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### Ofelia García: A Transformative Thinker and Leader

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## Ofelia García: A Transformative Thinker and Leader

### Cover Page Footnote

Cecilia Espinosa, PhD, was born in Ecuador, South America. She worked for 14 years in Phoenix, AZ as a bilingual/multiage (K-2nd) teacher and a Title VII Director at a large urban public school. She received her PhD at ASU (Tempe, AZ). She is now an Associate Professor in the Early Childhood/Childhood Department at the School of Education at Lehman College/CUNY. Her areas of concentration are biliteracies, ENL, children's literature, descriptive processes. Cecilia has participated in the following projects: New York City Writing Project (NYCWP), Elementary Teachers' Network (ETN), Math UP, and New York State Initiative for Emergent Bilinguals (CUNY NYSIEB).

# Ofelia García: A Transformative Thinker and Leader

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In this essay, I describe the ways in which Ofelia García's work influenced the field of bilingual education and multilingualism, as well as my thinking over the years as a bilingual educator. Dr. García has been a model of what it means to be an intellectual who is deeply connected to the importance of engaging in transformative theoretical ideas. Her ideas, in turn, have proven to have profound implications for pedagogy that impacts the education of emergent bilinguals. Her work is deeply grounded in understandings about language and language development as it exists in the world. Her perspective is one of strength and complexity. Ofelia García is a thinker whose work has had a tremendous impact and has transformed the field of bilingual and multilingual education at the local, national and international levels.

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**Keywords:** bilingual education, descriptive inquiry, Ofelia García, transformative thinker and leader, translanguaging

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The voice of Ofelia García with regards to the education of emergent bilinguals echoes, not only at the local and national levels but also at the international level. Her voice reminds us that no matter what the current educational climate is, it is of critical importance that one stands strong in connection with what is ethically best for immigrant and bilingual students. For decades Dr. García has challenged what has been understood as the norm with regards to bilingual education in many parts of the United States, that is, to help children transition into English as soon as possible, with little regard to the sustenance of the home language (García, 1984; García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008). She has questioned the rigid separation of named languages that traditionally occur in most dual language programs because they do not take into account the dynamic language practices of bilingual children (Sanchez, García, & Solorza, 2018). Ofelia García has also argued against dual language bilingual programs that serve only a particular and selective group of students, and thus, move away from the social justice principle that dual language bilingual programs' main purpose should be to serve all students and exclude no one (Sanchez, García, & Solorza, 2018).

Ofelia García's work has impacted the field of bilingualism and multilingualism in profound ways. Her work challenges researchers and educators to pay close attention to how emergent bilinguals use language in their different communities, rather than study language in isolation and separate from the purposes it serves. She asserted that when educators (and researchers) begin by looking at language from the perspective of the speaker (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015, 2018), they can witness how

they communicate effectively by deliberately selecting particular features from their one linguistic repertoire (García & Li Wei, 2014). Through her research on translanguaging she challenged the field to pay close attention to the “*multiple discursive practices*, in which, bilinguals engage in order to *make sense of their bilingual worlds*” (García, 2009, p. 45, emphasis in original). She defied the field to re-think how by capitalizing on the students’ full linguistic repertoires to learn, teach, and assess the learners’ bilingualism (and multilingualism) can be strengthened and sustained (García & Kleyn, 2016).

A translanguaging stance demands radical shifts in one’s ideology. It recognizes bilingualism as the norm. It makes evident the profound limitations of a monolingual perspective (García, 2009; García & Li Wei, 2014). This stance acknowledges that the learner’s full linguistic repertoire is always present in the classroom, even when the teacher fails to acknowledge and capitalize on it (García & Kleyn, 2016). Ofelia García insists vehemently that a translanguaging stance and approach opens spaces for the learner’s voice, creativity, critical thinking, and agency to be fully present, active and visible, rather than silenced (García & Kleyn, 2016). She has argued that labels matter, and that therefore, a shift in labels from *limited English proficient* to *emergent bilinguals* has the potential of radically changing how these students are educated (García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008; García & Kleyn, 2016).

