

## **The Concept of Educational Sovereignty**

### **Friday evening keynote address at the 2002 Ethnography in Education Research Forum**

**Luis Moll**

*Editor's note: This is a transcript of the Friday evening keynote address at the 2002 Ethnography in Education Forum at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. The transcript has been edited for clarity. However, some portions were difficult to transcribe and are marked with an [ ].*

Thank you, Professor Hornberger for that very kind introduction and thank you to Dean Fuhrman as well, for inviting me to present. I've prepared a text and I've promised my colleagues that I will be brief. About the toughest slot in a conference was right after lunch but nothing beats right after dinner at 9 o'clock at night. The key is to be relatively brief so I will give it a shot. I've asked Nancy to signal when 50 minutes are up, or maybe 45, and I'll abbreviate the talk and then we can chat a little bit if you so desire. I've prepared some notes so I will be relying on the text, and deviating from the text as needed to embellish the story or to wake you up.

It is indeed an honor to be here with you and to once again participate in the Ethnography in Education forum. I first attended this forum in 1979 or 1980, over twenty years ago, it's hard to believe, as a refugee seeking asylum from the stultifying positivism of educational psychology, my chosen field of study. In fact, I recall, around 1977, I was dragged kicking and screaming into a class on anthropology in education at UCLA taught by Tom LaBelle an anthropologist that some of you might know. It was a class that I did not anticipate was the beginning of shaping my entire career. Not only were the readings fabulous, especially the Spindler book, such a landmark study, and including articles by so many terrific colleagues, including Ray [McDermott], who, predictably, is late. From Ray, I learned the meaning of the word pariah for the first time in my career, as in pariah status. We spent the next two months calling each other pariah.

And I recall that I did a class project with Robert Rueda who was my roommate and is now a professor at the University of Southern California. A very brief ethnographic like study of a bar in Santa Monica very close to campus. I would say that we did extensive fieldwork, and we wanted a place where we could study the social life of workers, in this case, undocumented workers. We knew what they did during their work hours – they worked their asses off, what we didn't know was the rest of their life so we picked a site where they congregated and we started hanging out for the semester. I quickly learned that the word participant in participant observation is often to be taken metaphorically – when I couldn't read my field notes anymore. But it was a wonderful experience on many levels.

I had recently completed my doctorate at UCLA and I started working at a place called the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition at UC San Diego. I was with the lab in New York and when they moved to San Diego, I followed. A researcher with a strong interdisciplinary orientation, what attracted me to the Lab's work initially was the cross cultural research that was done in West Africa and the Yucatan some years earlier by Michael Cole, Sylvia Scribner, and

many other colleagues on the situational variability of thinking. I found their methods of study, combining strategically anthropological observation with experimental like manipulations and the resulting emphasis on the paramount importance of cultural context in the development of thinking. I found it enormously revealing, important and refreshing, and I still do. I would eventually pattern my work after these hybrid efforts, which Cole labeled then “ethnographic psychology.”

In particular, however, the existence of the lab as a social setting dedicated to extending the implications of this research to US language minority contexts created a social space for doing interdisciplinary educational research about minority issues that was unavailable, at least to me, in any other academic setting in the United States. I remember reporting at this forum on our initial classroom research conducted in collaboration with Esteban Diaz and modeled after Bud Mehan’s microethnographic research in classrooms. Working with teachers played an important collaborative role. In fact, Bud, a sociologist, helped me to write the grant proposal for the initial study. Building on the insights obtained from this observational study and the trust established by collaborating with teachers, we implemented a series of teaching experiments to attempt change in classroom lessons both as an analytical strategy and as a practical contribution. This work also included our initial attempts to appropriate for our purposes some of the ideas of the Russian cultural historical psychologists, especially those of Vygotsky. Work that will occupy me until the present day.

I would later extend the classroom study in collaboration with both Esteban and Henry Trueba, the anthropologist, to combine both classroom and community analysis and I’d also present that work here at the Forum about twenty years ago, or so. This work was a precursor to the funds of knowledge research that I was to develop with anthropologists in Arizona in which we sought to extend the social cultural approach initiated in San Diego, combining it with the powerful research of Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez and James Greenberg. By the way, as Nancy alluded to, although I would be more than happy to take credit for the term funds of knowledge, these two colleagues are the ones who coined it as part of their analysis of exchange relations that help constitute household knowledge. They, in turn, borrowed the metaphor of funds from Eric Wolf’s analysis of heads of households which was about twenty years prior to that. You get the picture here.

