

*Explorando Juntos:*  
Exploring the Organic Intellectualism of  
(Im)migrant Students and Communities

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# My Talk Today

- (Im)migrants in Wisconsin
  - Why '(im)migrant'?
  - *Bilingual students* (or English Language Learners)
- English Language Learner Plan in Madison District
  - Racial & political dimensions
  - Competing perspectives & ideologies about education for (im)migrant students
- Research about students' critical perspectives, insights, & sensibilities
  - Sense making around circulating ideologies & discourses
  - Positioning themselves as social actors with agency and creativity
- *Explorando juntos*: ways to re-center (im)migrant students' experiences & voices as we explore collaboratively ways to meet their needs





# Organic Intellectualism

- Taken up and elaborated by educators and educational theorists to argue that *organic* intellectuals are essential to inciting equitable societal transformation
  - “All men [sic] are intellectuals” (Gramsci, 1971)
  - “Critical agents that serve as vehicles for **interrogating** emergent patterns of thought and action” particular around contradictions of lived experiences
    - For example, Campano, Ghiso, & Sánchez (2013) applied these ideas to their analysis of young African American students as **emerging organic intellectuals** who “critiqued common ideologies that devalued them, their school, and their city” to articulate “alternative vision of their community”

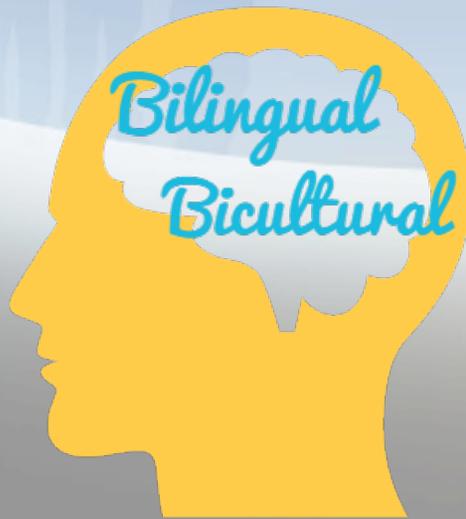
(Gramsci, 1971; see Apple, Au, & Gandin, 2009; Fischman & McLaren, 2005)



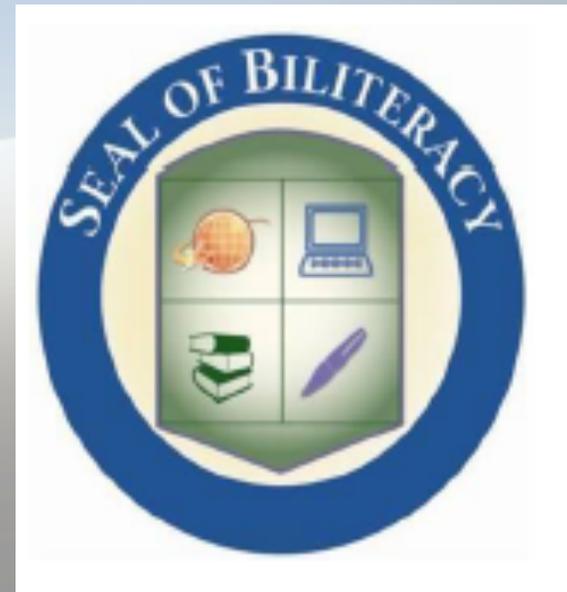
# Wisconsin

- 275,000 (im)migrants (5% of Wisconsinites)
  - (Im)migrant parents have U.S.-born children at a rate of 85%
- Anti-(im)migrant sentiment
  - 2007 compliance with federal Real ID, which requires “legal presence” for driver’s licenses and ID cards
  - 2009 in-state tuition for undocumented students repealed in 2011
  - Policies proposed in 2016
    - AB 450: ban on “sanctuary cities” (defeated)
    - SB 533: prevents local ID cards (passed)

# Bilingualism, Biculturalism, Biliteracy in WI



Bilingual-Bicultural Education  
(WI State Statute 115.95)



WI Seal of Biliteracy 2015



# Bilingual Education in Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD)

- Diverse (im)migrant and English Learner populations
  - Comprise almost 30% of student population; doubled in about 10 years
    - Spanish is home language for 60%; Hmong is home language for 10%
- Compensatory models
  - Try to 'fix' students
  - Goal is English & minimize value of home languages
  - E.g., transitional models
- Additive models
  - View students as bringing strengths, resources, assets to classrooms
  - Goal is bilingualism & biliteracy
  - E.g., Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs

# Background: DLI in Madison

Nuestro Mundo Community School

Madison, Wisconsin

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## About Us/Acerca de Nuestro Mundo



Nuestro Mundo is a [dual language](#) public charter school part of the Madison Metropolitan School District. We are located next to the Monona Public Library in Monona, WI.

