



**“We Need to Revisit the ‘Whys’ all the Time”:
Re-visiting Pláticas with Members of a Dual Language Bilingual Education School for
Community “Whys” and Researcher Answerability**

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Abstract

In this article, I re-visit pláticas with members of a pre-K through 8th grade school academy to explore the community “*Whys*” behind Dual Language Bilingual Education (DLBE). This article aims to capture and describe these “*Whys*” first from a padre de familia, second from the Assistant Principal, third from una maestra de tercer grado, y al último, I share my researcher “*Why*” and my ongoing process to embody researcher action and community answerability. The purpose of these “*Whys*” is to be a source of inspiration for reflection and action in DLBE. The article sheds light on the personal, educational, and cultural dimensions of the “*Whys*” behind DLBE. It serves as a valuable resource for educators, researchers, and policymakers interested in understanding the holistic impact of DLBE on individuals and communities.

“I cannot raise a child who is not bilingual.”
“For me, it’s a dream come true.”
“Están creciendo en ambos idiomas. Están aprendiendo ambos idiomas.”
“The solutions are out there; all we have to do is escuchar.”

This article is a compilation of purposes, motivations, razones, explicaciones, motivos, and driving forces *why* the educators, familias, mamás, and estudiantes wanted to be in and serve dual language bilingual education (DLBE). Each story includes direct quotes from an interview, but the stories are embellished through co-construction with the community-member, relationships with maestros y padres de familia en la comunidad, and pláticas that were held in the community (Guajardo et al., 2016).

As community members and educators within DLBE, we often are committed to the work we do for a variety of personal and professional reasons. In a discussion with Elena Aldaz, the assistant-principal (AP) of Writer Academy (pseudonym), when asked about what drives her in her position as AP, she reflected, “We need to re-visit the ‘*Whys*’ all the time.” Her quote was a source of inspiration for this article, which delves into the “*Whys*” for different members of the Writer Academy DLBE community. Each vignette draws from data with each community member: Maribel Olivas (padre de familia), Elena Aldaz (AP), Liliana Martínez (maestra de 3o), and me, Katy Henderson (researcher, parent, and substitute teacher). The “*Whys*” were diverse with personal, educational, and cultural dimensions. There is a discussion across these different meanings before the conclusion section, which discusses why all the “*Whys*” matter.

The school is predominantly Latino (approximately 91% of students are labeled as Hispanic/Latino) and mixed socioeconomically (approximately 60% identified as economically disadvantaged). Approximately 45% of the student population are identified as English language learners (ELLs). Importantly, this means that Writer Academy serves a large number of bilingual and/or English-dominant speaking Latino families whose children do not classify as ELLs. As will be shared in the padre de familia story below, DLBE offers these families a way to reclaim their Spanish heritage language (Brinton et al., 2017; Valdés, 2001).

The narratives are informed by my role in the community as a parent, researcher, and a substitute teacher for one semester. My dominant role in the community is as a parent. I self-identify as a white, female, former 4th grade elementary bilingual teacher in Guadalajara, Mexico where I taught for five years. My husband is from Guadalajara and our children, Casia and Leo, are currently in pre-K and 1st grade at Writer Academy. Leo is currently labeled an ELL and a special education student with dyslexia. Casia is currently not labeled as either. The language practices in our bilingual/bicultural family are fluid and reflect our bilingual/bicultural identities (García, 2009). We travel to Guadalajara two or three times a year to be with family and friends. I am a researcher in the community, and I was asked by community members to conduct a research project exploring diverse stakeholder experiences with DLBE implementation. The data for this article came from this research project and was revisited with the lens of community answerability (Chaparro, 2020) and re-analyzed for the underlying participants’ “*Why*” (Miles et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2016). Data analysis was complemented by my decision to substitute teach in the school as a strategy to strengthen and deepen my lens of community answerability. What I learned is shared in my personal “*Why*” below.

In alignment with the purpose and goal of this special issue to be answerable to our communities (Chaparro, 2020), every section is written to consistently reflect the language practices and choices with the community members.