At the beginning, our research efforts were informed by interdisciplinary conversations with other likeminded scholars and practitioners, including here at the Forum. [Renato Rosaldo] has written about how these connections between ideas and social relations thrive as a form of life of sorts in their interstitial status between institutions. These human communities, he writes, characterize less as formal organizations than as loose aggregates or networks of thinkers who, in conversation with one another, produce and sustain modes of talk that have come to be called interdisciplinary. He later points out that intellectual conversations and reading groups are key forms of sociality for interdisciplinary as a form of thought today. It may be difficult for some of you to appreciate, especially graduate students, just how important the Penn Ethnography in Education Forum, as it was called then, became in creating a space for discourse on qualitative research in education. Especially for those of us from outside the discipline of anthropology. This conference played an important role in the development of my career; it helped nurture the anthropological imagination, a term I borrowed perhaps from Spindler, as part of our developing

conceptual framework for doing educational research. And it is in that spirit, of having conversations with like minded colleagues, that I present this paper today.

I must add that the Forum also helped me to establish social relations with colleagues whose ideas in one way or another, have come to shape my work. One such colleague who was to become a very close friend and who was a founder of this Forum was David Smith. In one of his last papers (David passed away) in which he reflects on research that he conducted here in Philadelphia and elsewhere, David mentions how ethnographic research then, as it does today, has difficulty in addressing hard core issues in education, especially disparities in relations of power. He wrote as follows,

The challenge facing urban ethnography today is not only to surface the narratives of oppression in existence in the cities but to develop approaches that put these narratives to use in addressing the oppressive situations. It is not enough to uncover local funds of knowledge or to incorporate these into our pedagogical repertoire, but they must become the basis of a radical new pedagogy, one that is based on and privileges these narratives and local knowledge.

David's point, is, of course, well taken. So for the next few minutes I want to present and elaborate just a bit a concept that I believe attempts to respond at least in some respects, in some limited respects, to David's challenge. The concept is that of educational sovereignty.

Educational sovereignty is a term inspired by the work of colleagues doing research in and with indigenous communities in the United States, addressing the need to challenge a long history of coercion and control in the education of English students. We use the term educational sovereignty to capture the need to challenge the arbitrary authority of the power structure to determine the essence of the educational experience for Latino and other minority students. I do not utilize the term sovereignty in the sense of creating strict and arbitrary boundaries of separation, the way it is done to mark, chauvinistically, and often on the basis of the imposition of force, the territory of a nation or state. The concept of sovereignty, despite the recent nationalist rhetoric about homeland defense, is becoming obsolete by the context created by both the global economy and the transnational nature of immigration – issues which are not unique to the United States.

If not obsolete, then at the very least, the contradictions of sovereign boundaries that separate “us” from “them” have become apparent by the juxtaposition of calling for border free economic spaces while calling for strict border controls to keep immigrants out. The reality of the new economic regime [unclear phrase] sharply reduces the role of national governments and national borders in controlling international economic transactions. Yet [unclear] the framework for immigration policy in this country remains centered on older perceptions of the nation state and the national borders.

I am not using the term educational sovereignty then, to signal the need for an act of separation. I mean almost the opposite. The strength and power gained by developing strategic social networks or affiliations to create a cultural space that will enhance its autonomy, mediate ideological and programmatic constraints and provide adequate forms of schooling for its students. In relation to Latino children and their teachers, educational sovereignty also means

reframing their language rights in the midst of their oppression and the aggression perpetrated by elements of the dominant society. In particular, we emphasize the type of agency that considers the schooling of Latino children within the larger educational ecology with an eye towards the transnational potential of such schooling and that respects and responds to the values of education possessed by the families of the children. This larger ecology then, includes not only schools but the social relationships and cultural resources found in local households and community settings and the potential connections created with other schools and communities in the Americas.