Ofelia García’s work has also been tremendously influential in my roles as a prospective teacher, an early childhood-bilingual multiage K-2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher, a director of a dual bilingual language program and now as a researcher and teacher educator who works with both early childhood and childhood bilingual teachers at Lehman College/CUNY in the Bronx. Her legacy reminds me that it is OK to have the courage to question long-held ideas about teaching and learning. In addition, I have learned very important lessons from Dr. García from her compassionate ways with others. In the second part of the essay, I describe the ways in which her work has influenced deeply both my professional and personal life over the years. I have had the honor of learning from her published writings, also from working along her side, and through observations, learning from the person she is.

### **Learning about Ofelia García’s Work**

Ofelia García’s work has significantly influenced my professional life over the years as a bilingual educator. I was first introduced to her work when I was a master’s level student at Arizona State University, Tempe campus in the early 1990’s. As a graduate student, I read that in the 1980’s she already raised questions to the field asking us to rethink how bilingual education was conceived. She insisted early on in her career that a bilingual education that is based on deficit should not be the goal, as is often the case in transitional bilingual models (TBE) in which the purpose is to transition children into English as soon as possible so that English becomes the sole language of instruction (García, 1984).

Instead, after studying the education of Cuban American Children in Dade County ethnic schools in the late 1980’s, she proposed that we learn from a type of bilingual education that was conceived locally and holds high expectations for the development of bilingualism and biliteracy for all students; and most importantly, she

advocated for an education that included the community's perspectives (García & Otheguy, 1985). Dr. García endorsed, from the very beginning, an education that afforded a close connection between home and school. She has reminded us for decades that parents' voices matter, and that an intellectual and social continuity between home and school have tremendous potential for strengthening a child's educational possibilities. She has reiterated tirelessly that in developing bilingual programs, one must pay close attention to the community (García, Evangelista, Martinez, Disla, & Paulino, 1988) and take a perspective of strength (García & Traugh, 2002). I learned also from her published research and writings to resist and challenge the assumptions institutions made about bilingual students (García, 1993).

I arrived in New York in 2004 and took a non-tenure position at Long Island University (LIU), Brooklyn Campus. By this time Dr. García had already left after serving as Dean of the LIU School of Education for 5 years (1997-2002). However, in spite of her absence, the work she started with Cecelia Traugh (then Associate Dean at LIU Brooklyn Campus and now Dean at Bank Street College of Education in New York City), specifically on the Descriptive Review Process, had a deep impact in the quality of program prospective teachers received. Based on the work of Patricia Carini and her colleagues from Prospect Center for Education and Research in Bennington, Vermont, they implemented this review process on a teacher education program that served minoritized communities. This work transformed the LIU School of Education to become more inclusive of the community it served.

Descriptive inquiry is grounded on phenomenology (Husserl, 1965; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). It is the study of something or someone as it is in the world (Van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology argues that as humans we engage in and with the world (Carini, 1975). Our meaning making emerges from these active encounters with it. From a phenomenological perspective our knowledge is always in the making, never complete. Descriptive inquiry allows participants to get closer to the phenomenon under study through careful description, deep immersion, and avoidance of labels. Its main purpose is to experience what is being studied with full complexity (Carini, 1975; Himley, 2000). Descriptive inquiry is a collaborative practice through which participants engage imaginatively in ways that enhance the group's understandings of what could be possible (Ascenzi-Moreno et al., 2008). It begins with an open-ended question. It recognizes multiplicity of perspectives. It begins with the particular and avoids abstractions. Himley (2000) states, "the point is to use language to resist easy or conventional explanations of a child or work, to use language to produce precision and particularity" (p. 130). Descriptive inquiry has tremendous potential to generate ideas for action from an imaginative perspective of what it could be.

Each year the School of Education at LIU, Brooklyn Campus had a conference on Descriptive Processes in which students presented descriptive reviews of children and descriptive reviews of practice. Many of these were sessions that focused on emergent bilingual students. Since Ofelia García continued to attend these conferences, it allowed me to meet her at one of these events. I was immediately struck by the strong connection she still had with the community at the LIU, Brooklyn Campus School of Education.

