

Coral Way Elementary School Bilingual Program

**Group 1**, March 12, 2008

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Participants: Alejandro Perez (principal), Cristina Vasquez, Eduardo Carballo, Nadania Vega [all phonetic spellings]

Interviewed by Richard Ruiz

Recorded by Bess DeFarber in the principal's office, Coral Way School, Miami, Florida  
For University of Arizona, Louise Greenfield

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**Ruiz:** This is March 12, 2008. It's about ten minutes to one. We're sitting in the principal's office at Coral Way Elementary, in Miami. And so what I'd like to do right now is to make sure that you all—you've already consented on paper, and I just want to make sure that you all consent to this interview. So what I'd like you to do is, if you'd like for your name to be in the interview, just go ahead and say your name right now into the microphone:

**Perez:** Alejandro Perez.

**Vasquez:** Cristina Vasquez.

**Caballo:** Eduardo Carballo.

**Vega:** Nadania [phonetic] Vega.

**Ruiz:** And my name is Richard Ruiz. I am one of the principal investigators for this study. Bess DeFarber, who's back there recording and doing other things, is the other co-investigator. She's at the library at the University of Arizona, but she's also a graduate of Coral Way. She was here in '62-'63, so she was a member of the first bilingual class. And I'm a professor at the University of Arizona, and my work is in bilingual education, language planning, and I work all over the world, so that's why I know that Coral Way is known **everywhere**, not just in Florida or in the States, but everywhere.

So let me just ask a few questions of the principal, and then, again, if any of you have comments, please be free to do that. And I'll also have some other questions, not specifically for the principal.

So let me just ask you initially, how did you come to be principal at Coral Way?

**Perez:** Well, it's an interesting story. Back in '96 I was fortunate enough to become the **assistant** principal here at Coral Way, under Miss Nadania Vega, so I spent about six school years here, learning the bilingual program, learning under Miss Vega, learning what it takes to run a bilingual program in the sense of scheduling, in the sense of staffing for teachers, in the sense of the curriculum of the school. Back in the year 2002, I was assigned to Comstock Elementary, which was another elementary school in the area, to become the principal of the school. Then in 2006, I was called back, out of Comstock, to come back to Coral Way, to, number one, become the principal, and transition the school from a traditional elementary school to what now we call our Coral Way K-8 Center. So we've moved from Coral Way Elementary, to the Coral Way K-8 Center Bilingual School. So now we're a kindergarten through eighth-grade school, with approximately 600 students. Just four years ago, it was a traditional bilingual elementary school, with approximately 1,250 students.

So I've come full circle, I think, first coming as the assistant principal, leaving to another school for four years as principal, and having the distinct honor to be able to come back in 2006 as principal of the school, and transition the school from a traditional elementary to a full-time bilingual K-8 center.

**Ruiz:** So it's still a bilingual school, it hasn't changed that aspect?

**Perez:** Yeah, the bilingual program has been here since 1963, but it's still a full-time bilingual school from pre-kindergarten all the way through eighth grade.

**Ruiz:** Can you tell me how or if there is a kind of consortium of bilingual schools in Miami or in South Florida that Coral Way is part of? Or are you part of a larger organization of bilingual schools?

**Perez:** Well, not necessarily for a large organization, but I know there's numerous schools in Dade County, in Miami-Dade County, that are implementing bilingual programs, and they usually follow what's called the Coral Way Model, which is a 60-40 model, which is 60% of the instruction is done in English, while 40% of the instruction is done in Spanish. There's numerous schools, and Miss Vega is a consultant with some of those schools—in particular Ada Merritt K-8 Center, which also follows the bilingual program, and they're also a K-8 Center. So I think there's numerous schools throughout the district that have implemented bilingual programs in the last twenty years or so, and I'm going to let Miss Vega just jump in and say a few words about that. I'm sure she has a lot more experience in how many schools have really implemented bilingual programs in the last fifteen years or so. Miss Vega?

**Vega:** Well, as Mr. Perez said, this is a model that has been duplicated, because the district wants to just try to encourage success programs, and as Coral Way is one of the success stories in Dade County Public Schools, they are just duplicating the effort. And right now, we have like eight dual-language programs that go after the Coral Way dual model. The only one that is K-8 is Ada Merritt. But others are mostly bilingual elementary schools, and they follow pretty much.... In the last four years, we have been implementing Ada Merritt K-8, and the Lower Park Elementary, which is very interesting

model because it is a school that is 98% African American population. It's an elementary school. So the Hispanic population is very small, and they started four years ago in K and 1 doing the 60-40 format, and right now we are in the fourth grade, so we will be adding the fifth grade, the last grade level in the elementary. It's working very well. We have had our growing pains, of course, like everything else, but it's doing very well, and it's really the first model in an African-American population of that type. So that's something that we are really very proud of.

**Ruiz:** So it looks like the district is accepting of this, is interested in developing this. It's not resisting this. Do you sense any resistance anywhere, from the community or from other schools or from the political leaders or anything of that sort? Is there any kind of resistance to this kind of model?

**Perez:** No, I don't see any resistance currently from Miami-Dade County. I think they're **very** supportive of bilingual education. Even our current superintendent always talks about learning a new language, learning a different language, learning a second language. And I think they're very supportive of the bilingual office downtown, which is bilingual education and world languages. It's very supportive of Coral Way, **and** the other bilingual programs. And they're implementing a lot of different other bilingual programs. I get principals calling me constantly to come and observe the school, to come and learn about the school. They're always asking Cristina for schedules, how do we schedule our day, how many minutes are in English, how many minutes are in Spanish, how many minutes are in mathematics, how do you schedule your day, when do they go here, when do they go there? So there's a couple of schools in Region 1, which is the Hialeah area, that they're also implementing the bilingual program. So I get numerous

visitors from principals that are implementing bilingual programs—not only English-Spanish, but also English-French. Marie Brazil, which is the principal in a school in a part of town that has a lot of Haitian and French-speaking individuals, and she's implementing a bilingual French program. So she's following our model, but instead of being English-Spanish, she's doing English-French. So resistance at this point I would say, since I've been part of.... They've been very supportive. The community has been very supportive. I have a waiting list of students trying to get into the school, so that we have to sometimes turn away, unfortunately.