In what follows then, I will first review in a cursory fashion (I will be brief given the time restraints) the status quo for hundreds of thousands of Latino students, very diverse in their own right, but let's not forget, most from low-income communities. It will seem incredibly oppressive for those of you not familiar with the current conditions of Latino education. In fact, no white middle class child would ever face the pressures, abuses, and restrictive learning conditions imposed on so many of these children. Although I emphasize in my comments the education of Latino children, I believe that there are many cogent issues with the situation of African American children. There are very few studies, however, that attempt to jointly address the education issues of both groups. These studies are badly needed. Let us keep in mind that African American children and Latino children now constitute the majority population in all the urban school districts in the United States. This initial review will serve to highlight the encapsulation of these children's schooling, resulting in various forms of what Valenzuela calls "subtractive schooling" forms of schooling that are not only forcibly and punitively assimilative but that deliberately exclude the social, cultural, and linguistic resources of the students. Perhaps those of you committed to the schools in Philadelphia can inform me whether what I have to say has relevance to local conditions. I then will present – I have here three but I will reduce it to two – promising responses among many others that I could review to this encapsulation of schooling by dominant policies, practices, or ideologies that illustrates (at least that's what I claim) attempts at educational sovereignty. Each example is taken from projects in which I have participated and befitting a presentation at this conference, these are studies in which an ethnographic understanding of issues plays a pivotal role. I will conclude, I have here, with five areas of study and so forth and so on, but I will skip that and those of you that want to chat will know that we can do that tonight.

Let me just summarize in a couple of things, what I am calling the status quo. All issues having to do with the education of Latino students must be understood, now at least, in one way or the other, in the context created by demographic change. I have here in my notes that the city of Los Angeles is a case in point. For example, 62% of LA, approximately 6 million people, are now out of immigrant stock. That is, they are either first generation or second generation immigrants. A current estimate of the Latino population in the city and county of LA ranges from 40 to 45% of the population, about 4 ½ million people. The school district in LA is currently 72% Latino. However, this population nationally is also overwhelmingly the working class and low income population. Take just two national indicators; 35% of school age Latinos live below the poverty level compared to 11% of Whites, and 41% of Latino households make \$25,000 or less compared to 19% of Whites. If we exclude from these data the Cuban households in Miami, which is a much more affluent community, the percentage of Latino households making \$25,000 or less increases almost to 50%. The sociologist [unclear] in a study done of Latinos in LA,

concluded that given existing structural and economic conditions, this population will remain permanently in the low working class. Whether her prediction is accurate or not, the point is that this low social class is a more or less stable, more or less fixed structural condition of Latinos in urban settings including Philadelphia. The socioeconomic standing, as is well known, has major implications for the schooling of kids – a point to which I shall return.

One would figure, then, that in a school district with such a dominant Latino population like LA, that the issues affecting these children would take precedence. But nothing could be further from the truth. If anything, it has become one of the most restrictive districts anywhere. Consider the following issues. Bilingual education is banned statewide in California and Spanish is banished as a language of instruction (or more or less banished) under penalty of law, and a teacher is threatened with lawsuits if they use Spanish in school. A similar law was approved and is now in place in Arizona except the administrators are now threatened with lawsuits if Spanish is used in school. This is now being considered in other states such as New York.

Consider the coercive ideological context that such a law perpetuates. Establishing Spanish as a pariah language – that’s right, it’s a pariah language in schools - while privileging English exclusively shows clearly who is in charge. Two, highly restrictive and regimented reading curricula are put in place district wide without any evidence of their appropriateness. Imposed on teachers by law and focusing primarily on the children pronouncing phonemes in isolation as the principal if not sole pedagogy of early reading, severely curtailing if not prohibiting alternative meaning driven instructional approaches. Three, mandatory high stakes mass testing is implemented despite the failure of systems to narrow the gap between majority and minority students. These tests leave little or no room for more informative assessments that may lead to increased professional development for teachers, precisely what is needed to address a diverse and largely poor group of students. Four or five, I’m losing count, the referral of Latino students to special education classes increases with the onset of English only practices. The most common reason for referral is early reading difficulties, particularly common when non-English speakers are being taught to read in English by English monolingual teachers using mandated phonics methods. These lessons become in essence, prolonged guided correction lessons. Sixth, the district implements a “no-social promotions policy” as part of a standards movement with retention rates estimated at around 50%. Sixth or seventh, the district implements a mandatory class size reduction program; given the children to teacher ratio however, the consequence is that uncertified teachers are assigned to teach in the poorest schools with large populations of English language learners.

