

## **Bilingual Education in English-Only: A Qualitative Case Study of Language Policy in Practice at Lincoln Elementary School**

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*In this qualitative case study, we investigate teachers' appropriation of language policy at one urban elementary school in Illinois. Recognizing classroom teachers' central role in the education of English learners, we probe teachers' policy appropriation, or how bilingual educators take state-, district-, and school-level policies and corresponding programmatic requirements and utilize them in their own ways in classrooms in the midst of heightened accountability, including the shift to the Common Core Standards and other policy changes. Using ethnographic methods including participant observation, field notes, surveys, and interviews, we study the case of Abraham Lincoln School, which serves predominantly Latino students through both transitional and maintenance bilingual program models. Findings indicate the impacts of external demands on bilingual teachers' policy appropriation, as accountability to English-only tests shaped decisions in classroom practice. Results demonstrate that bilingual education is not consistently occurring in Lincoln classrooms, due to lack of clear expectations, multiple initiatives that take away from needed classroom instructional time, high-stakes and standardized tests given only in English, and varying challenges of students' Spanish proficiency due to the rush to mainstream. The significance of findings center on teachers' integral roles as policy makers in bilingual education, as they engage in daily decision making that directly impacts the education of English learners in Midwestern schools.*

The number of English learners (ELs) in the United States continues to grow rapidly, following the increase in demographics of cultural and linguistic diversity across the country. The label EL signifies a student who is still acquiring English language proficiency and typically speaks a language other than English at home (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010). Whereas U.S. students and residents speak hundreds of different languages, Spanish is the most common language spoken (Office of English Language Acquisition, 2015). To meet the needs of this large and growing student population, educators often utilize students' native languages to support English learning (August & Shanahan, 2006) and improve academic instruction (Faltis, 2005), commonly referred to as bilingual education (Zelasko & Antuñez, 2000). Nevertheless, bilingual programs continue to face many obstacles due to top-down policies that emphasize and prioritize English as a medium-of-instruction (Johnson, D.C. & Freeman, 2010; Johnson, E.J., 2012; Tollefson & Tsui, 2004). With the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, the age of accountability has encouraged educational actors to concentrate on English language acquisition rather than bilingualism (Johnson, D.C., 2009). As a result, bilingual education that promotes maintenance of students' native language is often ignored to fulfill what is mandated nationally.

One of the six most linguistically diverse states in the U.S., Illinois boasts one in five individuals older than age five who speak a language other than English. That number intensifies in urban

regions of the state, where the diverse population speaks Spanish, Polish, Arabic, Gujarati, and other languages outside of the formal school setting (Shin & Kominski, 2010). In the 2010 school year, Cook County served 54.8% of EL students in the state of Illinois (Ruiz & Koch, 2011). To support this linguistically diverse population, Illinois policy requires bilingual education when schools have 20 or more students from the same language background who are still learning English; the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE, 2010) recommends transitional bilingual education (TBE). TBE, which varies based on program length and percentage of native and English language instruction, promotes subtractive bilingualism with the ultimate goal of English proficiency (Zelasko & Antuñez, 2000). Although most schools opt for TBE to remain in compliance, some schools utilize maintenance bilingual education (MBE) with instruction in both languages to promote additive bilingualism (Zelasko & Antuñez, 2000). Whether TBE or MBE, program models vary based on teachers' appropriation (Levinson & Sutton, 2001; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996) of policy into classroom practice.

Research on teachers' language policy appropriation in the U.S. has largely documented the shift to monolingual language policy and programs in the past 15 years. Early literature focused on teachers' perceptions and implementation of English-only policy in the post-Proposition 227 era in California in 1998 (Alamillo & Viramontes, 2000; Stritikus, 2002; Stritikus & García, 2000; Valdez, 2001). Arizona and Massachusetts quickly followed California's monolingual policy lead, where research continued on teachers' implementation in English-only states (Combs, Evans, Fletcher, Parra, & Jimenez, 2005; deJong, 2008; Heineke, 2014; Heineke & Cameron, 2013; Johnson, E.J., 2012). In addition to research on language policy appropriation in the three English-only states in the U.S., other scholars have documented teachers' implementation when schools and districts shift to monolingual programs (Varghese & Stritikus, 2005). Overall, past studies highlight that teachers with bilingual backgrounds negotiated monolingual policies to align with their value and knowledge of the students' native language abilities (Varghese, 2008; Varghese & Stritikus, 2005). Situated in the context of the Midwest where bilingual education is mandated for educating ELs, the current study contributes to the existing literature by investigating how bilingual teachers appropriate language policies and bilingual programs in the state of Illinois.

In this study, we investigate teachers' appropriation of language policy at Abraham Lincoln School, an urban preschool through eighth grade (P-8) school with a large population of Spanish-speaking ELs that utilizes TBE, MBE, and sheltered program models. We begin by reviewing related literature, framing the research in the sociocultural theoretical theory and conceptual framework of figured worlds, and outlining the qualitative methods utilized to study the case of Lincoln School. We then share findings related to the multiple layers of language policy impacting the case of Lincoln School, the school-level actors' decisions regarding language policy in practice, and the factors that mediated the classroom-level implementation of bilingual education. Finally, we close with discussion on the impact of English-dominant policies, initiatives, and assessments in bilingual classrooms, including directions for bilingual education at Lincoln School and beyond.

### Language Policy in Practice: Appropriation in Classrooms and Schools

D.C. Johnson (2009) suggests that “the fate of bilingual education relies on language policy at multiple levels from national policies [like NCLB] to classroom policies, and everything in between” (p.74). To improve bilingual education, research must investigate the ways in which language policies impact teachers and teachers’ practice in classrooms with diverse children (Johnson, E.J., 2012; Stritikus & Varghese, 2005). Teachers have agency in the policy process and can make the decision of how to implement, or appropriate, policy in classroom practice (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). Datnow, Hubbard, and Mehan (2002) propose, “Teachers are considered by most policymakers and school change experts to be the centerpiece of education change” (p.71). To move toward more equitable educational policies and practices for linguistically diverse students, we must consider how teachers create classroom policies of their own, while simultaneously accepting or challenging mandates from policy makers and administrators (Skilton-Sylvester, 2003). In this study, we consider the role of school-based policy actors in the appropriation of TBE and MBE programming.

In the broader context of policy appropriation (Levinson & Sutton, 2001), teachers negotiate language policy to match the macro-level demands with micro-level realities, such as teacher preparation, classroom context, and personal beliefs (Heineke, 2014; Heineke & Cameron, 2013; Varghese, 2008; Varghese & Stritikus, 2005). Research in English-only states has demonstrated the impact of preparation on how teachers carry out language policy in practice (Arias, 2012; deJong, Arias, & Sanchez, 2010; Heineke & Cameron, 2013; Hopkins, 2012). Similarly, bilingual programs require the appropriate pre-service preparation (Hopkins, 2012; Stritikus & Garcia, 2000; Varghese & Stritikus, 2005) and in-service professional development (Combs et al., 2005; Elfers & Stritikus, 2014), including knowledge of similarities between English and students’ home languages and skills to effectively teach ELs (Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2000). In addition to preparation, teachers bring past experiences and perceptions of language, bilingualism, and bilingual education that impact policy appropriation (Stritikus, 2002; Varghese, 2008; Varghese & Stritikus, 2005). Varghese and Stritikus (2005) explained, “Language policy would not be learned solely as content or propositional knowledge in the form of teachers being taught the different types of language policies that exist but in relation to teachers’ own local variables and their personal beliefs” (p.84). Because of the unique perceptions of individual teachers, discussion around beliefs at the school level can foster common expectations and approaches to bilingual education inside classrooms (Kenner & Mahera, 2012; Spicer, 2011).