**Ruiz:** Can I ask you about your staff? There are lots of schools around the country that constantly have to be recruiting staff because they lose teachers all the time. What about your situation here? Are you replacing teachers a lot? Actually, what I'd like to ask is what criteria you use—since you're a bilingual school, what criteria do you use to hire teachers? What are the standards that you use to evaluate teachers [unclear 09:16].

**Perez:** Well, to attract teachers hasn't really been a problem at Coral Way. I mean, sometimes it's difficult in certain situations. The last three years we've been transitioning from a traditional elementary to a middle school, or a K-8 center, so we've been hiring **numerous** staff members every year. But I think now we've implemented the full K-8, that our number of new staff members that are going to be hired is going to be a lot less than the last three years. When I first got back in 2006, there were twenty-six new teachers to the school: meaning because of class size amendment, those new teachers had to be hired, plus implementing seventh grade, which is a whole new grade level, a certain group of teachers need to be hired. So the last three years we've hired a lot of new teachers, new to the school, not necessarily new to the district, but new to

Coral Way. But I think now, for the next couple of years, or in the next few years from this point forward, we're not going to have a lot of turnover. Most teachers stay here for many years to teach—some stay and retire. Some teachers just leave because of family issues, family concerns. But a high turnover? I wouldn't say there's a high turnover. Do we attract a lot of teachers? I constantly get resumes from teachers all over the district, new teachers, teachers from outside the district, or outside the school system, that want to come and teach at Coral Way.

**Ruiz:** Are the teachers evaluated in any way in terms of their language proficiency [unclear 10:49].

**Perez:** If a teacher is going to be hired for the Spanish program, they are given a language proficiency assessment that Miss Vasquez, our elite teacher, did for every teacher this year again. So there's a series of questions: are they fluent in Spanish, do they comprehend the language, can they read and write the language? And Mr. Carballo, who is elite teacher at the upper academy, he is part of our interview process to make sure that the Spanish teachers we're hiring, number one, are certified in the language that they're going to be teaching, and they're **proficient** in the language they're going to be teaching.

**Carballo:** For the middle school, was [unclear 11:26] elementary school, but the middle school, the big problem is to say no. We have a big list of people trying to get here into Coral Way, and the best teachers want to come to Coral Way. Then it is not a difficult thing just to select teachers to come here. And I can say very proudly that we have the best staff, at least in the Spanish language portion, because we teach math in Spanish, and we have humanities in the language, the original Spanish. And we have doctors in the

math department. Most of them are engineers from Cuba and from other places. And we have doctors in history. Really, we have the best staff in the Spanish portion that you can have anywhere for a middle school.

**Ruiz:** How long have you been affiliated with this program?

**Carballo:** When I was studying to be a psychologist [unclear 12:29] teaching in New York, I took as a minor, classes in education, and one class was in bilingual education. Like you, I studied about Coral Way, and I said, “I want to teach there.” And it happened that I came here, and I taught in many other schools that were very good schools, but it was very hard to have an opening here at Coral Way. We are a family, and people don’t—I mean, they retire from here. I came with other principals, and they said, “Yes, I will tell you whenever we have an opening.” And finally Miss Vega was here, and we knew each other because she was a bilingual supervisor, and then she was the principal here, and then she wanted to open.... In 1995 she wanted to open the bilingual gifted—completely bilingual and completely full-time, here at Coral Way. And she called me, and I have been here since 1995. We [unclear 13:27], whatever she said, “It’s up to you. You write the curriculum, it’s up to you.” And I was the Spanish portion with two other teachers. And we wrote the curriculum, we presented this curriculum [unclear 13:39], and Coral Way is always a pioneer, because after we were a pioneer in bilingual [unclear], pioneer, the first bilingual, full-time, gifted, in the nation. And then I was teaching in GATE for ten years, and the following principal was Pablo Ortiz. We went to open the middle school and he [asked] me if I wanted to be the lead teacher for the bilingual in the middle school, and I said yes. And since then, we are now in eight grades. This is the first class graduating from Coral Way for eighth grade here.

**Ruiz:** That's really amazing. One of the things that I want to make sure that we do, is we correct a lot of the record, because a lot of the historical record is distorted or wrong. There's even one fairly influential book that has.... Every book that talks about the history of bilingual education, or even the history of education, has Coral Way in it. Sometimes it's a paragraph, sometimes only a couple of pages, and sometimes it's just wrong. There's one book that's very influential that says that the bilingual program in Coral Way started in 1963 and ended in 1968, which is totally wrong! Right? There are still people who are in the program. So that's why I think it's important to correct the record.

Can I just ask one more thing specifically for Mr. Perez? Apparently there are other researchers who have come to Coral Way to research? Or is that not true? Have there been other people who have come here to study Coral Way, what's going on with Coral Way?

**Perez:** I think there's been researchers.... Since I've been here just these two years, back as principal, I haven't had a lot of researchers. I think you would be the first one. But I know with Miss Vega, the many years that she was here, over the years, I believe—and I'm sure she can speak on the behalf of that—but since the two years I've been here back as principal, we haven't had really, per se, as a university researcher or researching that. We've had newspaper articles, we've had people come talk about the school. You know, more on a local point. But I think, at more of, like you said, a national or international level, the last year and half we haven't had any researchers. We've had articles done about the school, those things, but I think Miss Vega, since her time, she's had numerous researchers. Miss Vega?



**Vega:** I think this program has been researched by every sector of the universities. [unclear 16:21] few studies done at the University of Miami here. And then we had a long-range study that was done by Johns Hopkins University, that was like in '97, '98. They followed the students for three or four years, and then they just came up with the resource and all that. And we have had people, even from Israel, coming down here, doing studies about this program from London, everywhere. Because like you said, this is a school whose program has been published in many different languages and many different parts of the world. And there is a big interest in how this has been evolving into what it is now, after so many years. You know, you start a program and it just blossoms, and then it falls, and it doesn't.... It's not anything anymore. But this program has maintained the interest, and there are numerous stories.