By the way, in LA there are approximately 300,000 English language learners. Therefore, if you are a young Latino student entering the school district in LA, you are likely to: 1) engage in low level academic curriculum befitting your low social class status that will limit your chances for academic achievement; 2) suffer the indignity of psychological violence having Spanish, your home language banned (by the edict of White strangers in this instance); 3) spend hours every week doing language drills on nonsense phonemes with little time devoted to understanding what you mean; 4) face a strong likelihood of being labeled retarded or learning disabled for the rest of your school career; 5) flunk or not pass a test of highly questionable validity but that is politically expedient; and, 6) risk being taught by a teacher with limited or no qualifications. You might get the point.

These constraints are not just isolated issues that coincide; it is vital to recognize the organized political forces and language ideologies that guide these activities as part of a broader social and educational policy of control and coercion created by the context of immigration and the changing demographics. Moreover, none of the structural or ideological conditions are likely to change in the near future. In fact, they are likely to become more oppressive given the changing demographics of the school population. Our claim, then, is that the situation as described, although with variations of course, represents the status quo for Latino children and for many other children in the United States, a population that is growing, of the working class and poor and suffering the consequences of the growth and their positions in the social order.

Can the status quo be mediated? [Unclear] Here are a couple of approaches These are examples taken from additive forms of agencies that may mediate some of these constraints by tapping into a system of cultural resources in local communities that attempt to situate and redefine teaching and learning in a broader educational ecology. I'm just going to mention two of them and then I will conclude. First, I just want to review briefly the work that we've done for some years that we've referred to as "funds of knowledge," and then I will switch to our most recent work which involves the documentation of biliteracy development in young children. The funds of knowledge work involves close collaboration with anthropologists and teachers, many of them bilingual teachers, to develop a pedagogical approach that builds on the cultural resources of local communities. We refer to these cultural resources as funds of knowledge, those bodies of knowledge that underlie the productive activities of households. We have been particularly successful, at least so we claim, in helping teachers as well as others, approach, understand, and define the school's community in terms of these funds of knowledge.

At the heart of our approach is the work of teachers conducting research in their students' households. In contrast to other approaches that emphasize home visits, the teachers in our study visit the students' households to learn from the family, and from a theoretical perspective, to seek to understand the ways in which people make sense of their everyday lives. By focusing theoretically and methodologically on understanding the particulars, the practices of life, we gain a deep appreciation of how people use resources of all kinds - most prominently the funds of knowledge - to engage life. Our claim, then, is that the act of development, from the first hand research experiences of families to the view of the community as possessing ample resources for learning leads to many possibilities for possible pedagogical activities. What I want to highlight, however, is what often remains embedded in the activities if the emphasis is solely on describing the visits or modifying classroom practices. The critical political task of representing the school's community as a collection of household data [Unclear] In addition to the possibilities of forming new classroom practices what has also become clear is that teachers come to know the households, not only intellectually, but personally, and emotionally. In fact, all of us have been transformed, in one form or another, by the emotional dimensions of this work. Let me jump ahead just a little bit here.

Following the visits to the households, the teachers are asked to write up fieldnotes based on each interview and these fieldnotes become the basis of study group discussions. This is part of the key to it; we call that the center of gravity of this study, the study group discussions. These social settings are created specially, specifically, to help us think with the teachers. In the

reflexive process, involved, for example, in transcriptions, teachers are able to obtain elusive insights that can easily be overlooked. As they replay the audiotapes, or refer to notes, or as they expand their fieldnotes, connections and hunches begin to emerge. And of course, teachers are not working here in isolation; we've formed a research team. The counsels begin to take on a multidimensional reality which has taken root at the interview and has reached fruition in the reflexive process of writing notes. That is, the process of writing gives theoretical form and substance to the connections, forks and [Unclear] between the councils and the teachers.

