

# Over Thirty Years of Language-in-Education Policy and Planning: Potter Thomas Bilingual School in Philadelphia

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## Abstract

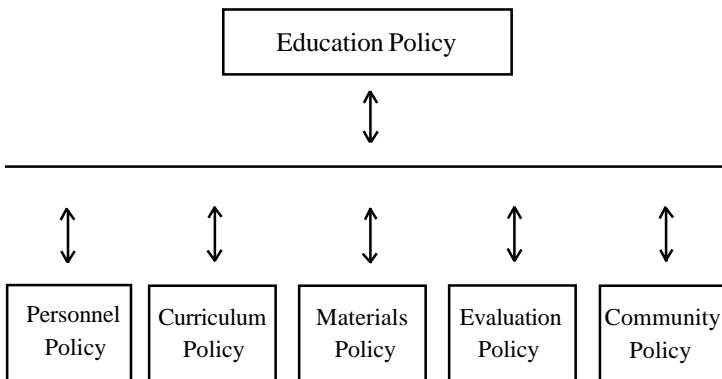
Changes in politics, the economy, demographics, and local leadership all led to the establishment of the Potter Thomas Bilingual School in Philadelphia in 1969. This paper examines the school's history and how it has created, implemented, and sustained various language policies that have constituted its bilingual program over the last 30 years. Using Kaplan and Baldauf's (1997) model, I will identify how Potter Thomas reconfigured its language-in-education policies to challenge "deficit" discourse and promote "resource" discourse (Ruiz, 1984) toward language diversity and speakers of languages other than English. I conclude with present and future challenges to Potter Thomas' bilingual education program, including a critique of the role Title VII funding has played in the program's development.

The late sixties and seventies marked bilingual education's hey-day, when Title VII funding flowed generously for "new and imaginative" programs (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1975). However, the last two decades have been characterized by national attacks against most educational services labeled bilingual. Since the Reagan administration, there have been several conservative attempts to limit, if not terminate, federal and state funding for education in languages other than English. For example, the 1984 and 1988 amendments to the 1968 Bilingual Education Act (BEA) decreased Title VII funds for programs using students' heritage language (Rampton, 1995) and significantly increased funds for English-only instruction called SAIP or structured English language instruction (Lyons, 1995). Additionally, wide-spread anti-bilingual sentiment at the state level has grown, resulting in legislation such as California's 1998 Proposition 227, aimed at virtually eliminating bilingual programs. The recent increases in federal and state level threats to bilingual education make it more critical than ever to learn from the past and to document the trials and tribulations of implementing Title VII policy at individual schools throughout the country. In spite of this need, little research has detailed the early political, economic, and bureaucratic constraints faced by the first Title VII programs, and how local schools and leaders have negotiated ongoing challenges from 1968 to the present. This paper traces the history of bilingual education at Potter Thomas Elementary school in Philadelphia, one of the first nationally recognized bilingual programs in the country (United States

Commission on Civil Rights, 1975; Hornberger, 1990, 1991; Rubio, 1995). Specifically, this case study will address the Title VII policy environment as well as the demographic and economic context in which the Potter Thomas school has carried out its bilingual education programs. I will conclude with a critique of the role Title VII policy has played as a monetary and organizing resource for this bilingual school.

As we look at how Title VII bilingual education policy took shape at Potter Thomas and in Philadelphia, it is important to ask, what is “policy,” and what does it mean to create and implement language policy at the school and classroom level? Corson defines policy as a set of guidelines providing a framework for action in order to achieve some purpose on a substantive issue (Corson, 1995, p. 73). He argues that language policy reaches across most educational issues, as language is the central instrument of learning. Consequently, language policy is multifaceted and complex; it might be more fruitfully understood “as a bundle of policies, each one addressing a substantive language-related issue for the school in its social and cultural context” (Corson, 1995. p. 73). Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) offer the following model for unpacking this “bundle” into its constituent parts:

*Figure 1. A bundle of policies*



*(Adapted from Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997, p.124)*

Kaplan and Baldauf define language policy as “a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules, and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in the society, group or system” (p. xi). Whereas language policy articulates what is to be done, language planning refers to efforts needed to implement the policy. Each of the above five policy areas go hand-in-hand with language-in-education planning efforts to promote systematic linguistic change at the school and classroom level.