Led by Dr. García and Dr. Traugh, the Teacher Education program at Long Island University (LIU), Brooklyn positioned teacher knowledge at the center. Using Ofelia's knowledge of bilingualism and Cecelia Traugh's understanding of the Descriptive Processes, spaces were created where prospective teachers engaged in scholarly reflective work through, for instance, descriptive reviews of children (child studies), descriptions of children's work, and inquiries into teachers' practice. In addition, they both invited the faculty at LIU, Brooklyn campus to participate in year-long inquiries. These inquiries led to questions that revealed emerging tensions, i.e. state mandates for certification and what it meant to prepare teachers (most of them from minoritized backgrounds) from a perspective of strength. Faculty engaged in phenomenological descriptive inquiries, documented their work over time, and utilized this documentation to propel appropriate changes to their teacher preparation program. These self-studies led faculty to transform the curriculum they offered to the prospective teachers.

The lessons learned from the work with faculty at LIU School of Education were expanded into supporting the Cypress Hills Community School, dual language school in East New York. There García and Traugh worked with this school's faculty and administrators to become more intentional and thoughtful in creating and developing practices that made sense for this bilingual community over time. They encouraged educators at this school to assume a phenomenological perspective in the study of biliteracy practices of its young bilingual students. The phenomenological stance they took was based on the principles of descriptive processes such as, inquiry, careful observations of "children in action and in motion" (Carini, 2000, p. 57), close descriptions of children's work, the study of a teacher's practice or an aspect of the curriculum. This phenomenological-inquiry stance required the educators at this dual language school to slow down, to look and to listen with care as they learned to more attentively pay attention to their work with children (Kesson, n/d).

The research at Cypress Hills Community School was another powerful space in which Dr. García reminded the field that it matters that one starts with the children and their linguistic repertoires, with the teachers' practices, with the community, rather than with the theories, strategies or how to structure programs from the top down. García and Traugh (2002) write about their research at the dual language school:

Descriptive Inquiry has enabled the entire Cypress Hills school faculty to continue to find intellectual and creative energy, passion and space necessary to continue their efforts to develop the children's bilingualism in the face of mounting attacks. It has also provided a space and time that allows them to consider their teaching practice and school structures in the light of work of individual children. The descriptive process has also enabled the faculty to build a relationship not only with children through their own work but also with each other. The process has kept the complexity of teaching and learning, and especially of developing bilingualism and biliteracy, alive and visible in the face of standardization and homogenization. (p. 324).

Through Ofelia García's commitment towards bilingualism and descriptive inquiry, the teacher education program at LIU, Brooklyn campus and Cypress Hills

Community bilingual dual language school had an abundance of opportunities to imagine “new pedagogical and curricular solutions” (García & Traugh, 2002, p. 316).

### **Working with Ofelia García**

Finally, in 2013 I was able to work with Ofelia García. I was invited to join the City University of New York - New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals Project (CUNY NYSIEB), which Dr. García co-lead with Dr. Menken, Dr. Otheguy, and Dr. Sánchez. My participation in this project challenged all my current understandings about bilingualism. CUNY NYSIEB work is based on Ofelia García’s understanding of dynamic bilingualism, rather than additive bilingualism (García & Sánchez, 2018). From this perspective, in order to make full sense of the world, bilingual individuals need to utilize their entire linguistic repertoire in flexible ways. Thus, she writes, “translanguaging posits that bilinguals have one linguistic repertoire from which they select features strategically to communicate effectively. That is, translanguaging takes as its starting point the language practices of bilingual people as the norm” (García, 2012, p. 1). Through the translanguaging perspective, she invited us to view bilinguals (and multilinguals) with new eyes. I learned, for example, that it is only from the outsider’s view that bilinguals have two named languages, as defined by nation-states (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015). From the bilingual person’s perspective (insider’s view), bilinguals have one linguistic repertoire. These new insights forced me to rethink and question how I was positioning the bilingual child and teacher in my pedagogy as a teacher educator. As I engage with teachers now, my evolving questions are: How can we leverage bilingual (and multilingual) children’s repertoires in order to better support their education? How can I best ensure that the whole bilingual child comes into the classroom?

