



Repositorio Institucional de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

<https://repositorio.uam.es>

Esta es la **versión de autor** del artículo publicado en:

This is an **author produced version** of a paper published in:

Pedagogies: an International Journal 6.1 (2011): 1-15

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1554480X.2011.531940>

Copyright: © 2011 Taylor & Francis

El acceso a la versión del editor puede requerir la suscripción del recurso
Access to the published version may require subscription

**TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND MINORITY STUDENTS:
THE POTENTIAL OF “SABERES DOCENTES”**

Running Head: Teacher Knowledge

Gisela Ernst-Slavit, PhD

Washington State University (USA)

gernst@wsu.edu

David Poveda, PhD

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain)

david.poveda@uam.es

February 17, 2009

Please contact:

Gisela Ernst-Slavit
Washington State University
14204 NE Salmon Creek Avenue
Vancouver, WA 98685
360.546.9659 (Ph)
360.546.9076 (F)
360.576.9079 (H)
gernst@wsu.edu

**TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND MINORITY STUDENTS:
THE POTENTIAL OF “SABERES DOCENTES”**

Abstract

Drawing heavily on the work of French sociologist Agnes Heller (1994), Latin American anthropologists and educators proposed the notion of *saberes docentes*, roughly translated as “teacher knowledge”, to account for the knowledge acquired through everyday trials and rehearsals of specific problems along with the accompanying reflective processes. In this paper, we argue in favor of incorporating the notion of *saberes docentes* into our current understanding of educators’ work with ethnic minority students in urban and semi-urban educational contexts. To support this argument, we discuss data from two different research settings involving the education of ethnic minority children: (a) the educational programs organized by a Gitano (Gypsy) cultural association, that employs several non-Gypsy educators, in a small city in central Spain; and (b) schools employing bilingual teaching assistants—both immigrant and nonimmigrant—working with immigrant students in the northwest region of the United States.

Work on *saberes docentes* (literally translated as “teaching/teacher knowledges”; Levinson, 1998) evolved in Latin American educational ethnography, particularly Mexican, during the early 1980s (Rockwell & Mercado, 1986). It draws on the sociology of everyday life developed by French historian and sociologist Agnes Heller (1994). For Heller, the knowledge used by social actors to navigate their daily lives is the result of each individual's personal and local histories, which simultaneously are embedded in and are partly a product of larger historical forces and institutions. Consequently, practical, everyday knowledge is multilayered and intertwines with various domains of social life, which sociological and historical analyses can identify and trace.

Schooling is a key element in the processes of social, economic and political reproduction. While traditional structural analysis focuses on teachers as agents of cultural reproduction, a focus on everyday knowledge allows a view of teachers as workers and of teaching as a socially constructed practice rather than as the automatic realization of didactic prescriptions (Rockwell, 1991a). Mexican educational ethnographers built upon Heller's theory to develop a complementary framework to explore teachers' work and knowledge. This framework is based on a crucial distinction between “pedagogical knowledge” (*saber pedagógico*), those formal descriptions, prescriptions, and theoretical formulations developed in the educational sciences, formal teacher training, and policy documents, and “teacher knowledge” (*saber docente*), educators' particular formulations and practices based on their daily professional and personal experiences (Mercado, 2002). The relationship between these two fields is dialectical and traces of one can be found in the other. Hence, this connection can be empirically examined (e.g. Franzé, 2003; Rockwell, 1995).

More recently, Mercado (2002) adds a Bakhtinian component to highlight the dialogical construction of teachers' practical knowledge in which formalized discourses, teachers' collective experiences, and individual educators' experiences with students, curricular materials, families, and other agents of the system

are constructively appropriated to produce a particular set of educational practices. Within this framework, empirical studies have focused on different dimensions of the construction and display of teachers' knowledge, such as the role of initial and continuing teacher training (Sandoval, 1995; Mercado, 2002) or mediations with print and textbooks (Rockwell, 1991b; Mercado, 2002). In short, *saberes docentes* has developed as an important concept in Latin American and Spanish educational research literature for understanding educators' daily work and teaching practices.

Broadening the focus to include educational research published in English, one finds the notion of "teacher knowledge" (Verloop, Van Driel & Meijer, 2002) developing parallel to *saberes docentes* (Mercado, 2002) with substantial theoretical and methodological differences between each tradition. For example, work on teacher knowledge draws on a cognitive-individualistic view of knowledge, as something composed of a "large variety of cognitions, from conscious and well-balanced opinions to unconscious and unreflected intuitions" (Verloop, Van Driel & Meijer, 2002, p. 446). In contrast, work on *saberes docentes* draws on a socio-cultural conception of knowledge, in which knowledge is manifested in teacher's perceptions and beliefs, their actual practices, and the rationality behind the educational materials and conditions they design. This knowledge cannot be reduced to an individual construction since it is mediated, in a Bakhtinian sense, by different layers of accumulated history and personal experience (Mercado, 2002). Consequently, while work on cognitive "teacher knowledge" can draw on methods such as questionnaires or semi-experimental designs to produce its findings, work on *saberes docentes* is heavily grounded in ethnographic research perspectives. The focus has been to document teachers' daily practices, examine their rationality, and trace the role that different experiences have in the configuration. Within this effort, there is special interest in understanding the role that local working conditions and accumulated experiences with students (e.g., in a particular community, school) have on the construction of educators' *saberes*.