School administrators also play a central role in policy appropriation in classrooms and schools. Studying school-based preparation for all teachers to support linguistically diverse students, Elfers and Stritikus (2014) describe how school leaders in Washington state facilitate support, resources, and collaboration to improve educational outcomes of ELs. Findings demonstrate that school-wide approaches to EL instructional scaffolds support teachers and dismantle isolation between bilingual and mainstream teachers; however, central to this good teaching for all students approach (deJong & Harper, 2005), the professional development must center on reinforcing the importance of bilingualism. All school-level actors must prioritize ELs and engage in professional learning to support the appropriation of policy in practice. Menken and Solorza (2014) concur that school administrators actively negotiate language policies, discussing

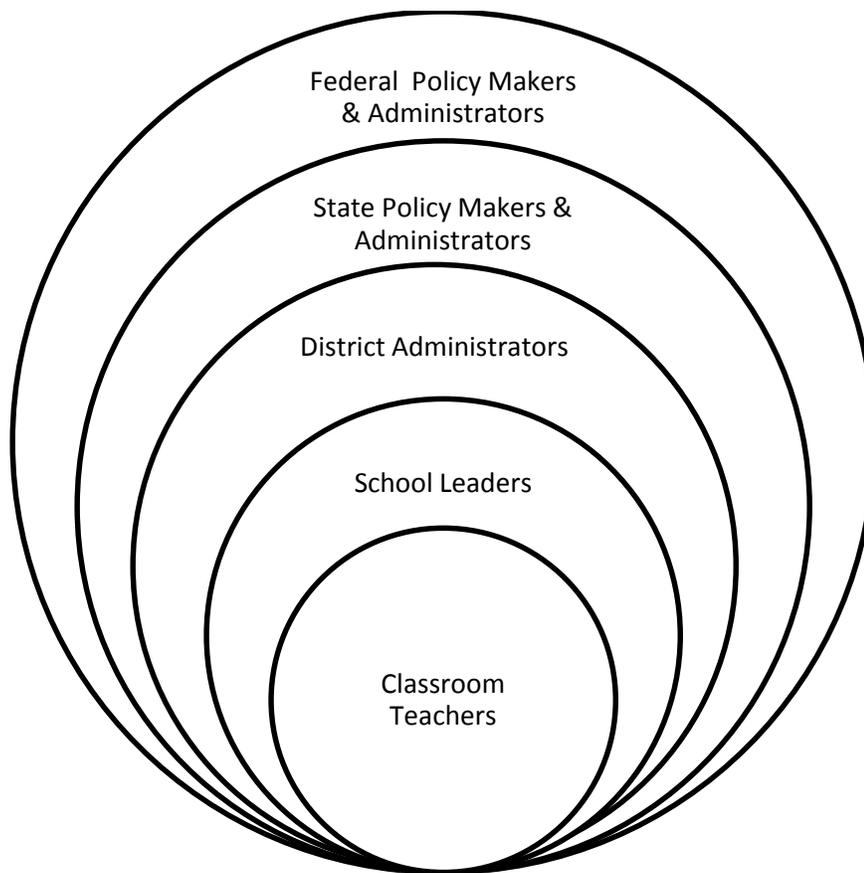
the English-only instructional approaches that shaped administrators' decisions to eliminate their bilingual programs in 10 schools across New York City.

Situated on the east coast, a handful of scholars have sought to understand the application of language policies and ideologies in bilingual classrooms. Freeman (1995, 1996, 2000) investigates how bilingual teachers in Washington D.C. use perceptions about bilingual education and equal educational opportunities, demonstrating the importance of collaboration from language majority and minority groups to successfully implement a bilingual program. Koyama and Bartlett (2011) share the collaborative interplay of teachers, leaders, and community members working together to promote bilingualism at Gregorio Luperón High School in New York City; the longitudinal study demonstrates school-level accomplishments, exploring the role of the school's mission to retain and promote bilingualism simultaneous to academic achievement. Also situated in New York City, Hunt's (2011) findings emphasize collaboration and shared leadership as essential to bilingual school success where administrators and teachers partner to make decisions for students. D. C. Johnson and Freeman (2010) explore the case of bilingual education in Philadelphia, where administrators and teachers collaboratively negotiate top-down policies to advocate for bilingual education. Recognizing the importance of these case studies in exploring language policy and practice in the eastern U.S., the present case study explores bilingual education in the culturally and linguistically diverse urban center of the Midwest.

Building on the extant literature of language policy appropriation in monolingual and bilingual settings, this study specifically explores one urban elementary school in the Midwest. Rather than investigating individual teachers at different school sites (Varghese, 2008) or expanding the focus across multiple districts (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014), we utilize qualitative methods to explore language policy in practice (Hornberger, 1995; Menken & Garcia, 2011) using a case study of one school. Distinct from the study of cases deemed to be successful bilingual schools with consistent and additive bilingual models (Hunt, 2011; Koyama & Bartlett, 2011), our study explores the reality of an elementary school in a time of leadership change, overarching policy change (e.g., Common Core), and programmatic shifts in bilingual education. In the next section, we outline the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that supported our case study investigation of language policy and practice at Abraham Lincoln School.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991) recognizes that individuals construct knowledge by participating in social and cultural activities on individual, interpersonal, and institutional planes (Rogoff, 2003). From a sociocultural perspective, we conceptualize educational policy as multifarious and dynamic, shaped and negotiated between multiple actors, including teachers, administrators, and policy makers (Datnow et al., 2002; Levinson & Sutton, 2001). The complexity of policy formation and implementation can only be captured through consideration of interactions and negotiations that occur on these multiple planes and between various actors in any given policy context (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996; Rogoff, 2003). The sociocultural theoretical framework allows us to zoom in to examine the policies, actors, and the interplay between policy and actors in Illinois bilingual classrooms and zoom out to consider the broader role of policy actors in bilingual education (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1. Multiple Layers and Actors in Educational Policy*

Grounded in sociocultural theory, we use the conceptual framework of figured worlds (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). A figured world is a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation used to make sense of the complexities and tensions of daily life. In a figured world, discourses, cultural constructions, and assumptions that constitute familiar aspects of daily life create a standard storyline used to figure the meanings of characters, acts, and events (Holland et al., 1998). Institutions and institutionalized structures of power, status, and influence, such as educational policies, provide depth and organization to the figured landscape to ensure repetition of situations and actions over time. In Illinois, the figured world of bilingual teaching involves the discourses and cultural constructions (e.g., student labels) that constitute the familiar aspects of teaching: the participants (e.g., students) and their common acts (e.g., assessment) as situated in a particular institution (e.g., education) with different positions of power (e.g., administrator).

