Cultivamos una Rosa Blanca

THE GROWTH OF BILINGUAL TEACHERS & A DUAL LANGUAGE SCHOOL

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Cultivo una rosa blanca
En Junio como en Enero
Para el amigo sincero
Que me da su mano franca
Y para el cruel que me arranca
El corazon con que vivo
Cardo ni ortiga cultivo
Cultivo una rosa blanca

[I cultivate a white rose
In June as in January
For the sincere friend
Who gives me his hand frankly
And for the cruel person who tears out
The heart with which I live
I cultivate neither nettles nor thorns
I cultivate a white rose]

—Jose Marti (1891)

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Introduction

It is a warm morning in mid-May, and crab apple trees are blossoming in the leafy streets of Appleton, Wisconsin. I reach Oneida Street, named for the members of the Iroquois federation who were compelled to leave their lands in New York and move to Wisconsin (Cornelius, 2013). I pass the corner with Winnebago Street, a name that reflects a misnomer for the Ho-Chunk people, who traditionally occupied much of the surrounding area (Wisconsin First Nations, 2021).

On my left is the oldest elementary school in the city, dating from 1892, 400 years after its namesake, Columbus, arrived to usher in centuries of genocide and marginalization for Native peoples in what has come to be called the Americas (Morales, 2018). On my right is the imposing steeple of Zion Lutheran Church, which rents rooms to the Appleton Bilingual School (ABS). The school parking lot faces an apartment building where, six months after he lost an election, a Trump flag waves from a second-story balcony. In an apartment below waves another flag with a smiling Joe Biden under a rainbow.

Entering through the back door, I climb the stairs and find at the top an array of books in two languages, *Libros de Intercambio*/Book Swap Shelf. Once inside, I am greeted by Alma Cendejas Ruiz, dean of students, who takes me on an impromptu tour. As we stop at each of the classrooms, I see that despite the lingering pandemic and need for social distancing, students are fully engaged with each other, with their teachers, and with their academic studies.

Most of the teachers are former students from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, so we have some shared history, and it is great to meet again. Alma shows me each of the six classrooms; the future 4K classroom; the newer spaces for art, music, and gym; and the cafeteria with its large wooden cross.

The bilingual school has steadily gotten more space within the church building, occupying much of what used to be a parochial school. In the book room, Nancy Aguilar, the literacy specialist, stops in to chat with us. It seems that the school is having trouble getting funds for new book sets. As a charter school, it is not funded to the same level as regular public schools

within the district. They can no longer use books from the Columbus Title 1 collection across the street.

Even the future playground is dependent on fundraisers. Despite these challenges, the teachers appear upbeat and resilient. There is a family feeling in the school, belying the divisiveness apparent in the competing flags of the apartments and the troubling history behind the nearby street and school names. ABS, a few rented rooms in a church, was a place of community, learning, and peace.

This article explores the fundamental role of teachers' lives as they work to create and maintain a small dual-language school. ABS is chartered by the Appleton Area School District in northeast Wisconsin. Appleton may not be the first place one would expect to find a bilingual school that consciously integrates children from Spanish-speaking and English-speaking homes. Nearby is the headquarters of the ultra-right John Birch Society, and the city was home to the red-baiting senator Joseph McCarthy (Soellner, 2018; Srubas, 2020).

Yet ABS was established with the support of city and school district officials and has maintained that support throughout its 11 years of existence. Moreover, ABS has assembled a staff of bilingual and bicultural teachers who, in their majority, have Spanish as their first language. This provides an additional authenticity to the school's goal of preparing children who are fluent and literate in English and Spanish. Existing in a conservative area of the state with changing demographics, this school models the words of the poem by Jose Marti (1891) "Cultivo una Rosa Blanca." ABS offers this metaphorical white rose of unity to a community that has often been divided.

The growth of dual-language schools and programs across the United States follows the proven success of the model for English learners (ELs) as well as for native English speakers mastering another language. Bilingual teachers are in high demand. They are also asked to perform a variety of roles in addition to instructing a class.

By means of interviews and narrative portraits of four teachers at the school, we seek to share how life experiences that include immigration, adapting to new languages, new cultures, and new educational systems have created these teachers committed to educating the whole child and engaging with parents and community. Themes raised by the teachers in their portraits are examined with the goal of finding ways for administrators, policy makers, and others to better support bilingual individuals who would share their cultural and linguistic support with the next generation of students.

Dual-Language Education: Seeking Quality Teachers

Approximately five million students in the United States are ELs. They represent over 10% of students in nine of the 50 states and 6.2% of students in the state of Wisconsin (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). Only 68% of ELs graduate from high school after four years, as compared to 85% of the general population (NCES, 2019).

Drawing on 32 years of longitudinal research, Collier and Thomas (2017) argue that long-term dual-language programs offer the best opportunity to close the achievement gap between ELs and their native-English-speaking peers. Young people well prepared in two languages experience stronger cognitive development as well as advanced social skills (Bialystok, 2007; Fan et al., 2015). Because of these advantages, many monolingual English families across the United States desire to have their children in dual-language classrooms (Harris, 2015).

Despite the strengths and popularity of dual-language programs, there remains a lack of highly qualified bilingual teachers to serve children in such programs. Thirty-one states and the District of Columbia report a shortage of bilingual teachers (Mitchell, 2020). Bilingual individuals who do become teachers face many structural challenges as well as potential marginalization within schools and the profession (Varghese, 2006). Among the extra tasks expected of bilingual teachers is extensive translation of materials (Amanti, 2019).

