mother I wanted to move to Mexico where I could speak Spanish anywhere just like my cousins did. She told me that I had been born in the United States and that I had to do what the teachers said. We should respect and not question the teacher's authority.

How many language minority children experienced incidents similar to mine? The unfortunate answer is probably "too many." This was Texas in the early 1960s before Title VII. This was a time when English-only was strictly enforced. From 1919 until 1969, the Texas legislature had made it a criminal offense to teach in any language other than English. Teachers could be indicted for speaking Spanish. It also was not uncommon for schools to punish children for speaking Spanish (Crawford, 1995). Many teachers were thus forced to adhere to a philosophical position of teaching that perhaps they did not necessarily believe in. One would think that even Mexican-American teachers would be put under tremendous pressure to "not speak Spanish" to children, although they may not have believed that speaking solely in English was a pedagogically ethical or humane thing to do to children. After all, one could not only be prosecuted for this offense, but a teacher could also be banished to some far away rural school that would certainly have little prestige to someone interested in climbing the educational ladder.

From 1976 to 1995, my professional life was ruled by Title VII and all of its intricacies. I worked as a Title VII third grade teacher and received a master's and doctorate through Title VII programs. Along the way, I was heavily involved in evaluating Title VII programs, teaching university

students in Title VII undergraduate and graduate programs, and being an administrator within a Title VII program of a large metropolitan school district with thirty-five languages represented. I was also an administrator within a Title VII Multifunctional Resource Center which serviced a five state region initially and later a nine state region. My experience has brought me directly in contact with many of Title VII program directors in fourteen states and all of the corresponding state directors of Title VII programs. Due to my physical appearance I was at times advised to be careful after work hours in small southern towns in order to avoid being picked up by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. I also had to exercise extreme caution when assigning consultants and topics in certain parts of our service area because the Klan was at times reported to be “very active.” Indeed, these twenty years have given me a very unique perspective on Title VII and the children and professionals involved.

It is hard to imagine that because of the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and specifically Title VI, discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin was prohibited in the operation of all federally-assisted programs (NCBE, 1995). Yet, I don’t remember any changes occurring in our classes or in the way our teachers conducted themselves. I was in the seventh grade when the Bilingual Education Act, Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1968, was signed into law. It established federal policy for bilingual education for economically disadvantaged language minority students; allocated funds for innovative programs; and recognized the unique educational disadvantages faced by non-English speaking students (NCBE, 1995).

The English immersion or “sink or swim” approach had by then left many scars on many of my classmates and me. Even in a Texas border town where the population was predominantly Mexican, the Anglo school system made us feel that speaking our language was wrong and that this language was inferior. We had been made to feel ashamed and embarrassed of our language, food, traditions, literature, culture, and sometimes, of our very own parents. The district’s curriculum and many of our teachers had not made an effort to recognize our culture in any of the reading materials, bulletin boards, or teachings. Respect was missing not only for the language minority student but also for our parents and the language minority community as a whole (Midobuche, 1999).

In 1974, the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols* was a victory for the rights of language minority children, ruling that providing the same educational experiences to all children (especially when some of these children did not understand the language of instruction) did not constitute equal education under the Civil Rights Act. It also ruled that school districts needed to take “affirmative steps” to overcome educational barriers faced by non-English speakers. Sink-or-swim was no longer acceptable (NCBE, 1995). However, most people (myself included), did not become aware of this court decision until much later. When I did, I felt this

wonderful feeling of release. Finally, I was being validated as a human being. In my naiveté I thought that no one else would ever be taught English with the sink-or-swim approach. Children would no longer be forced to suffer the indignity of writing lines for being human.

Toward the end of my bachelor's degree, the university began to offer courses in bilingual education. Not fully understanding what I was getting myself into, I was able to take two methods courses in bilingual education and I felt that I could not only relate to the material, but that I could also make a difference in children's education if I taught using this methodology. I graduated from college and began working in a Title VII self-contained bilingual classroom. Not knowing what the next day would bring, I can truly say that I had no idea of what the following twenty years would bring.

I discovered rather quickly that I was not really prepared to teach in a bilingual classroom. Yet, with a specialization in Spanish, the district believed that I was more than qualified. The first semester I felt overwhelmed. I was teaching content areas in Spanish and getting ready to transition some of these areas to English. I was also teaching ESL and individualized reading in English and in Spanish to thirty-six third graders. I could not believe the amount of planning that this effort took. We were all in this together, moving slowly and learning as we went. It was painstaking; yet, I could see that we were making a difference in these children's lives. I had never seen so many minority faculty working so feverishly toward a single goal. We were enjoying each other and helping to validate each other's existence. I kept thinking of how these children would someday make a difference because they would know and be proud of both languages.

