

Chapter 14. One
Minute of Silence



All Pianos Have Keys & Other Stories

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Chapter 14: One Minute of Silence

I have often criticized school administrators for their lack of support for bilingual education. Of course, such criticism should be tempered by an admission that it is a generalization and does not always hold true. Many administrators are strong supporters of bilingual education. This is particularly so in the case of language minority administrators who have consistently supported bilingual programs, probably because personal experiences in the era prior to the advent of bilingual programs led to their development of a unique sensitivity to the learning problems of limited-English-proficient children. Just how supportive of bilingual education administrators can be is illustrated by the following personal experience.

I was invited to speak to a group of parents and teachers in an evening meeting. After having spent so many years around the schools, I was well aware that speaking at PTA meetings can be one of the most demanding and frustrating experiences of a professional educator. Invariably, the PTA uses a sound system it purchased with profits from fundraising activities, and invariably, it does not work. Parents are encouraged to bring their children, and the innocents tend to run up and down the aisles during the course of the meeting. But the most taxing aspect for me has always been sitting through a never-ending sequence of committee reports, PTA business and school events that usually have little relevancy or interest for the guest speaker.

On this particular evening, after listening to the secretary's presentation of the minutes of the gist meeting, the treasurer's report on the financial status of the PTA, and several committee reports on fundraising activities, the founder's day dinner, and the status of purchases of audio-visual equipment that the PTA was going to donate to the school, the school principal was asked to report on school news and events. Toward the end of the report the principal made a very special and somber announcement.

"I regret to report that Mrs. Rodríguez is still very ill and is not expected to recover. I therefore ask that everyone present stand and observe one minute of silence as a token of our respect for Mrs. Rodríguez."

We all stood, bowed our heads and silently prayed that Mrs. Rodríguez would somehow recover and return to her teaching position in the school. We remained so for a minute and then started to sit down.

We were restrained from doing so when the principal added, “Since Mrs. Rodríguez teaches in the bilingual program, I now request that we all observe an additional minute of silence in Spanish.”