**Ruiz:** Yes, one of the things that we've noticed is that there are a lot of studies about the model, the bilingual model that you're using, and the way in which the students go through, and perhaps on the parental attitudes, the attitudes of the parents about that and so on. There are relatively few in-depth studies, detailed studies, of the history of the program, from the beginning. The Beebee-Mackey that a lot of us know, that you just showed me, is one of those, but it was very early, it was early 1970s. I think it was published in '72, which is okay. And actually, it does give quite an interesting picture of the school.

But one of the other things that we've noticed, and we know, is that very few researchers have ever talked with, for example, the teachers from that first group. Or [to] the students, of whom Bess is one. So that's one of the things that we're trying to do, is to get that fuller picture of your school.

Let me ask—and again, anybody can contribute—but I'd like specifically to know what your role is, since it's a bilingual school, and your role, Miss Vasquez, is what in the school?

**Vasquez:** I'm the lead teacher for the elementary school, and Mr. Carballo is the lead teacher for the middle school and the coordinator for the international studies program. It's an agreement that the school has with the consulate of Spain, where it's an elect group of students [who] stay for an extra five hours a week, where we [straddle? 19:37] the Spanish curriculum. When they say Spanish curriculum, it's the curriculum from Spain that those students follow. My son and my daughter study here. I was a student here in Coral Way. And my kids are here since kindergarten. My son is in fourth grade, and my daughter is in fifth grade, and she will continue in her middle school here as well. And for me, it's still very exciting when I walk down the hallway to feel that I'm just part of this big family, but I do feel the big responsibility that we all have in continuing not this program with how it is, but to even improve it and put it a step further than what we have.

**Ruiz:** When did this international program start?

**Vasquez:** The international study program....

**Vega:** That has been started in the late eighties.

**Ruiz:** Oh! Okay, so it's been around for a while.

**Vega:** Yes. Originally it was a program that was created for Sunset Elementary, which was a magnet school. And that school had the agreement with the Ministry of Education of Spain and all that. But then afterwards, Coral Way was accepted into that program. And ever since it has been in the international studies program, and our students, like

Christina said, what they do is, they have to cover some of the things that the curriculum in Spain covered that, and not covered here. Our program is so much a part of the program in Spain that we used to have it too, we used to take our students, fifth graders, to Spain for two weeks. Then afterwards, with all this terrorism, these things went away. I think it's coming back now, which I'm glad, because that was a wonderful experience. And those students used to spend two weeks in Spain, and they used to attend school in Spain. Our students that were fifth graders, they used to attend school in Spain for two weeks, and they managed perfectly. The curriculum they had no problem. As a matter of fact, even the professors said something along the lines that they're even better than the students of Mr. Carballo.

**Carballo:** Well, yes. This program, we have been going with Sunset, because it is the other elementary, because they have it not for the middle, but for the elementary, to go to Spain for two weeks, and one week is in the school, and another week going around and traveling for culture. And I remember one year that they told me that our students were in one class, and the professor said that he was going to have a test, but our students didn't have to have it because they were not there from the beginning studying that, but if they wanted, they were not going to do anything, to take the test anyway. And they took it, and one of my students at that time in Gifted, had the highest record, the highest [continuation? 22:54] in the test, and the student was in my program, that he didn't speak Spanish when he came to Coral Way. Then he was a student who learned Spanish here at Coral Way, went to Spain, and was the best grade on that test, and the professor there couldn't believe it.

**Ruiz:** That's really amazing.

**Vasquez:** I'm going to be going this year to Spain. It's organized by SIPA, the Spanish International Parent Association, and it's organized by the parents. So we're going to be going, students from Sunset Elementary, and also from Coral Way. We're going to be going to Spain for ten days. SIPA always invites one teacher from Sunset and a teacher from Coral Way. This year they invited me, and my daughter's one of the students who will be going, and they're going to be attending a school in Spain for five days.

**Ruiz:** And you **really** didn't want to go (laughter) but they persuaded you to go, right.

**Vasquez:** Yes, I'll sacrifice myself, yes. (laughs)

**Ruiz:** Can you tell me a little bit about—because we've established it's now a 60-40 kind of model—can you tell me how these—or anyone—can you tell me how the classes are stacked, in terms of.... Because sometimes.... These models are different in different places, right? You can have a 60-40, but for example they might be arranged by time of day, they might be arranged by the teacher—one teacher is a Spanish teacher, another teacher is an English teacher. They might be arranged by subject, where some of the subjects are in one language, and other subjects are in another, or whatever. Can you just give me a sense of how that works?

**Vasquez:** Yes. Well, I can explain to you from kindergarten to fourth grade is about the same thing: it's pairs of teachers, one who's in charge of the English, and only speaks in English, and the other teacher who does the Spanish. But this is the way it's composed: the English does language arts, reading, grammar, and it's either one of the content areas, either science or social studies. And then the other teacher, the Spanish teacher, does Spanish reading, language arts. They do different stories, we have different series. It's not the same thing, it's one enriching the other language. And the mathematics is thirty

minutes in English and fifteen minutes in Spanish. Now usually they use that at the end of the math class. Usually it's to review something they've already studied in the concepts maybe, and one of the content areas.

Our teachers plan together, they plan twice a week. I think that is extremely important. They're all on the same page, they all know what they're doing. You go to one class, you go to the other one, everybody's doing the same thing. Once a week is the whole grade level. Another day the Spanish components of that grade level plans together, and the English teachers of that grade level plan together. So I think that is extremely important. When they meet with parents, they meet together as well, because usually when a kid does very well in one language, he's doing very well in the other, and vice versa. When he's not doing well, it's good to have input from both. In fifth grade, Mr. Perez would like to explain the way they're doing it here.

**Perez:** I just want to piggy back on some of the things that Cristina said. In the elementary, what we call the K-4 area of grades, I have different models going on, but one of the models is where she was saying one English teacher, one Spanish teacher: the English teacher teaches in English, Spanish teaches in Spanish, and then sometime during the day they flip, and then the kids move to the other teacher based on the language. One of the things we've been able to do here, we have some cold teaching models, where you have an English **and** Spanish teacher in the room together at the same time, so then there would be one English teacher, one Spanish teacher, but in the same room with the kids the entire day. So that lowers class size, that gives them more opportunities, and most of the time the two teachers can speak both languages, so you have two teachers helping in Spanish and in math and in English.