During this first year of teaching I remember many visitors coming to my classroom. I was never informed ahead of time by the district, and I was usually only told that "these people are from Washington, and please answer their questions." This was most interesting because I most often did not know the answers to their questions (at least, not at that time). I remember one committee of about eight gentlemen who came to my room with the district superintendent and my building principal. They asked questions such as "How do you exit students from the bilingual program? What methods do you use? What materials . . . ?" I didn't know whether these people were from HEW, OCR, or the FBI. However, what most of us teachers discovered during this baptism by fire was that we needed professional development on the many facets and ways of educating the English language learner.

I asked specifically for this type of professional development after that particular visit. When asked the question about "exiting" students from the bilingual program, I responded with a question of my own. "Why," I asked, "would you want to exit children from a program that they really like and feel so comfortable in?" I continued telling visitors

that students “came alive in these [bilingual] settings.” I did not really understand the compensatory and transient nature of Title VII at that time. Many of my colleagues and I believed in maintaining the native language. One must remember that many of these teachers (myself included) had been LEP and knew firsthand the frustration and injustice of trying to succeed in a language that we did not understand. Title VII, and consequently our district, expected teachers to take control of classrooms with very little direction or preparation and to transition children to an all English curriculum in a very short period of time. I wasn’t sure how I was going to survive, but I knew that two basic courses in a new and radical methodology that few educators understood were not going to be anywhere near adequate preparation.

This was a time of stress for many bilingual teachers because it was the beginning of many attacks on the effectiveness of bilingual education. When Noel Epstein’s harsh criticism of bilingual education (1977) was immediately followed by the AIR Report of 1977-1978, many bilingual teachers found it difficult to explain why we were attempting to teach children bilingually. None of us had ever had a “foundations” class. We were not prepared to respond to these critics, and I felt personally that I needed more information and preparation. Little did I know that Title VII was about to come to my rescue in a big way.

During these early years (1974-1976), Texas was under quite a bit of scrutiny by the federal government. In the early 1970s, segregation was fairly routine in some parts of the state, and the lack of equal educational opportunity was still being challenged in *U.S. v. State of Texas* (Texas Education Agency, 1998). In late 1971, Judge William Wayne Justice ordered two south Texas school systems to consolidate and implement a comprehensive program of bilingual/bicultural education (Texas Education Agency, 1998). But where would the trained personnel come from to staff these programs? Most universities were doing very little in bilingual education at this time and had not developed teacher preparation programs. Clark (1990) writes that there were no “criteria nor competencies for bilingual education teachers, methodology, and much less a curriculum. Needless to say, there was not a faculty in place to develop the curriculum, conduct the research, develop the theories, nor do the training” (p. 364).

As part of my professional development, the district selected me to participate in the new Title VII master’s degree program. It was interesting because I had not applied for this program. However, I welcomed the opportunity not only because it paid for my tuition and books, but also because I felt that it would prepare me more thoroughly for what I was doing. Through this program I not only received my endorsement in bilingual education, but a master’s degree in Bilingual Bicultural Education as well. The coursework was taken locally and was offered by professors

who came from the main campus. However, during the summer many teachers would travel more than two hundred miles to the main campus in order to maximize the number of semester hours they could take.

Like many districts during that time, the district had a great need for bilingual teachers and yet, did not have a set of specific requirements in place. It did require a set of a Spanish proficiency examination of some sort. The Title VII program director came to my classroom one afternoon and asked me in Spanish to tell her about my bulletin board. After a couple of minutes, she informed me that I had just passed the Spanish Language Competency Test. I now wonder how many people were endorsed this way, especially since the director's proficiency in Spanish was not native. I certainly did not feel badly about this. After all, she had been asking me to translate reports for the superintendent's office that her department was responsible for translating. I had always thought that these translations were a part of my job not only because I was a native Spanish speaker, but also because I had a specialization in Spanish. Therefore, I felt honored at being asked to perform these translation duties without compensation. I also felt fortunate when I was selected as part of the cohort for the master's degree. It would include 36 hours of coursework in the field of bilingual/bicultural education. Most of my other colleagues were only taking a 12 semester hour endorsement.