And let me expand on this, just a little bit, because it involves the political task of re-presenting the community. As I mentioned, our study has been to get close to culture, to get close to the phenomenon of household knowledge, by making repeated visits in our role as learners. The elaboration of fieldnotes as well as other written parts such as articles are by necessity a strategic reduction of household life. A partial representation of that reality is too complex to understand without reducing it for specific purposes. Here is where the concept of funds of knowledge plays a major theoretical role or a major role as a theoretical artifact in the Vygotskian sense of artifact, by helping to mediate the teachers' comprehension of social life within the households that they study. This key concept and related ideas serve as a conceptual organizer, a concrete abstraction, if you will. A strategic way of reducing theoretically, but with plenty of respect, the complexity of people's everyday experiences without losing from sight the rich and dynamic vitality of their life. Furthermore, the fieldnotes and other artifacts such as audio and video tapes provide a context for our interpretation and our actions. These artifacts are central in helping us develop an attitude toward the cultural resources found in local households and by implication in the broader community. But also notice that in the process, reminiscent of David Olson's claim of how writing shapes thinking, that we first create this new attitude toward the text. Toward the great new representation that is the funds of knowledge documentation. Then, we generalize that attitude toward the families with whom we work as sources of data.

Of course, most of us are predisposed to think well of the families anyhow. But even those who are not convinced, or have not given the topic much thought, are influenced by the process, or at least develop a new vocabulary to refer to the household practices, such as funds of knowledge, networks of exchange, reciprocal relations, the creation of mutual trust, and the like. We don't create these new attitudes or dispositions for the families simply by visiting them. But through the theoretically inspired text analysis and reflections. To paraphrase Paulo Freire, by providing a new way of reading the word, we discovered new ways of reading the families' worlds. That is what we mean by a mediated approach to understanding families and their cultural resources which we claim raises many possibilities for addressing practice. However, as with any theoretical enterprise, our conclusions are always tentative, temporary, and subject to revision upon further study or scrutiny.

One further point and then I will switch to my final section. An important caveat - given the importance of social class in the schooling of children and the work of teachers, perhaps we could also treat social class in our funds of knowledge research as a primary theoretical and organizational tool, exactly the way we are treating funds of knowledge. After all, we did not just casually introduce the teachers to this concept of funds of knowledge and then walk into homes to discover what we would find. Instead, we prepared diligently to conduct the work by doing the required theoretical and methodological readings to establish the ethnographic nature

of the concept. As part of this preparation, we have highlighted the relation of funds of knowledge to the history of labor of the families, and to the existing household economies with the understanding that both were related primarily to the working class segment of the labor market. Ideally, we could have also developed a much more sophisticated understanding of social class as it conditions household and classroom dynamics, the production of knowledge, and the relationship between the settings. That is, just as the teachers develop and appropriate the language about funds of knowledge in the process of redefining their understandings of households and communities, and in taking action to make those funds of knowledge pedagogically viable, they, and we could have also developed a language to talk about class relations as a major source of inequalities in education. We haven't done so – that's a project for the future.

Let me switch to the final comments on the recent study, the biliteracy study, and then I'll stop. The new project that we have been conducting for the last three years extends our previous efforts in these two ways. One is that we are concentrating on the development of biliteracy - how young children come to become literate in two language systems. But especially how young children accomplish this feat routinely, as a mundane task. That is very important for us, that this is a routine task – little children becoming literate in two languages. This, I think, is a significant point. In the elementary school that is our study site – a Spanish immersion school from kindergarten through the fifth grade, all children regardless of social and language background, graduate the school literate in English and Spanish. Part of our analytical task is to document through various means, including participant observations, the developmental trajectory of students in these languages. So far, we have been doing this for three years and we hope to follow the students for another six years. Our primary strategy has been to develop longitudinal case studies of twenty students out of a sample of eighty such students, or what we call an integrated case study analysis. We take biliteracy development of young children as the clearest index of additive schooling. Simply put, if you are a parent and your child is not graduating elementary school literate in two languages, you are being short changed by the school system. The system is serving somebody else's needs and interests, but not yours. There is no magic in teaching children to learn how to read and write in two languages. It takes, of course, committed leadership by the principal, well trained instructional staff, sound bilingual pedagogy, well trained staff, and the wherewithal to mediate constraints imposed by the system.