Within the *saberes docentes* perspective, one topic that has produced distinct contributions is the analysis of teachers' adaptations when working with ethnic minority students--which in Mexico primarily

refers to indigenous populations. This line of inquiry shares some assumptions with the sociolinguistic/microethnographic tradition developed in the United States a few decades ago that focuses on home-school discontinuities and responds to these through culturally congruent instruction (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Guthrie & Hall, 1983). However, the *saberes docentes* framework offers new possibilities. More than examining instructional congruence/continuity as something that is achieved either as part of a designed educational intervention (e.g., Au, 1980; Vogt, Jordan & Tharp, 1987) or, more fundamentally, as possible because teachers and students share the same cultural backgrounds (Philips, 1983), work focusing on *saberes docentes* has examined the practical adaptations that teachers make. Often not from minority backgrounds, educators make adaptations in their classrooms as a result of their own personal and professional experiences, resources, and professional commitment (Paradise, 1991; Poveda, 2003).

In this paper we continue this line of analysis in our work with ethnic minority students as we discuss selected data from two larger studies, one in central Spain and the other in the northwestern United States. The cross-national analysis will center around two case studies of educators who are in the periphery of the educational system working with marginalized populations. Case Study 1 will focus on the non-Gitano¹ staff employed by two small educational programs in a small city in central Spain organized by a *Gitano* (Spanish Roma) cultural association. Case Study 2 will center around the work of two immigrant educators -- one teacher and one teaching assistant, working with immigrant students in schools in Washington state. While the two larger research studies were independently designed and conducted by each author, in this paper we have put the projects into dialogue with each other in order to continue exploring the conceptual potential of the notion of *saberes docentes*. The goals of this collaborative effort are to re-interpret part of our data through the lens of educators' practices and decision-making (i.e. *saberes*), to contribute to international educational research efforts by introducing this established research tradition into the English-speaking literature, and to further expand the database of research on *saberes docentes* by focusing on educational scenarios that previous studies have not explored. Each case study

reports on the teaching practices in very different geographical and sociopolitical contexts although they share a focus on the educational experiences of students and teachers working in multilingual, multiethnic industrialized settings rather than in rural indigenous communities. Additionally, these studies examine the teaching practices of educators who may be seen as working in the “periphery” of the formal educational system (i.e., teaching assistant support inside schools or participation in after-school community programs). For these educators, the dialectical relationship between formal pedagogical knowledge, the institutions in which they work, professional development, and the knowledge acquired *in situ*, are different from those of teachers working in the mainstream spaces of the formal educational system. Thus, the practices of these educators potentially show a distinct path in the social construction of *saberes docentes*. In the following sections we present the research contexts, procedures and relevant data from each context, and in the conclusions we turn to a general comparison and discussion of both cases.

SABERES DOCENTES AND GITANO CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL SETTINGS IN SPAIN

This section discusses the type of *saberes* developed by educators working with Gitano children outside school settings. The data presented comes from a sociolinguistic/ethnographic study involving participant observation, audio and video recordings, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. This 2000-2003 study focuses on Gitano children’s language practices in a small Spanish city, which we will call Mid-City. The participants in this research project included a network of Gitano children, their families, and the professionals who worked with them in various contexts. The setting was a new neighborhood of Mid-City in which a large proportion of the Gitano population had recently relocated. Mid-City Gitanos, as most Gitanos in Spain, have Spanish as their mother tongue and are primarily monolingual.

The data presented in this section are taken from research conducted in two different educational programs organized by the local Gitano cultural association: a summer program and an after-school computer club. This association ran several publicly funded educational and social programs, some of which targeted children and youth. The *summer program* was designed to provide childcare and educational leisure activities for children during the summer months of 2000. An additional goal of the program organizers was to nurture the school-like, academic skills the organizers believed Gitano children lacked in comparison to their non-Gitano Spanish peers. The *computer club after-school program* took place three evenings a week in the winter and spring of 2001. The program was designed to introduce children to new technologies and foster the acquisition of computer skills. The program provided also space for informal literacy development; however, these explicitly built-in objectives were not directly stated to the children. Both programs drew from the same pool of children and were regularly attended by between 20-30 children between 4-12 years of age. These programs were run by a small staff comprised of members/employees of the association and volunteers (including the participant-observer researcher). Both Carmen and Ana (pseudonyms) were instructors in the summer program while the computer after-school program was run solely by Carmen.

Carmen was a non-Gitano social worker who had been employed for several years by the Gitano association. She had extensive experience working with the children and members of the Gitano community and had been involved in the design, organization, and implementation of several of the social programs that the association had run over the years. She was also a native of Mid-City and had recently bought a house in the neighborhood where most of the children lived and where the association had a site during the years 2000-2002. At the time of the study, Ana had just graduated from a five-year educational program. Although she was hired by the association to work in the summer program, she continued to work for the association throughout the year. Prior to this position she had little teaching experience and had not previously worked with Gitano children. Ana had been living in Mid-City for several years but not in the

neighborhoods where the majority of Mid-City Gitanos resided (see Table 1 for a summary comparison of both educators).