In sum, school districts who seek to implement effective dual-language programs face a shortage of qualified bilingual teachers. When such teachers are hired, they face additional translation and interpretation work not required of other teachers. They often work in settings where they lack support from other grade-level teachers and administrators who are neither bilingual nor knowledgeable about bilingual programs.

Charter Schools and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities

Charter schools have been proposed as an option for addressing the marginalization of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students in traditional public schools (Anyon, 2005; Payne & Knowles, 2009). Such schools have elements of both public and private settings as they are operated by boards representing parents, community leaders, educators, and others.

In a study of leadership within a charter school in North Carolina comprising mostly African American and Latinx students, Jones-Goods and Okpala (2015) found that charters must promote professional development opportunities for teachers to "support the academic success of all students" and give "teachers an avenue to practice what they believe" (p. 6).

In an ethnographic study at a bilingual charter school, Gebhard (2002) found that bilingual teachers, initially attracted to the idea of creating a transformational school that worked best for the community, found that a focus on standardization through the district posed limits for themselves and their students:

> The teachers who worked at the bilingual charter school were politically minded and engaged in the creative work of attempting to develop transformative educational practices for the students for whom they were responsible. However . . . as the year unfolded the staff intensely debated required teacher lesson plans designed to standardize their teaching practices in the direction of a "whole language approach" and the development of a "point system" designed to standardize "acceptable" student behavior. (p. 259)

The Appleton Area School District currently supports 14 charter schools, of which the ABS is one. As charters, these schools have more flexibility within Wisconsin state mandates and regulations than do traditional public schools. They are held accountable in other ways for student performance, finances, and school operations (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction [WDPI], 2021b).

Appleton Bilingual School

The idea for ABS came to fruition when Bill Curtis, a veteran EL teacher, became EL coordinator for the Appleton Area School District. In response to the growth of the Spanish-speaking population in Appleton, a transitional K–2 bilingual program was established in one school in the district in 2001. With the bilingual teacher and other community supporters, Curtis advocated for a dual-language program.

Owing to resistance from many teachers within the traditional public schools, a charter school was pursued with district support. A board for the school was created, representative of members of the Latinx community and educational and community leaders. The board soon realized that finding qualified teachers would be paramount, so paraprofessionals in the district were encouraged to go back to school to become fully licensed bilingual teachers.

The school opened its doors in fall 2010 with kindergarten and first grade and added a new grade each successive year (W. Curtis, personal communication, March 17, 2021).

In its 10 years of existence, ABS has achieved measurable success in its academic instruction. In statewide FORWARD exams in English language arts and math and in the ACCESS test given to ELs, students from the school have not only shown impressive growth from year to year, they have also surpassed their peers from other Appleton elementary schools (WDPI, 2021a).

Just as importantly, the school has created a community among students and families that bridges linguistic and cultural differences. Since its inception, ABS has stood out in the region of northeastern Wisconsin for the presence of a majority of teachers who are bilingual and bicultural and who know, firsthand, what it is like to be an immigrant child attempting to navigate a strange new world. This personal connection enriches the lives of the children and the families of the school and is illustrated through the following teacher portraits.

Narrative Portraits of Bilingual Teachers

Co-authors Alma Lopez Lara, Alma Cendejas Ruiz, Nancy Aguilar, and Lilian Wenzel participated in virtual interviews about their early lives and educational experiences, how they became bilingual teachers, and their impressions of their work at ABS. These four participants are representative of a majority of teachers at the school who grew up with a language other than English in the home and have firsthand experiences with immigration.

A questionnaire developed and administered by co-author Donald Hones was sent to these teachers by email, and this was followed by a virtual interview of approximately one hour. Examples of questions asked include the following (see the appendix for the complete questionnaire):

> Tell about the place where you were born or where you grew up. What was something special about the place? What languages were around you as you grew up?
>
> Tell about your family and community relationships when you were growing up. Do you have special memories you connect with certain people who influenced you or your choice of career?
>
> What are your memories of school? How did your own school experiences impact your decision to become a bilingual teacher? How does it impact your practice as a teacher?

Following the interviews, transcripts were written and narrative portraits of each of these co-authors were constructed. Portraiture seeks "the authentic central story as perceived by the actors within the setting, choosing to expose and describe the story from a framework of strength rather than from deficiency" (Hackmann, 2002, p. 54). Each co-author participated in editing her portrait to final form.

In this process of narrative inquiry, fidelity to co-authors' own words has been the goal of the research (Benei, 2010; Clandinin et al., 2001; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010; Hones, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1995), wherein stories of individuals, groups, and communities are central to the interpretation. Through a process of interpretive interactionism (Denzin, 1994) and grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994), important themes are examined that emerge from the portraits of these co-authors.

Alma Lopez Lara: I Want to Make Families Feel Welcome

I was born in a small village, La Cañada, Guanajuato, Mexico, which is a very friendly environment, where everybody knew each other and we were close to family and friends. I moved to Appleton when I was 16 with my mom and dad and sister. My older sister was already living here. Our initial plan was to move to Florida, because my father worked in agriculture there.

However, at that time, my sister's husband, who was also from La Cañada, was killed in a work accident at a dairy farm. He had to reach very high to switch a button that controlled the movement of the cows. He pressed the wrong button, and the machine struck him in his heart. My mom went to Appleton to be with my sister and her newborn baby. When it was time for us to move to the United States, we just moved to Appleton to be with my sister.

The main difference between La Cañada and Appleton is opportunities and career possibilities. As I reflect on it, now I have a career, I'm a teacher, and if I think if I had stayed in Mexico I could not have had the same possibilities to go to school. I would have just finished high school and that's it. When you live in a small village, they believe that women should marry and take care of kids, and the man can continue with an education. My brother was the only one who got some money to go to the university in a bigger city. When I moved here, I was excited to be able to go to college. When we moved here, it seemed normal for my family that women and men could continue with an education.