The lack of formal preparation in the field of bilingual education was a concern for many educators at the time. With the 1974 reauthorization of the Bilingual Education Act, Congress required that funds be used exclusively for bilingual education programs which used the native language as the medium of instruction (Ambert and Meléndez, 1985). I was in this initial wave of teachers. Many of these teachers had been given waivers by their districts in return for agreeing to learn a new language and complete other certification requirements (Clark, 1990). As with most early and naive thinking in bilingual education, no one ever thought about how long it would take an adult to learn a second language.

In 1979, after several years of teaching and having already received my master's degree, I decided to enroll in a doctoral program. The institution that I finally selected and attended in Texas was the first in the nation to offer a doctoral program specifically in bilingual education. Again, I felt very lucky to be awarded a Title VII Fellowship from the U.S. Department of Education. In 1979, the national Title VII budget for the funding of training programs was \$20,513,305. The state of Texas received \$2,522,333 of that total (NCBE, 1996). My initial fellowship paid me approximately \$512 per month for nine months, and the amount, although very helpful, was not enough to prevent most of the fellows from working. Looking back, I believe that the amount of money that the Fellowships provided kept many talented and committed individuals in bilingual education from pursuing a doctorate. One of the fellowship requirements was that the recipient not work more than 25 percent of the time. It was

very difficult to be a full-time student and support a family and be restricted to the amount of time one could work. Most of the Title VII fellowship students worked and found ways to get around the 25 percent time restriction — one way or another.

In order to survive economically, I became part of an external evaluation team that evaluated many Title VII projects in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas. I also conducted numerous workshops and taught classes for the Title VII program at the university. This first-hand experience would serve me remarkably well in the future. As I reflect on those times, I remember walking into many classrooms where the students' native language was used, yet their culture still needed to be included and validated. It was somehow very important to me that these students' language and culture be reflected on bulletin boards and account for a large portion of the classroom's colorful walls. It would help these children avoid spending countless hours writing lines that had absolutely no meaning or value to anyone.

To understand how some of us felt about bilingual education during these early years, it is necessary to understand the impact of the Civil Rights movement on me and my generation of Mexican American colleagues. While diversity of opinion existed, many of us believed that education for Mexican American children was in an impoverished condition. Many of us had experienced the inequities of this educational system as children. Some of us went to the university with very lofty ideals about justice and equity through education. What we discovered was anything but equitable and just. Why would we want to continue a system of educational apartheid when we were in a position to struggle against it? To not address this particular issue would have been tantamount to a complete rejection of our cultural selves and our humanity. Most of us, and I in particular, could not do this.

The events in bilingual education during the 1970s included the Lau Supreme Court decision (1974), the implementation of the Lau Remedies in 1975 (Crawford, 1995), the Epstein criticism (1977), the AIR Report (1978), the reauthorization of Title VII in 1974 and again in 1978 (NCBE, 1995), and the tenacious scrutiny by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) for violations of children's language rights. All of this activism occurred at a time when I was just beginning to understand the meaning of bilingualism and bilingual education. After my Master's degree in 1978, and prior to my doctoral work in Texas, I had applied to and was accepted to a doctoral program in Early Childhood Education at a prestigious northeastern university. Here I was advised that I should study and learn Russian. At first I didn't understand why Spanish was not acceptable to my advisers and the program. Later, it became crystal clear. Again, what I had to offer wasn't acceptable. In essence, I was being told that Spanish was not acceptable or prestigious enough to be part of their doctoral program. It

was as if I was slipping and going backward in my attempts to be validated and become useful to my community. I felt that I was going to be assigned lines to write.

After some deep soul searching and introspection I returned to Texas and enrolled in the Bilingual-Bicultural Doctoral Program at Texas A&I University (now Texas A&M—Kingsville), in January of 1979. The date is significant only because of my age. I was only 23 years old at the time, but I considered myself a veteran of the classroom—with a master's degree to boot. I was really full of myself. I soon discovered, however, that through Title VII, I was about to learn who I truly was.

My first impression of the Title VII doctoral program was based on who my classmates were. I was in a cohort that consisted of approximately 35 students—of whom only 12 were Title VII fellows. These fellow students, who represented different stages of the program, were a real source of amazement for me. Of course, I was the youngest and least experienced. The group consisted of teachers who had been in education for twenty years or more, a high-level university administrator, consultants in the field of bilingual education, principals, curriculum directors, and other administrators who had much more experience than I. It could have been depressing, but I was very fortunate. My classmates turned out to be truly excellent human beings who accepted me and made me feel that I belonged.