When we move them to fifth grade, we change it a little bit, because we're transitioning the fifth graders to our upper academy, which is the middle school. So we don't do the English and Spanish per se—now we do what's called a track, a track of four groups. So we have eight teachers, there's a track of four, and a track of four. They do language arts and English, mathematics bilingually, English and Spanish, Spanish and Spanish, and then content—science and social studies—bilingually. So that prepares the students, number one, to get ready for the different type of schedule they're going to have in middle school, and it allows the teachers to specialize, so they now become specialized in the area that they're teaching—the math, the language arts, the Spanish—and the content area. So when we transition those students from fifth to our upper academy, then it's a whole different schedule. Then we go on a seven-period schedule throughout the day, where four of the classes are conducted in English, and three of the classes are conducted in Spanish. So you have language arts in English, science in English, social studies in English, and the electives—art, physical education, band, business technology, French. We offer the third language also as an elective. And then the three classes in Spanish would be mathematics conducted in Spanish; Spanish language arts; and Spanish humanities. So each group is a little different from that one.

**Ruiz:** So when you say upper academy, it's like middle school grades?

**Perez:** Middle school.

**Ruiz:** Middle school or junior high grades.

**Vasquez:** The lower academy....

**Ruiz:** Do you—and this is not a question I anticipated, but since you're talking about it—is there any problem that you're having with, for example, No Child Left Behind

requirements for middle school certification and all that kind of thing—is any of that an issue, a problem with anything here?

**Perez:** At the present moment it hasn't been a problem. With the No Child Left Behind, we've been able to meet all of our different subgroups. We've been able to meet the standards as they continue to raise—as they continue to raise the bar and continue to raise our subgroups' proficiency level, it's getting harder and harder. But at this point, for the last six years, the school has maintained an "A" grade, it has made AYP. This year will be the first year that we have a full K-8 grading system, where we'll have from third all the way to eighth grade with the different subject areas that are being tested in the different grade levels. So this will be the first year that we have a full range of scores from third all the way to eighth grades.

**Ruiz:** I was actually going to ask you about—the school has been recognized recently for student achievement. What are the assessments that are used for student achievement?

**Perez:** Right now, the main assessment is the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, which is the F-CAT.

**Ruiz:** Which I understand is happening right now.

**Perez:** It's happening actually this week and next week. Basically this week we have third doing reading and math. Fourth does the writing-plus that they took in February, reading and math. Fifth grade does reading and math and science. Sixth and seventh grade do reading and math. And eighth grade does reading, math, science, and writing. So the eighth graders have already conducted the writing tests, they've already participated in the writing tests. They did reading yesterday, they do math today, and

they're doing science on Monday. So all of those scores will count towards the grade, based on all the results, based on the F-CAT, then those are the tests that base our school grade. We also get, next week, the Norm Reference Test, which is our NRT. Norm Reference Test is more of an SAT type of test, where we get a comparison for the rest of the country, how our students are comparing to the rest of the country, based on the Norm Reference Test. Even the first graders are taking an SAT this year.

**Ruiz:** Oh, my! I assume from what you're saying, that your students are doing well.

**Perez:** Yes.

**Ruiz:** That's great. And I asked you about the materials that you use. How do you pick them, where do they come from?, in both English and Spanish. Where do you get the curriculum materials?

**Vasquez:** In the reading language arts, in the English, the whole district is using Houghton-Mifflin. It was a district scenario, so everybody uses Houghton-Mifflin. In Spanish we use Scott Foresman as a textbook, which is our practice book, but we buy a lot of chapter books, a lot of reference material, a lot of anthologies. We try not to buy any translations, but buy literature that was written in Spanish by authors that write in Spanish. So we complement, you could say, with the textbook.

**Ruiz:** And how is it that those decisions are made? Is there a committee that makes the decisions, you make those decisions?

**Vasquez:** Well, the thing is that we follow the Sunshine State Standards, and we do have our objectives and our goals, so based on our long-term planning, and our short-term planning, based on that, we look for literature, that Mr. Carballo now, as a matter of fact, once in a while when we're [in Nabé? 32:50], when we're walking down the hallway,



we're always looking for new material, and new books, and we also have a very good relationship with different editorial companies and people that represent books, that even come and pass by, because they say, "Can we try it out in Coral Way first? Do you think this is going to be good for us try out in other schools?" They always like to pass by and come by and ask for our opinion, and for us to try it out.

**Carballo:** In the middle school, we follow more, like he's saying. We have, for language arts, and for math, social studies and sciences—these are adopted by the state. Then we have to take half these books as textbooks. Even this year we have a different solution than we have for the Spanish language. And then we follow the books for the Spanish language that are adopted. But because we have the international program also, the books that we used in the international program, in the middle school we don't follow. Like the elementary, they have one hour extra. But what we have is like this during the day, and we have groups. The whole school is bilingual, but then the students who are in international studies in elementary, and they are in the middle school, they are in special classes only for these students. That way they can have the curriculum from Miami-Dade, but also the curriculum from Spain. And those books are the books that are used in Spain. We don't use any other books, just the books that are used in Spain. In any middle school in Spain, in that grade, we use the same. The only thing is like we have teachers here that are paid for from our district, or teachers who come from Spain, that the Spain government pays. But all of these teachers that we have in here, all we say, that our students are better prepared for this [unclear 34:48] than the students in Spain.

Then also, we, like Christina was saying, specifically in the middle school we have some short stories, but we also introduce them to novels, like from Garcia-Marquez,

Lorca. But of course they [unclear 35:11]. I mean, it's whatever they can read on their psychological level, but it has to be books written in Spanish from Spanish authors. We don't have translations, and we don't have versions. If we cannot read the book because it's very difficult, we don't read it. But we read something else, according to their age. But we don't have something that is translated from English into Spanish. And this is something that we are pioneers also, because everybody's saying, "How can you do that?" And of course we aren't going to do Lorca [unclear 35:48] because it's too difficult, but we can have some other material that is more to their age.