“I Cannot Raise a Child Who Is Not Bilingual.”
Maribel Olivas, Padre de Familia

Maribel Olivas es una padre de familia in the Writer Academy community. She is the mother of two children in pre-K4 and 3rd grade. Maribel is Mexican American and was born and raised in Texas. Like many in the Writer Academy family community, she has extended family that still lives in Mexico and visits often. Su familia en México es su razón principal de tener sus hijos en el programa dual. She explained:

I guess what really triggered my decision was when he was about two years old. He’s been able to speak since he was 1 or 11 months. He’s ridiculously outspoken. We went to Mexico. When we went to Mexico he couldn’t speak to any of his cousins, any of my family members. He was like, “What, what is everybody sayin’ around me?” That was when it hit me. *I cannot raise a child who is not bilingual.* I need to have him in some kind of program that’s gonna offer Spanish for him.

For Maribel, watching her children develop bilingually in the DLBE is a necessary thing. She is able to give her children something that she never had: “I didn’t receive any bilingual education, but because it was spoken at home, I was able to pick it up and learn how to read and write on my own.” But, more importantly, is the difference Maribel perceives about how her children feel about Spanish versus how she felt speaking it as a child:

It also brings new confidence to the kids. Well, growing up, for me, Spanish was not something that you could be proud of. It would just be like, if you know it you know it, but my son takes pride in it. That to me is everything. To just say he takes pride in his culture, in the language that his grandparents speak. He has so much more confidence. I’ll send him anywhere we go, “Go ask for this,” “Oh, what language?” “Well, ask him and see if they speak Spanish or English.” He’s happy to go. He can switch up the languages as needed. That’s just beautiful to me to be able to see that. So, to me, that makes it extra special. When I was growing up it was, I guess... I don’t really think it was a shame to speak Spanish, but you also didn’t wanna tell everyone, like, “Hey, I speak Spanish,” ‘cause they were just like, “Okay.”

In the Writer Academy school community, DLBE represents one way the parents have reclaimed pride in their culture and language for their children. She views her child’s developing bilingualism as “beautiful.”

As Maribel and her family are bilingual and part of a bilingual school community, it is not surprising that their home language es una mezcla. She described a typical day in their house in the following way:

Yeah, it’s 100 percent a mix. With my daughter, we try to speak mostly Spanish to her because now that my son is older, he tries to speak English. He speaks more English at home. We try to speak more with her in Spanish, but my son, we mix it based on what we’re doing—the context of the conversation. I know it sounds silly, but it really depends on the context of the conversation. That’s how we’ll edit our languages at home.

Maribel believes her school is serving her and her community. She believes the school serves Spanish speakers a little more than some families with less access to Spanish. Given the possibility for two-way DLBE programs to disproportionately serve white students in a process dubbed the gentrification of DLBE (Delavan et al., 2021, Valdés, 1997), Maribel’s perspective that the school serves her children, and the Hispanic community helps contextualize her “*Why*”:

I would definitely say that it does serve our Hispanic community a little bit more. I do mean a little bit only because most of our Hispanic children have a relative or a lot of relatives that are very fluent in Spanish versus some of the kids that their parents don’t speak any Spanish. Some Caucasian friends that my son has had have had to remove themselves from the program not because they don’t love it and believe in it, but the child simply can’t pick it up. So, I think it helps a lot that we speak Spanish. We understand it.

**“For Me, It’s a Dream Come True.”
Elena Aldaz, Assistant Principal**

Elena Aldaz’s words were the source of inspiration for this article, “We need to re-visit the ‘Whys’ all the time,” and for AP Elena Aldaz, the list of “*Whys*” for her dedication to DLBE was long. To begin, DLBE is personal for Elena Aldaz and a part of her long career in education:

I am an English language learner. I have been working for the district for 15 years. I started as a bilingual teacher and then four years ago I started working for the bilingual department, and at this time, I am the vice principal at Writer Academy, which is one of our model dual language schools in the district.

Over the course of her 15 years in the district, Elena Aldaz lived through what she described as a “very dramatic change” in bilingual programming from a late-exit model where “the idea is to move the kids to learning English rather than keeping their Spanish *and* English” to dual language where the goal of the program is student bilingualism, biliteracy, and biculturalism. Rather than replacing fluency of one language with another, the current model for dual language programming seeks for students to become proficient in both Spanish and English, avoiding the previous trap of DLBE in which students were being forced or encouraged to sacrifice their connection to one culture for another.