My second impression of the doctoral program was the faculty, which included several members from the first faculty brought together to initiate this first doctoral bilingual education program in the nation. It included one of the first pioneers in bilingual education—Dr. Mario Benítez. Professor Benítez, the initial program director, was one of the first people in the entire country to recognize the need for a bilingual education professoriate. The expectations he held for us were the same expectations that we were supposed to hold for our own LEP students. He elevated the field of bilingual education to a status never before achieved. This resulted in the acknowledgment and validation of bilingual education as a legitimate field of university study.

Another professor who the students held in high esteem was Professor Rolando Hinojosa-Smith. Professor Hinojosa-Smith represented the validation of our Mexican American language and culture. As a recognized scholar and international author, Hinojosa-Smith made us believe that we had an extremely useful, wonderful, and expressive language of which we should be very proud. As a former LEP student, this represented the formal acceptance of my family, the community I came from, and my cultural identity. This professor made us aware of our responsibility to look back and help those who might be following in our footsteps. There was no way that any of us would ever forget where we came from after listening to Professor Hinojosa-Smith.

Also, there was Dr. Stanley Bittinger. At this stage in my professional development, I had convinced myself that one had to be Chicano in order to be a bilingual teacher. Then, while sitting in Dr. Bittinger's sociology class, he made a statement to the effect that you are not who you are because of what you look like, but instead, because of your attitudes and state of mind. In other words, he was saying that just because you were of a certain background or ethnicity, did not necessarily mean that you would have certain attitudes or behave in a pre-ordained manner. All of a sudden I was struck by the realization that if I could be freed of the stereotypes that I held, then others could also be liberated. It meant that non-Chicanos could also be impacted in this manner and could be effective teachers of LEP children—if they wanted to be. Because of my particular educational history, this realization had a profound effect on me.

I lived three years with these classmates and friends in the Title VII fellowship program. The bonds that were forged in those short years have lasted throughout my career. This group was so strong in its belief about what we were doing and how important the field was to all of us, that the focus was never on any one individual, but instead, on the group. There was a sharing of the type that I have never seen or since experienced in academia. However, it eventually came time for us to go out and tilt at windmills individually. We went out into the world to make a difference on our own.

In the fall of 1982, although I had not yet finished my dissertation, I accepted a teaching position at the University of Texas at El Paso, (UTEP). I was happy in El Paso. There were many people who looked like me, and the need to produce bilingual teachers was overwhelming. Our classes were huge, usually 50-60 students. Even our methods classes were of this size. My colleagues were very helpful in making the transition from student to contributing member of a university faculty an easy one. They were instrumental in giving me the support necessary to finish my degree. This was also my first internal view of university politics. I soon discovered that what I had learned from my professors at Texas A&I University was only the beginning of what I would have to learn in order to function at this level.

At UTEP, I was again involved in several Title VII projects. However, this time I was not the student. Suddenly, I found myself as the one responsible for certain learning and outcomes. I also encountered the first students who were more interested in the field of bilingual education as a "marketability strategy," as opposed to a dedicated vocation. Later, as the demand for more qualified bilingual teachers intensified, I discovered more of these types of students attempting to pass themselves off as committed teachers. These particular students were usually those studying English as a second language. They were not required to know a second language nor understand another culture. Usually, the community environment took care of culling out teachers who were not

committed to them. It would be difficult to survive as a teacher who did not value or respect the children of this border community. Those teachers who were truly committed to the needs of these children usually found success in the field. If this commitment was found to be lacking, we could only hope that they left the field quickly before negatively impacting too many lives.

One of the most frustrating professional experiences of my life was about to begin. Due to personal reasons, I reluctantly left the university and became an administrator within a large urban school district in one of the plains states. The majority of all LEP students in the district were Hispanic. Title VII was supposed to be seed money. However, in this district I never understood how money and services for LEP students were utilized and distributed. Some students and schools were served under Title VII and others were not. Much of what was happening was really a matter of internal politics and not concern for the needs of children. In all of my years of experience with Title VII, this was perhaps the most disturbing. I could not fathom how a district could continue to receive Title VII funding year after year and treat LEP students as if they were social outcasts.