Using Kaplan and Baldauf’s model, I will identify how Potter Thomas reconfigured its bundle of policies in order to challenge deficit discourse and promote a resource discourse toward language diversity and speakers of languages other than English (Ruiz, 1984). Even as Title VII policy adopted an increasingly deficit orientation (i.e., viewing languages other than English as problems rather than resources), Potter Thomas held steadfast to many of the initial resource-oriented objectives in the original Bilingual Education Act (BEA) proposed in 1967 (Lyons, 1995, pp. 1-2). My aim is to illuminate the language policy processes that took place at Potter Thomas in hopes of creating and sustaining successful bilingual programming at this school and others.

## Method

My role as a participant-observer at the school from 1997 to 1999 helped me gather and contextualize the information for this paper. This research is based on diverse archival resources concerning Potter Thomas—from backdated newspaper articles to early promotional material. Equally informative were the 18 formal and informal interviews with Philadelphia teachers and school district personnel who have witnessed bilingual programming take shape over the last 30 years. Informants included Dr. Rudolf Masciantonio, a foreign language teacher and director of Foreign Languages for the school district from 1967 to 1994; Al Soler, one of the first teachers to be trained at the Bilingual Institute in 1972 (discussed below) and currently an administrator in the district; and Felicita Meléndez, one of the first Latina teachers (1964) and the first Latina principal in the Philadelphia school district (1974), and principal at Potter Thomas from 1980 to June 1999. Each section of the paper begins with a key quote from one of these participants or an important local expert, as their voices and first-hand experience add depth and specificity to our understanding of where bilingual education at Potter Thomas has come from and where it may be going.

## Setting and Policy Context

### Thomas Potter and the Historical Context of North Philadelphia

“The program came with a new building and the new building came with the program.”

In an interview, Felicita Meléndez, the principal at Potter Thomas from 1980 to 1999, recalled that before Potter Thomas opened in the fall of 1969 on Sixth Street in North Philadelphia, there were two separate schools: Potter School on Fourth Street and Thomas School on Eighth Street. The history behind Potter and Thomas schools sheds light on the demographic and economic changes that set the stage for the Potter Thomas bilingual school.

The school names date back to August 17, 1819, when Thomas Potter, son of George Potter, was born in County Fermanagh, Ireland, and immigrated to Philadelphia with his family when he was nine years old (Montgomery, 1923). As a boy Thomas Potter dreamed of taking orders in the church, but his father's early death compelled him to find work in the oil cloth industry to support his family (Young, n.d.). By the time Thomas Potter was nineteen years old he founded his own oil cloth company, which he would later expand to become "Thomas Potter, Sons and Company" (*The Sunday Dispatch*, 1878). Thomas Potter became active in local politics and took a special interest in education, volunteering to serve as school director, school controller, and chairman of the school committee (Young, n.d.). His active involvement in civic affairs led to the erection of two schools bearing either his first or last name.

Philadelphia's large manufacturing industries, like those started by Thomas Potter, would provide unskilled labor opportunities for scores of European immigrants through the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By the 1930s, however, manufacturing comprised little over 30 percent of total employment (Hershberg & Rubin, 1982, p. 95). While the number of manufacturing jobs continued to decline throughout the late 1960s and '70s, service sector employment—requiring higher skills and providing lower wages and benefits—increased (Hershberg & Rubin, 1982, p. 98). Goode and Schneider (1994) identify the 1964 riots in North Philadelphia as "signal[ing] the end of white mercantile and residential presence" in the area (p. 101). The vacated ice cream factory and brewery where the Potter Thomas school was established were just two of many manufacturing industries to close down and relocate to the suburbs or the sunbelt in search of lower taxes and cheaper land and/or as a result of "redlining" or federal disinvestment in city neighborhoods (p. 35).