For example, the school received complaints by the parents that the level of beginning Spanish reading was too low for Spanish speakers because they were privileging instructional English. You follow? The school, after consultation with all of the teachers, responded by creating what they call bilingual success, a series of cross age Spanish reading groups, one and a half hours a day, three days a week, into which students were placed according to their reading proficiency in Spanish. All of the students in the school. The entire school staff participates in these reading groups and there are currently fourteen such reading groups in the school. Now, when initiated, I feared that the program would turn into a static tracking program, because it could easily do that. That has not been the case; I was wrong. The students are evaluated often, both formally and informally, and the groups are rearranged accordingly. This innovation developed by the teachers has allowed for prolonged and sustained meaning based literacy instruction in Spanish for all students. Our data show how the majority of students in our sample are already fluent readers in both languages, some as early as the first grade. For the English dominant speakers,

these sessions have provided extra support in the weaker language. For the Spanish dominant speakers, they have provided accelerated development in Spanish that has created a kind of zone of proximal development for English reading.

The second important aspect of this study, after which, I will stop, has been to analyze how language ideologies come to mediate in one way or the other, the biliteracy development that I just described. Two unanticipated developments have shaped our work. One is the voters of Arizona approved what was called Proposition 203, the evil twin of the proposition in California which targets Latino kids and families and which placed the school ideologically under siege. As in California, Latino and American Indian voters opposed the proposition by about the same proportion that Anglo voters favored it, around 65%. In California, the only voters besides Latinos that opposed the proposition were African American voters. During the whole campaign and election period in Arizona, we have been able to document how the school becomes a site of resistance to such language oppression. The campaign became the defining moment of school as teachers, students, and their parents became political activists in defending their school. Even after the passage of the proposition into law, the school, with the support of the parents, has remained a site of defiance as it has continued to offer its curriculum. What they consider is not only a pedagogical but a moral choice for the students, while adjusting strategically to the new legal conditions. (Ron Unz, the millionaire from California who was the original economic backer for this proposition nationwide is in the habit of phoning district administrators in Tucson and threatening them with lawsuits if the proposition is not implemented as he decides. He has become in my opinion, in the leadership vacuum in Arizona, the de facto superintendent of schools for Latino students. This is akin to the Grand Wizard of the KKK dictating educational policy for African American students.) These are terrible conditions under which the children have to go to school.

A second development and I promise with this I'll conclude, is that we noticed, more than we had anticipated in designing the study, how children develop their own versions of language ideologies. These are children's language ideologies if you will, which influence their disposition towards literacy in one language or the other. These ideologies, if we can call them that, have little to do with parent's attitudes or beliefs about language but a lot with peer relations at the school. Let me elaborate with just one example that helped us to understand how these ideologies do their work. We have found, especially for Latino kids, language ideologies help to arouse strong feelings about Spanish and English from the very beginning of their formal education. As we initiated the study, we obtained a case example from a five year old girl Veronica, who while in Kindergarten expressed quite clearly her feelings about English and Spanish. Kathy Carmichael, a teacher and one of my doctoral students, collected this example. Veronica was born in Tucson and lives in the barrio, or neighborhood, where the school is located; she is the oldest of four children. Her mother immigrated, legally, along with her parents from Sedona, Mexico when she was fourteen. Her father was born in Mexico and also immigrated legally when he was fourteen. So, she is part of the second generation, almost generation two and a half because her parents were so young when they came over. Her parents married at the age of 17; her mother is now 27 and her father is 28. In an interview, this Spanish monolingual girl told the teacher, Kathy, that she, that is Veronica, the kid, that she enjoys speaking English more than Spanish and predicted that she would soon stop speaking Spanish because she doesn't like it much. In fact, this young girl imagined herself speaking solely in

English in two or three years when she would be in the intermediate grades, or at least so she expressed to us in the interview. She also expressed that one can learn more in English, a stance based on her observations that most grown ups speak English. In her view, a person who doesn't learn English will suffer dire consequences. Here is her quote, "He has to be out in the streets begging for food (a person who doesn't learn English) because when he went to school he didn't hear anything (he couldn't understand anything is what she means) and he ended up staying dumb."

