María Cioè-Peña. (2021) *(M)othering Labeled Children: Bilingualism and Disability in the Lives of Latinx Mothers.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters. 208 pages. ISBN: 9781800411272

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María Cioè-Peña's book "(M)othering Labeled Children: Bilingualism and Disability in the Lives of Latinx Mothers" delves into the lives of historically ignored mothers in the U.S. Minoritized women's social and personal challenges are brought to light as they raise their children who are labeled as emergent bilinguals and disabled by their schools. We learn how institutional decisions related to language, disability, and thus academic placement influence family dynamics. Through *testimonios*, the book places "mothers and their children at the center" (p. xii) of the investigation, exploring what mothers know, how they access information, and how resources are used to support their children throughout their schooling. Despite internal and external struggles, the narratives reveal how mothers navigate their lives in order to help their children, understand disability, and value bilingualism, since "most important for these mothers is the role that Spanish plays in their lives as undocumented Latinas." (p. xii). The implications for this book are noteworthy. Researchers, policy makers, teachers, and even Latinx mothers will gain knowledge about the intersection between bilingual education, disability studies and special education.

The book includes 13 chapters divided into three parts, with a foreword by Ofelia García, well-known for her work on bilingual education, language policy, and concepts such as translanguaging (Universidad de la Ciudad de Nueva York, s. f.). García summarizes the book, suggesting that it is not about mothers, "but *with* mothers" (p. xi), and that education is *reciprocal:* adults and children learn from each other. For example, as de Houwer (2021) finds, through active engagement children may influence parental language use patterns in bilingual environments. García concludes by stating that the "testimonios substitute absences by

plentitudes, disabilities by abilities, limited English by competent bilingualism" (p. xiii) therefore recentering the children as blessings ("bendiciones") for all.

In the preface Cioè-Peña exposes her positionality (the researcher's identity, objectives and relationship to participants). In discussing methodological issues in bilingualism research, Wei (2009) urges that a researcher's identity is immensely important, since it impacts the objectives and the researcher-participant relationship. Cioè-Peña thus emerges as a "formally educated, middle class, multilingual, Black Latina who immigrated to the United States" (p. xv) to account for bias and to establish credibility. She also states her objective of representing mothers "from a place of strength and appreciation" (p. xiv), contrary to present-day depictions. Indeed, missing from her graduate education were the voices of Latinx mothers, and through the publication of her book –an outgrowth of her dissertation research– she aspires to remedy this gap in the literature.

Part 1 is titled The Social Constructions of Motherhood: Poverty, Monolingualism and Disability (by Proxy). In Chapter 1 Cioè-Peña shares how bilingual programs allowed her to become "bilingual (and) biliterate" (p. 4). However, she describes how her sister, classified as "struggling" by the school system, created a linguistic fracture at home. Mothers, especially those raising dis/abled children, were described as broken. Cioè-Peña realizes that policies intended to help were based on exclusion and that mothers' voices continued to be absent and viewed from "a deficit perspective" (p. 7). Her desire to center mothers is emphasized such that their children are referred to as emergent bilinguals and their "full linguistic potential" (p. 8) is acknowledged. Finally, an intersectional approach to the study of these marginalized women is proposed.

Chapter 2 presents how disenfranchised Latinx mothers are constructed as "Others" and suggests that "the existing power dynamic between schools and mothers allows schools to define parental involvement" (p. 14). To reposition our engagement with them, three theoretical approaches are detailed. Intersectionality "gives equal importance to language, dis/ability and gender" (p. 17). Linguistic human rights (LHR) uphold an individual's right to access the world in their own language(s). Finally, the social construction model (SCM) illustrates that dis/ability is a social construction that results in "oppression and discrimination" (p. 21). These theoretical approaches help us understand "complex women navigating complicated systems" (p. 25).

Chapter 3 discusses two methodological tools: *testimonios* and descriptive inquiry (DI). "*Testimonios"* lie "heavily in the … understanding that a woman's experience is influenced by the multiple identity markers … gender race and

ethnicity" (p. 34). Along with recognizing power differences, "*testimonios"* focus on the speaker's goals and acknowledge the role of language, which explains why the interviews were in Spanish. DI is "excruciatingly hard" and it must be done "without enacting … judgmental and deficit-centered language" (p. 37). Observing mothers in their homes allowed for questions to emerge naturally and subsequently elicit life experiences related to "their children's bilingualism, dis/ability labels … parental identity … their relationship with the school" (p. 39). This chapter shows how three participants were selected to continue to Phase 2.