The philosophy of NMCS's dual language immersion is to develop literacy in both languages, preparing students for success in an increasingly global economy, and to promote acceptance and understanding of cultural differences and strengths.

Currently, NMCS offers dual immersion education from kindergarten through fifth grade.

Students from throughout both the Madison Metropolitan & Monona Grove School District's are eligible to attend NMCS. Due to the unique circumstance that our building is located in Monona, both districts came to the agreement to allow 5 spots to be reserved for Monona/Cottage Grove Residents. Preference is also given to siblings & students within the Frank Allis/NMCS [attendance area](#). Don't know what attendance zone you reside in? [Find your school](#).

Typically, demand exceeds available openings, in which case, wait lists are developed.

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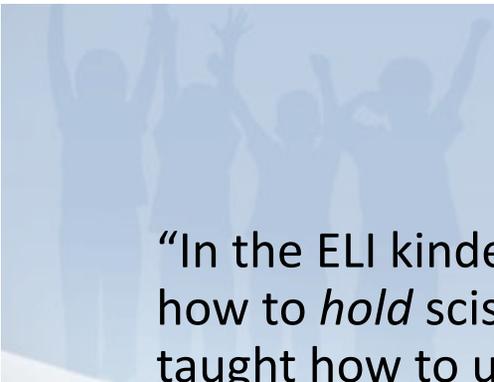
# English Language Learner (ELL) Plan

- Compliance with the Bilingual-Bicultural Statute
  - Expansion of bilingual program sites
    - Spanish and Hmong bilingual education programs
  - Increased diversity within dual language immersion programs
    - Increase participation of African American families
    - Better serve Hmong students

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# Issues that Emerged

1. Racialization of educational policies
2. Competition for (shrinking) resources
3. Varied discourses on equity & social justice
4. Link between language, culture, & identity
5. Segregation or 'strand schools'



# Sample Public Comment

“In the ELI kindergarten, Mary [co-teacher] and I are currently teaching children how to *hold* scissors and cut paper. In a DLI classroom, children don’t need to be taught how to use scissors and jump into their [art] project right away. This is one example of the general differences I see between ELI and DLI: the skills in ELI are *much* lower than DLI. When you watch the two groups of students, you see a *stark* difference that one can’t help but comment on. I also notice general behavior in ELI to be much more difficult than DLI. Some would say this is because DLI children are generally more quiet and they are the good kids who we recognize as quietly failing. I would say it’s because our ELI population is generally one of poverty and we know that poverty brings other issues that kids have to deal with within our classrooms, which brings with it behavior issues. Our DLI population is generally Spanish speaking *with* White families of privilege. In short, we have a segregated school. So, how do you expand a program—a wonderful program—without the creation of segregated schools?”

[[Public Comment](#)]

## ELI Classrooms

- African Americans, special education, non-Spanish speakers
- Children don't know how to hold scissors & cut paper
- Skills "*much* lower"
- Behavior "*much* more difficult"
- Poverty explains low skills & behavior problems

## DLI Classrooms

- Latino & White socioeconomically "privileged" families
- Children know how to hold scissors & cut paper, so can do art
- Higher skills
- Well-behaved and "quietly failing"
- Ethnicity & socioeconomic privilege explains high skills & good behavior



# Analysis of Public Comment

While segregation seemed to be concern, ELI classrooms were constructed as less desirable, based on particular ideologies

- Reified deficit perspectives
  - African American, special education, and non-Spanish speakers viewed as lacking and deficient
- Employed “readiness” model
  - Some can’t “*hold* scissors and cut paper” and so aren’t ready for school
- Advanced essentialist, monolithic views of race/ethnicity, class, culture, & language
  - Latinos are quiet, African American students misbehave
- Deployed a “culture of poverty” perspective
  - Poverty “bring other issues that kids have to deal with”



# Issue 1: Racialization of Educational Policies

- Emphasis on Spanish-English and Hmong-English bilingual programs
  - As benefiting Hispanic/Latino students and White students
  - As anti-African American and anti-special education students
- Constructions of “good” versus “problem” students along racial lines
- Ongoing acknowledgment that “I’m not a racist but...”