Also in middle school, we have many courses that are high school credits. For example, our students in the eighth grade, in the international program, they take A.P. [advanced placement] language, [unclear 36:12] language. And when they go to high school, the only thing that is missing is A.P. literature. And this is in international, but the rest of the students who are in the bilingual program, they go to high school with two credits in Spanish already, because our Spanish is very high. Also, in humanities, in eighth grade they are taking Latin American history, and this is credit for high school also. And in eighth grade in science, they take the students who are advanced in science, they take earth and space, that is a high school credit. And the ones who are in math, in the highest level, they take algebra at the high school level.

**Ruiz:** Sounds like a very exciting thing.

**Vasquez:** Even in fifth grade now, they're reading *Juan de Pareja* [phonetic]. *Juan de Pareja* is a 7.5 [unclear 37:08] accelerated reader, and they're reading it in fifth grade.

**Vega:** Going around the things that have happened at Coral Way, they are really unique. Once we took a project of staging a play from Federico Garcia Lorca with the initiative of

Mr. Carballo. And it was staged and performed by teachers from the school. It was a project that took the whole year, because some of the teachers, of course, none of the teachers that acted in the play had **ever** before acted anything—neither in English, and even less in Spanish. Some of them were even English teachers that were not that good in Spanish. But Mr. Carballo had that vision, that dream, “Yes, we can do that. We need to incorporate our faculty in the story of the [unclear 38:07], the literature of Spain.” So he decided that it was going to be *La Casa de Bernarda*. We sent the project to the consulate of Spain, and right off the bat they told us, “You are crazy. You will never get [unclear 38:25]. You have to get something simpler, something that is more in tune with the people that you’re going to be using.” But we did not listen and said, “We are going to do it!” Mr. Carballo started selecting the people, and then we hired a theater director from Cuba, who was somebody that could really get those teachers to the level that they needed to start performing. Like I said, it was a **whole year** project, but at the end, in June, it was such a success! that even theater directors from here, from Miami, when they saw it, they couldn’t believe that those teachers had gotten into that play and had done such a tremendous job. And we are very proud of that project. That was something that Coral Way did that has never been done before.

**Carballo:** Well, the thing is, my vision or my idea was like a.... Because Coral Way participates in a lot of things. We do a lot of things here that involves theater also—I mean, drama. In the international program, at the end of the year, they present something cultural about what they have been doing here in the international program, and we participate in everything like that. And they say, “It’s very hard for the teachers to do this kind of thing. How about the teachers do something, and they are more involved in

that?” And it started like Nadania Vega was saying, “Yes, but we were a little bit like, the cultural Spain, they’re saying we cannot do that, and we have to…” And then it transcended a little bit to be a project, like it was going to be an educational thing. And then we said, “Let’s hire somebody else.” Because I was directing first, and doing the production. But then we wanted to get to another level, and we hired that director. Then it was such a good thing. I mean, the television came in and taped it, and even the consulate said that it was “one of the best performances” that they saw, even in Spain. Then it was something that we are very proud of.

**Ruiz:** Well actually that brings up a question that I had about professional development for teachers, the way in which the teachers are developed professionally, since it is a bilingual school and it’s different from perhaps other kinds of development experiences that teachers have. How do you arrange for that, or what happens with that?

**Perez:** Well, we participate in all the professional development that the district has to offer. Sometimes we do in-house, sometimes we do outside where they go to different workshops. Especially now during the summer, we have a lot of opportunities for teachers to go to week-long summer institutes in either English or in Spanish. Cristina does one of the Spanish ones during the summer, so we make sure that our teachers that have not been in the Spanish program too long, to make sure that they participate in that professional development. Throughout the year we try to—Mr. Carballo and Cristina also do in-house in-services or workshops during the day for those teachers on some new strategy, something that they want to discuss with the Spanish teachers. During the year, teachers are given the opportunity to go to various professional development that the district has to offer, either during a school day, after school, or on Saturdays. During the

summer now, there will be numerous week-long summer institutes, either on reading, on math, on bilingual education, on Spanish, different science, hands-on science, those type of things. So we follow the district's guidelines on giving the opportunity to teachers to participate in professional development. But the teachers have to **want** to go to participate in professional development.

**Ruiz:** You said that you had attended NABE. Did any of your teachers go to NABE? Because sometimes NABE has like a pre-conference institute, professional development.

**Perez:** No, no one attended—only the three of us attended this year, which we presented. And also Miss Vega, I believe, presented.

**Ruiz:** It was in Orlando, wasn't it?

**Perez:** In Tampa.

**Carballo:** And we went to Orlando before, when it was in Orlando. And I was a teacher and my two colleagues, they were in the gifted program, and we went to present our gifted program—it was just brand new at that time, [unclear 42:44] and we went to present how we were pioneers also in the Gifted. Then we have been, in the past, participating a lot of times in NABE, and also in the Gifted international conferences.

**Ruiz:** Let me ask you, any of you, how were the students assigned to the different groups? I assume that the students are still assigned to the Spanish group or the English group, is that right? No? Is that not true?

**Perez:** Yes and no, but I think students are assigned, well, number one, by [unclear 43:22] of course. And let's say you have 150 kindergarteners, and we have eight classes of kindergarten. We separate our children based on, number one, if they're ESO [phonetic], ELL, English Language Learners. Depending, we may have an ESO or an

ELL self-contained, where we put all the Level 1's and 2's in kindergarten together, and that's what's called a self-contained ELL class, ESO class. But most of the other students are placed either within English or Spanish, because most of them will follow the bilingual track, bilingual program, where half the day, 60% is in English, 40% is done in Spanish. With fifth grade, the tracks are different, so they're either set up into this four-track, or into this four-track. One thing that we do is we try to put our students that are still learning **Spanish** as a second language, together, to get able to provide additional resources and additional assistance for those students to learn the Spanish.

In the upper academy, kids then are placed a little differently, because it's more of a subject-based curriculum, more than elementary, where it's a classroom, and Mr. Carballo could talk on that. But it's more based on if they're international studies, if they're going to be in advanced, if they're going to be in honors, or if they're going to be in advanced Spanish or regular Spanish, or advanced math, or algebra or pre-algebra. So based on the upper academies, we follow more of a secondary approach, where you see the child to see what type of program they're going to be able to go into.