This drastic decline in manufacturing also marked the beginning of a radical demographic shift. Santiago (1988) reports that large numbers of Puerto Ricans began moving to the mainland after World War II. From 1953 to 1960 the Puerto Rican population doubled in size from 7,000 to 14,000 and continued to increase through the 1990s when Latinos (the majority of whom are Puerto Rican) have become approximately 6 percent of Philadelphia's residents, at least 100,000 people (Goode and Schneider, 1994). The majority of this growing Latino population has clustered together in North Philadelphia where 15 contiguous census tracts account for 80 percent of the city's Latino population (Goode and Schneider, 1994).

Whereas mostly white Europeans populated the area in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, by the time Potter Thomas opened its doors in 1969 the student population included 42 percent Latinos, 31 percent African Americans, and 27 percent whites (Sutman, Sandstrom, & Shoemaker, 1979, p. 26). The minority student population has increased until today when 81 percent of the students are Latino (94 percent of whom are Puerto Rican), 18.4 percent are African American, and .6 percent are white (Potter Thomas Grant Proposal, 1998).

## From Problem to Resource: Potter Thomas and US Language Policy Before and After 1969

“I credit it [bilingual education in Philadelphia] to one person who really fought for the program, and that was Dr. Eleanor Sandstrom. She was a pioneer.” Al Soler

Prior to the Potter and Thomas schools merging there were very few educational support systems in place for Spanish-speaking students in Philadelphia and nationally (NCBE, 1995). Felicita Meléndez, a Puerto Rican hired to teach “special English classes” in the early 1960s, recalls her first days on assignment, and the lack of training to meet the needs of this newcomer population:

I wasn’t told anything. I was just told, you know, these are the kids. No orientation whatsoever, nothing. These are the kids that don’t speak the language. Deal with them. So that was my beginning.

Dating from the end of the last century and up into the late 1960s, the prevailing national discourse about new students from Puerto Rico and elsewhere reflected a “language as problem” orientation (Ruiz, 1984). In other words, languages other than English were viewed as problems to be overcome; immigrant students were seen as deficient in the cultural and linguistic resources necessary to succeed in school. The Philadelphia School-Community Coordinating Team Progress Report (1965) makes this deficit orientation explicit: “For the child who comes to school lacking in the experiential and language supports necessary to successful achievement—the disadvantaged child—programs of compensatory education must be designed” (p. 2). The report goes on to characterize North Philadelphia as “a locale that incorporates all the factors characteristic of the capsule of cultural disadvantage” (p. 4), and frames children from the area as having the following profile: “low degree of cultural stimulation,” “poor language facility,” “disoriented family patterns,” and “low degree of home motivation” among other undesirable characteristics (p. 25).

Potter Thomas emerged in the context of the new national discourse of the Civil Rights movement when the Bilingual Education Act authorized funding for “new and imaginative” programs to meet the needs of “children of limited English speaking ability” (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1975). The original purpose of the BEA was to provide seed money to state and local education agencies for programs aimed at improving drastically low test scores and high dropout rates for language minority students (Gómez, 1999). Although the original 1967 version of the BEA specified “the teaching of Spanish as the native language,” this objective was dropped from the final BEA law in 1968 (Lyons, 1995).

Despite this change, Potter Thomas designed its programs in accordance with the original language of the 1967 proposal: Spanish instruction as a first or second language for the entire student population.

According to Meléndez and other long-time school district employees, the charismatic leadership of a local district administrator was largely responsible for bringing bilingual education and Title VII funding to Philadelphia in the midst of a favorable political climate. Dr. Eleanor Sandstrom, director of the Office of Foreign Languages, put together a bilingual program and authored what would become a million dollar Title VII grant that would support the first six years of bilingual education planning and implementation in Philadelphia, of which the Potter Thomas model program was a key piece. Dr. Rudolf Masciantonio, who took over as director of foreign languages after Dr. Sandstrom retired, generously praised Sandstrom's character and many accomplishments:

She was a very bright woman and very sympathetic to the needs of people. She was forceful, dynamic, creative—these are some of the words that come to mind. . . . It's not too much to say that she was the 'mother' of bilingual education in Philadelphia. She was responsible for suggesting the program, going after resources, and putting an administrative structure in place.