My transition to North High School in Appleton was hard. Moving to a new country where I didn't speak the language, I didn't know anybody other than my sister. I had mixed emotions. I didn't want to move here, but I wanted to be with my parents and family. It took me about a year and a half to get used to it, to make friends. We arrived in 2001, and at that time there were many Spanish-speaking students at North from different parts of Mexico. I was able to continue to interact with people who spoke the same language, and that made me feel more comfortable.

I have good memories of my EL teachers, especially one who was very strict, Ramona. She was the one who really helped me to learn the language.

She cared about her students and the learning. If you didn't want to learn, you were not allowed to be in the classroom. That really helped everybody. She is the one who really influenced me to continue my education and to help other people too.

In La Cañada we had English class once a week, but it was just looking at a book and reading. The instructor was not a bilingual person. When I moved here, I forced myself to learn the language, because I was going to be the one to help other people, especially my parents.

After high school, I finished my early childhood program at Fox Valley Tech, and an interpreter position came up in Appleton. It was two days a week, working with newcomers. I really enjoyed working with students who were learning the language, students from India, China, and elsewhere.

Then I got a phone call from Bill Curtis, who invited me to a training in Chicago about opening a bilingual charter school. He suggested I go back to the university and get my teaching licenses so that I could teach at a bilingual school when they were able to open it. That is what I did. I was going to school and working full-time the following year as a Spanish interpreter with the newcomers. In 2010 Appleton Bilingual School opened, and I got a teaching assistant position with kindergarten. Then, after I finished my student teaching, I became the third-grade teacher. I have been teaching in that position for eight years.

Alma Lopez Lara with students at Appleton Bilingual School.

Being from another background, having knowledge of another culture, it makes you more sensitive to other beliefs and to understand families better. When I am teaching, I want to make families feel welcome and to feel that they can be part of their child's education too. My parents didn't have that opportunity, because they didn't speak the language.

I encourage parents to be part of their children's presentations, coming to the classroom, knowing what is happening, communicating what we are studying, as well as ways they can help at home, giving feedback to their kids. In my culture, in small towns, it is often hard for parents to give children feedback about their studies. It is important that students get that, that they know that their parents are proud of them and want them to do well.

Alma Lopez Lara in her classroom at Appleton Bilingual School.

My students research countries and create some Google slides to do a presentation about a specific country. Because of COVID-19, the parents were not allowed in the building. I printed the Google slides, added a note about the project, and had the students present it at home to their parents. The parents were asked to write feedback about the students' work. When they got back to the classroom, I asked, "Did you read what your parents wrote to you?" Some had and some hadn't.

So, we read the feedback together, and you could see the joy on their faces to read their parents' comments. I want to make that connection with parents and students. It is an advantage here for those families that they can communicate with their teachers, too, in their native language.

The dual-language program, with the students learning all subjects in both languages, is really enjoyable. In third grade it is 60% Spanish and 40%

English. I teach science, social studies, reading, and writing in Spanish. In English I teach English language arts and math. It is amazing what they can do in both languages, in their writing, in their oral presentations, and in their group projects. They know automatically who they can speak English with and who they can speak Spanish with, and they switch languages easily. It is beautiful to hear how a bilingual person can use their knowledge of both languages to communicate.

In every grade you can see how students develop their bilingual skills. The program is about what is best for the students, not overly focused on the testing or the numbers. It is a very friendly environment with the staff and the teachers, and very welcoming.

Another positive about our program is that I can always ask questions and work with the other teachers. Everyone is willing to make changes, to help, and to collaborate. The challenge is not having another grade-level partner, where you can exchange ideas or plan for that grade.

We used to lose so many minutes of transition when we had to go back and forth across the street for specials. Now, with art, music, and gym in our building, we have more minutes for the dual-language learning. Having a principal who is at two schools with different needs is challenging. Because we do not have the same behavioral needs in our building, we may not get the attention to the needs that we do have.

It is nice to have the presence of a principal in the building that the students know is there, who can come in the classrooms and be available for students, not just for behaviors, but also to be present there to support. Also, a principal in the building can invest more time in finding resources for the school. Sometimes our school is not a priority. We also don't have some of the support other schools have, such as library and media specialists, counselors, and EL support. As teachers, we have to play a lot of roles. We have to do it on our own.

Nancy Aguilar: When You Make Those Connections With Students, It Is Almost as If You Are Family

I was born in Oxnard, California, about an hour north of Los Angeles. My father was a *bracero* who would come to the United States to work in the strawberry fields. At the time my mom was in the United States undocumented, and she and I moved back to Mexico when I was two months old. My father had to stay to work. Every six months he would come back to Mexico and then six months later return to the United States.

The first four years of my life I grew up in Michoacan in a small village called Huitzo. When I was ready to start kindergarten, my parents decided to move back to the United States. My mom was still undocumented, and my brother had been born. I started kindergarten in a monolingual classroom in Oxnard. It was very difficult. I didn't understand what anyone was saying, and my teacher did not speak Spanish. I remember crying almost every day because I didn't want to go to school.

It took months for me to get used to it, to get acclimated. For first grade I went to a different school. My first-grade teacher was phenomenal. She was bilingual, and she spoke to us in both languages. She was talented in music, sang with us, and played many instruments. I remember enjoying literacy because she would integrate music with it. Then I went to a different school in second grade. My teacher did not speak Spanish, but at the time since I was able to understand a lot of English, I didn't necessarily need as much support.