In Chapter 4 Cioè-Peña describes New York, where "to be White and monolingual is to be the minority" since almost half of New Yorkers speak another language other than English, usually "Spanish" (p. 43). She describes the immigrant community of Sunset Park, and the implications that the 2016 elections had on them. Then the 10 participants are introduced, nine of which "identified as Mexican … bound together by the shared experience of mothering emergent bilingual children … identified as having a disability; by their use of Spanish" (p. 46) in the home. However, only three women were "invited to serve as Testimonialistas" (p. 48).

Chapter 5 presents the three selected mothers: Ana, María and Paty, who "followed one principle: 'primero están mis hijos' [my children come first]". Then, "the three mothers' homes, and their interactions with their children" (p. 53) are described. Through the use of transcripts and pictures we are invited into their homes, and we get a sense of how Spanish is used and also how "English and Spanish interact in the home" (p. 61). The absence of men is highlighted overall. In conclusion, Cioè-Peña asserts that the home "is the site of their greatest and most taxing work … where most of their mothering takes place" (pp. 63-64).

Part 2 is titled Testimonios: Mothers Speak. Chapter 6 presents multiple ways that the mothers comprehend their child's dis/ability. Indeed, "they viewed their children as normal" (p. 67) and their disability as something transitory that healthcare providers and God can help overcome. These mothers not only minimize disability, but they also see disability as a social construct, or "failure to recognize neurodiversity" (p. 69). While their child's disability is a private matter, the disability label is also a resource granting access to "added support in school" (p. 75) and information to better "understand" (p. 77) their children's challenges. Nevertheless, these mothers often feel sad, helpless, and physically tired, "revealing the complexity that arises from labeling a child with a disability" (p. 86).

Aspects of bilingualism are the focus of Chapter 7. Indeed, "English is more important than their Spanish" (p. 90). However, bilingualism is tied to

"Latinx heritage" (p. 89), to future employment opportunities, and to maintaining relationships with family abroad. Children's various educational settings are also discussed. Cioè-Peña highlights how "many bilingual students labeled as dis/abled are often placed in English-only special education programs" (p. 97), based on the perception that bilingualism hinders academic progress. Also, a contradiction is revealed: "all of the mothers … expressed an interest in bilingualism" (p. 98), but only two children were enrolled in bilingual programs.

Chapter 8 delves further into the linguistic practices and perceptions of mothers. Spanish language learning takes place in the home, allowing mothers to "take on the role of Spanish teachers" (p. 108). However, to expand their literacy development, children are also enrolled in catechism classes. Nevertheless, some of these mothers also try to learn English, but their "efforts … have often been met with serious challenges" (p. 110), including time and money. We see a role reversal where children help their mothers learn English in the home, which "supports the mothers' perceptions of disability as socially constructed" (p. 115).

Chapter 9 shows that, in supporting academic development at home, "these mothers are extremely engaged" (p. 118), but in non-traditional ways. Initially, mothers help with what they can. When this path is exhausted, they turn "to their other children" (p. 120) for help. Moreover, Cioè-Peña shows that "many of the mothers relied on outside help" (p. 121), for example paying tutors or enrolling their children in outside programs. Interestingly, technology like Google Translate helped them "bridge the language gap … created by the school" (p. 123). Despite the varied challenges, these mothers considered themselves to be their child's first teacher.

Chapter 10 underscores how the mothers felt lonely and overwhelmed because of social isolation and family obligations. They cared for their other children in the U.S. and abroad, dealt with their own health problems, drug and alcohol abuse, and cared for their older parents. Moreover, "all of them were involved in abusive spousal relationships" (p. 130), so they could not turn to their husbands for help. Indeed, their roles were fractured since, with minimal support, they were responsible for their dis/abled children, "their other children … their spouses" (p. 141), and for some, even their siblings. However, in the face of these challenges the mothers persevered.

In Chapter 11 the mothers' experiences are described more positively. They reported feeling happy, considered them "a blessing" (p. 143), and felt "loved by

their children." (p. 146). This sentiment was reciprocal. Children spoke warmly about their mothers even if they "identified English as [their mothers'] primary impediment." (p. 148). Nevertheless, in the mother-child relationship homework was central, and caused "a great deal of stress … and frustration … (creating) more distance than unity" (p. 149). In the study described in this book, homework was a recurring theme. It was through this prism that the children understood "the power dynamics associated with linguistic policies and with linguistic abilities" (p. 150).