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## Issue 2: Competition for (Shrinking) Resources

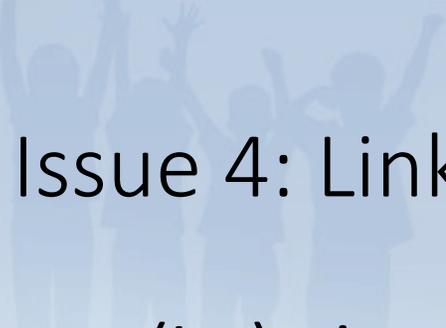
- DLI viewed as “taking resources away” from student sub-groups
  - African American students
  - Special Education students
  - Other non-English bi/multilingual students (aside from Spanish & Hmong)



## Issue 3: Varied Discourses on Equity

Depending on who was speaking, equity meant:

- Developing strategies to address white/non-white achievement gap
- Avoiding displacement of veteran English monolingual teachers
- Representing needs/concerns of students & families of color
  - “...Pause and halt DLI program at Thoreau Elementary [...] If you want to segregate classrooms by race, introducing a DLI strand will do this very effectively.”
  - One Latino community member noted, “I see a lot of parents here that are really advocating and speaking up about the needs of AA children but [...] I haven’t seen these same parents advocating for AA children [on other committees].”



## Issue 4: Link between Language, Culture, & Identity

- (Im)migrant students' languages and cultures viewed as assets and resources
  - Promotes ethnolinguistic pride and dignity
- Bilingualism, biliteracy, & biculturalism advantages in long term academic and professional lives

[[Hmong speaker](#)]



## Issue 5: Segregation and ‘Strand Schools’

- Viewed as divisive and threatened “school family” and “school community”
- Created structure of “haves” and “have-nots”
- Used to argue against DLI—but schoolwide program never proposed

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# Analysis of Discussions about Plan

- Dominance of white privilege and access rarely questioned
  - Highest achievement levels
  - Almost exclusive participation as English speakers in DLI programs
  - Interests continue to affect bilingual programs



...continued

## Structural and systemic issues ignored & left unresolved

- Societal disenfranchisement of oppressed groups reflected in district policies, programs, and practices
- Neighborhood and community racial segregation
- African American students disproportionately referred to special education, suspended, punished for behavior "problems," etc.
  - Disproportionate underrepresentation of students of color in Gifted & Talented Programs



# Re-centering Students

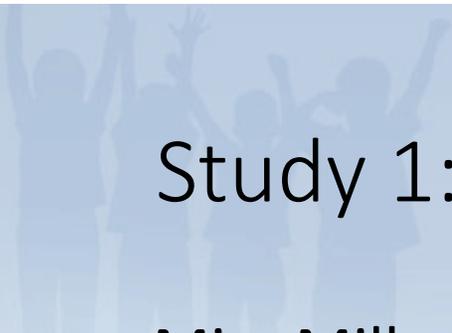
- Embody critical awareness of linguistic and cultural difference
- Reveal their exposure to competing ideologies about (im)migrants and the (im)migrant experience
- Actively engage in sense making—contesting, taking up, and linking—these ideologies
- Demonstrate understanding of oppressive discourses & structures
  - Privileging of English and English speakers
  - Anti-(im)migrant views
  - Devaluing of Spanish (and Spanish speakers)



# Organic Intellectualism

- Organic intellectuals essential to inciting equitable social transformation
  - “Critical agents that serve as vehicles for **interrogating** emergent patterns of thought and action” particular around contradictions of lived experiences
    - For example, *emerging organic intellectuals* (Campano, Ghiso, & Sánchez, 2013)

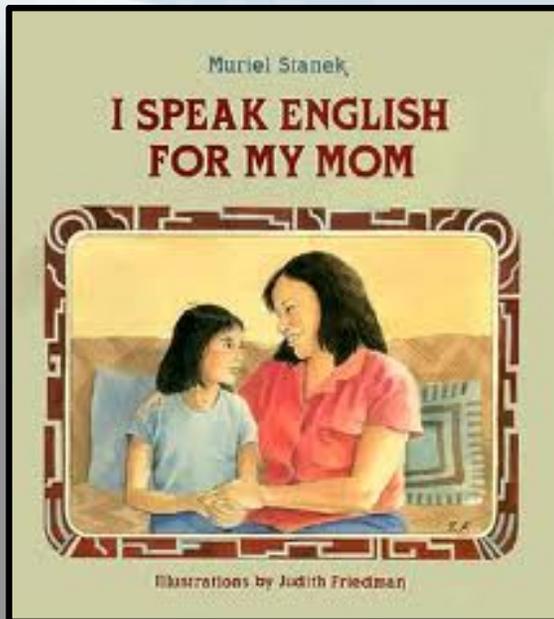
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# Study 1: Bilingualism in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Classroom

- Miss Mills
  - White & bilingual teacher; Spanish as a second language; WI native
- Students
  - Latino, mostly of Mexican origin & recent (im)migrant families
  - L1 = Spanish
  - Formerly in early-exit transitional program but now in English only