This shift in mentality was a welcome change for Elena Aldaz, who states: “When I first heard about [the Dual Language program], I was excited because I am a mom, and I am a bilingual student, and I am a bilingual teacher, and I believe in having two languages and appreciating two cultures and taking advantage of all.” As a mom, Elena wanted dual language: “I want my son to be able to be bilingual, bicultural, biliterate just like I am.” That journey led her to her current position as an assistant principal, which she serves passionately:

Around February or March, I knew about the opportunity to become one of the leaders at this school where I am right now, and I couldn’t think of a better place for me to be. I mean for me *it’s a dream come true*.

As a campus leader, she leads by revisiting the “*Whys*” all the time:

Sometimes we try our own things, but then we have to know the research behind it, the “*Why*.” And so, we need to revisit the “*Whys*” *all the time* and review the process again so that we ensure that the practices and the strategies that we’re implementing or delivering are faithful so that our students can also benefit and be able to speak, read, and write in two languages.

Here, Elena Aldaz sends a message in support of a reflective educational process. The “*Why*” here is connected to academic knowledge and research. Everyone involved in serving students must consistently review and revisit the “*Whys*” for the benefit of students. This insistence on constant reflection helps to create a comprehensive environment in which all students can thrive. Elena’s message aligns with her advocacy work where the well-being of students is always at the center of administrative decisions. Elena acknowledges the challenges of her approach but faces them by centering the needs of the community over less inclusive educational practices. A good example of her insistence on this inclusivity comes from Elena describing her advocacy work for equitable materials and assessments in English and Spanish, an issue she has dealt with many times over the course of her career:

As a bilingual teacher, I never had the resources in text or test materials in Spanish equivalent to monolingual peers. I always had to make my own and try to find resources where there were no resources, and as a teacher, you don’t have the luxury of hundreds of hours to be doing that. But you have no choice because you are working for the benefit of your students, and so... Well, that was one of my questions that I had with one of our first directors. My question to him was, “Are we going to have the resources available to ensure that our kids have this quality? The same ideal bilingual program that you’re seeing that we’re going to have?” And, so, he said yes, and of course, it has been a process. It’s not a decision that comes from one person; it’s a community, and so that has been taking some time.

Elena Aldaz engaged in extra labor creating bilingual resources as bilingual teachers often do (Amanti, 2019; Amos, 2016). As an administrator, she engages and advocates as a bilingual. Standing at the door every morning, she welcomes parents with “Buenos días!” in the morning and “Buenas tardes!” in the afternoons. She switches between English and Spanish based on to whom she is speaking, just as her students do in their bilingual lives. She uses language practices from both languages with a slight preference for Spanish as it is the language in which she considers herself more proficient. She is dedicated and looks forward to maintaining and increasing academic excellence with help and inclusion of all members of her community:

It’s not something that you can achieve on your own. It’s a team effort. It’s the culture. It’s the passion. It’s the excitement to ensure that our kids are able to get there. That’s what I hope for.

“Están Creciendo en Ambos Idiomas. Están Aprendiendo Ambos Idiomas.”
Liliana Martínez, Maestra de 3o

Liliana Martínez es una maestra con 20 años de experiencia de Tampico en Tamaulipas, México, un pueblo que ella describe como más industrial que turístico. Con muchos años de

experiencia, Liliana sigue dedicada al programa dual porque sabe que es el mejor programa para aprender los dos idiomas por experiencia personal y profesional. Ella ha enseñado 2o, 3o y 5o grado. Nació, creció y estudió en México hasta nivel licenciatura (en los Estados Unidos un bachelor degree). Ella explicó su camino para ser una maestra bilingüe. Empezó en México con su entrenamiento como maestra de inglés:

Inglés es mi segundo idioma, lo empecé a estudiar hasta la secundaria. Yo en primaria, en donde yo estudié en México, era escuela pública y no llevaba nada de inglés. En secundaria llevaba inglés pero muy básico. Yo quería estudiar ballet y mi papá me dijo o estudias ballet o estudias inglés pero no te puedo pagar las dos cosas y lo que vas a ocupar más es el inglés entonces te vas a estudiar inglés y pues a mí me gustaba y ya fue cuando empecé a estudiar inglés pero en una escuela privada.