Although the figured world provides actors with social and cultural constructions to make meaning of daily life, these are not static scripts that dictate actions. Individuals maintain agency to make decisions and participate in varied ways in the figured world (Holland et al., 1998). Through appropriation (Rogoff, 1995), individuals actively change involvement, including understanding of and responsibility for activities and practices. Specific to language policy in the sociocultural framework, appropriation (Levinson & Sutton, 2001) occurs when teachers

interpret, modify, and contest policy mandates to fit local contexts (Datnow et al., 2002). Within the figured world of bilingual teaching, teachers make active decisions on how to appropriate language policy and program into daily classroom practice, such as opting to use a specific medium-of-instruction (e.g., Spanish, English; Tollefson & Tsui, 2004). Policy appropriation (Levinson & Sutton, 2001) occurs when teachers take the state-, district-, and school-level policies and corresponding programmatic requirements and utilize them in their own way in the classroom.

Using the theoretical framework of sociocultural policy appropriation (Levinson & Sutton, 2001) and the conceptual framework of figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998), we explore the overarching research question: How do language policy actors (e.g., administrators, teachers) appropriate policy in practice? To respond to this broader question regarding the appropriation of language policy in practice focused on the case of one urban Midwest school, we investigate three sub-questions: (a) What layers of language policy (e.g., federal, state, district) shape bilingual classroom practice at Lincoln School?, (b) How do teachers make decisions about how to carry out state, district, and school language policies in practice?, and (c) What macro-level policies and micro-level factors mediate the appropriation of bilingual education at Lincoln School?

### Methods

We designed our research as a qualitative case study (Yin, 2008) to investigate language policy in practice at Abraham Lincoln School (all names are pseudonyms). Scholars describe the qualitative case study as a favored approach to “delve into language education policy implementation, to gain the rich understandings of the language policy processes” (Menken & Garcia, 2011, p. 3). To investigate the figured world of bilingual teaching within this bounded case of Abraham Lincoln School, we collected and analyzed various sources of qualitative data to understand the institutional, interpersonal, and personal planes at Lincoln School (Erickson, 1986; Rogoff, 1995; see Figure 2).

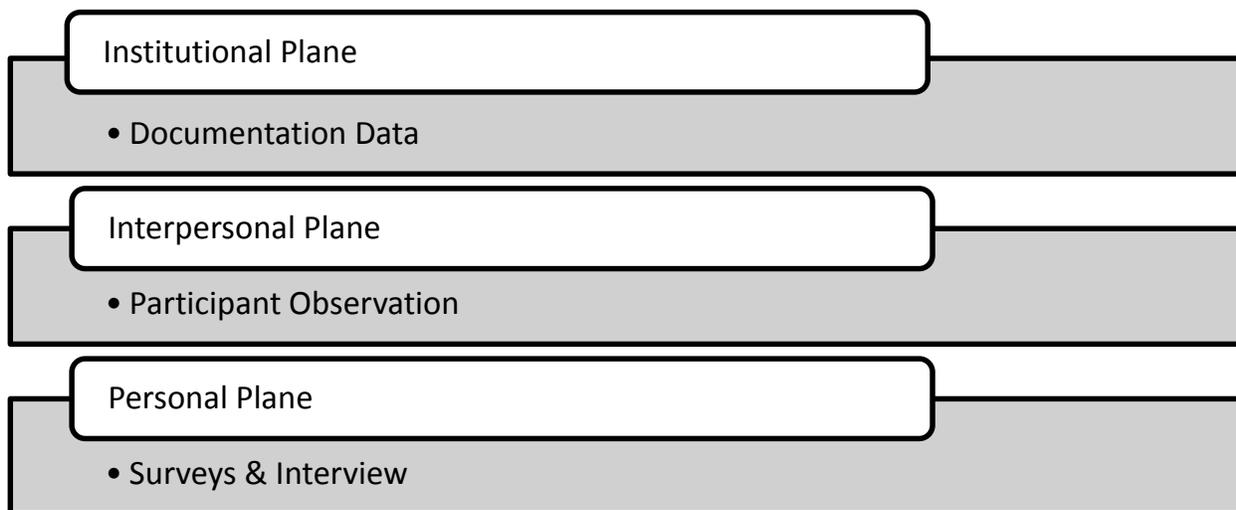


Figure 2. Multi-layered Data Collection

First, to understand the institutional plane of language policy, we collected documentation data from the school, district, and state related to language policy and bilingual programming, cataloged and organized to understand the various facets of language policy in Illinois, the large urban school district, and Abraham Lincoln School. Second, we explored the interpersonal plane using participant-observation data across two school years spanning November 2010 to June 2012, logging anecdotal data and reflective memos from conversations, collaborations, and interactions with the school principal, leadership team, and various bilingual teachers. Third, we investigated the personal plane using surveys and interviews with individual teachers, probing teachers' appropriation via 23 surveys and three interviews.

After piloting in a nearby district, the survey included 28 items in six general categories: seven questions regarding teacher attributes (e.g., endorsements, experience), four questions for teachers to provide a numerical rating based on confidence (e.g., ability to teach bilingual students), nine narrative prompts (e.g., Describe the bilingual students in your classroom.), and eight open-ended questions (e.g., What are the strengths of your classroom for bilingual students?). Twenty-three out of approximately 35 teachers responded to the online survey, including a representative sampling of the grade level (i.e., lower and upper elementary, middle school) and classroom context (i.e., mainstream, bilingual, gifted bilingual) of the larger teacher population. Approximately 80% of survey respondents self-identified as novice teachers with between one and five years of teaching experience; this also reflects the young faculty at Lincoln School.

Survey respondents also indicated willingness to participate in follow-up interviews. Three bilingual teachers agreed to participate, conveniently providing a sample that spanned grade levels at Abraham Lincoln School: (a) Vanessa, a gifted bilingual teacher in an early elementary classroom, (b) Christine, a gifted bilingual teacher in a late elementary classroom, and (c) Roxanne, a sheltered bilingual teacher in the middle school science classroom (see Table 1).

Table 1  
*Interview Participants*

| <b>Pseudonym</b> | <b>Teaching Placement</b>      | <b>Years of Total Teaching</b> | <b>Years of Teaching at Lincoln</b> | <b>Ethnicity</b> | <b>Language Abilities</b>                |
|------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------|--|
| Vanessa          | Kindergarten, Gifted Bilingual | 18                             | 18                                  | Latina           | L1: Spanish<br>L2: English               |
| Christine        | Third Grade, Gifted Bilingual  | 5                              | 2                                   | Caucasian        | L1: English<br>L2: Spanish<br>L3: French |
| Roxanne          | Middle School, Bilingual       | 6                              | 1                                   | Caucasian        | L1: English<br>L2: Spanish               |

Prior to sitting down individually with each teacher, we developed an interview protocol with 22 interview questions in five general categories to span personal (i.e., teacher), interpersonal (i.e., practice), and institutional (i.e., policy) planes of sociocultural activity (Rogoff, 1995). We utilized a digital voice recorder to record the interviews, which were later transcribed into Word documents for analysis. We uploaded data to Nudist Vivo 8.0 research software, including documentation, participant-observation notes, surveys, and interview transcriptions.