District politics were eroding our ability to serve students in a positive manner. I saw that many of the district's policies were aimed at keeping the status quo of the district and not advocating or aiding children with specific language learning needs. In particular, it felt as if this school system was fomenting division among the various ethnic/linguistic groups. This was my first encounter with Asian students and their families. This was a personal positive experience for me. However, if I attempted to work with parents (a Title VII initiative), I was informed that I could not work with the Hispanic community in particular. I had to sit idly by as incompetent district officials made policy for LEP students, never once asking for input from the only professionally prepared bilingual educator in the entire administration. When I tried to offer my input, I was told that it was not my concern. I couldn't understand how or why educators could act so disrespectfully toward children and a community which they were expected to serve.

An example of the contempt which this particular district demonstrated for the minority community occurred on a cold and blustery winter day in 1988. The district had issued a school bulletin alerting parents that the start of school would be delayed the following morning due to severe weather conditions. This alert had come out during the 10 p.m. local news programs of the previous evening. Although teachers did not have to report for work until later in the morning, central administrative staff, such as myself, were required to adhere to our normal schedule. Therefore, I arrived for work, the blizzard notwithstanding. At approximately 9:30, I received a telephone call from a very concerned

Hispanic parent who informed me that she had her child and 10 other very cold and wet five year olds shivering in her kitchen. She wanted to know what had happened at school and what to do?

These eleven Hispanic kindergarten children were routinely picked up by a private van (the parents paid for this service) and taken to school because they lived just inside the district's two-mile boundary for busing purposes, and yet, the parents felt that they were still too young to walk almost two miles to school. Many of these children's parents worked early shifts and therefore were unable to shuttle the children themselves. On this day, the children (all Title VII children) were met at the entrance of the school by the principal. She informed them that school was closed and to come back later. The children were all LEP kindergartners and probably did not understand anything the principal told them. With the exception of one child, they did not know where home was or how to get home. So they began walking in the general direction of this child's home.

After informing the parent that the opening of school had been delayed (a message they never got because they did not speak English), I called the principal to inquire about the specifics of the situation. I was sure that the children had misunderstood the principal; after all, what educational leader would allow five-year-olds to wander the streets of the city without regard for their safety—not to mention the weather conditions. The principal informed me that she indeed had turned them away because school was closed. She also suggested that these children were not her responsibility because the closure had been announced the previous evening. To allow them into the school would have meant that she was taking responsibility for them. She added that there were others she had also turned away.

I could not believe what I was hearing. I explained the possible repercussions. Forget the legalities, what about the children's safety and welfare? She seemed unconcerned at first. However, when I informed her that perhaps some of the children might be missing, lost, or harmed, she quickly changed her attitude. She told me to call the parents, make an apology, and request that they bring the children back to school. I told her that perhaps it would be more appropriate if the apology came from her since I did not know how many children she had sent home, nor who they were. It would have been more appropriate for her to take the initiative and contact each parent herself, so that she could apologize and explain her actions to them.

The principal reminded me of the loyalty oath that I had signed for the district. She implied that I was encouraging these parents to consider legal action against her and the district. Little did she know that most of the parents were undocumented workers and the furthest thing from their minds was a lawsuit. The parent who had contacted me even refused to give me her name or the names of the other students. Although *Plyler v. Doe* (NCBE, 1995) had amply affirmed the educational rights of immigrant

children in U.S. public schools, these parents were unwilling to expose themselves to this type of scrutiny. No official complaint was ever made by the parents. However, out of concern for both children and school, I did file a report with my immediate supervisor. I was concerned for the safety of these children as well as those in other schools, along with the legal liability which the district could face. I also recommended that we find an alternative way of communicating with our non-English speaking parents when it came to school closures or other official actions by the school district.

The resolution of this problem and the response to my memorandum came at the district's annual awards dinner a few months later. As I sat eating my institutional dinner, I became nauseous when I heard this principal's name being announced as the recipient of the district's Principal of the Year Award. I literally wanted to be sick. This was an obvious and heartless disrespect for children, parents, the minority community, and human beings in general. It was difficult to swallow. I began to realize that this was the culminating experience for me in this district. I did not want to be a part of this system. I could not allow myself to become an accomplice to the systematic mistreatment of the children who not only reminded me of myself but who depended on us as educators for protection. I learned that some public schools still had a very long way to go in terms of respecting children. I also learned that these particular schools need more resources than other better equipped and staffed schools. Equity of resources truly means very little when some schools are so far behind.