**Ruiz:** Do any of you perceive a difference in achievement level or comfort level, or whatever, depending on if you're an English speaker or a Spanish speaker in the school? Let me preface that maybe with a little more context. In many dual language bilingual schools in the country, sometimes there is this sense that the English speakers are not learning very much Spanish, and that they're somewhat uncomfortable with some of the Spanish classes. They learn a lot of English, and they learn some Spanish, and so sometimes they feel as if they're not learning as much, in terms of the language, as perhaps the Spanish speakers are, because the Spanish speakers are developing their

Spanish, and they're learning a lot of English. In other words, they're becoming more balanced as bilinguals. Do you perceive anything like that among the different groups of students in your school?

**Carballo:** Nadania Vega can tell you more about it, because she was really very instrumental in doing that, in getting the message. Like sometimes it's a perception. Anything that we don't expect.... And I am not talking about the school, but in general. And you think, "Okay, a child is coming from a Latin American country and they have to learn English, because of course in one year or two years they have to get [unclear 46:25]. When you have an English-speaking student, it's like if they know the colors, and it's so funny, "Oh, they know the colors!" whatever. You don't expect that, that they can do. But here at Coral Way, it's different. And thanks to principals like Nadania and like Alex, [unclear 46:42] and with the principals [unclear] we have after that, we had the same philosophy, and it's transmitted to the teachers also. And they have been very instrumental in that too. And our students, the English-speaking students are treated the same way as we treat the ESO students, the ones learning English. I mean, like this is.... They learn in both languages, and of course one language is a little bit more stronger, of course. But they immediately, they transition into being bilingual, and this is what we are expecting, that they are bilingual, and they are good in both languages. And I am going to give you an example. Not everybody's the same, but we have a child who came this year in seventh grade—not in kindergarten or first, but [unclear 47:35] in seventh grade, and she didn't speak Spanish at all. But she's in Gifted, she's in a family who speaks several languages, of course. And I put her in the Spanish as second language, and we have one teacher just with these students, one [unclear 47:52] doesn't have vocabulary.

Then in the middle of the school year, we transferred that student to another Spanish class where we have Spanish S.L., students who are English-speaking, but were here in Coral Way since [unclear 48:07]. They **know**, but they are not so fluent like these Hispanic. And we jump ahead with that class, with some Hispanic who didn't speak Spanish very well. Now the teacher is telling me that that child has to go to the next level, and he has been [unclear 48:24] this marking period is [unclear]. And like that, I can give you a lot of examples.

We just had an article in the paper, in *The Miami Herald*, a family coming from Quebec, three students, and the same. They are doing the algebra in Spanish, and they came here in sixth grade, one; the other one.... And they didn't know even **English**, because they're French speaking. A little bit of English, and they learned. Then our students, in the perception that we have, and what we expect from them, they are bilingual in both languages. And of course we can have, because of psychological reasons, [unclear 49:09] slowly, I mean the language. But it's not the average student.

**Ruiz:** Okay, good. Can I ask you a little bit about your experience as a student here? You were a student here, right?

**Vasquez:** Yes, I was a student here. I did my first grade. I used to live on 17<sup>th</sup> Terrace, and I did my first grade here. Then I left to Mexico, and then I came back and I did fifth grade.

**Ruiz:** We won't do any calculations in our head, but can you tell us what year that was?

**Vasquez:** Oh my God. I know that I was here in 1978-79, when I was in fifth grade and Mr. Tonoho [phonetic] was my teacher. Miss Adams was my English teacher. I was an ESO student, so Miss Papier [phonetic], who was an **awesome** teacher, awesome teacher,



was my teacher. Mr. Brown, who came the other day, one of the P.E. teachers, he was here about a month ago. He was just the same! And Mr. Long also was mine. And Miss Vee [phonetic], who was the music teacher, still today! She was my music teacher as well.

?: [unclear]

**Vasquez:** Yes. I was in fifth grade and in first grade. And my sister also studied here.

**Ruiz:** You said you were an ESO student.

**Vasquez:** I was an ESO student when I came back from Mexico because I had forgotten my English.

**Ruiz:** So does that also mean that in your home you principally spoke Spanish growing up?

**Vasquez:** In my home, yes. And also when I lived in Mexico, my parents didn't put me in an American school, like most of the kids, because my father used to work in the American consulate. But since my family is Cuban, my mother wanted to put me in a typical Mexican school that reminded her of Cuba. So I got to go to an all-Spanish school in Mexico.

**Ruiz:** So how did you do in the program here? How did you feel about your experience as a student here in this school?

**Vasquez:** When I was a student here, it was, for me, a normal part of it, of speaking English or speaking Spanish. And it's funny because now I just turned forty, and it's funny because a lot of the teachers tell me, "Cristina, if there's somebody here who's bilingual-bilingual, **you** are." And I think to myself, there were periods here and then periods in Mexico, and I came back, I'd lost my English. When I went back to Mexico, I

didn't want to speak English. I didn't want to, because I was embarrassed. But after Miss Papier, I never forgot my English. After that year in Coral Way, I never forgot English. I did read a lot in English. I did read a lot of Nancy Drew stories, and I think that kept me up with my vocabulary. But it's funny, because it was just a normal part of being. I remember when we left school here, I would walk down, because I lived on 17<sup>th</sup> Terrace, and I remember in those times we used to watch "The Three Stooges," we used to love "*Qué Pasa USA*," and when I would see "*Qué Pasa USA*" on the TV, that was my family! The same thing! *Abuela, Abuelo, Carmencita, Josito*, that went to Miami High. That was my **life**. *La Abuela* was *la vata [phonetic] de casa* with the bag. That's the way that I lived, although I lived out of Miami for a few years.