In contrast to the discourse of the early 1960s, Dr. Sandstrom incorporated a "language-as-resource" orientation (Ruiz, 1984). Languages and speakers of languages other than English were viewed as resources to overall goals of biliteracy for all students, both native Spanish and English speakers. Central to the program's vision was to promote additive rather than subtractive bilingualism, "fluency in both languages without losing either" (Potter Thomas bulletin, 1970).

### A Bundle of Policies, Plans, and Practices at Potter Thomas

"The commitment [to the educational values of learning in two languages] emanates from the school board and permeates every area of responsibility from the Superintendent of Schools to the child in the classroom." Eleanor Sandstrom

Having reviewed the setting and policy context of bilingual education at Potter Thomas, I now focus on how the school actualized Dr. Sandstrom's vision. How were each of the five policy areas—personnel, curriculum and materials, evaluation, and the local community—outlined by Kaplan and Baldauf (1997), created, implemented, and sustained over the last 30 years? In the sections below I define each issue in light of the changing demographic, economic, and political environment of the '60s, '70s and '80s, with particular attention to shifts in Title VII funding and orientation. I identify the measures taken to ensure that Potter Thomas School had what was necessary to establish and maintain a model bilingual school.

## Personnel Policy

“The institute had a great purpose, and I would like to see it reinstated again.” Al Soler

According to Kaplan and Baldauf (1997), personnel policy refers to the issue of recruitment of bilingual teachers and their pre- and in-service training in language pedagogy (pp. 130-133). From the beginning, Dr. Eleanor Sandstrom designed the Title VII grant to include funding for a six-year Bilingual Institute in conjunction with Temple University to train 20-30 qualified bilingual applicants each summer to begin teaching in the fall (Clark, 1969). As the Puerto Rican population increased, the school district initiated creative policies to attract qualified bilingual teachers to enter the Institute. In 1969 the school district proposed to recruit teachers from Puerto Rico and Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America (Philadelphia City Planning, 1969, pp. 8-9; Clark, 1969), adhering to the original intent of the 1967 BEA to “attract and retain as teachers promising individuals of Mexican or Puerto Rican descent” (later dropped from the final 1968 legislation) (Lyons, 1995).

Initially, many Spanish-speaking recruits from Puerto Rico and elsewhere had teaching credentials from their home countries that did not satisfy local requirements. Thus, the Career Ladder Program was initiated as a means to relieve personnel shortages by hiring Spanish-dominant adults with or without a BA or teaching credential to work for the district as they fulfilled local certification requirements (Philadelphia City Planning, 1969, pp. 8-9). By 1972 these criteria had become more stringent, requiring that all teachers have a BA and successfully complete both an oral interview and a writing sample in Spanish and English. Applicants without a BA were encouraged to enter the Career Ladder program at a lower rung, becoming paraprofessionals as they acquired professional skills (Philadelphia City Planning, 1969, pp. 8-11).

Despite the success of the Bilingual Institute, as discussed by Bob Offenbergh in his evaluations of the program (1970, 1972a, 1974, 1976) and by Al Soler, a participant in the program, the Bilingual Institute was phased out of existence when the school’s first Title VII grant ended in 1975. The end of the Bilingual Institute signaled the end of specific training for bilingual teachers in Philadelphia regarding language instruction, curriculum, and program sequencing. Compounding the historic loss of Title VII funding was Pennsylvania’s policy climate with respect to bilingual teacher certification. As Pennsylvania was, and is today, one of the few states where there is no bilingual or ESOL certification. As a result, few applicants today have extended training in second language acquisition, the sociology of language, or bilingual methodology.