At CUNY NYSIEB Ofelia García was instrumental in creating the kind of intellectual community one rarely has the opportunity to be part of. This community brought together faculty from different CUNY colleges and doctoral students from the CUNY Graduate Center (García & Sánchez, 2018). The project viewed bilingualism in new ways and it challenged teachers, administrators, state, and other education officials and teacher educators to re-examine what has so far been held as truth in bilingual education and in English as a New Language Education programs (García & Sánchez, 2018; García & Li Wei, 2014). As it is characteristic of Dr. García, the CUNY NYSIEB principles she proposed were based on the actual practices of bilingual students and their experiences in the outside world. García and Li Wei (2014) write, “translanguaging is the discursive norm in bilingual families and communities” (p. 23). Based on this lens, the CUNY NYSIEB work challenged traditional perspectives of bilinguals and bilingualism by arguing that bilinguals need spaces where they can enact their own agency and engage in fluid and dynamic language practices as the norm. The pedagogical theory of CUNY NYSIEB advocates for two principles: (1) for bilingualism to be utilized as a resource in education, (2) for a multilingual ecology for the entire school (García & Menken, 2015; García & Li Wei, 2014).

The purpose of CUNY NYSIEB is to support teachers and administrators in developing a pedagogy that reflects the needs and uses of bilinguals in the 21st Century. This is a pedagogy that requires a transformation of one’s ideology with regards to

bilingualism. As we engaged in this transformative journey, Dr. García sat by our side, modeling through her research, listening carefully as we strived to understand this new perspective, challenging our rigid conceptions of bilingualism. Through her writings, she introduced to this community thinkers such as South American scholars Walter Mignolo, Humberto Maturana, and Francisco Varela, and other thinkers such as Jasone Cenoz, Suresh Canagarajah, Mileidis Gort, Bruce Horner, among many others. She also read the professional literature with us and invited us to write about the ideas we were developing through our participation in CUNY NYSIEB. In a dialogical manner, she nudged us to fully integrate translanguaging pedagogy in our practices as teacher educators.

As one of the leaders of CUNY NYSIEB Dr. García took the time to respond to our writing, to our professional development plans in the different schools associated with CUNY NYSIEB; and most importantly, she engaged in dialogue with us as we developed deeper and more complex understandings about translanguaging. She never hesitated to pose a question that would challenge us to more multifaceted insights. Meeting after meeting I witnessed Dr. García taking careful notes of the discussions. Often, she weaved these notes into the next session placing our ideas next to those of other thinkers in the field, as well as her own thinking.

As I reconceptualized my understandings about bilingual education within the context of translanguaging and the CUNY-NYSIEB project, I understand from my participation in this project that as bilingual educators we need to go beyond language maintenance to envision language sustenance. Ofelia García described that when we think about sustainability, we conceive of language practices as being dynamic rather than rigid (García, 2009; García & Li Wei, 2014). She reminded us that emergent bilinguals bring with them complex identities, agency, as well as cultural and pluriliteracy practices located in their families and multiple communities. These must be leveraged as powerful resources for learning, if schools are to be transformed as spaces that ensure the full participation of each learner, as well as spaces that mirror the dynamic practices of bilinguals in the world rather than the practices of monolinguals (García, 2013). When students are invited to fully capitalize on their linguistic practices and these become the norm in the *official spaces* of the school life opportunities for language sustenance multiply. A perspective on language sustenance affirms a bilingual identity and normalizes their linguistic practices.