- Insert Table 1 around here -

The following analysis focuses on how Ana and Carmen constructed different educational materials and managed different interactions with the Gitano children. The comparison is especially relevant, because Ana and Carmen reflect different configurations in the pedagogical-teaching knowledge matrix. While they share similarities in their own socio-demographic backgrounds, Ana has advanced theoretical training but little practical experience with Gitano children. Carmen, on the other hand, has years of experience educating Gitano children in out-of-school settings but no formal training in education.

A central finding of the larger ethnographic study (e.g. Poveda & Martin, 2004) is the pivotal role played by the local community in the lives of Gitano children. This knowledge is local and particular to the community and not immediately accessible or comprehensible to outsiders (although it is not explicitly concealed or made elusive) and permeates their oral and literacy practices. For example, the conversational descriptions and narratives of the participating Gitanos often make reference to events, places and members of the community. Consequently, an important part of fieldwork consisted in identifying and understanding these conversational contexts, allowing the researcher to ultimately incorporate this information into the analysis of children's oral and written productions. From another point of view, these discourses are deeply contextualized in a local network of participants and activities and involve a form of contextualization that shows some of the classic differences that have been established between 'schooled' and informal forms of reasoning (Scribner & Cole, 1973).

We argue that the *saberes docentes* developed by educators working in precisely these types of contextualized settings, recognizes, acknowledges, and builds upon this local orientation, either by letting it develop or by making it visible and identifying it as a first step into Gitano children's "acculturation" into school-academic understandings. This latter framing, focusing on explicit transmission of the "school code"

as a form of *saberes docentes*, reflects what is currently a part of the sociopolitical discourse on formal education endorsed by many Gitano families and organizations. On the one hand, there is a demand for changes within the educational system and formal pedagogical practices to incorporate and accommodate elements of Gitano culture and social organization. On the other hand, there is also “recognition” that formal education, while not part of the Gitano traditions, is needed to attain the skills necessary to successfully transact with the larger society. Within this logic, Carmen and Ana displayed different strategies. Carmen was able to identify many of children’s references and re-introduce them in her pedagogical actions, while Ana did not recognize many of the references introduced by the children and assessed them accordingly. The data we present next illustrate these dynamics.

School literacies in the summer program

The worksheet in Figure 1 was created by Ana during the summer program and completed by a 7-year-old girl. It reflects the type of school tasks and problems that children may encounter in school. In a two-column format, the worksheet directs children to name and write the “type” of stores/establishments where the products in the left column are sold. In Spanish, this can be seen primarily as a linguistic task² since most of the names of these establishments are created by adding a particular suffix (*ría*) to each of the nouns. This rule works for all examples (e.g., *reloj* - *relojería*, clock – clock store; *libro* - *librería*, book - bookstore) except for the first item--an exception to the rule--since “a thermometer” is sold in a store where a variety of health products are sold (*farmacia* - pharmacy).

-- Insert Figure 1 at about here --

Ana distributed the worksheet to the children to work individually. The second author was at the table where the children were completing these worksheets and observed them writing the answers on the

worksheet but did not correct them before Ana intervened. Later she collected and corrected the worksheets, and promptly returned them to the children without much feedback. Once the corrections had been made and Ana had left the table, the researcher reviewed the problem answers with the 7-year-old girl so that she could propose alternatives. Soon after, given the analytically interesting nature of these answers, he discussed the student's "errors" with Ana.

In her initial review of the worksheet two answers were marked as incorrect. The student's first corrected answer, '*El hiper*' ('dollar store'), suggests she considered that clocks are bought in multi-purpose establishments, since a dollar store is where a moderately priced clock could typically be purchased by Spanish families (vs. a *relojería* clock-store, which is in fact a specialized establishment). This answer was corrected by Ana but later accepted as plausible after a discussion with the researcher and other adults in the program. However, the answer to item 2 could also be seen as an instance of the girl naming a particular shop where she or her family could buy the product. In the neighborhood where the Gitano cultural association houses its program and where most of the children live, there is a store called '*Hiper 100*'. So, it is possible that the girl is referring to this particular establishment in her answer. Ana, living in a neighborhood outside of the Gitano community, did not share the intimate contextual-based references of the child and so did not consider this response accurate. This interpretation may be speculative, however, the girl's answer to item 4 clearly indicated that she was writing down the name of the particular establishment (*la mari*) where she buys (or would buy) bread. For the option bread (*pan*), she does not answer bakery (*panaderia*), but '*la mari*'. *La mari* is the nickname for a particular establishment ('Maria's shop'), a small neighborhood food store, two doors away from the summer program. This store name was not recognized by Ana and was crossed out as nonsensical, and she explained that the correct answer was *panadería* (bakery).

More importantly, both answers were corrected and no further consideration was given to what could be the underlying logic to the answers and what they revealed about the girl's individual reasoning or

experiences. In this case, Ana made a blanket application of conventional academic, school-like logic, and the girl's locally based interpretations were not recognized, incorporated, or valued. Even if the stated summer program goal was to promote an academic rationality, the girl's answers were not even considered to be potential scaffolds or mid-steps in the process. These educational practices around written text contrasted with those of Carmen.