Due to an ongoing shortage of qualified bilingual/ESOL teachers, the Career Ladder Program has continued, recruiting applicants for provisional positions with the district. Today, provisional teachers need

only prove they hold a BA and are fluent in English and another language spoken by students in the district and/or have 18 college credit hours in foreign language or cultural study. Consequently, what was once a rigorous application and screening process has become emergency policy, forcing the district to fill vacant bilingual/ESOL positions with teachers who: (a) may or may not have background in second language acquisition theory and methodology and (b) may or may not have a long term commitment to education.

The Potter Thomas school has suffered in the past as a result of bilingual teacher shortages. However, as of spring 1999 school administrators feel fortunate to have almost a completely bilingual staff in place for the first time in the school's history; and 75 percent of the staff are Latino. District policy has allowed all vacated monolingual positions to be frozen and held for teachers with bilingual skills (Sutman, Sandstrom, & Shoemaker, 1979). However, having teachers fluent in Spanish and English is only half the battle. Bilingual fluency does not imply the speaker has professional expertise in bilingual education theory and methodology. The national presence of largely untrained bilingual teachers as well as the fact that bilingual teachers only serve an estimated 9 percent of the nation's 3.4 million language minority students (Gómez, 1999), may partially explain why Title VII funding has not brought about the success that was hoped for when first passed into law 30 years ago.

## Curriculum and Materials Policies

“We tried all different models. You know I hear about all these models now and I say, my god. I have been there somehow in my other life.” Felicita Meléndez

Curriculum policy addresses concerns about what languages to use in the education of second language learners and when to use them; whereas, materials policy addresses what content will be used for language teaching and by what methodology language instruction will be delivered (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997, pp. 127-133). Curriculum and materials policies go hand-in-hand as one cannot decide upon a curriculum without materials to support it and one cannot decide to use specific materials unless the decision is supported by curricular goals.

Before 1969 the curriculum policy in the Philadelphia School District had been to offer Special English Classes to newcomer and immigrant students. However, there were few curricular guidelines or materials to support special English instruction. When Dr. Eleanor Sandstrom and her assistants, including Felicita Meléndez, put together the vision for a two-way bilingual school, they carefully designed a curriculum policy with bilingual goals. Despite the 1974 BEA amendment barring federal support for two-way programs (Lyons, 1995, pp. 2-3), Sandstrom secured district support for Potter Thomas' two-way vision. Both Spanish- and

English-dominant students would begin with 90 percent instruction in the mother tongue and 10 percent in the second language. Instructional time gradually moved to 50 percent in each language as children developed security in the mother tongue (Sutman et al., 1979, p. 26).

Teachers carried out the above sequence of language instruction in a team-teaching fashion: Spanish-dominant and English-dominant students were taught part of the day with same-language-dominant teachers who would then switch students for 10 percent or 50 percent of the day, depending on second language readiness (Offenberg, 1970, p. 59). By the time the program included fourth, fifth, and sixth graders, parents requested that the curriculum be changed to increase students' exposure to English. The program responded, increasing English instructional time to 70 percent in the upper elementary grades (Sutman et al., 1979).

Though the structure and sequence of which languages (when to teach them and why) was clearly in place during the first year of the program, actual curricular units and materials in Spanish for the content areas had not yet been developed (Sutman et al., 1979). These, along with FLES (Foreign Languages in Elementary Schools) materials, were developed by curriculum specialists and teachers with Title VII funds over the first few years of the program (ibid, p. 13; Offenberg, 1972b). Al Soler, who began as an ESOL teacher in 1972 said that as "money was flowing back then" there was no shortage of materials by the time he entered the classroom. In fact, there were so many new materials being created with Title VII funds across the country, that he was quickly moved out of the classroom to become the "field trial coordinator" in charge of testing bilingual materials for several states in the Northeast. Soler recalls: "We used them (the materials) at Potter Thomas and a few other schools in Philadelphia, but that funding dried up." As mentioned earlier, re-authorizations of the BEA in the 1980s moved from exclusively funding bilingual education programs toward Title VII support for SAIP programs that relied primarily on English instruction. Lyons (1990) observes that drastic funding cuts in the 1980s reduced real BEA spending for all programs by 47 percent. Today several teachers at Potter Thomas feel they do not have adequate supplies in both languages; in particular, Spanish language academic materials that relate specifically to the language and cultural experiences of Caribbean youth.