We did move a few times. In Oxnard, when you worked in the strawberry

Co-authors Nancy Aguilar and Alma Cendejas Ruiz at Appleton Bilingual School.

fields, you couldn't really afford your own home. We lived with other people. I remember moving to different homes, and moving to a different home meant moving to a different school as well. I went to about four different schools during my elementary years. There were large classrooms, 35–40 kids with one teacher. There were no separate classes for gym, music, or art.

My teachers did not speak Spanish, but I remember receiving support in a back room from a paraprofessional who would help with literacy. Even though the instruction in the classroom was all English, when we were pulled into this back room for a reading group, it was all in Spanish. So, I grew up reading and writing in both languages, but it was not a dual-language program.

I enjoyed my first years of middle school. We would go to school three months, and then one month off. We had tracks, and I remember being in Track A. I remember what everybody would call the different tracks: If you're in Track A, you are awesome; if you are in Track B, you're the best; if you are in Track C, you're the coolest; and if you are in Track D, you are the dumbest. Looking back, I remember the kids who were non-English speakers who were in Track D. It is incredible to think that all of that—the tracks—was even allowed.

There was no high school in Oxnard, so as a freshman, I started at Rio Mesa High School. I was afraid of going to that school. There were a lot of gang members, and even though I wasn't in a gang, people from El Rio did not get along with people from Oxnard. I remember going to the restroom and feeling that I couldn't look at people in the eyes because they would think you wanted to start something. I only went there for three months, and then my parents, who knew I was afraid to go to school, decided to sell everything and move to Appleton, Wisconsin. My father had a sister and brother living there. They sold and gave everything away and moved to Appleton with a very small truck. The only thing I remember that they brought was their bed. They started from nothing.

I am very proud of my parents. Once they came to Appleton, they went to school at a church and learned English. Thanks to those classes, my father can speak and write in English, and he got his citizenship. My mother is not as confident as my dad, but she also learned English there.

I fell in love with Appleton. Once I knew I had an opportunity to stay here, and maybe one day having my own family, I never even questioned going back to Oxnard. As a freshman in Menasha High School, it was a culture shock. I felt like I was one of the only Latinas in the entire high school. At the time, there were probably 10 students who spoke Spanish, but most of them were in the ESL classes. I was not, and I didn't really have opportunities to connect with them other than gym class. By the time I graduated, most of them had dropped out. The year I graduated, it was just one other Latina and myself.

In high school, there were so many opportunities. My last year, I volunteered afternoons at the high school ESL class. Even though I enjoyed what I was learning about dentistry in my co-op program, I also enjoyed helping out students who were learning English. I remember one student in particular, Juan, who gave me a gift one day and said that he appreciated all of the help that he had received from me. I was able to help him pass a class that he was about to fail. We grew together. It filled my heart, and I thought, maybe this is what I want to do. So, I completely changed career direction and decided to become a teacher.

When I first started teaching, I worked at the Gegan dual-language program in Menasha. I loved working there, but I had to find something else, because I couldn't pass the PRAXIS II exam required for licensure in Wisconsin (Hones, Aguilar, & Thao, 2009). I could only be in an emergency license for so long, and then I had to find something else.

I went to Green Bay, where I worked in a one-way, third-grade bilingual classroom. That same year, as I was expecting my first child, I was spending almost two hours on the road each day, and I wanted something closer to home. At the time, Bill Curtis also told me about Appleton Bilingual School and that they would be opening it the coming year, but I did not have the kindergarten license.

I worked in Menasha one year and kept an eye out for ABS and its development. I liked the idea of starting up a new school. I thought, maybe this is the time for me to work with others to create a wonderful school. The following year, second grade opened up at ABS, and I applied and was chosen for that position. I learned some more about a charter school. There was not always a lot of money for resources. It was challenging, because you start off with nothing and are given a certain amount to buy what you need. It takes a lot of planning.

We started at Columbus Elementary, then as the grades were added, we moved across the street upstairs at Zion Lutheran Church. There was no office. There was no principal. There was no book room. It was just us three educators with 28 kids in each classroom. Everything, recess, lunch, specials, was at Columbus. For every single thing, we had to walk the kids across the street. Now, the only time we cross to Columbus is for recess. We have gym, art, music, an office with a secretary, all in the building. We are a school. It is a challenge when you first start a charter school, a lot of work, a lot of planning.

I do reading intervention in Spanish. I was looking for a program that was not direct translation. The program has real-life cultural texts that are for Spanish speakers with texts such as *Los Tamales de Abuelita*. When I am reading, many of the kids can relate right away. They will say, "Oh, tamales, me encantan los tamales!" They will go on about which tamales they like, when they make them for Christmas. I feel that when you make those connections with students and when they start to feel comfortable, it is almost as if you are family. It is very important to build those relationships. That is when they learn the most. They are not afraid, they speak up, they want to read more and write more. The motivation is there.

We currently have six teachers. It is great to have a small group of staff to work with, but it is also a lot of work. When there is only one teacher per grade, you don't really have another person at the same grade to collaborate with. If you collaborate across schools, you can do things together—but they are not bilingual programs. You feel sometimes that you are on your own. We work well together for the goals of the school. We have worked with people from the Illinois Resource Center, but when we lack the funds, the staff development stops.

The families that come to ABS have chosen to be there. That makes a big difference. These are all children and families who want to become bilingual. The children do not see the separation of Spanish speaker and English speaker—they are all bilingual. They truly behave like relatives, like family. They grow up together. The same group of kids move

up together, and they create very close relationships among each other and among the families. I have always felt the support from parents. It is a close community.