We also found however, that the sources of Veronica's and other children's ideologies did not depend, on any unilinear transmission model from adults to kids. Veronica's mother expressed very clearly that she wanted her child to retain Spanish and become bilingual. She said, "I want both languages to go in life with her." The mother also expressed that she saw Spanish as the language of family, something that Veronica acknowledged by the way, and saw Spanish as intimately connected to her Mexican cultural identity. Nevertheless, even in the context of a Spanish immersion school, one that makes every effort to privilege Spanish in the school, in a classroom where the teacher speaks only Spanish and conveys through her actions and attitudes the importance of knowing Spanish well, and with a mother who wants her to retain Spanish while learning English and considers Spanish to be the language of family and of her identity, this little girl was ready to speak English and only English in the near future.

What's going on with Veronica? She's only five years old. We had some hints in the initial interview, and we followed those hints. One is that she was a very limited English speaker as a Spanish monolingual speaker and was eager to learn the language that was the first language of most of the kids in the school. The school, therefore, is dominated by peer relations conducted in English. The language of instruction may be Spanish, but the language of the school as divined by the children's actions, is definitely English. By the way, we asked another kid "Did you realize that the teachers speak only Spanish to you?" He said, "Yeah." We asked him, "How come?" He said, "I don't know. Maybe they need to practice it." The point here is that Veronica, we claim, already embodies and articulates competing language ideologies which are linked to the larger culture of Spanish speakers in the Tucson borderlands and the larger community of Latinos in the US and to specific forms of life and schooling. We have suggested as [Unclear] points out, that these social interactions are central to the schooling process and inescapable to students and teachers. Therefore, in a Vygotskian sort of way, language ideologies may function as cultural resources with differential influences on actions by adults and children. In particular as Teun van Dijk proposes, a key dimension of ideologies is their cross situational potential as socially shared resources for thinking for both groups or individuals that can be drawn upon or not or applied in different contexts.

The example of Veronica, then a kindergarten student, illustrates how a child can come to restrict herself, determine her future and who she will be by decisions she makes about language. This, we claim, is a childhood version of hegemony – how she comes to consent, how she comes to acquiesce to a dominant social ideology about language, in this instance about English, even before she can speak the language. That is what we find striking; even before she can speak the language, she is already planning her future in a language that she doesn't speak. As such, we are struck by the ways in which language ideologies are always involved in the process of students' personal production, that is the process of producing who they are as human beings.

Children form their subjectivities, who they are, their personalities, and reconstitute them using the cultural resources and social processes available to them. These subjectivities are always fluid and simultaneously deeply singular, for no two kids have identical social histories. And they are deeply social for they are always embedded in particular systems of social interaction.

In this respect, one must consider that children actively create themselves with domains and communities not necessarily of their choosing but with social, symbiotic, and ideological aspects specific to their particular status as children, especially as minority children. Norma González has coined the term “subalternity” that is, how minority status itself provides a structure for child language development and mediates the children’s construction of meaning and identity. She writes,

These evocative dimensions of race, class, and minority status have been absent in language development studies of children yet they represent a formative force in language socialization. Thus, for Latinos as for African American children, ambiguity and contradiction are always a backdrop for language learning and development, especially in relation to schooling.

Final sentence, I promise. I have proposed then this concept of educational sovereignty to capture the agency needed to challenge the legacy of control and impositions. Educational sovereignty requires that communities with assistance, with affiliations, create their own infrastructures for development including mechanisms for the education of children that capitalize on rather than devalue cultural resources. It will then be their initiative to invite others, including those in the academic community. These forms of education must address Latino self interest and self determination while limiting the influence of the whims of the majority that have historically influenced their schooling. At the very minimum: 1) educational sovereignty must attend to the larger historical structures and ideologies of schooling with the goal of making educational constraints especially those related to social class visible and unstable for all in the school, and 2) educational sovereignty must include developing social agency that situates teaching and learning as part of a broader education ecology that taps into existing social and cultural resources in schools, households, and communities in promoting change. Thanks for being so patient.