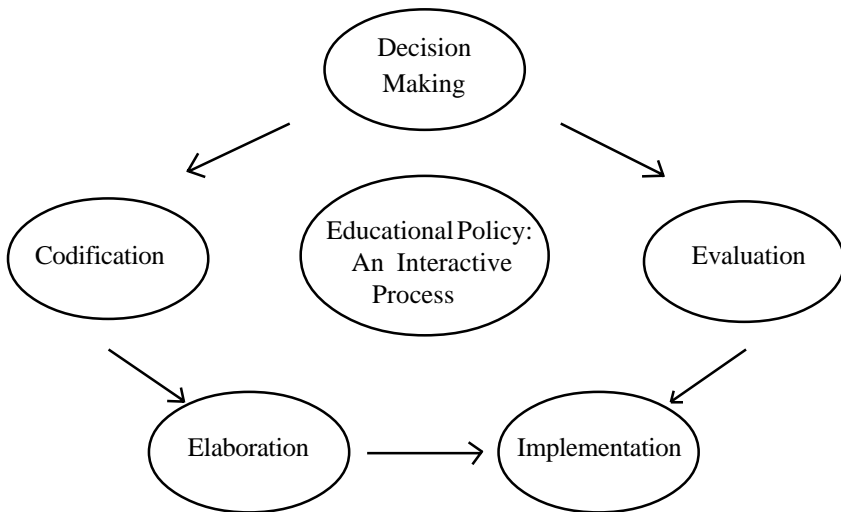
## Evaluation Policy

"I, as evaluator, participated in drawing a distinction between program-specific goals, and broader philosophy by playing a devil's advocate role, challenging other staff members to tell how I or any outsider could observe the program outcomes implied by a goal statement." Robert Offenberg (1972b).

Evaluation policy refers to the assessment of the curriculum and program as a whole, as well as the assessment of student performance, with the goal of determining whether a program is producing the desired results in a cost-effective manner (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997, pp. 135-142). The Potter Thomas model bilingual program, as well as other bilingual programs initiated with Title VII funds, were held accountable for producing evaluations of their students and the instructional program. To meet this Title VII obligation the district hired an internal evaluator to document the “successes and failures” of the bilingual program in its first years of operation (Offenberg, 1972b, pp. 73-74).

Bob Offenberg (1972b) considered his role as evaluator to be formative rather than summative, gathering data to provide feedback to the program for improvement rather than rewards for its achievements or sanctions for failures. According to Fishman (1979), the evaluation feedback loop is a critical iterative stage that informs all decision-making in language-in-education policy. Below, a diagram illustrates the critical role of evaluation in the cyclical stages of language policy, as identified by Fishman.

*Figure 2. Educational policy as iterative process (based on Fishman 1979)*



An important piece of the bilingual program evaluations concerned whether or not students' language acquisition and academic achievement were meeting the Potter Thomas objectives. Offenbergs (1970, 1972a, 1974, 1976) work successfully encouraged the school to convert its philosophy into measurable, testable objectives. To satisfy this requirement teachers kept systematic records (logs) of individual student performance on "micro-objectives" such as the development of specific number concepts and literacy skills in both languages. In the first year evaluation, Offenbergs (1970) concluded: "The log served both a product-evaluation function and a process evaluation function" (p. 13). According to Offenbergs, these logs, combined with other site-specific test evaluations, informed teachers' instructional practices, and proved the program was successfully achieving all goals except for Spanish language acquisition for English-dominant students. This finding helped the program reshape its methods and objectives while placing more emphasis on improving its curriculum to teach Spanish as a foreign language.

When the first six year Title VII grant ended these authentic assessments of student work gave way to a nationwide push for statistical accountability and the use of English-only standardized tests to measure student progress. While Offenbergs (1983a, 1983b) continued to evaluate subsequent Title VII grants Potter Thomas received for new programs (discussed below), there has never been as comprehensive an approach to evaluation of the Potter Thomas program since Offenbergs sixth year report in 1976.