# *I Speak English for My Mom* (Stanek, 1989)



Miss Mills: *Piensen en como es el libro igual que algo que tu haces [sic]*

[Think about how the book is similar to something that you do]

# Vignette 1: Why Don't They Know English?

Regarding a section about evenings when the daughter helps her mom with ESL homework, Leo asks, "Homework. What homework? Homework, like words in Spanish but writing them in English?" Miss Mills explains that ESL homework likely meant that the daughter helped her mom understand the English instructions. Iris adds that her mom takes ESL classes too and in an exasperated tone adds, "*Y yo siempre le tengo que ayudar*" [I always have to help her] as she throws her hands up in the air. The following heated exchange ensues:

Leo: **Why don't they know how to speak English?**

Iris: Because they came from Mexico.

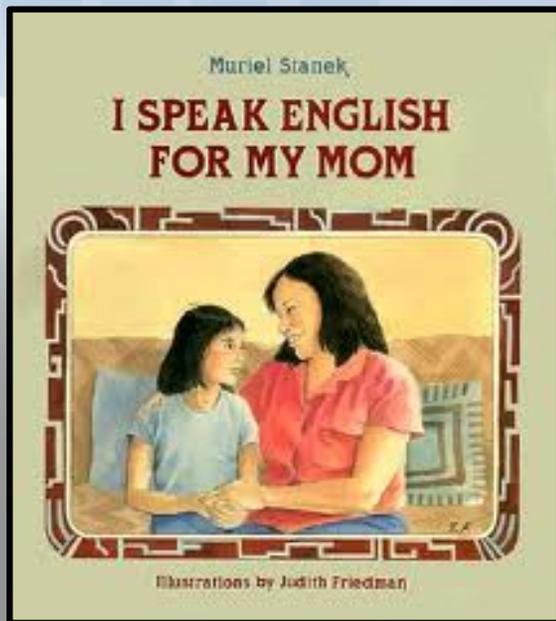
Leo: My mom is from Mexico and she speaks English.

Iris: It takes time to learn!

Delia: Cus they're Mexican!

Leo: **But they're not bilingual.**

# Noticing Contradictions



- Spanish-speaking mother asks, “Please come with me to the grocery store.”

Logan: “If she’s talking Spanish, why is it in English in the book?”

The top left corner of the slide features a light blue background with silhouettes of four people with their arms raised in celebration. The rest of the slide has a light blue to white gradient background.

## Miss Mills' Teacher Reflection Journal

- “I explained that the book is written so that people who don't speak Spanish can read it. If the words were written in Spanish, then people who only spoke English would not be able to understand. I pointed out an example of this when later, the book had the mother speaking in Spanish and then translated what she said.”



"You will have to come and speak for me," Mom said.

I must go to the clinic and see a dentist right away!"

"But I want to play," I told her

"*¡Necesito que vengas ahora!*" my mother said,  
which means, "I need you to come now!"

I wished I didn't have to go with her that day.



A decorative graphic in the top left corner showing the silhouettes of four people with their arms raised in a celebratory gesture, set against a light blue background.

## Mixed View & Feelings about Spanish

Field notes:

“When the teacher says Spanish first, then English, a great deal of students let out big, loud sighs. They **shifted visibly and audibly** in their chairs and this movement made loud screeching sounds.”



## Joel: Animosity toward Spanish

- Field notes:

“When Joel sees me, he says “Ugh! I hate this!” His classmates respond with inhaled outbursts of “**huuuuuhh**” and quick glances at one another, Ms. Seemuth, and me. She does not address Joel’s outburst. [...] Later, she explains that they are moving on to another activity, to which Joel excitedly responds, “**Yesssss!**”

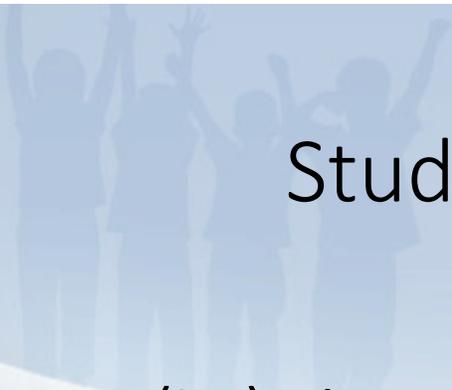
- Classwork: “**this sucks**” and “**I don’t wanna do it.**”



# Analysis

*Emerging* awareness and critical perspectives about (im)migrants, bilingualism, and learning bilingually

- Some resented their translation work
  - “*Siempre le tengo que ayudar*” [I always have to help her]
- Debated constructions of (im)migrants & Spanish speakers
  - “Why don’t they know how to speak English?”
- Some challenged representation of Spanish and Spanish speakers in texts
- Some resented classwork in Spanish

A decorative graphic in the top left corner showing the silhouettes of several people with their arms raised in a celebratory gesture, set against a light blue background.