Vernacular texts in the after-school computer program

Segment 1: Written during the after-school computer program:

dios yo te quiero pero no bajo
al culto porque mis padres no
me degan porque esta muy
lejos algunas veces bajare con
mi primo luis angel aun que
el baja todos los días

English translation:

god I love you but I don't go down
to 'the service' because my parents don't
let me because it is very
far away sometimes I will go down
with my cousin luis angel although
he goes down every day

Segment 1 is a line-by-line reproduction of a text composed by a 13 year-old boy during the computer after-school program. The program primarily offered free use of the computers and allowed children to explore different software and applications (e.g., painting programs, games, word processors). The children chose a computer and worked with it rather freely, either individually or in small groups. A

significant finding, one which can be considered counterintuitive given popular misconceptions about Gitano children's literacy, is that a fair number of children spontaneously dedicated their time to writing texts during the program. The content and structure of the texts were chosen by the children and later saved on a floppy disk without much adult editing or correcting. Correcting and editing the text only took place when requested by the children.

The text above is an example of the type of texts produced by the children, many of which share a number of characteristics. They are clearly vernacular and detached from traditional school-type rationality. Punctuation, grammar and spelling are unconventional, and the topics are often unrelated (or even antagonistic) to those sanctioned by the educational system. In this case, the text is religious in nature, addressed to God, and was written by an Evangelical Gitano (a religious minority) student.

Given that the text was produced in a community context outside of school, it may be no surprise that the content and form of the text do not meet academic expectations. More importantly for the discussion is how the text has an indexical organization in which the local environment and its physical and social relationships are again articulated. The text establishes a spatial connection between the site of the Evangelical chapel and the child's home. The chapel is located in an older section of the city, where most Gitano families resided until a few decades ago, while the child's home is located in the newer neighborhood where the program takes place. The result is that currently Mid-City's Gitano families, friendships, and institutional resources are spread across two sectors of the city, and daily movement between both sectors is a recurrent practical issue that is especially visible to the children. In other words, from this perspective, this student's brief text condenses a number of issues central to Gitano children's lives in this community: (1) their participation in a variety of informal institutions unique to the Gitano community (e.g., the Evangelical Church, the Gitano cultural association's programs), (2) the relationship between different nuclear and extended family structures and (3) the significant role that mobility between two sections of the city has for Gitano families.

The apparently spontaneous interest in literacy and writing (vs. multi-media video-games, computer painting, or the use of CD-Rom) was generated by Carmen's open-ended and non-directive design of the activity. Instead of creating constrained writing tasks or more directed activities around computers, she was able to maintain regular participation in the program and, perhaps more significantly, even engage older Gitano boys such as the author of the text above (about 37% of the written texts that were collected in this program were authored by boys). Also, when commenting on these texts with the children or reading them, she was able to identify most referents and situate the meaning of the texts within children's lives, even when they were as ambiguous as Segment 2.

***SABERES DOCENTES* IN BILINGUAL TEACHING ASSISTANTS WORKING WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN THE UNITED STATES**

We now turn our attention to another group of educators working in the periphery with a minority group in the northwestern United States. In the following section, the analysis focuses on the *saberes docentes* displayed by two bilingual English/Spanish educators working with children of Mexican descent. The examples are derived from a multi-year, multi-site ethnographic study in the northwestern states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho and explore the lives and circumstances of twenty teaching assistants -- both immigrant and nonimmigrant (Ernst-Slavit, 2006; Wenger et al., 2004)- in formal K-12 school settings. In addition, data from an ethnographic study of a first grade bilingual classroom (Ernst-Slavit, 1997) is (re)analyzed (Baker & Green, 2007) to offer a contrast between the different interactional and educational opportunities that are afforded to language minority students in K-12 settings.

The discussion below revolves around two representative instances of classroom interaction wherein two educators are working with their language minority students. These examples were selected because they are bold illustrations of recurrent interactions and events. The first example discusses a case

in which a certified bilingual teacher, when presented with the opportunity to validate and expand her students' linguistic repertoires, fails to acknowledge their contributions. Each example will be preceded by selected contextual and methodological information.

Missed opportunities in a bilingual classroom

The first segment was collected during a yearlong ethnographic study in a bilingual first grade classroom located in central Washington State (Ernst-Slavit, 1997). Students and teachers were all native Spanish speakers, and most classroom instruction took place in Spanish (about 80%). All children in this classroom came from rural backgrounds and were either born in Mexico or were born in the US to Mexican immigrants. The students had two teachers, a morning and an afternoon teacher. Mrs. Miller, the afternoon teacher, was born and raised in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and came to the United States as a teenager. She had taught in the district for over five years (mostly in upper elementary grades) and was highly regarded by colleagues and administrators. This was, however, the first time she had taught in a first grade, bilingual classroom.

During the third week of March, students were studying *Los Animales de la Granja* (Farm Animals). Throughout the week teachers and students talked about farm animals, viewed pictures of animals, and read stories about different farm animals. The children also wrote short sentences and drew pictures of animals. On the fourth day, Mrs. Miller distributed a worksheet depicting sixteen farm animals while announcing that they were going to review the names of these animals. As she pointed to each picture, she asked the children to name the animal. Once a child mentioned the "appropriate" label for the animal as determined by Mrs. Miller, she moved on to the next picture. What follows is the exchange that took place while the teacher pointed at the pig.