But I'll never forget when I was in first grade.... [unclear 52:52] Small glimpses of what I remember. One of the little things I do remember was Miss DiMartino [phonetic] coming into the classroom. It was the last classroom where Cruz Vidad [phonetic] is now. And I'll never forget, I had my first-grade paper with the big pencil, and I remember writing and Miss DiMartino saying, "You have beautiful handwriting." I'll **never** forget it. And it's so funny, because today I'm still, when we go to workshops and things, people tell me, "You write, because you're the one with the beautiful handwriting." And that is something that I never forgot. When it came years later and I had my daughter and I was a volunteer here, then I started as a [unclear 53:33] with Miss Vega, it's funny because even the corridors still had a smell—I don't know—of the school when I used to come here. Because when I used to come here, I remember that the copies used to be, like, in purple.

**Ruiz:** Mimeograph machine.

**Perez:** Yes. And that ink had a special scent to it.

**Ruiz:** I think we all remember.... Well, at least everybody my age remembers the smell of the school. It smelled just like that.

**Vasquez:** Very distinctive.

**Ruiz:** Yes.

**Perez:** One of the things that this particular, this last school year I was hiring teachers, I actually hired four ex-Coral Way alumni that were actually students from Miss Kay [phonetic], which is from Palestine, and she's pretty much bilingual, Miss Abril [phonetic] which was also a teacher here.

**Vasquez:** Trilingual.

**Perez:** Miss Montez—the two Montezes, two sisters that both studied here—and they're all now teachers here—in different areas, but they're all teachers here.

**Ruiz:** So is the program, as you remember it then, different now? I mean, is there a lot of difference in the way in which students experience Coral Way?

**Vasquez:** I think that it's pretty much the same, because I remember that I was in Miss Sotolongo's morning group, and I remember knowing that we were in the high Spanish group. And it's funny, because a lot of those students that studied that year, some of them are doctors, I know that one is an anchor woman on *Aquevo* [phonetic]. Her son comes here as well. And I remember it was the same thing. The only thing, that in the afternoon when I had my English, it was a time that I would leave with Miss Papier, and then I would come back to Miss Adams' class. I remember that. But it was pretty much the same.

**Ruiz:** So you were in the Spanish group?

**Vasquez:** I was in the high Spanish group, yes.

**Ruiz:** Did you have student friends who were just in the Spanish group, or in the other group too, or do you remember that, if there was any difference?

**Vasquez:** Well, the thing is, that with that group we went to special areas and everything, most of my friends were in that group. And it's funny, because I still see them a lot of times in Public's or Wynn Dixie. My kids go to summer camp at the Miami Museum of Science, and the director of the camp, his wife was a classmate of mine in fifth grade. We used to do gymnastics when there used to be a P.E. field. We used to do gymnastics together, and now she has six kids, and she is completely bilingual. We speak in English, we speak in Spanish. She lives in North Carolina.

**Ruiz:** Was that true then, too, that you spoke English or Spanish with your friends and it didn't really seem to....

**Vasquez:** Well, the thing is that I had the both of best worlds [sic], because I would come here on my vacation, and my mother's goal was for us to practice English, because we were living in Mexico. But at my home we would speak Spanish all the time. I mean, I'm first-generation, born in Miami. My parents were born in Cuba, and my mother, although she left forty years ago, you would feel that she left two months ago, because in her mind she still hasn't left Cuba. So (laughs) in a lot of things....

**Ruiz:** Now what about with your friends outside of school? Did you speak Spanish or English or do you even remember?

**Vasquez:** I spoke both. I spoke both, because I lived a few years in Mexico, and I always spoke in both, and I would joke in both, and I would gossip in both. Oh yes, oh yes.

**Ruiz:** How about how your parents were....

**Vasquez:** Now with my children, it's different. My children are different. My husband is Colombian, and at home I do have to remind them sometimes, (Spanish 57:28), or, "If you're going to tell me in English, tell me the whole thing in English. Don't...." But I've done it, I've done it intentionally. The last four or five years I've been visiting Mexico with my kids, and we spend two or three weeks, and that's the best, because I relax and they practice their Spanish with friends **their** age. Now, when we got **there**, my friends tell me, tell them, "Please talk to my son in English, please talk to him!" Because a lot of our friends in Mexico went to a bilingual school—the most expensive schools, and the ones where the middle-upper-class ones are [unclear 58:10]. Bilingual, either German-Spanish, or French-Spanish, or English-Spanish. My friends have their kids in a bilingual school, using the same series—at grade level, not to teach English, **at grade level**—our Scott Foresman. My friends spent \$500, \$600 per child because the books come there from the United States. So I'm like, "No, please, I want my kids to practice [Spanish]." But it is a commitment and it's a compromise.

**Ruiz:** I wanted to ask you, and I think anyone else, about what's happening now, too. But in terms of parents involved in the school, were your parents involved in school activities? Did they come to the school for meetings, did they come into the classroom? How were they involved in the school?

**Vasquez:** You mean my parents?

**Ruiz:** Your parents.

**Vasquez:** Oh no, my parents were not as involved, and when I talk to my friends about it, because we talk about it all the time.... I think also maybe you can [unclear 59:16], I

think times have changed. I remember when my responsibility was to do homework, and there was no question about it. I mean, I would not even question it! Because my mother's eyes would turn into plates, just that, I knew what trouble was.

**Perez:** I think it's funny that parents now are probably **more** involved, than they were. Going back to elementary school, I don't remember my parents ever, ever, **ever**, going to the elementary school, because number one, most of my teachers were American, they couldn't even speak to the teachers. Parents are more involved now—it's weird—and we have more behavior problems now, or more issues with students now than we probably did. There was always issues: kids are kids from the history of time. But I think parents are more involved now than our generation, which we're in the same generation, more so than.... Her children are also my generation, and it seems like they're more involved now than they were twenty-five years ago when I was in elementary school. I don't know, is that good or bad? Is it positive or negative? But it seems like....

**Ruiz:** So you do have a lot more parental involvement in your programs now than before?

**Perez:** I've seen the change here since I've been here in '96 to now—there's more. This area has changed in the sense of it's a little more affluent and it's more involved parents, more second-generation students coming into the school. Where, I'll give an example, in '96 I think we would have three or four ESO self-contained in kindergarten, and now I barely have one, with a little bit of a second one. I mean, I'm sure you've even seen a bigger change since you were here even before that.