With the data analyses, we aimed to answer the research questions on language policy in practice focused on the case of Lincoln School. The guidelines of Yin (2008) for analyzing case study evidence guided us to approach the data with the preferred analytic strategy for case study research by relying on our theoretical orientation (Holland et al., 1998). To understand the storyline that guided school actors' decision making, we utilized the analytic technique of the logic model, which "deliberately stipulates a complex chain of events over an extended period of time" (Yin, 2008, p. 149). In this way, using data collected over time from the institutional, interpersonal, and personal planes, we matched patterns emergent from the data to the conceptually framed storyline (Erickson, 1986; Rogoff, 1995; Yin, 2008). We then utilized thick description to merge these findings across data sources into a detailed narrative case (Yin, 2008). We compiled and shared our findings through thick description and detailed narrative to capture the complexity of the case (Yin, 2008).

Situated in the qualitative case study research design, we ensured validity and trustworthiness of our findings in a variety of ways (Yin, 2008). The bounded case focus on Lincoln School allowed for deep exploration of one institutional entity drawing from multiple sources of evidence. With documentation, participant observation, survey, and interviews coming together to form a large corpus of qualitative data, we triangulated findings across data sources to ensure validity and trustworthiness. Additionally, we utilized the distinct roles and lenses of the two authors, with the second serving as the insider who engaged with school actors across two school years and the first author serving as an outsider as a graduate assistant supporting in the cataloging and analysis of the data. With two distinct lenses, we triangulated findings by first analyzing data and drafting assertions individually, followed by collaborative crafting of the narrative storyline, which is described in the next section.

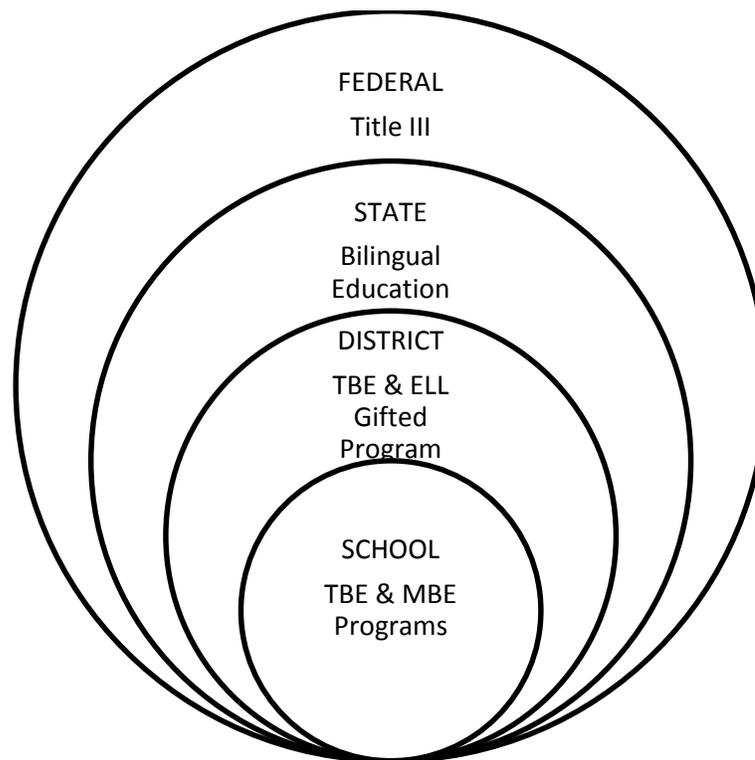
### **Findings**

In this section, we thickly describe the case of bilingual education at Lincoln School. Results focus on the figured world of bilingual teaching (Holland et al., 1998), the standard storyline used by school actors to make meaning of daily practice with ELs. To analyze the institutional, interpersonal, and personal planes of policy (Heineke & Cameron, 2013; Rogoff, 1995), we share our findings in three sub-sections: (a) Policy storyline: The figured world of bilingual education at the Lincoln School, (b) Practical decisions: Teachers' appropriation of policy in bilingual classrooms, and (c) Policies in practice: The role of English-only initiatives and assessments. We begin with the figured world of bilingual teaching, including the community and school context, state-level language policies, and district- and school-level bilingual programs that guide the practice of teachers. After exploring macro-level facets that shape the figured world, we investigate how teachers interpret and appropriate policies and programs.

Finally, we merge policy and practice to explore the macro-level policies and micro-level factors that impacted bilingual classroom practice at Lincoln School.

### Policy Storyline: The Figured World of Bilingual Education at Lincoln School

In the figured world of bilingual teaching, educators make decisions in daily practice by using the standard storyline created by the multiple layers of educational policy, including federal, state, district, and school, as well as the context of the surrounding school community. In this results sub-section, we draw from analyses of documentation and participant-observation data to respond to the first research sub-question: What layers of language policy (e.g., federal, state, district) shape bilingual classroom practice at Lincoln School (see Figure 3)?



*Figure 3.* Macro-level Language Policy Layers at Lincoln School (TBE = Transitional Bilingual Education; ELL = English language learner).

Lincoln is a P-8 school located in Rivertown, a gentrified urban community. Once a diverse neighborhood of predominantly Latino families, many have been displaced with Caucasian, upper-class families building upscale condos and homes. However, Lincoln has maintained its image as a school that represents the original fabric of the community with 92% Latino students, with 250 of the 800 students considered to be ELs. Lincoln pairs as a neighborhood school and a regional bilingual gifted school, therefore, at each grade level, there are three different tracks and program models: (a) mainstream for neighborhood children who are not classified as ELs, (b) bilingual for neighborhood children who are classified as ELs, and (c) gifted bilingual for regional children who speak a native language other than English and qualify for gifted services. The bilingual track corresponds with the Illinois policy that requires bilingual education at

schools with 20 or more ELs who speak the same language (ISBE, 2010). These classrooms are to utilize TBE to transition students from their native language of Spanish to English proficiency (Zelasko & Antuñez, 2000). The gifted bilingual track relates to a district-level proposal written in the 1990s, which specifically called for MBE to allow those regional bilingual students classified as gifted to maintain their native language of Spanish through literacy and content instruction in both languages.