## Study 2: Interviews of Bilingual Youth

- (Im)migrant youth and children of (im)migrants in high school
- Views of language, bilingualism, and schooling
- Had participated in English as a Second Language and bilingual programs in elementary school
- Ranged from academically ‘successful’ to struggling



# Linda

- ‘Successful’ rising 10<sup>th</sup> grader, but beginning to struggle
  - Participated in English mainstream classrooms
  - Spent numerous hours on homework
  - Linked academic challenges to her linguistic and ethnic background
    - “You can tell I’m Mexican...”
    - Avoided Latina/o peers

MP: And why do you think you struggled in English and History?

Linda: I think it's cus the language—not cus of English, in general. Just, I don't know, words, I've never—I'm good at spelling and everything. Just understanding content and stuff, it's just like so, I think it's so much to remember. You already have enough things to remember. Why remember some **big word** that you, isn't in your daily vocab or whatever?

MP: Mhm, yeah. That's part of it, right? You feel like some of these words are not part of your daily vocabulary, 'daily vocab' as you said?

Linda: Before I said, as long as people, for example, like **people who don't speak good English**. As long as you understand what they're trying to say, you should be fine. So, as long as I tell you I want a big piece of gum, I don't gotta tell you I want an *enormous* piece of gum. You know?

MP: Uh-huh.

Linda: You don't need that.

MP: Yeah, yeah.

Linda: That's unnecessary.



A decorative header image showing the silhouettes of several people with their arms raised in celebration, set against a light blue background that transitions into a white curve.

## Analysis of Linda's Reflections

- Acknowledged language as challenge (not skill or motivation)
- Discerned value placed on some languages, speech communities, and registers over others
  - “big piece of gum” vs. “enormous gum”
  - “word that isn't in your daily vocab”
- Critiqued privileging of ‘academic English’—and hence privileging of dominant (White) speakers of this variety

# (Im)migrant Students as Organic Intellectuals

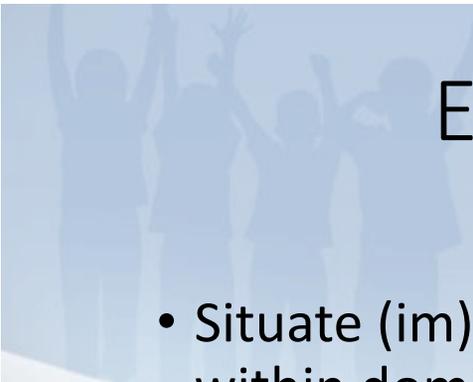
Students' questions, insights, & perspectives—while fluid—reflected their deep immersion in competing and contested ideologies about (im)migrants and their languages

- Demonstrated changing understandings about ways language intersects with race, ethnicity, culture, class, (im)migrant statuses, etc.
- Interrogated & disputed contradictions
  - Some questioned (im)migrants' "lack of English" while other defended it
  - Some resented academic work in Spanish while others embraced it
  - Linda resented privileging of White native English speakers

A light blue banner at the top of the slide features silhouettes of several people with their arms raised in a gesture of celebration or protest. Below the banner, the slide background transitions from light blue to a gradient of white and grey.

# Explorando Juntos for Social Transformation

- “If society is to become democratic, the organic intellectuals of the popular classes must possess both knowledge of the problems facing them as well as practical **solutions** to these problems” (Fischman & McLaren, 2005)



# Explorando Juntos: Suggestions

- Situate (im)migrant students' schooling and educational experiences within dominant, oppressive discourses and structures
  - Remain vigilant about ways white dominance & privilege is reproduced
    - “Explicitly name the racial backgrounds of Native English speakers and to clearly distinguish those who are coming from positions of privilege (White Native English speakers) from those who are coming from positions of oppression (Black Native English speakers).” (Flores, 2016)
- Employ anti-racist approaches to education & schooling
  - E.g., examine critically how differences and power intersect to affect (im)migrant students in particular ways (i.e., how their cultures, language, and communities are demonized)

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- Develop coalitions and dialogues, particularly among communities of color
  - Re-center and elevate the voices, critiques, and educational needs of (im)migrant children and youth
    - As ‘emerging organic intellectuals’ with growing sensibilities, insights, and perceptions about how language and power intersect for them
    - A social actors with agency and creativity

¡Gracias!

