

# features

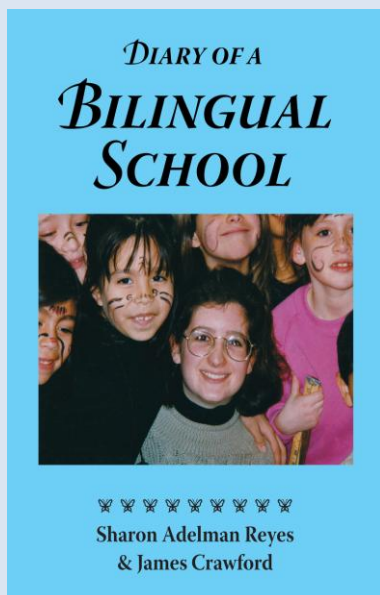
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## Diary of a Bilingual School

By Sharon Adelman Reyes and James Crawford

Review by Robert Leos and a Q and A with the Authors

**D** *diary of a Bilingual School* by Sharon Adelman Reyes and James Crawford documents a year in a dual immersion program at the Inter-American Magnet School in Chicago, a school that has garnered national attention for its success in dual immersion.



*Diary of a Bilingual School* is about how children learn. It is about self-discovery and students' inherent abilities to learn on their own and in partnership with supportive teachers, parents, and classmates. Using easy and fun-to-read small slices of life in the classroom, Adelman Reyes and Crawford guide readers through

concepts of education and human development usually reserved for academia. Intertwined with their descriptions of how the students learned about worms, spiders, and life cycles, are the authors' explanations of the constructivist concepts used to create the learning environment in this classroom. They illustrate the "student-centered" approach, in which the classroom's physical arrangement helps to facilitate curiosity and learning. Included throughout the book are sidebars that provide succinct explanations of why the students' experiences led to learning.

*Diary of a Bilingual School* by Sharon Adelman Reyes and James Crawford shows readers how students can learn in optimal conditions, such as those at the Inter-American Magnet School. For teachers in less than optimal conditions, the book provides a wealth of information about how students learn, with numerous examples of classroom experiences that every teacher can apply to make learning more enjoyable for their students. **Diary of a Bilingual School** is a wonderful resource that should serve as a reminder to everyone that children love to learn. We just need to let them. **rhl.**

**The Q and A with the authors follows. Thanks to both!**

## Sharon Adelman Reyes and James Crawford, Authors

### *Diary of a Bilingual School*

**FEATURES:** *This book presents an account of a school year at the Inter-American Magnet School almost 17 years ago. Did you wait all these years to publish this because you felt that educators view dual immersion more favorably now than they did then?*

**ADELMAN REYES:** *Diary of a Bilingual School* came out of dissertation research that I conducted at Inter-American in a second-grade classroom where my daughter was enrolled. I expected to write mainly about academic issues, in an academic style, but soon found myself writing about the children, their lives, discoveries, and relationships to each other and to their teacher. When I began presenting this research at professional conferences, it generated more excitement than anything I had done before. Often the enthusiasm came from academics who were also parents of bilingual children. At that point I knew I was on to something special, and began to formulate plans to write a book on dual immersion for parents as well as educators.

So it came as a huge disappointment when I could find no publisher willing to take a chance on this type of writing, which I think of as “creative nonfiction.” The book I had in mind simply did not fit into any familiar genre of education publications. But finally, 17 years later – shortly after my husband, James Crawford, and I founded a consulting group called DiversityLearningK12 – we saw an opportunity to become publishers ourselves. *Diary of a Bilingual School* is the



**Sharon Adelman Reyes**

first of what we hope will be a long list of books about the challenges and rewards of those who teach English language learners.

**CRAWFORD:** We also believe the timing was right. While the lessons of Inter-American are just as relevant today, the number and popularity of dual immersion programs has greatly increased, and so has our potential audience. Our aim in writing *Diary of a Bilingual School* was to craft a yearlong narrative that conveys the immediacy of the classroom experience, combined with short analytical passages explaining why teacher Jill Sontag was so effective in engaging her students. It was especially exciting for us to track down 14 out of the 18 second-graders – now young adults – and see how they turned out, both in terms of bilingual proficiency and of progress in life (hint: very well).

**FEATURES:** *The classroom and school described in **Diary of a Bilingual School** are quite different from many of the classrooms in schools across the country where the emphasis is on teaching the national or state curriculum standards. How can teachers use some of the constructivist concepts you describe in their classrooms even if driven by test scores and accountability?*



**James Crawford**

**CRAWFORD:** It's true. Today educators and kids must cope with a harsher climate of standardization and high-stakes testing than they did in the 1990s. These factors often encourage a behaviorist response. Assessment "drives" curriculum rather than vice versa. To paraphrase Beverly Falk, many schools now treat learning not as an active process – something done *by* the learner – but as something done *to* the learner. That is, as a process of filling passive minds with information they will need to regurgitate on standardized tests. Unfortunately, this is where the current pressures for "accountability" are leading. So it certainly does become harder to offer the kind of constructivist curriculum that made Inter-American so exciting.

### **James Crawford**

*James Crawford, former Washington editor of Education Week, is an independent writer on issues affecting English language learners and founder of the Institute for Language and Education Policy, a nonprofit advocacy organization. Previously, he served as executive director of the National Association for Bilingual Education. In addition to Diary of a Bilingual School, his works include Educating English Learners (5th edition), Language Loyalties, Hold Your Tongue, and At War with Diversity. He is currently president of DiversityLearningK12.*

As the kids everyone expects to fail, English language learners are probably affected more than most students by these misguided "reforms." If all they get is test-prep and other forms of rote learning, they are not receiving a real education. And if schools don't stimulate their imaginations and creativity, they're going to turn off to school.