Having a bilingual school can help educate the community about learning in more than one language. It opens the door to a bigger world. Our students want to learn more about Latin American culture, they want to learn more about other Spanish-speaking countries. This is the only way we can grow as a community, by learning about each other.

The leader of the school drives the ship. As educators, we may have all of these ideas, but without the support of an administrator, it doesn't go anywhere. A full-time administrator can advocate for the resources, for someone who can teach guidance, for a media specialist, for all of the specialists who can teach in both English and Spanish. Wouldn't that be great? That would be a perfect bilingual school.

We also need the higher administration in the district to believe in bilingualism and bilingual schools. It is a chain. We all need to want the same things in order for something to succeed. If one of the pieces of the chain is not there, it falls apart.

Alma Cendejas Ruiz: Our Students Always Have the Feeling That Their Cultures and Backgrounds Are Important

I was born in San Luis Potosi in Mexico. My mom brought my brother and me to the States when I was two years old. I remember staying in Brownsville, Texas, for a little bit, and then we made a home with multiple families near Lumberton, North Carolina. I was surrounded by both languages. At home it was only Spanish, and at school it was only English. Even before I started school, my mom would bring me to her work where she was picking cucumbers, and I would go out there and help her.

When I got the chance to go to school in kindergarten, it was something new. There was also a teacher who would come and help us with English at our home. She would take the time with me, and when she came to the house, she would help my family with English. She even gave us an ancient computer. My mom would always let her pick some corn from our cornfield.

I know I spoke more Spanish at home because of my dad, but when my parents divorced, my main language became English, especially as I got more fluent. I remember translating for my mom at school and translating incorrectly because I didn't want to get in trouble. When she went back to school and worked on her GED, she became our model, and we also wanted to continue our education. My dad still has limited English, just whatever is relevant to his work.

When we moved to Wisconsin, I started high school, and I finally learned what "ESL" stood for. They wanted to put me in an ESL class, based on my name. This was also when I started to speak more Spanish, because in the apartments where we lived, there were a lot more Spanish speakers around. I was using the language incorrectly, so my friends would be the ones who helped me correct my Spanish. My friends who spoke Spanish all went to North High School, and I went to West. There were very few people who looked like me at my high school.

Now I was in high school, and I still didn't have papers. College was not in the picture—I wouldn't be able to get scholarships; I wouldn't be able to get any support. I took the early childhood classes offered in high school, and that got me more interested in becoming a teacher. Once I got my papers, I went to University of Wisconsin Oshkosh and did the early childhood program alongside my good friend Alma Lopez.

My mom was a big influence, as she was a teacher's assistant at Head Start. I didn't have bilingual support in school growing up. When we are doing a book study now and we talk about code-switching, I think, this is who I am. I don't even know that my brain is going between two languages because I never had that foundation in school.

When I saw the course descriptions for becoming a bilingual teacher, I thought, this is what I want, this is what I am searching for. When I did my bilingual student teaching experience and became the teacher of the fourth-grade class, it was a quick learning experience.

My mom began the process of getting residency while we were in North Carolina. She became a citizen in 2000, but myself and my siblings still didn't have documents. We lost money in Charlotte to a fraudulent program attempting to get documents for my brother and me. When she got her citizenship, my mom felt it best to move to Wisconsin. We started all over in the residency process. We went to Milwaukee, but we didn't have a lawyer, so I was doing all of the applications. It was long, tedious, and expensive. I remember we filled something out incorrectly, so they wanted to deport us. I remember being in high school, 16 years old, crying. I had never been to Mexico and we got this letter.

But my mom is good with people, she knew how to make connections. She got a letter from the governor of Wisconsin on our behalf. We were able to go to Milwaukee for the interview for myself, my brother, and my dad. I feel like we were fluent in English, but there were a lot of idioms and expressions that we didn't understand. My brother made a mistake when they asked, "What's your first name, middle name, and last name?" Well, my brother has two first names, one middle name, and two last names. And he doesn't go by any of them, he goes by a nickname. They were very rude to us, and it was not a good experience going to Milwaukee for the interview. We were fortunate that we didn't have to go to Ciudad Juarez and then return to get our residency.

The minute we got our residency, we drove 32 hours to San Luis Potosi, Mexico. I had just turned twenty. It was a culture shock. Where I am from there was one electrical outlet, an outhouse for a bathroom, no shower, just a drain in the floor. You would have to heat up water over a wood fire in the kitchen, then add cold water, before bathing with it. It was a neat experience, but I have only been there twice. My mom is the oldest of 12, so I am the oldest of the cousins. I see the lives that they are living, and they are very different than mine. My mom went through all of it. She was like a second mom to all of her siblings, and she wanted us to have a different life.

I started at ABS in 2014 when they added the fourth grade. I was the fourth-grade teacher for a few years. We shared a principal between two schools. There were two different perspectives from teachers on this. One was that the principal is not here because he trusts us to do our jobs. The other was that the principal is not here because we are being forgotten. Our new principal has experience with charters and has helped with reorganizing our governance board. Each year that we added a grade we

were able to have more conversations about what we envisioned for the school.

I appreciate it that the staff has a voice and can navigate for themselves. It is not like the principal or the governance board is making the final decision. It is really teacher led. We are the ones working with the students; we are the ones noticing the changes, the growth, and the areas of need. We finally have our own classrooms in the same building; we are getting a playground next year; we have a Spanish support specialist. It is still growing.