The original bilingual program models at Lincoln attempted to follow the guidelines provided by the state- and district-level policy actors. In bilingual classrooms, which followed a late-exit or developmental TBE program model (Zelasko & Antuñez, 2000), students received native language instruction and support in decreasing daily allotments of time over a five-year span from Kindergarten through fourth grade (K-4); in fifth grade, students entered English-only classrooms. In the gifted bilingual classrooms, which followed a MBE program model, teachers provided a similar developmental approach in the initial five years of schooling, but the maintenance of the Spanish language continued from fifth to eighth grade with a portion of daily instruction aimed at supporting and building students' native language and literacy abilities. In this way, the gifted bilingual program met state-level policies and exemplified a district-level initiative where qualifying students from around the city, those who spoke Spanish as their native language and demonstrated gifted exceptionality on a district-level examination, were bussed to Lincoln to receive rigorous content and bilingual instruction. Nevertheless, at some point in the two decades since the inception of the program models, the articulated school-level program models have shifted to inconsistent classroom use of medium-of-instruction. In the mid-2000s, Lincoln School as a whole demonstrated less than average achievement data, which caught the attention of district-level administrators.

Known across the district as an administrator capable of turning around schools in need of improvement, Dr. Paul Brown came to Lincoln Elementary in the summer of 2010 to support the overall school-level change process. First, he hired a large number of new teachers to change the culture of achievement at Lincoln. These were primarily young and novice teachers, many bringing EL and bilingual certification and experience. Next, he analyzed state standardized test scores, which suggested that ELs' academic and linguistic needs were not being met. Then, Dr. Brown began to collaboratively explore and consider the bilingual programs outlined in state and district documentation, paired with the current context and challenges at the school. He recognized that due to Rivertown's changing population, leading to an increase in native English speakers and a decline in native Spanish speakers, there were no longer enough ELs to have bilingual classrooms at early grade levels. Although TBE was designated for ELs from K-4, classroom spots in the neighborhood bilingual classroom were needed for the overflow from the mainstream track. In this way, he recognized that teachers in Kindergarten and first grade "bilingual" classrooms could not utilize bilingual instruction because half of the students spoke only English.

Despite this demographic challenge posed to the implementation of bilingual programming, Dr. Brown recognized the need to provide teachers and students with more consistent program models for both gifted bilingual and bilingual classrooms. Both TBE and MBE program models lost consistent Spanish components over the years, which we discovered through our participant-observations at the school site over two years, particularly based on the dialog with and

perspectives of veteran Lincoln teachers’ observations. Using the trends in the academic achievement data from standardized tests to drive decision making, Dr. Brown and his leadership team centered on the need to provide teachers with clear expectations for bilingual classroom practice, hoping to return to the more consistent models of bilingual education that had characterized the school in years past. Recognizing that more substantial change would need to occur over time to improve bilingual education, school leaders began with initial expectations that Kindergarten to fourth grade bilingual and gifted bilingual teachers would utilize science to provide content-based Spanish language instruction and teachers in fifth through eighth grade would provide maintenance bilingual instruction to labeled gifted bilingual students through literacy-focused portions of both English language arts and Spanish as foreign language classes (see Table 2).

Table 2  
*Refinement of Program Model Expectations*

| <b>Grade</b> | <b>Mainstream</b>    | <b>Bilingual</b>      | <b>Gifted Bilingual</b> |
|--------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| K            | Sheltered Strategies | TBE/Sheltered         | TBE (Science)           |
| 1            | Sheltered Strategies | TBE/Sheltered         | TBE (Science)           |
| 2            | Sheltered Strategies | TBE (Science)         | TBE (Science)           |
| 3            | Sheltered Strategies | TBE (Science)         | TBE (Science)           |
| 4            | Sheltered Strategies | TBE (Science)         | TBE (Science)           |
| 5            | Sheltered Strategies | Sheltered Instruction | MBE (ELA)               |
| 6            | Sheltered Strategies | Sheltered Instruction | MBE (ELA)               |
| 7            | Sheltered Strategies | Sheltered Instruction | MBE (ELA)               |
| 8            | Sheltered Strategies | Sheltered Instruction | MBE (ELA)               |

**Practical Decisions: Teachers’ Appropriation of Policy in Bilingual Classrooms**

The figured world of bilingual education at Lincoln School, described above through the state-, district-, and school-level language policies and decisions, provided a standard storyline for bilingual teachers to make meaning of daily practice. In this way, teachers utilized the figured world, as well as other factors and challenges within the community, school, and classrooms, to make decisions about policy in practice. At the school-and classroom-level, teachers described appropriation of bilingual practice using the standard storyline of macro-level language policies. In this section, we utilize thick descriptions based on interview and participant-observation data to respond to the second sub-question: How do teachers make decisions about how to carry out state, district, and school language policies in practice?

Early in Dr. Brown’s tenure, the Lincoln faculty found the expectations and goals of the bilingual program models to be ill-defined. Veteran teachers, who had been long-standing participants in the dynamic figured world of bilingual education at Lincoln School, described what the program models were “supposed” to look like in practice, using the standard storyline of policy to juxtapose with the appropriation in practice. New bilingual teachers utilized prior experiences in teacher education and at other school sites to make meaning of the bilingual teaching realities at Lincoln, recognizing the lack of a vertical alignment across bilingual program models or horizontal differentiation between bilingual, gifted bilingual, and mainstream classroom practice. Survey data demonstrated that new general education teachers did not know

details of the school-wide system for bilingual education, although one novice teacher had already realized that “the type of bilingual program students receive at Lincoln vary greatly depending on their teacher.” Consistent among teachers was the frustration with the “unclear and inconsistent” approach to bilingual education.

In Vanessa’s Kindergarten classroom, students entered via the gifted track based on performance on a district-level assessment and typically had high levels of oral language proficiency in Spanish and English. Without formal Spanish-language assessment data to guide her initial decision making, she used anecdotal observations to determine the students’ dominant language and then differentiated literacy instruction in either language: Spanish dominant students read and wrote in Spanish, whereas English dominant students read and wrote in English. For the classroom environment and whole-group instruction, Vanessa started the year in Spanish, but then transitioned to English as the year moved on. She attributed her increasing use of English as the year progressed as largely due to the pressures she felt from the first-grade teachers; with teachers “fearful” of the emphasis placed on student achievement measured by English-only standardized tests, they subsequently insisted upon English as the medium-of-instruction. Using the standard storyline from her decade of participation in the figured world of bilingual education at Lincoln School, Vanessa articulated that the gifted bilingual program was “supposed to be maintenance,” but the internal and external pressures to demonstrate student achievement through English-only assessments led her to transition her students to English during their first year of school – knowing that students would head into first grade to receive only English medium-of-instruction.

