

An Interview with APPLE Lecture Speaker Professor Mary McGroarty

Catherine Box & Victoria Parra-Moreno

INTRODUCTION

On Friday, April 19, 2013, our journal (represented by Catherine Box and Victoria Parra-Moreno) had the fortunate opportunity to speak one-on-one with the Teachers College, Columbia University 2013 Applied Linguistics and Language Education (APPLE) speaker, Professor Mary McGroarty. She graciously agreed to take time out of her quite packed schedule, which included two talks with the Teachers College community, to converse about her thoughts on language policies in education, teacher training, bilingualism in the schools, and the progression of the applied linguistics field.

Professor McGroarty is professor in the applied linguistics program in the English Department at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona. She is a former president of the American Association for Applied Linguistics and editor-in-chief of the *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*. She has also served on editorial boards for journals published in the U.S., U.K., Canada, and Europe. She has published numerous book chapters, and her articles have appeared in journals such as *TESOL Quarterly*, *Language Policy*, *Educational Researcher*, and *Language Learning*. Her current research and teaching interests include sociolinguistics, language policy, pedagogy, bilingualism, and assessment.

We would like to thank Professor McGroarty for allowing us to interview her and providing us doctoral students such rich food for thought on topics that we often grapple with as researchers and as parents of bilingual children. We would also like to thank Fred Tsutagawa for videotaping the interview, and Yuna Seong and Dr. Kirby Grabowski for helping to coordinate our time with Professor McGroarty.

THE INTERVIEW

Question 1: Introduction & Evolving research interests

Your impressive body of scholarly work, while varied in scope, centers around issues of social justice in education, with a focus on linguistically diverse student populations. What drew you to this type of research? [\[Q1 video\]](#)

Question 2: Link between theory and practice

In 2006, Northern Arizona University awarded you the Teaching Scholar award, in recognition of your exemplary achievements in research as well as pedagogy. As one might imagine, here at Teachers College we are particularly concerned with the link between theory and practice. Often, students and professors alike are challenged with applying research findings—which ultimately aim to contribute to theories of language learning, language use, or language assessment, for example—to the day-to-day classroom. For those of us in the K-12 public school classrooms, this can be especially challenging, as there are many competing demands on time. Quite

honestly, I have received feedback from students that certain scholarly concepts they encounter during their training are “too theoretical” for aspiring teachers, and “not useful for the classroom.”

How have you managed this sometimes uneasy relationship between theory and practice? How do you respond to the notion that perhaps teachers do not need a strong theoretical background to be effective in their profession? [\[Q2 video\]](#)

Question 3: On preparing novice teachers

How do you envision the role of academia in preparing novice teachers to make the connection between theory and practice? [\[Q3 video\]](#)

Question 4: On the disparity in language identity and bilingual education policy

In your 2006 essay appearing in *Language Policy*, “Neoliberal collusion or simultaneous spontaneity?” you write of the necessity to connect language ideology to language practice and language management (again, harkening to the theory/practice relationship), and perhaps most importantly, the need for continuing advocacy in bilingual education to “continue to articulate a range of reasons to support access to expanded linguistic opportunities in both school settings and in extracurricular contexts” (p. 10).

Why do you think there remains debate concerning the value of expanded linguistic opportunities? Such a debate seems especially ironic in New York City, where second language instruction is introduced in many public and private elementary schools beginning as early as Kindergarten. In fact, many affluent areas of New York City have recently implemented bilingual programs within the public school system, which are popular with the local community. In these cases, the vast majority of children speak English as a first language, and the community is deeming it important to introduce another language early in their educational experience. On the other hand, such ‘value’ does not seem to be placed on linguistic resources for students, often from minoritized backgrounds, whose first language is not English. In those bilingual schools, the goal is usually to eventually transition the students to English. In the first example, bilingualism seems to be an end goal, whereas in the other case, bilingual instruction is a stop-gap measure until the student is deemed “ready” for a monolingual environment. Why the disparity, in your opinion? [\[Q4 video\]](#)

Question 5: On differing state language policies

In your chapter in Tollefson’s book, you articulate that differing state language policies could be traced to different orientations concerning the role of government in social life. You live and work in a state, Arizona, whose language policy differs considerably from those here in New York. Could you speak a bit about the reasons for these differences, as you’ve discussed in your writing? [\[Q5 video\]](#)

Question 6: On changes in the field of education language policy

How have you seen the field of progress since beginning your research in education language policy? [\[Q6 video\]](#)

Question 7: Advice for graduate students

What advice would you give to graduate students and aspiring researchers in the field? What should Vicky and I know before going out into the world of academia? [\[Q7 video\]](#)

REFERENCES

- McGroarty, M. (2002). Evolving influences of educational language policies. In Tollefson, J.W. (Ed.). *Language policies in education: Critical issues*. (pp. 17-36). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- McGroarty, M. (2006). Neoliberal collusion or strategic simultaneity?: On multiple rationales for language-in-education policies. *Language Policy*, 5, 3-13.
- Ruiz, R. (1984). Orientation in Language Planning. *The Journal for the National Association of Bilingual Education*, 8(2), 15-34.