As a staff, when we talked about bringing in multicultural elements, some people would ask, do I bring in a flag? A book? It felt forced versus natural. At ABS we all know that there are different backgrounds for our families, and when we do celebrations, it is a way for us to educate and to learn. We have parents who present; we have students who share all the time; we have teachers' input. Some teachers decorate their classrooms with cultural elements from different countries, and some teachers stay more with just the language colors for the word walls. I feel that our students always have the feeling that their traditions and backgrounds are important, just like my neighbors. It shows in the positive school environment.

When I moved to Appleton, there was culture shock. It was not as diverse as where we had lived in North Carolina. I felt pressure among my Latinx friends because I didn't speak Spanish as well, and I did do well in school. In the community I felt there were not many places to go as a young Latina person. There are more opportunities now for diverse people in Appleton. We now have Latino Fest in September, and they make a lot of resources available to the community in Spanish. I brought a group of our ABS student dancers to the Fest, and this also gave some awareness about our school. We want people to know that we are here.

I noticed a lot of concern and fear from the students after the election of 2016. In fourth grade they are old enough to ask, if someone like the president says something negative about a certain group, does that mean that they will take away my friends? Will they take away their families, and if they take them away, what is going to happen to them? It was a good opportunity for us to listen, to educate, and to stay positive.

The friendship in our school is huge: They are in cohorts since kindergarten. I think there is still a lot of misinformation about undocumented Americans. We are in the process of getting my husband papers, and people think that he doesn't pay taxes, and he does. With our English-speaking neighbors, they see my husband and they know that he is a hard worker. He does odd jobs for the neighbors, and we get the chance to educate them.

I love how far we have come. There is a challenge not having a bilingual administrator. That is how my role as dean of students came to be. But I am only there part-time, as I am an EL coach at another school. I am at ABS to advocate. I feel that because there is not enough full-time administration support, there are not enough ways to support the teachers to become even better teachers. I am not a principal. Sometimes the mind-set of some staff people can be defensive, especially when they are new at ABS. They might say that there are not enough resources.

Some teachers say, "hand me the book, tell me what I need to do and I'll do it." Some teachers say, "give me the standards, I will see what my kids need and then I can create my lessons from there." That is something as a staff that we continue to work on. Our mission is that our kids will be proficient in two languages. We are not seeing that at all times. Our EL students are doing great. We want to make sure our students stay proficient when they leave, even though there will not be a middle school bilingual program for them.

This is my fourth year as dean of students, part-time. Now we have grades K–5, as we no longer have sixth grade. We will add 4K in 2022. Nancy is the bilingual support specialist working with both students and teachers. We have two paraprofessionals and a bilingual secretary.

We are still trying to figure out our school, our identity. We notice a lot of our students do not have a strong base in either language. Most have grown up here, and we are almost becoming a heritage program. We can improve on math. We don't have a math coach or interventionist. And we can never have enough books in both languages. I am doing some grant writing.

A few years ago, someone suggested I go for an educational administration master's, and I was terrified. But I did an accelerated program and finished in a year and a half. I learned a lot about being an advocate. I learned to use my voice more. In the end, what are they going to tell me? No? And that is OK, because one starts from nothing. I advocated for my position. I advocated for the growth of the school, and now I'm making sure our teachers are getting what they need.

Lilian Wenzel: Sometimes Our Deep Conversations Would Take Over Our Writing Time, and It Changed All of Us

I grew up in Brazil, in the city of Sao Paolo, and lived there until I was 11 when we left to come to the United States. I remember neighbors being like family. We were always at their houses. We were always outside playing and riding our bikes all over the place. I really enjoyed my childhood. We were often visiting my dad's side of the family. We had a family member with a house not far from the beach, so that was very much a part of growing up as well.

I grew up speaking Portuguese, and English was taught in school as a subject. Knowing what I know now, I can see that there was little conversation going on in English. It was really just learning numbers, basic things. My sister and I actually took English classes outside of school as well.

I don't remember wanting to be a teacher as I was growing up, but I used to play "teacher" with my younger sister. I would write things on the board and she would have to copy—which is very much how education was in Brazil. It was direct instruction and teacher centered. I attended mostly private schools, as public schools are not what they are here in the United States. We chose whether to attend a morning period or an afternoon period. We always attended mornings. There weren't school buses. You could take the city bus or take a private van that would pick you up at home and take you to school. We never changed classrooms, even as we got older. The teachers would rotate. There weren't decorations all over the wall. You didn't have assigned seats, and you didn't leave things at school.

There would be a break in the middle of the day and there was a cantina where you could get what you wanted if you brought money, or you could eat something from home. It was your time to eat and play. There were

no tables, you sat on the floor or on steps. There was gym. There was art sometimes, but no music class. There was a lot more emphasis on subjects like geography. It surprised me coming to this country and seeing how little people in this country—especially in school—are exposed to geography. They don't know about the world. As an adult, I worked at a restaurant and I had another server, whom I considered to be very intelligent, come up to me one day as she was ready to serve some wine and ask, "Do you know if Argentina is in Spain?" Another reason I am drawn to bilingual education is that you end up exposed to more of the world.

It really wasn't until I moved here, and was in fifth grade, that I had a teacher who embraced me. She used to look at my little English–Portuguese dictionary and she would translate things for me, as we had no way to communicate. There was no EL program, and technology was not what it is today. When I first became a teacher, I contacted her and told her that I remembered coming to her crying one day and not being able to tell her what I was feeling. I was shaking, looking through my dictionary, and she took the dictionary away and just hugged me. I still remember that. That is where my interest in teaching started, but I never thought it would end in bilingual education.