In Christine’s third-grade gifted bilingual classroom, students entered with a wide range of Spanish language and literacy abilities, despite three years of continuous enrollment in a supposed MBE program. On the first day of school, Christine encountered 30 students who had not utilized Spanish in school since Kindergarten, which she determined after students mistook her for the foreign language teacher when she used Spanish as the medium-of-instruction. As a novice teacher at Lincoln School, she utilized the policy-based storyline to discern the expectation that she consistently use Spanish in the MBE classroom. Even after recognizing that the model was not consistently implemented in prior years, Christine’s personal passion for bilingual education prompted her persistence in supporting students’ varying levels of Spanish proficiency through differentiated language support during readers’ and writers’ workshop. When the new program model expectations emerged from Dr. Brown and the leadership team in her second year at Lincoln (i.e., teaching science in Spanish), Christine embraced the opportunity and challenge, although her students struggled “being thrown back into Spanish” particularly without Spanish-medium content area materials and with multiple English-only initiatives and corresponding high-stakes accountability measures. Continuing to make practical decisions aligned with the storyline of the figured world of bilingual education, Christine described being alone in her enactment of the new program model expectations, anecdotally hearing that she was the only teacher following the new school-level mandate and teaching science in Spanish.

In the departmentalized middle school classrooms at Lincoln School, students of all labels (e.g., gifted bilingual, bilingual, mainstream) were grouped at random to receive English as the medium-of-instruction for all content areas with the exception of Spanish as a foreign language. In Roxanne’s science classroom, the principles of sheltered instruction, such as the use of

graphic organizers, cognates, and total physical response to build academic vocabulary, shaped her practice. Whereas sheltered instructional strategies guided her practice in whole-group settings, Roxanne toiled to meet the individual needs of students, particularly long-term students that had not exited the TBE program. Nevertheless, she struggled to find time to support individual students' needs or bring Spanish into her instruction, primarily due to multiple initiatives and assessments from the state, district, and school levels. Roxanne described the "juggling" act that goes on in her classroom, expressing concern around adequately preparing her students to demonstrate achievement on English-only assessments such as the Explorer test and the Illinois Standardized Achievement Test (ISAT). She questioned how to get students ready for the Common Core and at the same time how to ace the [Lincoln] five-week benchmark assessments in English language arts, writing, and math. In the complex figured world with the challenges presented to the standard storyline for bilingual instruction, multiple initiatives deterred from language-specific support and instruction.

Through our participant-observations at the school site over two years, particularly from the dialog with and perspectives of veteran Lincoln teachers' observations, we found that both the TBE and MBE program models were losing consistent Spanish components over the years. Using the perspectives and experiences of multiple teachers through survey data and three target bilingual teachers' interview data, we found that teachers made meaning of the standard policy-based storyline in various ways based on personal and professional experiences and specific challenges and contexts posed in classroom contexts. In this way, bilingual instruction looked remarkably different depending on the classroom. In contrast to the differentiated bilingual literacy instruction in Vanessa's classroom to Christine's Spanish-medium science lessons to Roxanne's English-only sheltered instruction, students also most likely experienced English-only settings.

Overall, the pressures from English-only initiatives and assessments – outside of and separate from the bilingual education policies and programs – had an impact on the figured world of bilingual education. Both before and after the refinement of program models to provide clarity and consistency across Lincoln School, the demands of English-only curriculum and instruction driven by the Common Core Standards and measured through state-, district-, and school-level assessment tools shaped teachers' appropriation of language policy in practice (see Figure 4).

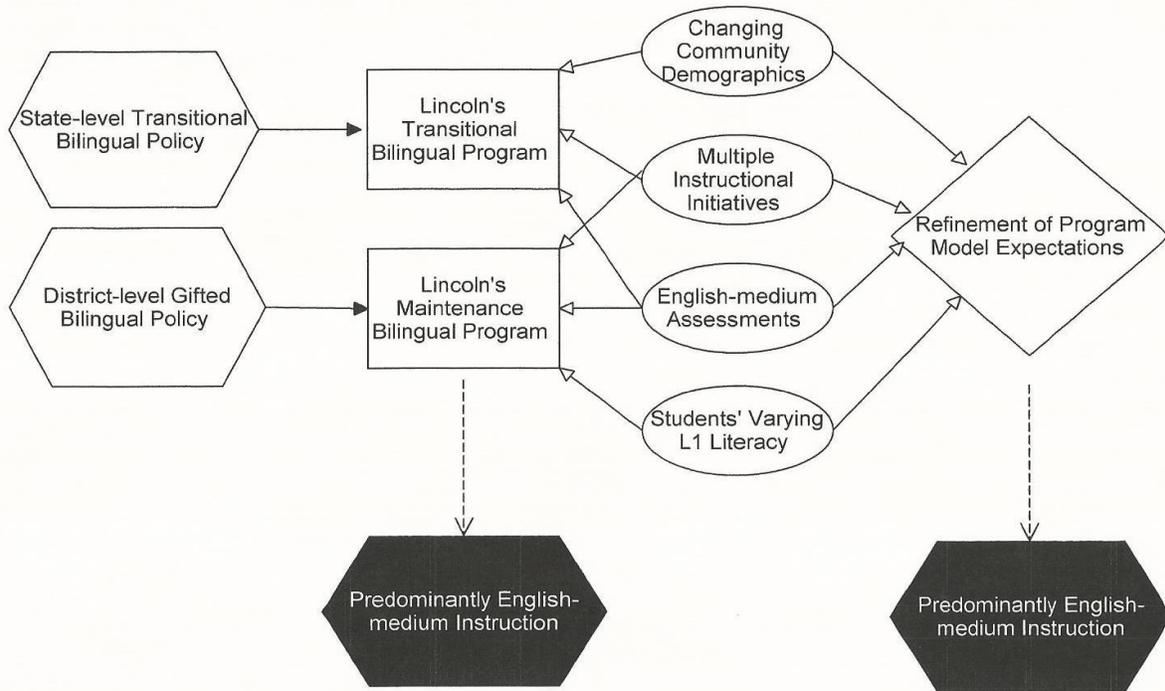


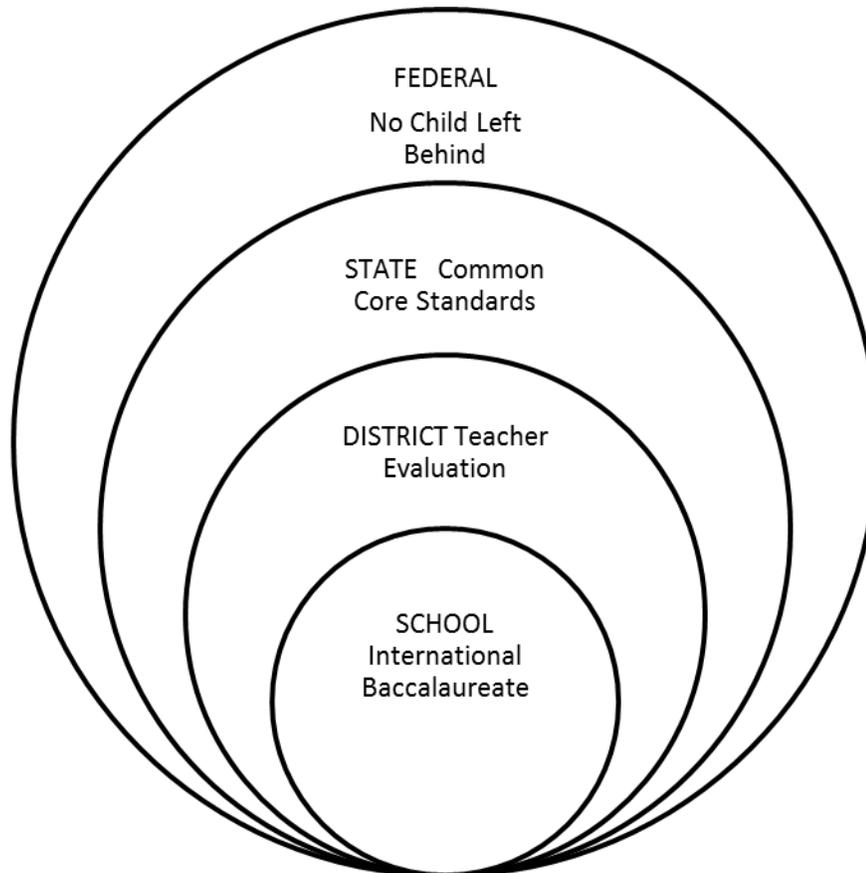
Figure 4. Language Policy in Practice in the Figured World of Bilingual Education at Lincoln School