Segment 2: "The Five Little Pigs?"

| | | | |
|------|----------|---|-----------------------------------|
| 100 | Mrs. M | Y ESTE | |
| 101 | | Y ESTE COMO SE LLAMA | |
| 102 | | IGNACIO | |
| 103 | Ignacio | un marrano | |
| 104 | Mrs. M | NO | {snickers} |
| 105 | | ANA | |
| 106 | Ana | un cochino | |
| 107 | Mrs. M | | {snickers} |
| 108 | Lizeth | si si es un cochino | |
| 109 | Javier | cochiiiino | {making faces} |
| 110 | Ramona | marrano marrano si | |
| 111 | | si si como un como un chancho | |
| 112 | Ana | un cochino te digo | |
| 113 | Mrs. M | BUENO SI ESTE | |
| 114 | | ESTE ES EHH UN PUERCO | |
| 115 | | SI UN PUERCO | |
| 116 | Raúl | pueerco | |
| 116a | Students | | {laugh} |
| 117 | Mrs. M | SI YA A VER YAAA | |
| 118 | | SI SI ESTA BIEN TODOS | |
| 119 | | TODOS SON PUERCOS O TAMBIEN TODOS SON TODOS SON | |
| 120 | | CERDOS | |
| 121 | | SI AQUI | {points at "cerdo" on chalkboard} |
| 122 | | CERDO ESTE ES UN CERDO COMO EL DEL LIBRO | {points at desk} |
| 123 | | Y ESTE ESTE | {points at goat on ditto sheet} |
| 124 | | COMO SE LLAMA | |

English Translation

| | | | |
|------|----------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 100 | Mrs. MO | AND THIS ONE | |
| 101 | | AND THIS ONE WHAT IS IT CALLED | |
| 102 | | IGNACIO | |
| 103 | Ignacio | a marrano | |
| 104 | Mrs. O | NO | {snickers} |
| 105 | | ANA | |
| 106 | Ana | a cochino | |
| 107 | Mrs. O | | {snickers} |
| 108 | Lizeth | yes yes it's a cochino | |
| 109 | Javier | cochiiiino | {making faces} |
| 110 | Ramona | marrano marrano yes | |
| 111 | | yes yes like a chancho | |
| 112 | Ana | a cochino I tell you | |
| 113 | Mrs. O | WELL YES THIS | |
| 114 | | THIS IS AHH A PUERCO | |
| 115 | | YES A PUERCO | |
| 116 | Raúl | pueeerco | |
| 116a | Students | | {laugh} |
| 117 | Mrs. O | YES OKAY LET'S SEEEE | |
| 118 | | YES YES ALRIGHT ALL | |
| 119 | | ARE PUERCOS OR ALSO ALL ARE | |
| 120 | | CERDOS | |
| 121 | | YES HERE | {points at "cerdo" on chalkboard} |
| 122 | | CERDO THIS IS A CERDO LIKE THE ONE IN THE BOOK | {points at desk} |

As evidenced in the above segment, when students were asked to name the animal in the picture, Ignacio said *marrano* (line 103) and earned a "no" from the teacher (line 104). Ana tried a different term,

that is, *cochino* (line 106) and received only a snicker from the teacher. After several children repeated *marrano* and *cochino* more than once, Ramona added a third term, *chancho*, as she explained that a "*marrano* is like a *chancho*" (lines 111-112). Following students' attempts to provide the "right" name of the animal, Mrs. Miller introduced the word *puerco* (line 114). When Raúl heard this term he repeated it as other students laughed. At this point, the teacher interjected to say that all are *puercos* and *cerdos* as on the chalkboard (line 121) and in the book (line 122) then swiftly moved on to the next animal on the worksheet.

This segment clearly illustrates the teacher's efforts to help her students learn "standard" terms in Spanish—unfortunately, at the cost of de-valuing what she considered to be students' "non-standard" terms. Although five different terms were used to refer to a pig (all of them standard terms found in most Spanish dictionaries) the only terms accepted by the teacher were (1) *cerdo*, which appeared in the book they had read the day before (published in Spain) and (2) *puerco*, which is the term most frequently used in Argentina, Mrs. Miller's homeland. In essence, the three words for pig mentioned by the children (i.e., *marrano*, *cochino*, *chancho*) were not accepted by the teacher, because they were not part of the language legitimized by the curricular materials or by the teacher's perception of what was "appropriate." In this case it can be said that Mrs. Miller's pedagogical decisions were influenced by her own assessment of what counted as correct or standard Spanish. Even after conversations with the native Spanish-speaking researcher about the diversity of "Spanishes" and the possibility of different standards, Mrs. Miller considered it beneficial for the children to use the Castilian standard, which is the national standard in Spain and in several Latin American nations, including Argentina. Mrs. Miller's choice of the Castilian standard as the only valid linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) reproduced the existing hierarchies regarding Spanish varieties that exist in Spain and parts of Latin America. This personal preference is a product of Mrs. Miller's own *saberes* and is now part of her teaching inventory.