Liliana encontró su pasión por la educación y así terminó su licenciatura como maestra de inglés. Llegando a los Estados Unidos, a pesar de tener un título universitario en México, ella no tenía una certificación en los Estados Unidos. Como ella no podría trabajar en los Estados Unidos como maestra sin certificación, encontró otra ruta para apoyar en el salón y terminó encontrando un programa dual para certificarse:

Lo que hice fue irme de voluntaria a las escuelas de mis hijos. Entonces ahí pues yo trabajaba con la maestra y la maestra de kinder, cuando mis hijos estaban chicos, este fue la que me mencionó de un programa en la universidad en ese tiempo se llamaba la Universidad de Tejas la Panamericana en Edimburgo, Tejas. Fui donde saque mi certificación y fijate de un programa dual a nivel universitario porque entregaron 10 maestros de México—yo entre ellos—y 10 maestros que ya estaban ahí en el programa de la universidad. Ellos nos ayudaban a nosotros y nosotros les ayudábamos a ellos. Y fue super interesante, aprendimos mucho con ellos y ellos aprendieron mucho con nosotros. Formamos así amistades para la vida.

Liliana asistió a la Universidad de Tejas la Panamericana que ahora se llama la Universidad de Tejas Valle de Río Grande. El programa en que participaba se llamaba Project Alianza que apoyó a normalistas viviendo en los Estados Unidos para certificarse para servir a la comunidad hispano (IDRA, 2023). Liliana notó la fuerza de haber graduado de un programa dual y ahora trabajar en un programa dual. Como ella explicó, el programa dual funcionó para ella. Ella aprendió de sus compañeros, ella enseñó a sus compañeros y formó relaciones que duraron todo su vida. Liliana cree en el poder de un programa dual porque lo vivió personalmente. Cuando ella dijo, “aprendimos mucho con ellos y ellos aprendieron mucho con nosotros” esto demuestra el aprendizaje bidireccional en un programa dual. Esta dinámica no solo implica la transmisión de conocimientos de los maestros a los estudiantes, sino también un intercambio constante de experiencias y saberes entre los alumnos. Este intercambio bidireccional trasciende las barreras tradicionales del aula. En este contexto, el aula se convierte en un espacio de crecimiento conjunto, donde los estudiantes comparten la responsabilidad de construir conocimiento y comprensión.

Liliana empezó trabajando en el Valle en el Sur de Tejas y ella dijo que le gustó porque allí en el Valle la población era 99% hispano y a ella una de las razones o su motivo (su “*Why*”) para servir en el programa dual es su conexión con los estudiantes:

Me identifiqué mucho con los niños con sus experiencias con sus problemas todo eso. Muy bonito. Entonces pues estoy feliz verdad ahora de seguir trabajando ahora acá en San Antonio en un programa dual también.

Además Liliana le gustó y apoyó el programa dual porque ella sabe que es el mejor programa académico para los alumnos. Ella tuvo muchos ejemplos por tantos años enseñando. Ella compartió un éxito específico a como el programa impactó la vida de un niño:

Otro tipo de éxito bueno, por ejemplo, ahorita tengo un niño que apenas ahorita literalmente entró en abril y si pues trae muy buen español y está aprendiendo muy rápido el inglés. Este niño llegó con una baja autoestima porque en enero llegó a otra escuela pero era todo inglés y pues no estaba entendiendo nada porque era todo totalmente en inglés. Tú estás viendo cómo su autoestima está cambiando porque sabe los conceptos entonces participa en matemáticas y está bien atento y se para y me pregunta y es un niño mexicano, un niño tan inteligente, cómo te diré, con ganas. Entonces ese es uno de los éxitos.