Part 3 is titled Making Room for Mothers: Visions of Radical Possibilities. The introduction to Chapter 12 resumes the challenges that mothers face, stating that they are "as complicated … as the concepts of dis/abilities and bilingualism" (p. 159). The next part of the chapter presents three of Cioè-Peña's "radical possibilities" (p. 160) to enact change. She first suggests putting the theories presented in Part 1 into practice. Second, she highlights the need for intersectional educational policies that address the needs of dis/abled children "and their families" (p. 162). Third, she underscores that "the existing literature does not need to be reframed, it needs to be corrected" (p. 163) and that "more research needs to be dedicated to the actual linguistic practices" (p. 163) of dis/abled children. The second part of the chapter suggests various strategies that may be implemented. These include better preparing future teachers, adapting curriculum, and supporting parents in the home. Cioè-Peña's concludes by making an initial recommendation, "that we restore school funding and allocate money for the services we know parents and students need" (p. 173).

Chapter 13 is short. It reminds the reader how Cioè-Peña related to the mothers' stories, understanding "both the specificity of their experience and the universality of their feelings" (p. 175). Her vision of the book is presented and she states that it is "not a presentation or revelation but rather … an invitation for teachers, administrators and researchers to dig deeper, to act intentionally, to connect with mothers" (p. 176)

The book ends with an afterword by David J. Connor in which he discusses three broad topics. The first is his personal connection with the stories in the book, which reminded him of an old Mexican-American friend and the struggles he and his mother faced. The second is his professional connection and the "conceptual confusion within the fields of bilingual education about disability, and in the field of special education about bilingualism" (p. 180). The third and final topic is the fact the accounts related in this book could take place in any "urban centers around the world … where immigrants

–both documented and undocumented– strive to adapt and provide for their children" (p. 181).

Cioè-Peña accomplishes what she set out to do in her book. She gives ten incredible immigrant women a platform to share the ups but mostly downs of supporting their emerging bilingual children diagnosed with disabilities. In 1996 Mehan showed that test results and expert knowledge are privileged over a mother's experiential knowledge when assessing children as learning disabled. In the 25 years since, not much has changed on this front, however the voices that the U.S. educational system has ignored are finally brought to the forefront through the powerful testimonios in this book. Cioè-Peña thus fills a gap in the literature as she positions Latinx mothers as knowledge generators. Additionally, she shows that mothers and their concerns should be central to discussions impacting their bilingual dis/abled children. Language-related institutional decisions impacted these children at school and at home, especially when it came to homework, a recurrent struggle for the Spanish speaking mothers. Nevertheless, the attentive and respectful analyses of these Latinx mothers are at the intersection of language, race, and disability, as the deficit perspective anchored in standards of whiteness is challenged both by Cioè-Peña and the mothers themselves. Thus, the goal of employing an intersectional approach is also reached.

The book will undoubtedly be an asset to researchers, policy makers, and teachers interested in bilingual education, disability studies, and special education. Even so, it remains reader-friendly since it is not excessively scientific and theoretical concepts are well explained. It is thus accessible to parents who are raising emergent bilinguals labeled as dis/abled and who seek community and positive acknowledgment, but only if they can read English. In other words, to expand the book's reach to the very people to whom it gives a voice, a future translation project into Spanish should be considered. If not, it seems that it will only perpetuate the marginalization of Latinx mothers that it seeks to overcome, i.e., English-only access to information. Nevertheless, Cioè-Peña makes the reader feel as though we are with her as she interacts with and interviews the mothers and their children. This is facilitated using some pictures, plenty of transcripts, and personal accounts of her relationships with the mothers.

A drawback is that the book seemed repetitive, especially when discussing the testimonios. For example, to introduce discussions key words from the testimonios were cited from the Spanish original. Naturally, they were followed by their English translations. However, the entire testimonio was then presented in Spanish, followed again by its English translation. Introducing testimonios in the

speaker's own words could have helped avoid redundancy. Also, I was surprised that bilingualism was not briefly defined, even if issues related to heritage language acquisition, as Montrul (2016), Polinsky and Scontras (2019), or heritage language socialization as Guardado (2018) and He (2014) have thoroughly examined, were not the target of the book. Afterall, this was the outcome that these mothers wished for their children. For example, Grosjean (2015) discusses broad and strict definitions to help explain bilingual language practices in different contexts. Furthermore, Valdés's (2000) definition of heritage speakers, one that includes dominance shift to English from Spanish in the U.S., could have been helpful since it considers restricted use and insufficient input of minority languages.

Overall Cioè-Peña, along with the courageous mothers she interviewed, provides valuable information through the testimonios presented, thus expanding the current state of the art. Cioè-Peña also presents suitable recommendations to better help mothers raise their emerging bilingual children diagnosed with dis/abilities. The present intersectional study paves new paths for interdisciplinary inquiry. For example, future research could analyze parental discourse strategies, as Lanza (1997) proposes, used to encourage and maintain bilingualism in the home. Finally, these findings could also be a springboard to study fathers and their elusive roles in these types of immigrant contexts. They too seem to be missing from the picture, so research in this area could prove to be fruitful.

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