

Foreword

I left my home country of Cuba on 22 July 1961, at the age of 9. Fortunately, I came with my parents and two brothers (ages 11 and 1), a luxury many other children did not enjoy, having to come by themselves through the Peter Pan initiative. The 22 July was to become a day of mixed emotions for our family; it was my father's birthday, my parents wedding anniversary and the day I said goodbye to everything I had known up to then.

In Miami, I was enrolled in a Catholic school where no special help was provided to the tens of Cuban students entering on a daily basis. However, I had attended The Phillips School in Cuba, a school owned by a Canadian couple where we had the morning session in English and the afternoon session in Spanish; thus, I had some knowledge of English. What I never foresaw as I started fifth grade in Miami is that throughout my teenage years I would sacrifice knowledge of my home language to join the bandwagon of the 1960s generation. I eventually graduated from the University of Miami in 1973 with limited academic Spanish and a degree in elementary education, at a time when teachers were a dime a dozen.

I recall sitting at home fully dressed and ready to leave on a minute's notice as I called school after school asking if they had a teaching position. Remember, we didn't even have faxes at the time! One 'no after another' scared me, until a clerk who answered the phone asked if I was bilingual. A very emphatic 'yes' got me an interview at Coral Way Elementary, a school about which I knew nothing.

I was hired to teach the English block to a fourth-grade group of students, but fate always takes its turns and two days before starting school, a teacher had emergency surgery and my assignment was changed to one block of English and one block of Spanish. My first day as a Spanish teacher at Coral Way was a turning point in my personal

and professional life. Within the first 20 minutes of the school day, I had already written a huge mistake on the board to be quickly corrected by a student who not only pointed out my spelling mistake but gave me the grammatical rule for what I had done. Convinced that I was about to lose my job, as soon as school was dismissed, I drove to the only bookstore that sold Spanish books and bought every third-, fourth- and fifth-grade language book that I could find. When I got home, I had to sit through enough ‘I told you so’ from my mother who had insisted that we speak and study Spanish. There began my journey into the world of bilingualism, language and identity. I started studying Spanish to reappropriate myself with the language and culture I had lost.

Although I did not attend Coral Way Elementary as a student, Coral Way Elementary transformed my life. It took me from writing ‘lapizes’ with a ‘z’ on the board to becoming passionate about the Coral Way experience and an advocate for dual-language education. Little did I know that September day in 1973 that I would one day be the director of bilingual and world language education in Miami-Dade County Public Schools and, in 2009, be awarded the Cruz de Oficial de la Orden de Isabel la Católica for my work on behalf of the promotion of the Spanish language in the United States.

My experience is not unique. For hundreds of students that were fortunate to attend Coral Way, both English and Spanish speakers, their elementary experience was unlike any other at the time. Half a day in English, half a day in Spanish, ‘acentos, diéresis’, schwa sound, long vowels, square dancing one day and the cha cha cha the next during PE class. Students were exposed to two languages, two cultures and two different ways of reading the world.

Although Coral Way was to shape the landscape of bilingual education in the United States in the 20th century, little has been written about this transformative school with its Mediterranean architecture and beautiful central patio. For those who are immersed in the world of bilingual education, Coral Way Elementary (now Coral Way K-8 Center) is no stranger. However, what Coral Way contributed, and continues to contribute to the educational arena is worthy of being shouted from a mountain top (disseminated across the world).

Dr Maria Coady has done just that. With the publication of *The Coral Way Bilingual Program*, Dr Coady takes us on a journey from gestation and birth in the early 1960s to present-day implementation 56 years later. We learn that at the root of the Coral Way experiment was the Cuban exodus caused by the Castro revolution. We are introduced to the visionaries who dared to dream and challenge the establishment at a

time when bilingual education was unheard of in a public school: Pauline Rojas, Paul Bell, Ralph Robinett, Joe Hall, Rosa Guas Inclán, Lee Logan and ‘the Marines’, the teachers, the trailblazers who ‘bajo capa y espada’ (against all odds...) made sure that the program was implemented with fidelity.

Dr Coady’s book provides detailed descriptions and an in-depth study of the Coral Way program never before compiled under one cover. Her research is exhaustive and includes the political climate of Miami in the early years of the Cuban exodus, including the Peter Pan program, oral interviews with former students, teachers and administrators, and statistics that support the tenets behind the need to establish a bilingual program. We are afforded the opportunity to see the report cards that were used, images of the daily schedules, sample letters to parents, evaluations submitted to the Ford Foundation and so much more.

The Coral Way Bilingual Program offers something for everyone. For the English-speaking parents who took the risk to trust what the educators promised, this book reassures them that they gave their children a lifelong gift. For the students themselves, both English and Spanish speakers, who participated in the program, the book will help them to relive the days when without knowing what was being done, they were acquiring a new language and culture that would forever enrich their lives. For the academic, the researcher, Dr Coady dedicates a chapter to describing the research design, the data and the findings. For those of us who worked at Coral Way Elementary at one time or another, we can continue to take pride in knowing that we were part of a school whose contributions to education resonate across the world.

The education community, and more specifically the bilingual community, applaud Dr Coady for this important publication. It sheds light on the beginnings of a movement that today continues to be misunderstood and undervalued. In studying and learning about the success of the first two-way immersion program in a public school, we can continue to forge the future based on proven experiences and research.

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