Liliana se sintió feliz de estar trabajando en una escuela dónde todos estaban dedicados al desarrollo bilingüe. Liliana asistió a un programa dual y siempre ha trabajado en un programa dual, pero, en el pasado las escuelas no siempre han implementado bien el programa. Ella explicaba que al principio de su carrera trabajaba en una escuela donde no implementaron bien el programa. Desde su punto de visto tener maestras dedicadas con la misma filosofía es lo más importante para que un programa dual tenga éxito:

No sé si fue por cambios de administración escolar a nivel distrito que fue que ya no sé aplicaba bien. Aparte muchos maestros no creían en los beneficios del programa porque bueno con el tiempo yo hice la maestría, maestría en educación bilingüe. Llegué a entender todo lo del proceso como va creciendo un niño en su segundo idioma pero la mayoría de mis compañeros no tenían esa educación y aunque nos daban entrenamientos no lo alcanzaban a comprender porque un entrenamiento no es suficiente... el maestro debe de estar convencido cuando está en un programa dual de que el programa funciona.

Liliana es una maestra convencida. Vivió el poder de un programa dual y tiene una base de conocimientos de su certificación y maestría.

Para mí es muy importante porque veo cómo los niños aprenden un segundo idioma. Desde chiquitos. Veo niños que están aprendiendo y qué bonito es verlos que lo intentan y que lo practican en la clase y pues esos niños ya desde chiquitos son bilingües. *Están creciendo en ambos idiomas. Están aprendiendo ambos idiomas.* Como escuela también creo que es muy importante y el ambiente aquí en la escuela esa actitud de los maestros hacia el programa es abrumadoramente positiva. Todos lo apoyan. No he escuchado nunca de ningún maestro una queja acerca del programa. Entonces eso también aparte a mí me encanta. La verdad estoy muy contenta de estar en esta escuela. Y a nivel distrito yo pienso que si esta escuela que queremos llevar también a un nivel ejemplar pues nos están dando el apoyo, el apoyo correcto.

“The Solutions Are Out There; All We Have to Do Is Escuchar.”

Katy Henderson, Researcher

The opportunity to participate in this special issue came just as I was about to start my sabbatical. It was mid-December, and I found myself succumbing to seasonal illness. There I was, lying in bed with a fever and chills, drenched in sweat at one in the morning, unable to sleep due to ruminating thoughts about answerability to my community and school. My fellow late-night thinkers out there can possibly relate.

The answer came suddenly. During my sabbatical, I would substitute teach at Writer Academy Elementary, my children’s DLBE school.

As soon as I was feeling better, I started tackling the paperwork required to substitute. I was confused; I could not figure out how to fill out the necessary forms. After multiple phone calls, personal conversations, visits with the Writer Academy administrative assistant, permission from my Chair, two trips to get my background check, and trips to the central office, I got my badge, and I got on the list. My phone rang every morning afterwards.

True to the stereotype of a professor locked in the ivory tower of academia, despite teaching other teachers, I hadn’t been in charge of an actual elementary classroom in years, on top of which, my teaching experience was in fourth and sixth grade, so my first week subbing for pre-Kindergarten grade came with a healthy mix of shock, euphoria, and exhaustion. I will share a short anecdote of one of my most challenging moments in substitute teaching to contextualize the major takeaways I learned during my semester as a substitute teacher in connection to my “*Why*.”

On my third day of substitute teaching at Writer Academy Elementary, I *lost* one of my students. That’s right. I physically lost her returning from recess. Trying to hold back my panic, I turned to my students and said:

Katy: “Somos diecisiete. Quién falta?”

Student: “No está Antonella”

Katy: “Where is Antonella?! Niños! ¿Dónde está Antonella?!”

[Lined up outside against the brick wall, the 17 three-, four-, and five-year-olds either shrugged their shoulders in a total dismissal of my growing alarm or ignored me entirely. Fortunately, a teacher I recognized turned the hallway corner just then.]

Katy: “Ms. Alvarez! I am missing a student! Her name is Antonella!”

Ms. Magaña: “Ay! Esa Antonella! No te dijeron? No puedes dejarla sola—si no—se te va. Mira, déjame ir por ella. Yo sé donde va a estar. Clase! quédense aquí paraditos, calladitos con Ms. Henderson hasta que regrese.”

Katy: “Mil gracias! ¡Me salvaste!”