My dad's job brought us here to the United States. He began working here, and his contract just kept getting extended. We were eligible for green cards, and his company sponsored us. At that time in the 1990s it wasn't $12,000 for a green card! I was 11 and my sister was nine when we came here. First, we came to Fairfield, outside of Cincinnati, Ohio, where my dad worked. After four years we moved to Appleton when he was transferred there. I was just starting high school. It was a difficult time emotionally, as I was finishing middle school, leaving my friends, and starting all over again. I have grown to really like it here in Appleton. I feel at home.

I have never in any of my schooling been given or even asked about getting additional support as an English learner. I remember taking AP courses and really struggling with reading. It wasn't until I became a teacher that I was capable of so much more with some support. I applied to UW Madison and they told me I could come to school there but I would need to seek out a tutor. I never did, and I almost failed that first semester. I developed a lot of anxieties. I quit college and I took five years off after high school before returning to school.

I went to live on the West Coast, which is where I really learned Spanish. I started listening to Latin music for the first time, working in restaurants, working in casinos. I lived in Bullhead City, Arizona, not far from Las Vegas, and later in California, always surrounded by Spanish.

Lilian Wenzel and her students at Appleton Bilingual School.

When I came home to Appleton, I went back to college at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. I had always been drawn to special education. My mom used to work at our church with adults with disabilities and my sister and I would always go along when she volunteered. I decided to get a double major in elementary education and special education, with a minor in Spanish.

After graduation, Green Bay approached me with an offer for a bilingual education job, and I thought, "But I don't speak Spanish." I took the job, and that is when I really learned Spanish, on the job. My paraprofessional was always there helping me so much. I made so many mistakes and she always had such a gentle way of correcting me. Being around the kids and being around the teachers, other professionals, really pushed me to get better.

Green Bay told me that, since I had accepted the job, I would have to go back to school and get my bilingual license. I decided to get my master's as well. In the ESL and bilingual education graduate classes it was such a reminder of where I had come from in my own schooling experience.

I taught two years as a bilingual special educator in Green Bay before coming to Appleton Bilingual School. I came in as the fifth-grade teacher. I loved it. That class changed me. They were there when I became a mother for the first time. I realized then that the number one thing is building relationships with the kids and their families.

It wasn't until I moved to the United States that I realized that as a Brazilian, I am also a Latina. We don't fit in exactly with the Spanish speakers though. It is a weird in-between place. Yet, at ABS, I felt that I had finally met my people in a way. There were so many similarities: music and dance, and behaviors and expectations; how parents handled things, how I could talk to the kids. Also that kids were like me in that they were stuck between two cultures. I didn't have anyone else around like me growing up in the States, and all of a sudden, I was surrounded by them, at that same age that I was when we came here. I loved it.

I taught fifth grade and then moved up to sixth grade the second year, coming back from maternity leave. I was the only one who was not a native Spanish speaker at that time, so I had to catch up quickly, because meetings would be happening in Spanish. I found it difficult for me to stay in Spanish during Spanish time. The other teachers held me accountable, which I appreciated. I had never been a regular classroom teacher before. I had never taught bilingual education like that before. There had never been a fifth or sixth grade teacher at the school before.

The level of conversations I was able to have with my students was incredible. Half of my class the first year were gifted students. Parents gave me books to read about how to work well with their children. The benefit of being at ABS is not having anyone looking over my shoulder. I could be whoever I wanted to be as a teacher. I could allow my kids to have more freedom. We could push curriculum aside a little bit and explore their interests a little more. Sometimes our deep conversations would take over our writing time, and it changed all of us. It worked for me to be real with them.

Themes From Teacher Portraits

Several themes emerge from these portraits of Alma Lopez Lara, Nancy Aguilar, Alma Cendejas Ruiz, and Lilian Wenzel. One common theme involves the connections to the immigration experience for these teachers and their family members. A second theme involves their experiences as English learners in U.S. schools and their accommodation to U.S. culture. Third, each of these teachers highlights the importance of developing and maintaining relationships with students and families. Finally, there is the theme of the multiple roles played by these teachers and the challenges of finding appropriate support for themselves and their school.

Influence of One's Immigration Experience

Each of these teachers has very personal experience with immigration. Typically, one of their parents found work in the United States, and eventually their families followed. Alma Lopez Lara was able to finish middle school in La Cañada, Guanajuato, Mexico, before joining her parents in the United States. Instead of going to Florida, where her father worked in the agricultural sector, they relocated to Appleton due to the death of a family member in a dairy farm accident. This tragedy underscores the dangerous working conditions often faced by immigrant workers in the United States (Orrenius & Zavodny, 2009).

Nancy Aguilar was born in the United States but returned to Huitzo, Michoacan, Mexico, with her mother. Her father, a *bracero*, continued working in California, visiting the family twice each year. Nancy came back to Oxnard, California, with her mother and brother to start elementary school. Though Nancy is an American citizen by birth, other family members spent years pursuing residency and citizenship.

Alma Cendejas Ruiz came to the United States from the state of San Luis Potosi, Mexico, when she was two years old. She grew up assisting her mother in field work but also immersed in American culture in Lumberton, North Carolina, and later in Appleton. It wasn't until after she graduated from high school that she, her brother, and her father were able to successfully navigate a complex, expensive, and often demeaning immigration process to achieve their residency. Like many of today's Dreamers, she had faced an uncertain future and the possibility of no affordable access to higher education, despite having grown up in the United States (Hsin & Ortega, 2017).

Lilian Wenzel and her family were able to fly from Sao Paulo, Brazil, and get residency with the support of her father's workplace in the United States.

Each of these teachers is shaped by her experience with immigration. They bring insight to share with their students and with members of the community, who are often misinformed.