**Vega:** When I was here, we had a larger ELL population, students that were just coming from other countries and learning English and all that, but that has changed, as Alex said,

because of.... I just want to just say—and this is the last thing I am going to say—I want to say that I think the success of this program has always been our standards. We have always had very high standards in this school. There is a pride, a general pride in the faculty and the student body, in the staff, in **everybody** that works in this school. There is a tremendous pride about being in this school, because this school is special. This is the best school in the whole world. Our students accept that. We tell them all the time, we say, “You are in the best school, you should be very proud of being a Coral Way student.” And they have assimilated that, and everybody in this school is like a big family. We want to make **this** program better. And the Spanish program is not a second-class citizen in **this** school, which is something that is important, because some of the bilingual programs in other places, as you know, the most important program I think is—the Spanish program is a second-class citizen. [unclear 62:33] Here it’s always **as good as**. You’re going to the room, understand resources that you see in an English class, you’ll see them in the Spanish class: computers, books, state-of-the-art materials, everything. We never use double standards for the students—going back to that question that you asked about if the American child, the English speaker, was behind, or felt that he was not at par. (raising voice to be emphatic) We do not use double standards! You’re here to become bilingual and biliterate, and we’re going to work with everybody. And by the same token, the same thing that we do with the ELL, we say, “You are here, you need to learn English, because this is America and you have to learn English!” We tell the English speaker, “You are here, this is a bilingual school, you are here to learn Spanish, and we are not going to spoon feed you, and we are not going to make it easy for you, you are going to immerse. You are going to do exactly what we expect of an

ELL we're going to expect of you." And they perform, because you have to expect for them to do it, and you tell the parents, when the parents say, (with hysteria) "Oh! but he doesn't understand anything! You have to speak [English]!" "No, no, no, we don't speak Spanish here to the kids that are learning English. Why are we going to translate it to English to your child? Your child is here to learn Spanish. Do you want him to learn Spanish, yes or no?" "Yes." "Okay, well then he's going to go the same method." No double standards, and that works. Like Mr. Carballo says, "You're coming here, we give you a little help, but afterwards, swim or sink!"

**Carballo:** Yes. Since Nadania and I started here, one of the things that we did is like we kind of eliminated the [troll? 64:20] or the teacher group that teaches Spanish as a second language. We had it, but it's just to have the first vocabulary. Immediately that child is [unclear 64:33], and if they, in the beginning, the child needs some help, we'll [unclear] professional somebody, or retired teacher somebody in the classroom who can help a little bit. But that child, he's not learning only from the teachers. That child is learning from the other students. And this is why immediately they can learn so fast. And a child came with me, I can remember, in fourth grade, a girl from Bulgaria, and [unclear 65:01] do you think that they can read *Don Quixote* that we have [unclear]? I said, "Yes." I mean, they knew some vocabulary, it could help. [unclear] they actually did the same, and we [spend?] the same.

**Ruiz:** I know we only have a few minutes left with you. If you could tell us briefly what you think would be your best experience as a student—and maybe your worst experience as a student—when you were a student here in the school. What did you really like about your experience, what did you maybe not like so much?



**Vasquez:** Well, what I liked the most, I think, of those years, was that my teachers were very involved, and my teachers, the ones that I had, were very hands-on. Miss Papier was very hands-on and very giving a lot of examples that were very easy to relate to. I remember that I was very, very involved with the classroom, very engaged in the classroom. That is something that I did like a lot. For me, it was kind of hard, because I had left what I had known as my home, and I came back here. Although I was with my family, I missed my school, I missed my friends. So my teachers made that transition smoother for me.

**Ruiz:** Anything you didn't particularly like?

**Vasquez:** I don't remember. I remember enjoying it very much, I really do. I really do. And my sister came to this school too, and she has very fond memories of Coral Way as well.

**Ruiz:** I have a question that I'm reluctant to ask because I think I know the answer from all of you, which has to do with whether or not you think this model of dual language, two-way, double immersion—it's called all kinds of things—bilingual model, is a good model to use. Not just with **some** people, but with maybe everybody. Would you recommend this model as a general model in education? Or is it just for some populations of people?

**Perez:** I would recommend it. I wish back in elementary school when I came, and my parents moved to a certain part of the Westchester area in Miami, all the schools in that area were mono-lingual. There was no Spanish programs. I wish **I** would have had a bilingual program back in elementary school. Because back then, this is the mid-seventies, late seventies. The only bilingual program, I believe, was Coral Way. So most

of the other immigrant kids that came from Cuba, that came from other countries, went to a mono-lingual school, where I don't remember having—through elementary school, I only remember having one Hispanic teacher all through elementary school. I mean, it was basically, back then most of my friends were American, so I didn't have the experiences of a bilingual program, versus Cristina and some of the kids that are going through now, education, the different programs that are throughout the district and throughout the country, of being able to learn that second language. And Mr. Carballo has said it perfectly with those three children that we have from Quebec. I mean, amazing! They speak French, they're learning English.... Well, now they speak French, they came here learning English and learning Spanish. Now they speak French, English, and Spanish. I mean, amazing. Around the **world** you see everybody speaks **at least** two languages. So I recommend it. I'm sure they definitely....

**Vega:** The only concern that I have, and we can take a lesson, we can use it everywhere, but in order to have a program like this to succeed, it has to have the ingredients to succeed. It has to have support from the administration. The administration believes in it, the faculty believes in it, and everybody's willing to do what it takes to make a program like this succeed. It's just I'm saying that well, it's the latest in the novelties that we have to implement, we do it, but I really don't care, or I don't think it's that important. It doesn't work like that.

**Perez:** Sustainability, I think is what she's saying. Can it sustain itself, regardless of who is here? And it's shown itself that it's been able to sustain itself and be able to, from 1963, sustain itself, sustain itself. Little adjustments to it as you go, but sustain itself, sustain itself. Where fly-by programs, "Yeah, we're gonna do SRA one year; and then

we're gonna do this reading program one year; and then we're gonna do **this** model one year; and then we're gonna do...." So I think....

**Ruiz:** Well, thank you very much for sitting here with us this long. I'm going to go ahead and turn off the recorder now, but thank you very much.

[END OF FOCUS GROUP]