Ms. Magaña: “No hay de que... Pero ya sabes, no la sueltas de la mano cuando caminas con ella.”

Katy: “No pues no- ya aprendí!”

[Several of the students laughed.]

Student: We forgot to tell you. You always have to hold Antonella’s hand.

[Silently, I thought, “Deep breaths. What would you tell your students to do?” Luckily, Antonella hadn’t gone far.]

Later, I found myself in the once familiar Teacher’s Lounge where fellow teachers tell it like it is. I was very self-conscious in the space. How should I navigate the space with my multiple identities—a substitute teacher, a mom of a pre-K and Kindergarten student, and a University professor?

It was easy and natural to engage as a substitute. I was welcomed as an insider, and the teachers were at ease, could relate, and laugh at my story of losing Antonella (knowing she was and always had been safe). It felt nice to be an insider again amidst educators doing the work. I asked a lot of questions and listened to teachers talk about the struggles in teaching and education (and there are many). I listened to many concerns about the task of meeting all students’ needs, including an increasing number of students with anxiety, with depression, and with both a special education and English language learner label; I experienced this too substituting. I heard them discuss pride points and student successes. I heard them support one another, give advice, and share lesson ideas. I listened. Escuché.

It was informative and endearing to navigate the space as a mom. The art teacher told me stories about my son and daughter and the way they engaged with other children that I would never have heard otherwise. I learned that my son frequently visits the nurse’s office, but that the nurse doesn’t mind giving students like my son a break from class when they need it.

It was humbling and important to navigate the space as a professor. As the days passed, and I got to know some of the teachers better, I talked about being a professor. There was a sense of “What are you doing here?” but also an overall feeling of “We think it’s great what you are doing. We need *this* kind of support.”

The entire experience was humbling, exhausting, and inspiring. On a few of the days, I considered leaving higher education and returning to the classroom, but I finished the year more committed than ever to community-based teacher education and research that is meaningful and impactful. “*Why*” do I engage in research? I engage in research if it matters for the community and can make a difference. Here are three important takeaways I learned that will inform my ongoing journey towards community and researcher answerability.

First, to be answerable to my school community right now means *not* engaging teachers unless they approach me. Because I used to be a teacher, my work as a researcher had been previously focused on teachers. I now realize, however, that our teachers on the ground in my community are maxed out dealing with students and do not have time to cooperate or collaborate with researchers such as myself. The majority of them are in survival mode just trying to do their job, so it’s understandable that they don’t have the mental energy to collaborate with a researcher trying to study culturally and linguistically responsive teaching. If things get better, we can collaborate, but for now, I’m giving them space.

Secondly, while I may not be an on-the-ground elementary school teacher anymore, I am a parent, and that’s an equally (if not even more) valuable role in the community right now. That is where I can focus on integration; that is where I can build. I am committed to ongoing critical listening and reflection on my positionality and how it impacts my engagement (Heiman et al., 2023).

Finally, by listening to educators and parents in the community, I learned that one of the biggest problems Writer Academy faces is identifying and serving students in special education. Writer Academy is not alone. We need better systems in our DLBE programming to serve students with intersectional identities that include special education (Cioè-Peña, 2020). Bilingual or ELLS

are often labeled as either language learners *or* special education students; when a student identifies as both, the system grinds to a halt. On top of this, it is often difficult to separate learning issues from language issues as many of the features look the same. Commitment to my “*Why*” means that I need to be answerable to my community and focus on this need. As someone who is not an expert in special education, it is important to engage in professional development on this topic. This will allow me to better prepare teacher candidates at the University level and serve as a resource for my own community. Currently, I am waiting to hear back on a grant proposal I wrote for special education in my community to accomplish just that.

Despite the many complications involved, I am confident that true answerability is well within our reach. It is not only my job as an educator, but my privilege as a member of my community to do everything I can to tailor my work in academia towards stuff that really works, whether that’s minimizing paperwork, focusing on parents over teachers, or simply remembering to hold little Antonella’s hand so she doesn’t run off and get lost somewhere in the system. The solutions are out there; all we have to do is escuchar.