Education in a New Language and Culture

The schooling experiences of these teachers were varied, yet all of them needed to adapt to the English language and the dominant culture of the United States. Lilian Wenzel and Alma Lopez Lara received substantial schooling in their home countries and languages, Lilian through fourth grade and Alma through middle school. Nancy Aguilar and Alma Cendejas Ruiz each started school in the United States, although with different degrees of bilingual support. Nancy was able to develop fluency in both languages early, whereas Alma never had Spanish language support in school and did not practice

the language fully until meeting a new friend group in Appleton.

Nancy and Lilian give poignant examples of their fears and frustrations as young people trying to be understood in an English-speaking classroom. All four teachers draw on their own language learning experiences as they discuss why they were attracted to bilingual education. All mention the importance of individual teachers who reached out to them and their families, who brought music into their lives, visited them at home, held them accountable, or gave them a hug when they needed it.

Relationships With Students and Families

It is very clear that each of these teachers places tremendous importance on building relationships. As mentioned, they each clearly remember teachers who reached out to them and their families. Nancy utilizes books with cultural references to engage students in reading and help them make connections to the lives of their families. Alma Lopez Lara assigns student projects that were sent home during the pandemic so that parents could see them and send back written comments of support for their children. Lilian speaks of the strong support she felt from her students and their families as she became a new mother.

As a charter school, parental engagement is critical for the very existence of the program. Families choose to send their children to ABS. Building relationships is fundamental as well to the language learning experience. As Alma Cendejas Ruiz states, the relationships built by the students themselves bring a sense of friendship, family, and support at critical times, including in the face of divisive anti-immigrant rhetoric from political leaders.

Teachers' Multiple Roles and the Need for Support

Lilian Wenzel states that at the school, she was teacher, counselor, and nurse. Although the six grade-level teachers collaborate together, they do not have colleagues at the same grade level with whom they can share ideas or plan. There is no counselor available at the school, no media specialist, and no full-time principal. Alma Cendejas Ruiz fulfills some of the day-to-day administrative duties as dean of students, but she is only at the school part-time. Nancy Aguilar is also at the school part-time as a literacy specialist. Books can no longer be borrowed from Columbus School due to Title I restrictions, and a bilingual school needs challenging, content-level books in both languages.

Additional administrative support for technology upgrades, professional development, and the new playground could help the school meet some of its current needs. With a principal shared with another school and with its charter status, ABS is often not a first priority, despite its record of academic success and the linguistically and culturally rich curriculum it offers to children and families. The teachers at the school value their independence, but too many roles to fill could cause them to consider professional options elsewhere.

Implications for Educators, Administrators, Policy Makers, and Community

The experiences of Alma Lopez Lara, Nancy Aguilar, Alma Cendejas Ruiz, and Lilian Wenzel and their work at ABS offer implications for educators, administrators, policy makers, and the wider community. University teacher educators can find value in the ways in which bilingual teachers' lives impact their growth as professionals and can utilize teacher portraits to help preservice teachers understand the impacts that immigration, culture shock, and learning a new language have on a child.

Furthermore, teacher education programs as well as school districts can make a stronger effort to recruit paraprofessionals and others who wish to become licensed teachers, to draw from their personal bilingual and bicultural strengths in the development of future teachers who represent the changing demographics of students in U.S. schools (Field, 2011).

Administrators in school districts need to consider dual-language programs as a way to provide the linguistic and cultural skills that all students will need in a global economy. Importantly, where dual-language programs exist, administrators need to fully support teachers. Bilingual teachers cannot be given extra tasks, such interpretation and translation, that are beyond what monolingual teachers are asked to do (Amanti, 2019). More support for media and library collections is needed, as well as onsite bilingual counselors and bilingual principals.

Policy makers at the state and federal levels can continue to encourage dual-language programming and, if public charters are funded, make sure that initial funding is matched with ongoing funding so that successful programs can be sustained.

Finally, dual-language programs at places like ABS offer wonderful opportunities to communities seeking to enrich the lives of their children and build skills for a culturally and linguistically diverse economy and nation. When children have the chance to befriend classmates from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, they will be concerned for their welfare.

At ABS, students and teachers become like family. Family members are welcomed and celebrated, not separated from loved ones, put into cages, neglected, and deported, like so many thousands of children and adults who have attempted to cross the southern border in recent years (Bassett & Yoshikawa, 2020).

If adults in Appleton and other communities can learn from the teachers and children of this dual-language program, we may begin to move beyond habits of blaming others who look, speak, or live differently—we may begin to cultivate white roses throughout the land.

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Appendix

Questionnaire for Appleton Bilingual School Teachers

1. Tell about the place where you were born or where you grew up. What was something special about the place? What languages were around you as you grew up?

2. Tell about your family and community relationships when you were growing up. Do you have special memories you connect with certain people who influenced you or your choice of career?

3. What are your memories of school? How did your own school experiences impact your decision to become a bilingual teacher? How does it impact your practice as a teacher?

4. What are some beliefs or practices that you grew up with that are important for you to maintain? How do you address these in your own teaching?

5. How do you feel in the broader Appleton community? Do you feel welcome? Have you experienced racism or ethnocentrism because of your ethnicity or language use? Do the children or families at your school experience racism in the community?

6. What has your experience at ABS been like? What is special about the school? In what ways does the school help to build positive relationships among students and families?

7. What have been your biggest challenges as a teacher at ABS? What have been your greatest rewards?

8. How would you describe the educational team at your school?

9. What additional support would you like to see from the school district, the city, and the state to further promote bilingualism and a positive culture of diversity at your school and in the city?