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LANGUAGE COMMUNITY & EDUCATION
Language as a Resource in Flowers Bay, Roatan, Honduras

Carla A. McNelly

The global perspective toward bilingual and multilingual education supports literacy in the student's first, second, and the possibility of a third or more language to attain socio-political pluralism (Ochoa, 1995). The goal of this discussion is to highlight the importance of bilingual education in the local community of Flowers Bay, Honduras where the educational mission is a pluralistic society. According to the Honduran constitution bilingual education is a right. The *Código de la Niñez y de la Adolescencia* [Child and Adolescent Code] specifically states that students have the right to a public education that includes their native language and culture. In the early 1980s, while many people were preparing to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus "discovering" America, families from multiple ethnic groups in Honduras, including the Garífuna and the Black English Speakers, worked tirelessly to gain racial and ethnic recognition from the Honduran government. Their efforts led to a 1994 presidential decree by Carlos Roberto Reina to form the *Educación Intercultural Bilingüe* (EIB) [Intercultural Bilingual Education]. One of the main principals of EIB is "preparing students to live and work in a pluralistic society". The program's fundamentals and principals incorporate the vision that intercultural education is relevant for everyone and that culture and language are critical to the construction of a democratic society, "*unidad en la diversidad*" [unity in diversity].

A pluralistic society emphasizes coexistence between multiple languages, cultures, interests, and convictions. A pluralistic also recognizes distributions of power and the individual

needs of its members. That said, language is an essential component of working toward reaching a pluralistic society (Darder, 2011). When language is viewed as a resource (Ruiz, 1984), pluralistic societies are prioritized over the assimilation of minority groups into the dominant cultures. Framing the discussion around “language-as-a resource” may be helpful in engaging majority and minority communities in conversations focused on the need for bilingual education. These conversations allow individuals from marginalized and/or minority groups to play a greater role in the local economy and in preserving their cultural identity (Ruíz, 1984; UN News Centre, 2013), while affirming and empowering cultural ideologies and beliefs (Darder, 2011).

Flowers Bay is a community established in the late 1830s on the Southwest side of Roatan with a population of approximately 1000 residents who self-identify as Black English Speakers (Brooks Smith, 2013). According to latest census data available in 2001, the Instituto Nacional of Honduras [National Institute of Honduras], reports that *Negro Ingles* [Black English Speakers] comprise 60%, of people living in Flowers Bay. They are a minority community on the island of Roatan where the majority is Ladino (Spanish and Indigenous mix). The community is about two and one-half miles from a port of entry for cruise ships carrying Europeans and North Americans docking in Coxen Hole, the capital of *el departamento* [the state] of Roatan. The increase in tourist activity within the community causes a greater demand for a multilingual labor force to support the economy where service industry labor is a vital resource. The need for multilingual language learning is essential to the sustainability of the local community of Flowers Bay.

Because of the history of British influences in the region, many older Black English Speakers on the Bay Islands are monolingual. The *Curricula Básica*, the national curriculum, published in Spanish only, is educating their children and grandchildren in local public schools. Mothers reported that after returning home from their Spanish-only public schools, they received

English instruction by community members from the British *Royal Readers* published in 1877. Even with constitutional rights, the Presidential decree of 1994, and the formation of the national *Educación Intercultural Bilingüe* (EIB) [Intercultural Bilingual Education program, Black English Speakers have not been successful in gaining access for their children. Historically, on Roatan, public schools in Black English Speaker communities offer English as a foreign language when teachers are available. Nineteen years after the 1994 Presidential decree, the national government initiated nine pilot bilingual (Spanish/English) kindergarten program in Roatan public schools.

The hope of bilingual education for Black English Speakers continues with the second school year that began February 2014. Access to bilingual education programs in the public schools is a priority for mothers in Flowers Bay, who overwhelmingly report the need for their children to speak English. Bilingual English and Spanish speakers find it easier to secure jobs. Employers favor hiring people who speak English in order to communicate with tourists arriving on Roatan. The mothers also express the desire for the children to learn how to read and write English as well as Spanish. The skills of reading and writing along with speaking two languages provide their children the ability to navigate working on the Bay Islands and on the mainland of Honduras. In addition, these are important skills if they choose to travel to another country like the United States to find employment. The *Educación Intercultural Bilingüe* (EIB) program is an international model with the goal of being a pluralistic society. The voices of mothers make the case that even though language is a right according to the Honduran constitution, it is also clearly a highly valued resource in Flowers Bay, Roatan, Honduras.

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