Ofelia García argued passionately that when we emphasize only the idea of maintenance and strict language separation, we remain with a focus solely on the past, in addition to the idea of holding onto a stance that privileges exclusively monolinguals. There is always the danger, she warned us, that by focusing on strict language separation, we will continue to construct minoritized languages as the other (García & Kleyn, 2016). She insisted that a perspective on language maintenance holds a static view of people's languaging and identities, while a perspective on language sustenance contends that "fixed identities and meanings are questioned" (García, 2013, p. 162). When we insist on a focus on language maintenance, we ignore the fact that bilinguals are not two monolinguals in one (Grosjean, 1984), and we also fail to acknowledge the complex language practices of bilinguals (García, 2013). For emergent bilinguals these are fluid and interdependent (García, 2009; García & Li Wei, 2014). In addition, given



the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where students are asked to engage with texts that demand critical thinking and depth of comprehension, the only way to ensure full participation is if they are invited to construct meaning utilizing their entire linguistic repertoire (García & Li Wei, 2014). It is a perspective that recognizes the local histories of people and embraces translanguaging practices as the norm.

Dr. García consistently reminded us that, given the realities of schools and the focus on assessments, within the context of bilingual programs, teachers need to plan intentionally for particular language practices. Students need full access to dominant language practices. They also need focused time dedicated to enhancing their home language practices. At the same time, they need to be provided with spaces to enact their "agency to negotiate their linguistic and meaning-making repertoires" (García & Li Wei, 2014, p. 75). In addition, teachers need to create spaces for students to bridge and leverage the ways in which language practices exist in the world, i.e., bilingual families utilize their entire linguistic repertoire to communicate with one another; writers often translanguange, such as is the case of the United States 2015 Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera. In addition, she insisted, diverse communities' languages co-exist in authentic ways; therefore, the language ecology of a bilingual neighborhood offers texts in languages other than English.

Ofelia García urged us to consider that, if we embrace a perspective of translanguaging as a pedagogy of empowerment, we stop reinforcing the ideology of monolingualism as the standard. It matters that the legitimization of these power structures be challenged, she insisted. Educators can begin by creating intentional spaces within the macro language policies set by school administrators and policymakers in order to ensure students can build bridges between families' and communities' ways of knowing (García & Menken, 2015). It matters that students see reflections of themselves at school in ways that empower them. Their voices and agency need to be invited to be an integral part of their education. In addition, teachers can capitalize on the students' language practices in order to ensure depth of understanding, as well as enhancement of their literacy capacities and abilities (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017).

As I reflect on my experiences as a teacher educator and a scholar in the CUNY NYSIEB Project and the leadership Ofelia García provided, I marvel at the growth experiences I was afforded. I had, for example, ample opportunities to work with practicing teachers and principals helping them find spaces in the school day where the whole child could be invited to participate fully by bringing in their entire linguistic repertoire. This was challenging work since schools exist under the surveillance of the State and the heavy emphasis on test scores tends to make English the sole language of instruction. Yet, there were brave teachers and principals willing to challenge official and unofficial language policies.

Ms. Tacy (pseudonym), a bilingual kindergarten teacher is one of these daring teachers. I supported her to figure out ways to integrate translanguaging into her pedagogy by understanding that in science cognates were key to supporting children's understandings of essential concepts. As the class studied about plants, she invited the children on a journey about gathering cognates of words connected to what they were

learning about plants. In this space she created in her bilingual class, the children had opportunities to bring both languages together and thus, had opportunities to build their language practices in new ways, while building on their linguistic strengths. Ms. Tacy created a space of resistance within a school in which the language policies were becoming gradually stricter with regards to utilizing English as the only language of instruction, in spite of saying that they had a bilingual program (CUNY NYSIEB notes, 2016).

Another courageous educator was brand new middle school teacher Ms. Cope (pseudonym). She understood quickly that in her English as a New Language class capitalizing on the students' home language was key to their development as writers and thinkers in the new language. Once she opened these windows, her students willingly wrote utilizing their entire linguistic repertoire. Once her students wrote in their home languages, she challenged the school's unofficial language policy that only student work written in English could be posted outside the classroom walls. Ms. Cope was determined to transform the language ecology of the school in ways that truly reflected the language practices of her students, their families, and the community. She engaged in this struggle in spite of the pressure she received from colleagues about her stance towards developing a multilingual ecology at the school (CUNY NYSIEB notes, 2016). Without the vision of CUNY NYSIEB developed by Ofelia García and her colleagues, the students in these classes might not have engaged in opportunities to sustain their home language practices.