Teaching assistant's *saberes docentes*

In contrast with “The Five Little Pigs” segment above, Mrs. Peralta, a teaching assistant, validated her students’ comparative language attempts as they added new learning to their existing schema--in this case, comparing a zebra to a donkey and a horse. This representative segment, extracted from a larger ethnographic study on a selected group of bilingual teaching assistants (Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006), took place in an elementary school library located in southwest Washington with four first graders pulled out from their mainstream classroom to receive English as a second language (ESL) instruction. The four children are Spanish-speaking students originally from Mexico, who had been in the United States for less than a year. The ESL teaching assistant met with them daily for thirty minutes. Mrs. Peralta is a native English speaker born and raised in the United States. She and her former husband, a native Spanish-speaker from Mexico, raised their children bilingually. The segment below begins with a question from Mrs. Peralta after she observed Andrés struggling in his efforts to draw a zebra.

Segment 3: Like a zebra

| | | | |
|-----|--------|--|-------------------|
| 200 | Mrs. P | How would you draw a zebra? What does a zebra look like? | |
| 201 | Andrés | Tall | |
| 202 | Mrs. P | Tall | |
| 203 | Gina | [] | |
| 204 | Mrs. P | Um, hum. What kind of animal does a zebra look like? | |
| 205 | Samuel | | {raises his hand} |
| 206 | | Um, um....Un burro | {very softly} |
| 207 | Mrs. P | You can say it in Spanish if you need to. | |
| 208 | Samuel | A burro | |
| 209 | Diana | It's a donkey | |
| 210 | Mrs. P | Ah, right! A burro or caballo. | |

211 Andrés Yah, they do look like a donkey.

In this instance, two children, who had been mostly quiet during the preceding discussion about “places we would like to go,” volunteered information (lines 206, 208 and 209). When Samuel in an almost inaudible and timid voice said “*un burro*” (line 206), Mrs. Peralta supported his use of Spanish (line 207). Samuel then more confidently restated his answer (line 208). Diana, who had also been very quiet, followed Samuel’s comment by announcing that a “*burro*” is a “donkey.” By doing so, Diana demonstrated that she knew enough English to function as a bilingual broker between Spanish and English. Mrs. Peralta, followed Diana’s comment by acknowledging Diana’s contribution (“Ah, right!” in line 210) and also validated the use of Spanish by going back to Samuel’s Spanish term “*burro*.” In addition, Mrs. Peralta added her own contribution in Spanish, “*caballo*,” that is horse. Andrés, the student attempting to draw the zebra, acknowledged his peers’ contributions by giving a positive assessment in English to Samuel’s initial suggestion that a zebra looks like “*burro*” (line 206) and to Diana’s translation, “donkey.”

Unlike Segment 2, where the teacher dismissed the three terms for pig offered by the children in spite of being linguistically valid, in Segment 3 the teaching assistant accepted and encouraged the use of the students’ native language and even validated the comment that a zebra looks like a *burro* (donkey). In her final remarks in this sequence, Mrs. Peralta validated students’ contributions and enhanced their understanding by using the Spanish term supplied by a student (i.e., *burro*), and by mentioning another animal that resembles a zebra (i.e., *caballo* - horse) in the children’s native language.

This kind of responsiveness to students’ abilities and needs was not unusual for Mrs. Peralta. During this study, the researcher witnessed many instances when the teaching assistant allowed students to use their first language, even though in some cases (e.g., with Russian, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese) she had no knowledge of the language.

While Mrs. Peralta's role as teaching assistant was to assist her language minority students learn English, her *saberes docentes* included the consistent use of their native language and the validation of students' perspectives—even if occasionally they were not as accurate as in the “Like a zebra” segment above. In comparing the personal trajectories of the teacher in Segment 2 (Mrs. Miller) and this teaching assistant a few important contrasts emerge.

Insert Table 2 at about here –

The comparison between the trajectories of these two educators, as depicted in Table 2, reflects similar patterns to those of the two educators in the Gitano programs. These disparities are significant as we attempt to tease apart the factors affecting the *saberes docentes* of each teacher. Mrs. Miller, highly regarded by district administrators as a model teacher, saw herself as an important role model in helping her first grade students learn Castilian Spanish. By the same token, she was raising her own children as monolingual English speakers. Mrs. Peralta, on the other hand, raised her own children bilingually, often tried to improve her own Spanish language skills, had just received a scholarship to pursue her teaching degree, and was able to validate students' contributions in any language. In the process, she modeled attitudes and behaviors that signaled to students that their knowledge, languages, and cultures were valuable.

CONCLUSIONS

These cases, derived from two different international contexts, illustrate a continuum between bicultural education in a mid-sized, bicultural urban community in Spain and multiethnic and multilingual school settings in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. Such cross-national, case-based analyses are not common in the educational literature as a whole, including the area of multicultural education. This