Nevertheless, as we argue in the book, there are ways to evade the tyranny of standards and testing. Creative teachers and committed parents can always find spaces where the excitement of learning can break out.

**ADELMAN REYES:** The challenge for constructivist educators is to create classroom environments that are based on *how* children learn, not *what* children learn, while ensuring that they will do well on standardized assessments. This balancing act is not new. It was faced even by the educators at Inter-American 17 years ago. They decided to continue teaching a child-centered curriculum for most of the year, then suspended it for a few weeks each spring to prepare children for the tests required by the Chicago Public Schools. This

included explicit instruction in test-taking strategies.

The faculty was honest with students, parents, and community about their reasons. They made no pretense of supporting the mandates for standardized testing, but neither did they pretend that their school could survive for long as outlaws flouting the will of district administrators. Their balanced approach usually worked out well. It resulted in a vibrant learning environment, better-than-average test scores, and a political consciousness not often found in public schools. By implication, if schooling is relevant and engaging, based on sound learning theory and honesty, children should learn what they need to learn. Obsessing on assessment is unnecessary.

**Sharon Adelman Reyes, Ph.D.**

*Dr. Adelman Reyes has worked in education for more than thirty years as a teacher, principal, school district administrator, curriculum specialist, researcher, and university professor with extensive experience in bilingual and ESL classrooms. In addition to *Diary of a Bilingual School*, she is coauthor of two other recent books: *Teaching in Two Languages: A Guide for K-12 Bilingual Educators* and *Constructivist Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners*. Today she serves as program director of *DiversityLearningK12*.*

**CRAWFORD:** Advocacy, on the other hand, is essential. Educating parents about these issues, fostering democratic discussion, and reaching consensus about the educational philosophy of Inter-American were keys to its success. Today you hear a lot of loose talk about “learning communities.” This was the real thing.

**FEATURES:** *I gathered that parental involvement was a significant part of school governance at Inter-American. What were some of the strategies that school leaders used to involve parents and what were some of the responsibilities assumed by parents?*

**ADELMAN REYES:** Inter-American Magnet School grew out of a grassroots struggle by an alliance of parents and educators seeking a different type of bilingual and multicultural education for their children than was offered, at the time, by the Chicago Public Schools. This movement, which began in the mid-1970s, was spearheaded by Adela Coronado Greeley and Janet Nolan, both of whom were bilingual teachers and community organizers. Both were determined to raise their own young children bilingually in Spanish and in English. Parental involvement was therefore a fundamental ingredient of the school from its inception. Parent and educator roles were often blurred because, as the years went by, many faculty had their own children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews enrolled there.

In the 1980s, under the leadership of then-Mayor Harold Washington, all Chicago Public Schools were required to have a governing board, called a Local School Council (LSC), with the majority of seats reserved for parents. At Inter-American, however, the LSC merely formalized what was already in place. Students’ families participated in everything from curriculum development to school governance. Alongside faculty, they sponsored school social and cultural functions and participated in new teacher selection committees. Parents were seen in classrooms on a daily basis, where they assisted teachers, contributed to instructional activities, and were always free to observe.

**FEATURES:** *When did you start **DiversityLearningK12** and what kinds of activities are at the center of its operation? Do you have other projects in the works?*

**CRAWFORD:** Sharon and I founded our consulting group two years ago. Since then, DiversityLearningK12 has brought together about a dozen colleagues, experts in various aspects of English-learner education (including some well-known figures like Stephen Krashen), who had been doing consulting and professional development on their own. We see this group as more than the sum of its parts – able to provide a comprehensive range of services to school districts, teacher preparation programs, and others. For example, we have developed a Mini-Conference format for professional development and a Field Support Model for intensive follow-up. And our partners are frequently invited to keynote professional conferences.

Most recently, we have entered the field of publishing with ***Diary of a Bilingual School***. We are now working on a sequel to that book, focusing more on the long-term outcomes for graduates of dual immersion programs. In addition, a team of our consultants is putting together an English-Spanish/Español-Inglés glossary of academic terms for bilingual teachers (working title: *La Palabra Justa*).

We are planning a series of books on sheltered English instruction in content areas such as Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. And I am working on a long-overdue sequel to my textbook, *Educating English Learners*.

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**FEATURES:** *Publishing is a tough business these days, especially for small operators. How is it going?*

**ADELMAN REYES:** Our experience with ***Diary of a Bilingual School*** has been very encouraging. The book is selling well on [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) and through word of mouth within the fields of bilingual education and ESL. It's already being used in teacher-preparation courses at several universities. But most exciting to us is that school districts, especially in Texas, are buying it in bulk to give to parents and educators in bilingual programs, and also to use in study groups among their own staff. Clearly, there's a hunger for this type of book, which depicts the immediacy of a dual immersion classroom. One reviewer called it "a window into real teaching in a bilingual setting." That's exactly what we were striving for.

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**Diary of a Bilingual School**

Sharon Adelman Reyes  
& James Crawford

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Diary of a Bilingual School is available at  
[Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com), [Barnes and Noble](http://BarnesandNoble.com) and  
wherever quality books are sold.

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