**Policies in Practice: The Role of English-Only Initiatives and Assessments**

In this final results sub-section, we utilize the themes across all data sets to discuss the third and final research sub-question: What macro-level policies and micro-level factors mediate the appropriation of bilingual education at Lincoln School? At the time of the study, faculty at Lincoln engaged in many facets of school reform based on national-, state-, district- and school-level demands (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). First, school-wide changes impacted ELs as a result of national educational movements, such as the Common Core Standards (VanLier & Walqui, 2012) and Response to Intervention (Brown & Doolittle, 2008). Second, similar to other schools under the state and district microscope due to past challenges, teachers and other school personnel focused attention on many initiatives to promote student academic achievement (Koyama & Barlett, 2011). Third, the school was seeking approval as an International Baccalaureate (IB) school, which included revamping curriculum to be inquiry-based and globally-minded and providing world language instruction to all students (Saavedra, 2011). Roxanne stated that there were “so many cooks in the kitchen,” reflecting other teachers’ frustrations of being pulled in too many directions to do any one particular initiative well.

Typical in the age of accountability, these many educational initiatives coming from state (e.g., Common Core), district (e.g., teacher evaluation tied to standardized test scores), and school (e.g., IB) policy actors were consistently accompanied by standardized tests to hold teachers and students, including ELs, accountable for related goals and objectives. Throughout the various sources of data, teachers described the plethora of state-, district, and school-level initiatives and corresponding assessments, including but not limited to: Common Core, Dibels, Scantron,

Illinois Standardized Achievement Test, Explorer college readiness, district writing benchmark assessments, and five-week assessments of Lincoln math, writing, and reading outcomes. Although seemingly unrelated to bilingual programming, these initiatives took time away from bilingual instruction in classrooms and added pressure to increase English medium-of-instruction time to prepare students for the corresponding assessments (see Figure 5).



*Figure 5.* Educational Policies Impacting Bilingual Education at Lincoln School

Whereas teachers depicted the juggling act of multiple school-wide initiatives, the anxieties around testing played a role in teachers' decisions around medium-of-instruction in bilingual classroom practice. In addition to frustrations with teaching demands, teachers described how frequent testing affected students' learning. The myriad tests that consumed much of the teaching and learning time in bilingual classrooms were written and completed in the English language, which placed additional pressures on teachers to limit Spanish use in classroom instruction. Despite the numerous high-stakes and English-only tests, the teachers recognized the lack of assessment data to inform instruction for bilingual students, such as the need for earlier administration of diagnostic language assessments in Kindergarten to begin differentiated bilingual instruction at the beginning of the school year.

With multiple English-only initiatives and corresponding standardized tests, testing became the de facto language policy guiding teachers' practice (Menken, 2008), rather than the various state, district-, and school-level language policies that attempted to systematize bilingual education across the Pre-kindergarten to eighth grade setting. The multiple schoolwide priorities, each

with its own corresponding standardized English medium assessment, placed pressure on teachers related to accountability. Academic accountability, measured only in English, reinforced the rush to teach students predominantly in the English language to prepare them for high-stakes tests. Additionally, teachers shaped language policy decisions based on the perceived tensions to mainstream students and the resulting challenges of prior years of English-only instruction in bilingual classrooms. Because many educators apparently succumbed to pressure to move students through to the mainstream, those bilingual teachers who attempted to provide instruction in Spanish faced many challenges. The inconsistencies across both TBE and MBE program models left students with varying levels of Spanish language and literacy. Even with the attempt at a consistent bilingual program, teachers explained that they could not reasonably teach in Spanish, since many students who had entered Lincoln as Spanish dominant or bilingual had substantially lost their native language abilities and lacked the academic vocabulary in Spanish to access grade-level material.

After hearing from bilingual teachers of the staunch difficulties of enacting the new school-level mandate and utilizing Spanish as the medium-of-instruction to teach science, Dr. Brown recognized that this short-term fix did not factor in the historical complexities of bilingual education at Lincoln School. Seeking to design a long-term plan to roll out over time to re-figure the standard storyline of bilingual teaching and learning, he convened a bilingual think tank with teachers and leaders to collaboratively plan new directions for bilingual education. The group's long-term plan included goals for the students, families, school, and community and centered on a sustainable and consistent model for bilingual education. After engaging in a year-long learning community mediated by professional texts on bilingual education (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000; Soltero, 2003), the team decided to implement two-way immersion to meet the changing needs of the neighborhood population (i.e., the growing English speaking population due to gentrification) and their desire for a consistent, additive model of bilingual instruction. After two years of qualitative research and collaborative planning, just months before the initial implementation of the two-way program starting with Kindergarten, Dr. Brown left Lincoln. Without permanent school leadership until February of the following school year, and a new set of priorities brought by the new principal, the dual language initiative halted. Slowing down the pace of meaningful change in urban schools (Haberman, 2004), attrition resulted in lack of reform to bilingual education.

### **Discussion**

In this study, we investigated the appropriation of bilingual programming at one diverse, urban elementary school in the state of Illinois, responding to the overarching research question: How do language policy actors (e.g., administrators, teachers) appropriate policy in practice? Overall, the findings demonstrated that bilingual instruction is not consistently occurring at Lincoln, as the external pressures of educational accountability outside of language policies led teachers to make decisions about bilingual instruction and medium-of-instruction use in classrooms. Even when school-based leaders and policies shifted to provide more structure and clarity for bilingual teachers, the persisting challenges, mandates, and initiatives guided decision-making and resulted in predominantly English-only instruction in bilingual classrooms. Whereas most research focuses on how teachers enact monolingual policies, this study highlights that more attention needs to be paid to bilingual settings. In this final section, we discuss the findings and

their significance to contemporary educational policy and practice, as well as provide recommendations for future practice and research.