research also explores the daily work of educators who have not followed traditional teacher training programs and/or professional trajectories (as defined in either geographical context) and who work either in non-school community settings or in marginalized positions within the formal school system. The comparison of the trajectories and practices of the educators we have presented highlights the complex and multiple layers of experiences that configure their educational practices and knowledge. Formal training, personal biography, individual styles, and work experience intersect in different ways and result in particular *saberes* that these educators put into action in their work with children from diverse cultural backgrounds. Further, the cases of Ana and Mrs. Miller (in contrast to Carmen and Mrs. Peralta) suggest that advanced formal training in educational theory and pedagogy does not necessarily facilitate educators' understandings of and connections with their students' experiences. Rather, especially in the case of Ana, formal training (which has been lengthy and recent in her case) seems to have prioritized school-based texts and forms of rationality to the point that other modes of thought and textual interpretation are disregarded, misinterpreted, or devalued. In contrast, Carmen and Mrs. Peralta, who have constructed their educational knowledge primarily through practice and work within the community, are more flexible and receptive to children's contributions and needs. In other words, while Ana and Mrs. Miller expected students to use a school-based, academic, specialist and public-sphere forms of language (Gee, 1998), Carmen and Mrs. Peralta welcomed and validated students' use of language skills from non-mainstream practices (Bartolomé, 1998). It is unwarranted to draw a general conclusion from these contrasts; however, they do suggest reconsidering how formal teacher training articulates the relationship between theoretical-conceptual pedagogical knowledge (*saber pedagógico*) and practical knowledge (*saber docente*), a concern that was already present in initial formulations of the construct of pedagogical knowledge (Rockwell & Mercado, 1986).

The instances we present also expand the findings of the more commonly used frameworks to understand minority education in the United States. Classic work within educational micro-ethnography and

sociolinguistics suggests that the educational failure of ethnic minority students is the result of a mismatch between the cultural patterns of communication that unfold in children's communities and in schools, which are regulated by non-minority norms (e.g., Heath, 1983; Philips, 1983). Changes in educational processes and outcomes can be achieved by facilitating cultural congruence between these patterns and moving classroom interactional patterns closer to community forms of interaction. Some of the more emblematic works within this sociolinguistic/ethnographic tradition consider that important cultural aspects of communication are the result of life-long learning experiences and thus, in practice, achieving "cultural congruence" may primarily involve the controversial and problematic matching of the ethnic origin of students and teachers (Au, 1980; Philips, 1983). In contrast, the cases we present, show how educators, who are not of the same ethnic origin as their students, accumulate *saberes* which allow them to adjust their forms of communication and the social organization of their learning activities to minority children's forms of interaction and learning. We argue that these adaptations are reflexive solutions stemming from these educators' emergent pedagogical knowledge - from their *saberes docentes*.

These conclusions have a number of implications for future work, which our results have only begun to address. The active adaptations that we have documented, which do not limit the possibility of cultural congruence to a common ethnic-historical background, highlight educators' agency. Teachers' accumulated personal, professional, and social experiences play a role in how they organize and adapt their instruction and materials and, at least, create educational micro-spaces where minority students' knowledge is valued and validated. Further, these adaptations take place despite material and professional conditions that compare unfavorably in relation to other parts of the educational and public social welfare system (i.e., mainstream teachers, other community programs). Thus, the potential for educational transformation at the local level or the periphery should be neither underestimated nor over-relied upon, since it is dependent upon the pedagogical application by individual educators, each with differing trajectories and *saberes docentes*. Also, the perspective provided by the *saberes docentes* framework

invites educators and researchers alike to carefully consider educators' personal biographies and trajectories as elements that configure their teaching knowledge. The cases we have presented here make this especially visible simply because extensive contact, through traditional teacher training schemes with reified pedagogical discourses and practices has not taken place. Therefore, educational strategies must have been appropriated elsewhere.

Finally, a focus on biography ties with a need to systematically take into account ideology as a process that is expressed and should be uncovered at many levels. By examining relatively marginalized spaces within complex educational systems we have uncovered small instances in which the rationale of formal educational procedures and assumptions are potentially problematized and denaturalized. This denaturalization requires certain ideological and reflexive commitments on the part of educators and also suggests that in some communities, formal education can play a variety of roles within their own social and economic trajectories. Thus, at the very least, the role of and procedures prescribed by formal education in the mainstream ideological system should not be taken for granted.

End Notes

1. *Gitano* (translated into English as Gypsy) is the term used to label the Spanish population of Roma origin. It is the preferred label for self-reference by the group and is commonly used in Spanish public discourse and the research literature.
2. As a simple test of this worksheet, the second author asked his second grade daughter to complete it. Once the girl began the task, she pointed out, "But all I have to do is add *ria*."

REFERENCES

- Au, K. (1980). Participation structures in a reading lesson with Hawaiian children: Analysis of a culturally appropriate instructional event. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 11, 91-115.
- Au, K. & Kawakami, A. (1994). Cultural congruence in instruction. In E. Hollins, J. King and W. Hayman (Eds.), *Teaching diverse populations: Formulating a knowledge base* (pp. 5-23). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Baker, D.W. & Green, J. (2007). Limits to certainty in interpreting video data: Interactional ethnography and disciplinary knowledge. *Pedaogies*, 2 (3), 191-204.
- Bartolomé, L.I. (1998) *The misteaching of academic discourses: The politics of language in the classroom*. Boulder, CO; Westview Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Ernst-Slavit, G. (1997). Different words, different worlds: Language use, power and authorized language in a bilingual classroom. *Linguistics and Education*, 9, 25-48.
- Ernst-Slavit, G. and Wenger, K. (2006). Teaching in the margins: The multifaceted work and struggles of bilingual paraeducators. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 37 (1), 62-82.
- Franzé, A. (2003). Las formas escolares del extrañamiento: Un estudio de los intercambios comunicativos en un contexto multicultural. In D. Poveda (Ed.), *Entre la diferencia y el conflicto: Miradas etnográficas a la diversidad cultural en la educación* (pp. 99-137). Cuenca: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha.
- Gee, J.P. (1998). Foreword. In L.I. Bartolomé, *The misteaching of academic discourses: The politics of language in the classroom* (pp. ix-xvi). Boulder, CO; Westview Press.
- Guthrie, L. & Hall, W. (1983). Continuity/discontinuity in the function of language use. *Review of Research in Education*, 10, 55-77.

- Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heller, A. (1994). *Sociología de la vida cotidiana, 4ª edición*. Barcelona: Ediciones Península.
- Levinson, B. (1998). Mexican educational ethnography and the work of the DIE: Crossing the border and finding the historical everyday. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 29 (4), 487-494.
- Mercado, R. (2002). *Los saberes docentes como construcción social*. México DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Paradise, R. (1991). El conocimiento cultural en el aula: Niños indígenas y su orientación hacia la observación. *Infancia y Aprendizaje*, 55, 73-85.
- Philips, S. (1983). *The invisible culture: Communication in classroom and community on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Poveda, D. (2003). Saberes sociolingüísticos en una clase multicultural. In D. Poveda (ed.) *Entre la diferencia y el conflicto: miradas etnográficas a la diversidad cultural en la educación* (pp. 67-97). Cuenca: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha.
- Poveda, D. and Martín, B. (2004). Looking for cultural congruence in the education of Gitano children. *Language and Education*, 18 (5), 413-434.
- Rockwell, E. (1991a). Ethnography and critical knowledge of education in Latin America. *Prospects*, 21, 156-167.
- Rockwell, E. (1991b). Palabra escrita, interpretación oral: Los libros de texto en clase. *Infancia y Aprendizaje*, 55, 29-43.
- Rockwell, E. (1995). *La escuela cotidiana*. México DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Rockwell, E. & Mercado, R. (1986). *La escuela, lugar del trabajo docente: Descripciones y debates*. Mexico DF: DIE/Cinvestav/IPN.
- Sandoval, E. (1995). Relaciones y saberes docentes en los cursos de actualización. In E. Rockwell (Ed.), *La escuela cotidiana* (pp. 88-119). México DF: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

- Scribner, S. & Cole, M. (1973). Cognitive consequences of formal and informal education. *Science*, 132, 553-558.
- Veerlop, N., Van Driel, J., & Meijer, P. (2002). Teacher knowledge and the knowledge base of teaching. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 35, 441-461
- Vogt, L., Jordan, C., & Tharp, R. (1987). Explaining school failure, producing school success: Two cases. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 18, 276-286.
- Wenger, K.J; Lubbes, T; Lazo, M; Azcarraga, I; Sharp, S. and Ernst-Slavit, G. (2004). Hidden teachers, invisible students: Lessons learned from exemplary bilingual paraprofessionals in secondary schools. *Teacher Education Quarterly* 31(2):89-111.

Table 1: Carmen and Ana's Trajectories

| Carmen | Ana |
|---|---|
| Degree in Social Work | Combined degrees in Education |
| Age: mid-thirties | Age: mid-twenties |
| Multiple years of professional experience | Brief professional experience |
| Most work with Gitano children and their families | Not worked with Gitano children and families |
| Mid-City resident | Mid-City resident |
| Informal contact with the Gitano community | Little informal contact with the Gitano community |

Figure 1: Worksheet exercise in the summer program

Escribe a lado de cada producto el nombre de la tienda donde se vende

| PRODUCTO | TIENDA |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Un termómetro | <i>La farmacia</i> |
| 2. Un reloj de pared | <i>EL hiper (CORRECTED)</i> |
| 3. Un par de zapatos | <i>En la zapatería</i> |
| 4. Una barra de pan | <i>En la mari (CORRECTED)</i> |
| 5. Unos libros | <i>En la librería</i> |
| 6. Un kilo de peras | <i>En la frutería</i> |
| 7. Una docena de pasteles | <i>En la pastelería</i> |

English translation:

Next to each product, write the name of the store where it is sold

| PRODUCT | STORE |
|---------------------|--|
| 1. A thermometer | <i>The pharmacy</i> |
| 2. A clock | <i>The 'hiper' ('dollar store')(CORRECTED)</i> |
| 3. A pair of shoes | <i>At the shoe store</i> |
| 4. A loaf of bread | <i>At 'the' mari (CORRECTED)</i> |
| 5. Some books | <i>At the bookstore</i> |
| 6. A kilo of pears | <i>At the fruit store (grocery store)</i> |
| 7. A dozen pastries | <i>At the pastry (bakery)</i> |

Table 2: Mrs. Miller and Mrs. Peralta's Trajectories

| <i>Mrs. Miller</i> | <i>Mrs. Peralta</i> |
|--|--|
| Certified teacher | Part-time teaching assistant |
| 5 years of teaching experience in upper elementary working with native English speaking students | 8 years as teaching assistant working with English language learners |
| Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina | Born in the United States of America |
| Lived mostly in large cities | Lived mostly in small towns |
| Native Spanish speaker | Native English Speaker |
| Married to a native English speaker | Married to a Spanish speaker |
| Raised children monolingual English | Raised children bilingually—English-Spanish |
| Owns house | Rents apartment |
| Two-salary household — financially stable | One single income — economically challenged |