The Diverse “*Whys*” Behind Dual Language Bilingual Education

Each participant’s story and commitment (or “*Why*”) behind DLBE was distinct, reflecting their unique experiences and roles. In this way, the concept of “*Why*” takes on distinct and multifaceted meanings for various participants. This section summarizes the different participants’ perspectives before discussing the personal, educational, and cultural dimensions the “*Whys*” had in common.

Parental Perspective

For Maribel, the “*Why*” behind engaging in DLBE was deeply personal. It revolved around preserving cultural and linguistic heritage for the next generation. Maribel’s “*Why*” is driven by the desire to ensure her child is bilingual, fostering a connection with relatives in Mexico, and instilling pride in their cultural identity. The “*Why*,” from a parental viewpoint, encompasses a commitment to providing opportunities for children that they might not have experienced themselves.

Administrative Perspective

Assistant Principal Elena Aldaz contributes a unique “*Why*” as an administrator. Her “*Why*” is shaped by personal experiences as an English language learner and a former bilingual teacher. Elena’s commitment extends to transforming the educational landscape and promoting bilingualism, biliteracy, and biculturalism. Her “*Why*” reflects a broader systemic change, ensuring that the dual language approach becomes a cornerstone rather than an exception in the educational system. When she urged all educators to revisit the “*Whys*,” she highlighted the need for all to constantly back up their choice by research and academic reasoning.

Maestra Perspective

Liliana Martínez brought a professional dimension to the “*Why*.” Liliana’s “*Why*” is rooted in the belief that DLBE is the most effective approach for language acquisition. Liliana experienced the benefits of a DLBE firsthand in her teacher certification through Project Alianza. She

understands the power of bidirectional learning when diverse groups of learners are brought together. Her “*Why*” encompasses a collective school-wide dedication to creating an environment where Hispanic students flourish academically and culturally.

Researcher’s Perspective

My researcher “*Why*” is based on a constant cycle of reflection stemming from academia and informed by my multiple roles as parent and substitute teacher. My “*Why*” revolves around connecting theory with practice, understanding the challenges faced by educators, and fostering a sense of community answerability. My “*Why*” involves active engagement with the school community and the commitment to connect academic research and on-the-ground realities with the desire to make a meaningful and responsive impact.

Intertwining the Personal, Educational, and Cultural Dimensions of the “*Whys*”

Each participant’s “*Whys*” are intertwined across personal, educational, and cultural dimensions. The narratives underscore the multifaceted nature of their commitment to DLBE.

On the *personal dimension*, Maribel’s account stood out as she proclaimed, “I cannot raise a child who is not bilingual.” However, all three other participants were committed to DLBE for personal reasons. Elena’s personal “*Why*” was interwoven with her identity as an English language learner. Liliana’s personal “*Why*” was rooted in her journey from Mexico to the United States. Her initial path between studying ballet or English exemplified a pivotal life circumstance that ultimately led her to become a bilingual teacher. Liliana’s commitment to DLBE reflected her personal experience as an English language learner, showcasing how individual circumstances can shape one’s educational trajectory. My commitment to DLBE is personal as a mom of two children in the program and a member of a bilingual/bicultural family.

As the two full-time school educators, Elena Aldaz and Lilina Martínez both connected their “*Why*” intimately to the *educational dimension*. For Elena Aldaz her “*Why*” is evident in her commitment to a shift in bilingual programming philosophy. Moving away from a late-exit model that focused on English proficiency, she advocates for DLBE’s goal of fostering bilingualism, biliteracy, and biculturalism. Lilina Martínez similarly wants to be in an environment where all educators support this goal. She emphasizes the importance of teachers being convinced of the program’s efficacy, highlighting the educational dimension of belief and commitment within DLBE. Her “*Why*” is intertwined with her recognition of the effectiveness of such an approach. In many ways, I would say that my “*Why*” responds to this. From an educational perspective, I have a commitment to understanding the on-the-ground realities of DLBE, reflecting a dedication to meaningful research that resonates with the community. For Maribel, the educational dimension is simply the transformational potential that DLBE provides for her children.