The first research question focused on the impact of various layers of educational policy and actors that impacted practice at the Lincoln School: What layers of language policy (e.g., federal, state, district) shape bilingual classroom practice at Lincoln School? Various historical and contemporary language policies came together to inform the figured world of bilingual teaching at Lincoln School (Holland et al., 1998), including the district-level language policy that made the school a regional bilingual gifted center and the state-level language policy related to mandated TBE for 20 or more ELs at the school setting. Nevertheless, federal-level policies non-specific to language, related to NCLB and resulting high-stakes testing, created a competing storyline that teachers utilized to make meaning of everyday practice, as the focus on English-only in assessment tools played a role in teachers' decision making related to language (Menken, 2008). Within the sociocultural framework that recognized policy as more than static words on a page, the human agents of policy also impacted the figured world (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007), including Dr. Brown's initiatives related and unrelated to bilingual education across the two-year study (Efers & Stritikus, 2014; Hunt, 2011; Johnson, D.C. & Freeman, 2010; Menken & Solorza, 2014).

The second research question focused on teachers' negotiation and implementation of multiple layers of policy: How do teachers make decisions about how to carry out state, district, and school language policies in practice? Findings confirmed that educators are active policy makers (Datnow et al., 2002), as bilingual teachers at Lincoln School made sense of the figured world using their own personal and professional experiences that impacted policy appropriation in their classrooms (Stritikus, 2002; Varghese, 2008; Varghese & Stritikus, 2005). Findings demonstrated unique perceptions and beliefs reflected in each teacher's bilingual classroom (Kenner & Mahera, 2012; Varghese, 2008); however, English-only initiatives and standardized testing created a competing storyline across classrooms. Using these policy-based storylines, teachers made their own language policies in classrooms – teaching in English instead of Spanish due to the pressures of multiple initiatives and accountability measures (Menken, 2008). The significance of findings centered on the importance of teachers' ongoing negotiation of various policy demands, both broad educational policies and specific language policies (Menken & Garcia, 2011; Datnow et al., 2002). Despite valuing bilingualism and bilingual education, monolingual pressures spanning federal and local levels influenced classroom practices. Whereas previous studies in English-only states have suggested that teachers need collaborative, on-site support in negotiating policy demands (Heineke, 2014; Heineke & Cameron, 2013), our findings demonstrated that even in bilingual states like Illinois, classroom teachers must collaboratively consider the barriers that interfere with bilingual education.

The final research question provided insight on local actors' appropriation of policy (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007; Levinson & Sutton, 2001; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996) for bilingual education: What macro-level policies and micro-level factors mediate the appropriation of bilingual education at Lincoln School? Our findings indicated the significant interplay between language-specific and non-language-specific policies in practice with ELs and bilingual students. Moving beyond the conception of language policies guiding language programs and practices, teachers struggled in classrooms with the lack of alignment between language policies (i.e.,

bilingual education) and other educational policies (i.e., accountability and assessment) and language programs (i.e., TBE/MBE) and other educational initiatives (i.e., IB) – when and how the other high-stakes policies (i.e., job security) trump the language policies (i.e., bilingualism). In an effort to overcome both macro- and micro-level complexities in the school, collaboration became a priority, as teachers and leaders attempted to share common understandings for Lincoln bilingual education. Despite the short-lived efforts due to urban leader attrition (Haberman, 2004), Dr. Brown began to create this collaborative, solutions-oriented environment to discuss issues and pressures impacting the bilingual program, thus creating an implementational space (Johnson, D.C. & Freeman, 2010) for school actors to contribute to the new plan for bilingual education.

In sum, with external pressures and changing circumstances at Lincoln School, the resulting approach to bilingual education did not align with extant research on effective schooling (deJong, 2011; Koyama & Bartlett, 2011; Zelasko & Antuñez, 2000). Recommendations for Lincoln School educators, as well as other Midwest schools attempting to implement bilingual programming in this age of accountability, center on explicitly defining personal and professional beliefs and commitments to guide bilingual teaching and learning. We recognize the value of deJong's (2011) principled approach where teachers and administrators regularly reflect, embed, and make decisions based on the principles of educational equity, including affirming identities, promoting additive bilingualism, and structuring for integration. In this way, educators become more cognizant of the standard storyline and their active roles in educational policy in practice, clearly defining their beliefs about ELs and bilingual education and using those stated commitments to carry out consistent, effective, and meaningful bilingual teaching and learning.

By focusing on these principles of educational equity, the figured world of bilingual education at Lincoln School can be re-figured (Holland et al., 1998) with a new standard storyline for teachers to make meaning of daily practice. At the classroom level, teachers can contextualize daily decision-making by reflecting upon the importance of students' linguistic and cultural identities and additive bilingual abilities (deJong, 2011; Koyama & Bartlett, 2011). At the school level, administrators can consider the building structures for integration, such as the role that tracking plays when ELs are separated from non-EL students based on gifted or non-gifted status. Similar work has been approached in east coast schools in Washington D.C. and New York City, as scholars collaborate with policy actors to promote bilingual education despite accountability and testing demands. The Oyster Bilingual School in Washington is an example of an educational setting with a diverse population of students performing well on standardized tests (Freeman, 1995). Additionally, New York State is currently making efforts to push back against testing pressures and increasingly supporting bilingual education (Menken & Solorza, 2014). Thus, despite the challenges of teaching and learning in a nation where English dominates, a principled approach opens opportunities for policy actors to re-figure their context in order to re-conceptualize the education of ELs (see Table 3).

Table 3  
*Principles of Educational Equity*

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Actors engage in practices that reflect respect, non-discrimination, and fairness for all students.

| <b>Affirming Identities</b>   | <b>Promoting Additive Bilingualism</b>   | <b>Structuring for Integration</b>   |
|---|--|--|
| Respects students’ linguistic and cultural identities                               | Creates opportunities for using, developing, displaying, and engaging in multiple languages  | Brings together different parts, on an equal basis, to make a whole                              |
| Validates students’ cultural experiences in school policies and classroom practices | Builds on all students’ existing linguistic repertoires<br><br>Makes knowing multiple languages an integral part of the curriculum and instructional practices | Allows participants to contribute in meaningful ways to the educational process, broadly defined |

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The case of Abraham Lincoln School provides a window into language policy in practice at one urban Midwest school. By investigating the complexities of the figured world of bilingual education, the case study design allowed for “deep, self-referential probes of problems” (Stake, 1998, p. 401). Limitations of this study center around this qualitative case study design, as findings are particular to this particular school and not generalizable across schools. Recognizing this limitation, our goal with this research was not to generalize bilingual settings in the conventional sense, but to capture the intricacy of one context to connect and inform situations beyond the case itself (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). With the shift to Common Core and other initiatives, bilingual programs across the U.S. face analogous issues in responding to external demands while maintaining a principled approach to bilingual education. In this way, future research is needed both at Lincoln School and other bilingual settings. At the Lincoln School, research should continue to investigate the ever-changing figured world of bilingual education as administrators and initiatives continue to change and evolve. At other schools, research should continue to emphasize the perspective of educators as the central policy actors as they work to implement federal, state, and local policy in a way that supports and advocates for bilingual education (Heineke, 2014; Johnson, D.C., 2010).

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