Dr. García always challenged us to continue the work as well as to take ownership of it. On one occasion, she invited a small group of us to consider our areas of expertise and re-imagine what could be possible if we integrated translanguaging into our work. On this occasion, she was envisioning we re-imagine what writing could be like if a translanguaging stance was weaved into it. This is how the *Translanguaging Pedagogy for Writing: A CUNY NYSIEB Guide for Educators* (Espinosa, Ascenzi-Moreno, & Vogel, 2016) was composed. We grounded it on the principles we had learned from her and the CUNY NYSIEB colleagues, that translanguaging can support, expand, and enhance student writing; and that it can also support students along with all stages of the writing process. Translanguaging is more than a scaffold to support student writing in English. Translanguaging deepens meaning-making, provides students to access richer content, allows emergent bilinguals to truly show what they know. It also allows students to position themselves as the experts, while they negotiate their multilingual identities from a perspective of strength (Canagarajah, 2011; García & Li Wei, 2014). Deeply influenced by the CUNY NYSIEB vision this guide challenges notions of deficit with regards to emergent bilinguals and writing, and instead, it takes a perspective of strength (Carini & Himley, 2010). It invites teachers to create environments where bilingual students can capitalize on their entire linguistic repertoire to construct meaning as writers and thinkers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in order to fully participate in the life of the classroom. With Garcia's nudging, guidance, and support we have continued to explore our ideas on translanguaging and writing (Ascenzi-Moreno & Espinosa, 2018).

Her commitment to bringing practice and theory together has always been at the forefront of her work as a bilingual educator. She understood that good teachers

always recognize that the whole child needs to come to the classroom, meaning that students need spaces in which it is possible to capitalize on their entire linguistic repertoire. As part of one of the CUNY NYSIEB projects, she also supported us in creating spaces for us to engage in research. She invited us to participate in collaborative action research projects with classroom teachers (Espinosa & Herrera, 2016). The purpose of this research project was to better understand and document translanguaging practices of teachers and students in New York City Schools. She invited us to pursue the following overarching questions: How, when, and why is translanguaging taken up or resisted by students and teachers? What does its use mean for them? This work culminated in the edited book of Dr. García with Dr. Tatyana Kleyan (2016) titled *Translanguaging with Multilingual Students: Learning from Classroom Moments*. As is distinctive of her stance with regards to working in a democratic manner, this book ends with a call for principals to end top-down leadership structures and create more democratic decision-making spaces where teachers who have expertise in working with emergent bilinguals work side-by-side with administrators (Menken & Sánchez, 2016).

The work with CUNY NYSIEB through Ofelia García's vision was deeply engaging and also challenging. It answered many questions for me, but it also raised new questions. Within the context of my work as an early childhood bilingual educator, I ask how to ensure that young emergent bilingual students attend early childhood classrooms where teachers will have the agency and knowledge to create classroom environments and learning experiences that will sustain and enhance the language practices all young children bring with them? This is particularly important as states move to provide universal Pre-K to all children. New York State and New York City in particular have witnessed the rapid expansion of preschool classrooms (New York City Department of Education, 2018). Without doubt, these changes have brought forward an urgent need to ensure that the prospective and practicing early childhood teachers are fully prepared to offer quality learning experiences to all emergent multilingual learners (New York State Department of Education, 2018).

Ofelia García has tirelessly reminded us that as teacher educators we need to think carefully how we are preparing teachers to understand the importance of starting their pedagogical practices by creating learning spaces that allow all children to bring their entire selves into the classroom. She is arguing for teacher preparation programs that support prospective teachers in understanding the value and importance of translanguaging. It matters that we bring forward new ideas about language and language development (Faltis, 2013). Without doubt, Dr. García's work will serve as an important terrain to continue the commitment of advocacy for the best education possible for young emergent bilingual students.