All four participants had a *cultural dimension* to their “*Why*.” Maribel’s cultural “*Why*” is illuminated when she observes the change in her son’s attitude towards Spanish. She notes that, unlike her own upbringing, her son takes pride in his culture and language. Liliana’s cultural commitment is evident as she reflects on her experience as a student in a DLBE and how it shaped her perspective. Her dedication to DLBE stems from the belief that it worked for her personally. Liliana’s cultural “*Why*” is interlinked with her understanding of the effectiveness of a dual language approach. Elena’s dream of seeing her son become bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate reflects a cultural commitment to preserving linguistic and cultural heritage within the educational setting. My cultural engagement in the community was accomplished through the decision to

immerse myself in the role of a substitute teacher within the DLBE context. By navigating the space as a mom and a professor, I actively participate in and learn from the cultural dynamics of the school community, emphasizing the cultural dimensions of answerability in research.

Conclusion: Why Do All the “Whys” Matter?

The aim of sharing these “Whys” is to be a source of inspiration and action. As a padre de familia, Maribel’s “Why” speaks to the purpose of DLBE to serve Spanish speakers and heritage speakers that had their language taken away from them (Palmer et al., 2019) or as Maribel explained, to be able to speak with pride. Amidst DLBE gentrification (Bernstein et al., 2022; Delavan et al., 2021), it matters that there are schools being led by leaders like Elena Aldaz and maestras como Liliana who make mothers like Maribel feel that the program is for her Hispanic community o en sus palabras, “[serves] our Hispanic community a little bit more.”

The program is doing more than serving the Hispanic community according to Maribel and Liliana. The program is bringing “new confidence” or “autoestima” to students. Maribel’s son takes pride in his culture and the language his grandparents speak. Liliana explained how the shift from an English-only school into her dual language classroom allowed for her students to participate in mathematics and gain confidence. These reflections on confidence building within DLBE underscore the transformative impact of DLBE on identity development (García-Mateus et al., 2023; García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017). In other words, this shift is not merely linguistic; it symbolizes the broader cultural responsiveness within DLBE.

The stories also unearthed problematic systemic inequities that deserve attention. DLBE educators often shoulder additional burdens in comparison to their monolingual counterparts (Amanti, 2019; Amos, 2016). Elena Aldaz translated materials as a teacher and engaged in extra advocacy work to *try* to receive equitable testing materials in both languages as an administrator. Liliana’s story of her student’s success in her classroom transitioning from an English-only program could have been framed in a different way if she had focused on the amount of labor it took to repair the damage done by the English-only program. Liliana also shared her experience of being a licensed teacher in Mexico and her credential invalidation in the United States. If not for Project Alianza, Liliana’s career trajectory would have looked very different. There is a need for more responsive and adaptable credentialing processes that value the skills and knowledge that educators like Liliana bring from their home countries.

My transition from the “ivory tower” back to the elementary classroom was illuminating and highlighted some disconnects between my approaches in teacher preparation classes to current realities in classrooms. I humbly recognize a lot of the social-emotional issues were different from when I was a teacher, and I want to do better as a parent, teacher, and teacher educator. I don’t have any concrete answers yet, but I do know we need to start addressing the diverse needs of students from a holistic approach with increased complexity and more support. Addressing the diverse needs of students with intersectional identities, particularly those in special education, is a critical aspect of enhancing DLBE programs for equity (Cioè-Peña, 2020). A deeper exploration of the challenges faced by these students and the systemic barriers preventing inclusive education is essential.

A final take away from listening to the “Whys” is that it is—in the words of Elena Aldaz—a team effort. Listening and critical listening (Heiman et al., 2023) is a part of this reflective process for action. Research supports what Liliana and Elena have lived in their school communities; you need to have teachers, administrators, and district leaders that support DLBE for it to be successful

(Lindholm-Leary, 2001). You need educators who believe in DLBE (Henderson, 2022) or as Liliana explained, “el maestro debe de estar convencido cuando está en un programa dual de que el programa funciona.” The Writer Academy community is a beautiful place because “todos lo apoyan.” It is a place with profound “*Whys*”; our end is really just the start:

“I cannot raise a child who is not bilingual.”

“For me, it’s a dream come true.”

“Están creciendo en ambos idiomas. Están aprendiendo ambos idiomas.”

“The solutions are out there; all we have to do is escuchar.”

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