Records of students' academic achievement in the bilingual program began to decline, with the majority of students scoring below the national average on standardized tests. Recently, the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (1996-1997) reports that 82% of Potter Thomas fifth graders scored in the lowest quartile in reading and 83% scored in the lowest quartile in mathematics. These dismal statistics have led to several recent changes. First, because these scores have traditionally excluded Spanish-dominant students, the district adopted the APRENDA test in 1997, a Spanish language version of the standardized test for students who are Spanish-dominant. Secondly, the school superintendent, David Hornbeck, has established a performance index that measures and compares school improvement based on a compilation of criteria: standardized test scores, dropout rates, and student and staff attendance records. A final effort to improve evaluation accountability has been a return to the process-oriented approach used by Potter Thomas 30 years ago. Completing a historical loop, the school is once again encouraging teachers to keep individual logs of student work, now called "portfolios," over the entire school year, to complement documentation of student growth that may or may not appear on year-end, grade-level tests.

## Community Policy

“So we started with one kindergarten, one first grade, one pre-school. Because you have to sell the philosophy to the parents, to the new staff here. That’s why you have that advisory committee with people from different walks of life.”  
Felicita Meléndez

Lastly, a bilingual program must address issues related to the local community if it is to retain funding sources and convince parents that the program will support community goals (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997, pp. 134-135). Sandstrom and others spent one year informing local parents and community members about the Potter Thomas bilingual program to begin in the fall of 1969 (Sutman et al., 1979). Sandstrom organized an advisory board including parents, staff, and community members to discuss topics from the design of the new building to the philosophy of the program. Sandstrom, Meléndez, and others engaged in a lengthy and strategic process to convince wary locals that the program did not imply a Puerto Rican “take-over.”

“There were night meetings with the community people. There was this sense, the sentiment, the feeling that the white teachers and the other teachers here were being replaced by Puerto Ricans. ‘We were [pounds the table] taking over!’—which was not so.”

Initially, five parents refused to allow their children to participate in the program; however, by December these parents had changed their minds (Sutman et al., 1979). Melendez noted that when parents saw that students were becoming bilingual, “They were begging to have the kids back!”

In 1977, the school initiated a program called PACT (Parents and Children Together) as a means to bridge the school-community gap. The PACT program was designed to educate parents about bilingual educational practices in the United States, to provide literacy and life skills courses, and to offer parents GED high school equivalency courses. It was expected that three years of parent participation in PACT would result in increasing parent support of students in school and therefore increase attendance and test performance (Offenberg, 1983a). Offenberg’s evaluation concludes that PACT reached its objectives: “evaluators conclude that the program has had a measurable effect on the behavior of school children in the important skills of reading in Spanish and English and has improved the academic achievement of program participants” (p. 18).

In 1981 Potter Thomas sought to become a “bilingual-bicultural magnet school” that would attract “pupils from outside the school boundaries” (Offenberg, 1983b, p. 1). As the school had become increasingly segregated, serving primarily working class African American and Latino students, the magnet program sought to create a bilingual-bicultural learning center that would attract middle class and white parents to enroll their children in the program. While this program

did attract minority pupils from outside the school boundaries, it was not successful in supporting the district's efforts to desegregate the school and attract a more diverse mix of minority and majority students from various class backgrounds.

Today, the school continues to apply for Title VII funds, seeking to integrate the student population with children from diverse socioeconomic and racial backgrounds (Potter Thomas Grant Proposal, 1998). However, due to high crime, drug trafficking, and poverty in North Philadelphia, it is unlikely that middle class parents will send their children to Potter Thomas voluntarily.

## CONCLUSION

“It’s a long way to go yet, a long way. But I think if we have done it so far, we’re going to be doing it—we DO it.” Felicitá Meléndez

Educators, researchers, and other advocates of bilingualism and biliteracy must analyze the trajectories of bilingual education in the past if they are to fight neo-conservative attacks in the future, such as those spawned by Ron Unz and California’s Proposition 227 (Crawford, 1999). Much can be learned from places like Potter Thomas about the struggles bilingual schools have faced in poverty-stricken urban areas to create and sustain the various components of language-in-education policy to improve education for language minority students.