I left the district when I was offered a position with the regional Title VII Bilingual Multifunctional Resource Center. I devoted seven years to this center and felt a tremendous satisfaction when we delivered educational services to districts, State Education Agencies (SEAs), educational organizations, and other universities. Over the course of these seven years, the center serviced a total of 14 midwestern and southern states. The primary objective of the center was to provide technical assistance to Title VII projects in our service area. During these seven years, our center provided literally thousands of workshops. The center was responsible for a multicultural, multilingual, and multi-faceted population of clients. Assistance was provided for Native Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Middle Easterners, and refugees from all over the world. The center staff also represented a diverse set of people, and we seemed to validate each other's experiences in education.

The center activities were often frenzied as staff members rushed from project to project to deliver services. At times it seemed like "Have Briefcase, Will Travel." The staff was always extremely busy. I eventually became the center's associate director. I was responsible for sending consultants into the field and coordinating all service contacts. As mentioned earlier, there were times when I would receive a telephone call

from an SEA director or school district requesting that I be careful about my choice of consultant for their scheduled workshop because of reported “Klan” activity. (While this is certainly true, there were many school districts which could fit into this profile just by the reception we were given.) Because one of the states in our service area had mandated training in multicultural education (with no money allocated), we were asked by many districts to inservice their faculty. Many times districts wanted us to come for a very minimal time such as one-half hour or forty-five minutes. Clearly these districts did not care about professional development in multicultural education. They seemed to care only about reporting to the state that they were in compliance with the requirements.

We developed our own policy and never conducted workshops for less than two hours. Other districts gave us auditorium-size classrooms with several teachers sitting in the “outfield” swearing that they could “read lips.” In situations like these, we simply refused to acknowledge that these ‘lip readers’ had been present. Still, other districts would show videos of one of our consultants (with the volume turned off), in the teachers’ lunchroom. In large measure, these types of receptions and reactions were indicative of how some people felt about having to be inserviced on “minority issues.” Yet, many districts welcomed us, and we developed excellent relationships with them. I was even able to return to my previous employer and do more as an outsider to help the children than when I had been on the inside and being asked to abide by a dubious loyalty oath. I often wondered to whom these educators gave their loyalty. In all of my university experience and at the center, we knew that our loyalty was to children and their particular educational needs.

Comprehensive educational reforms in 1994 changed how these centers and others were configured and how Title VII children were to be served (NCBE, 1995). Unfortunately, what some consider reform, others see as a reduction of scope and service. After the 1994 reforms were implemented, many of the larger school districts were given more money and expanded responsibilities. Smaller districts many times were left to fend for themselves. The centers were turned into very large “Comprehensive Centers” with a wider range and scope of activities and services. Bilingual education and Title VII were now no more than a small part of the focus as opposed to being the main attraction.

I left my insider’s role in Title VII in August of 1995. I am thankful to Title VII for what I was able to learn and for most of the people with whom I worked. As a student, I received assistance from Title VII, and as a professional I provided assistance. Title VII, with the right funding and management, can do many wonderful things for LEP children. In the wrong hands and without oversight, Title VII can be just another ineffective program that can actually cause more harm than good. All one has to do is look at how some of our school leaders treat Title VII students and parents (the very people they are charged with serving) and listen to

the political attacks on the field, based on half-baked notions of program inferiority—an inferiority often brought about by inept leaders and administrators. This abuse of clients and the unfounded attacks on programs aimed at bringing them into the mainstream, based on ethnocentrism and a lack of knowledge, only serve to hinder the schools' effectiveness with our most educationally needy students.

I wish I could say that the Civil Rights movement had the same impact on my non-minority colleagues, students, and educators in general. If this were so, I believe that the problems of LEP children today would be much less severe than what they are. Language minority and majority children alike would be enjoying the benefits of over 30 years of feverish research in bilingual education. All of these children would together be learning what many of us already know—that we can achieve almost anything if we believe in ourselves and are reinforced and supported in these beliefs by our parents, community, and teachers.

It is sometimes difficult to be understood by colleagues who have never experienced the capriciousness of a racist system. We have been accused of being liberal and self-serving destroyers of the American school system. These are terms that have been used in reference to many Mexican American educators who have struggled to change a system that has been so patently unfair to so many children. This sense of unfairness and injustice has fueled the passion that we feel for our profession. Only through education will our children be able to overcome the barriers to success. Programs such as Title VII, with enlightened leadership, can help to achieve the high expectations that we set for our students.

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