As I think about some of the implications we as educators can draw from her legacy, I am reminded that projects such as CUNY NYSIEB need to have a complex and broad vision:

- to bring faculty from across universities to create new knowledge and understandings about the importance of educating emergent bilinguals to the fullest of their potential;

- to support quality and 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning in schools by bridging the worlds of research and pedagogy;
- to develop a caring and dialogical community among educators committed to the education of emergent bilinguals where mentoring is as its core;
- to engage in work with schools that challenges administrators, teachers practices and teacher educator practices;
- to engage in careful documentation of the work and engage in ongoing research;
- to serve and to connect local, national and international communities through presentations, writing for publication, and provide access through technology (website, webinars, electronic documents, etc.).

Dr. García work challenges us as educators to consider carefully how we construct the different projects in which we participate. As her vision of the CUNY NYSIEB project demonstrated, each aspect of the project's multilayered nature needs to be carefully orchestrated if we want it to have a long-lasting impact.

### **Learning from Ofelia García, the Person**

Ofelia García has a unique way to attend with care and thoughtfulness to individuals, as well as communities. I remember when I was a newcomer to New York City and had to apply for jobs as an assistant professor since my position at LIU Brooklyn Campus was a one-year position. I reached out to Ofelia García for advice, although I had only met her briefly once. She generously gave me recommendations of universities where I could apply, suggestions for interviewing, and offered to take a look at my curriculum vitae (O. García, personal communication, spring, 2005). After reviewing it, she gave me detailed feedback on ways to tighten it up and strengthen it. Although she barely knew me, her generous feedback had tremendous implications on how I was presenting myself and my work. Ofelia García always takes the time to open-heartedly help and attend to others even in those important but minute details.

She brings with her a deep commitment to what Patricia Carini calls, *human capacity widely distributed* (Himley & Carini, 2000). Without doubt, one of Ofelia García's ways of being in the world is of one of deep caring. She has a way of figuring out what is it that matters to each person in her many circles. She is curious about what is happening in other people's lives. With her incredible memory, she remembers just about everything one tells her. She also shares generously about what is important in her life. Through conversations, we learned about her experiences as a mother, a wife, a friend, a daughter, as a grandmother, as an immigrant who left her beloved Cuba. We learned about her life as a bilingual immigrant student in The Bronx, New York City (O. García, personal communication, April 23, 2015).

Ofelia García generously opens the doors to her home and these rich conversations take place often around a delicious meal made by her. In getting to know her one learns about the thinker, the professor, the mentor, the colleague, the immigrant; as well as her values, commitments, experiences and dreams. I remember one day at her house, we asked her about a painting in one of her apartment walls. She

shared with us that this painting was done by her mother-in-law. It was left in Cuba when her husband's family had to immigrate to the USA. Many years later Ricardo Otheguy, her husband, went back to Cuba. He went to visit the house where the family had lived. He shared with us that it belonged now to a government official. He recognized the painting on the wall. Before leaving, one of the occupants of the house gave him the painting. It now hangs in their apartment as a reminder of their deep connection to Cuba. When they left the island all they could bring was a small piece of luggage. As the conversation continued, we learned about the jobs her father, a professional in Cuba, had to take as an immigrant who only spoke Spanish in a new land (O. García, personal communication, April 23, 2015).

Ofelia García is a master at creating community. She knows that ideas are best developed through authentic dialogue and multiplicity of perspectives. She brings people together to think, to question, to rethink, to dialogue, to reflect, and to have fun. She also knows where and how she can challenge each member of the community to go to the next level, to take on the next challenge. She teaches us that one never stops learning and caring. She also demonstrates for us daily what it means to have the courage and the ethical commitment to questioning what the field of bilingual education has considered the truth about teaching and learning. Dr. García challenges us to pay attention to what bilingual students are doing in the world, as we strive to create spaces that will build bridges between home and school. According to her, it matters that we work collaboratively to create a clearly articulated vision to better serve emergent bilingual students and their families. It has been an honor for me to learn from and work with Dr. Ofelia García these years. Yet, as she once wrote, “The best lesson learned has been the human one” (García, 1991, p. 19).

*¡Gracias por inspirarnos Dr. García! [Dr. García, thank you for inspiring us!]*

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