The passage of Title VII, the dynamic leadership of Dr. Sandstrom, and political, economic, and demographic change all worked together to enable the creation of Potter Thomas Bilingual Model School in 1969. While Title VII funding played a critical role in making “new and imaginative” bilingual programs like Potter Thomas possible over the last 30 years, Title VII has not helped these programs to become sustainable. By failing to provide renewable support for effective programs already in place, Title VII funding falls short of securing long-term success. Thus, important structural features that contributed to Potter Thomas’ early success—such as the Bilingual Training Institute and an iterative evaluation process—were lost when Title VII funding ended. By remaining true to its original intent to fund new programs, Title VII does not continue to fund new programs for long-term success.

However, important questions remain: What should be the priority for a limited pool of Title VII money—to sustain effective programs or to fund those that are newly created? Is it possible to do both? Title VII funding was never meant to legislate or institutionalize bilingual education. Rather, it has functioned more like a carrot on a stick: large sums of grant money were used to entice rather than enforce the implementation of bilingual education. The case of Potter Thomas Elementary School illustrates how such an approach fails to address long-term needs where there is limited enforcement from and/or accountability to local school district and state legislation. However, as Lyons points

out, the Department of Education's proposal in 1980 to require districts to provide special instruction to all Limited English proficient (LEP) students, was met with a conservative backlash which helped secure the presidential election of bilingual foe Ronald Reagan (1995, p. 5). Consequently, if bilingual programs are to have long term success, it is essential for bilingual education legislation to walk a thin policy line.

A classic American political struggle emerges between the demand for local autonomy and control versus the need for state and federal policy to explicitly legislate what is "appropriate" in terms of the five policy areas critical for success of language-in-education policy and planning: personnel, curriculum, materials, evaluation, and community. Currently, the Potter Thomas school has initiated another iterative cycle (Fishman, 1979) through its language-in-education policies, planning, and practices. For example, in light of the absence of bilingual/ESOL certification in Pennsylvania, the school continues to face challenges as to the recruitment and training of qualified bilingual teachers. Administrators and teachers at the school (Potter Thomas Grant Proposal), as well as school district personnel (Shwartz, personal communication), are currently seeking Title VII funds to develop systematic in-service training for bilingual/ESOL teachers. Additionally, the school seeks to establish a high-tech language laboratory, a means to educate and empower members of the local community (Potter Thomas Grant Proposal, 1998). However, as discussed above, real opportunities for long-term success are limited by the short-term life span of most Title VII grants. It is important to note that these creative efforts to transform relationships of power are also limited by historical and structural constraints that are beyond the power of federal or local legislation and funding alone to change (Tollefson, 1991, p. 202). The context for the Potter Thomas bilingual program is one of urban poverty, racism, unemployment, and drug-related violence—the result of decades of neglect by the local, state, and federal governments of inner-city areas such as North Philadelphia. This paper has examined how a school and district's vision and local leadership can mitigate against these powerful, structural constraints. New leaders continue to emerge, especially in 1999, as pioneers in the field of bilingual education such as Potter Thomas' principal, Felicita Meléndez, begin to retire from the district. Potter Thomas bilingual school pushes on through its 30th anniversary without any false hopes that the job will get any easier:

I am very blessed. It's a long way to go yet, it's a long way. But I think if we have done it so far, we're going to be doing it. We'll be doing *paso a paso, un día a un tiempo*.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Actual names are used with permission throughout this paper.

<sup>2</sup> This citation is taken from a publication titled “Educating personnel for bilingual settings: Present and future” by Sutman, Sandstrom and Shoemaker (1979). I credit this passage to Sandstrom because this section of the co-authored text is explicitly about Philadelphia’s efforts and she is the only author of the three to have been intimately involved with language policy and planning in Philadelphia.

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