



# Unpacking the Role of Advocate in Contentious Times

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# A reading from *Citizen Illegal*, by José Olivarez

*Mexican American Disambiguation*  
pages 41-42

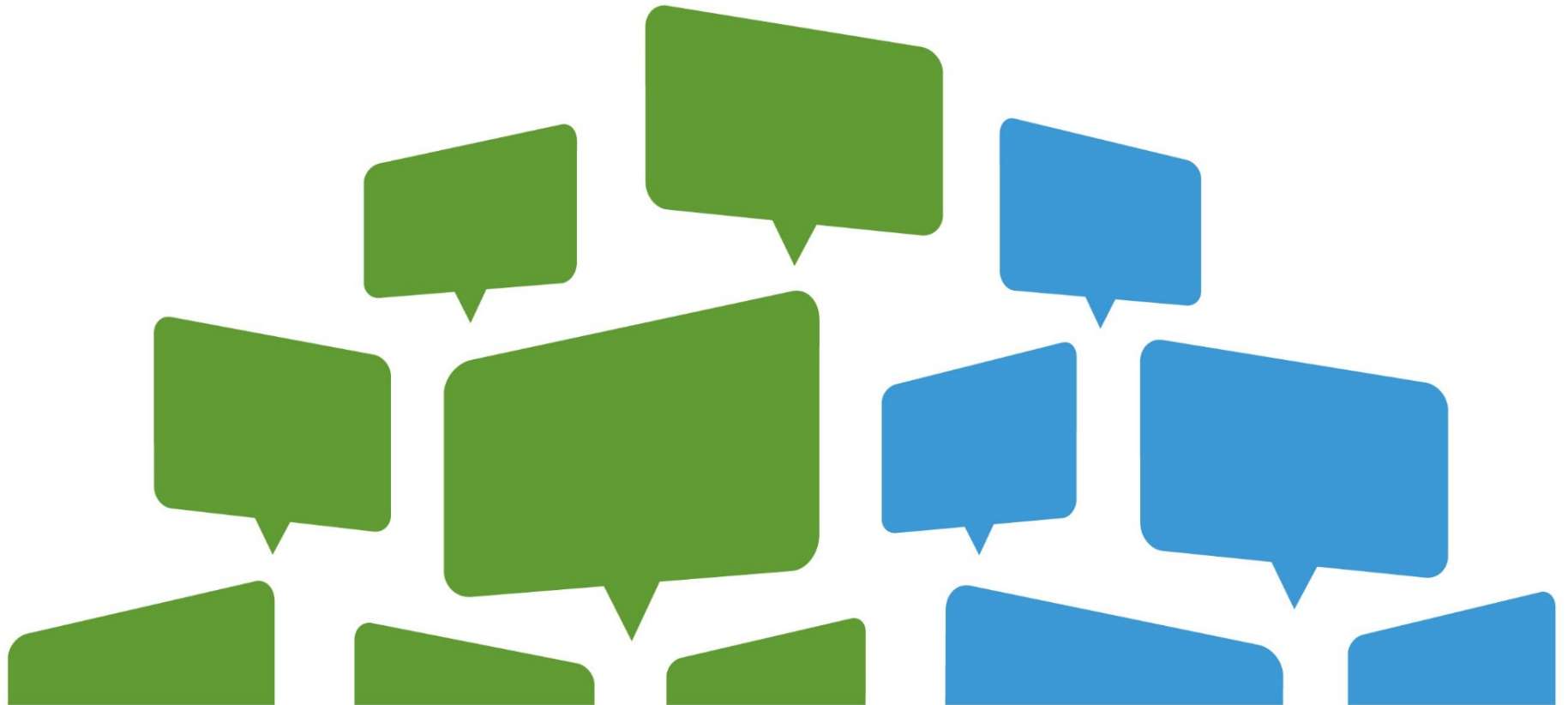


# Goals for our time today:

- Talk about strategic ways to be an advocate in contentious times
- Consider what it means to be an effective advocate
- Look at your role as a professional and the roles others play (administrators, paraprofessionals, mainstream teachers)
- Begin with your local reality

**Advocating is defined “...as working for ELs’ equitable and excellent education by taking appropriate actions on their behalf.”**

**Staehr Fenner, 2014**



# What to advocate for:

*Advocate first and foremost for supported access to the richest curriculum and most engaging opportunities (OTL) your school has to offer. Advocate for a school filled with teachers who understand the assets that multilingual learners bring and what they need to pursue college and career.*

*Goals, 2018*



# Tim's anecdotes over the years:

- The Spanish teacher who failed Mexican new arrival because she couldn't read directions in English on his test of Spanish
- The school staff who placed Mexican student in special education because "he didn't speak Spanish or English well enough." The student's native language was Mixtec, an indigenous language from Oaxaca, Mexico.
- The Russian student who failed Biology I because he spoke no English. The student had taken three levels of Biology in Russia prior to coming to the USA.

# Realities I've observed:

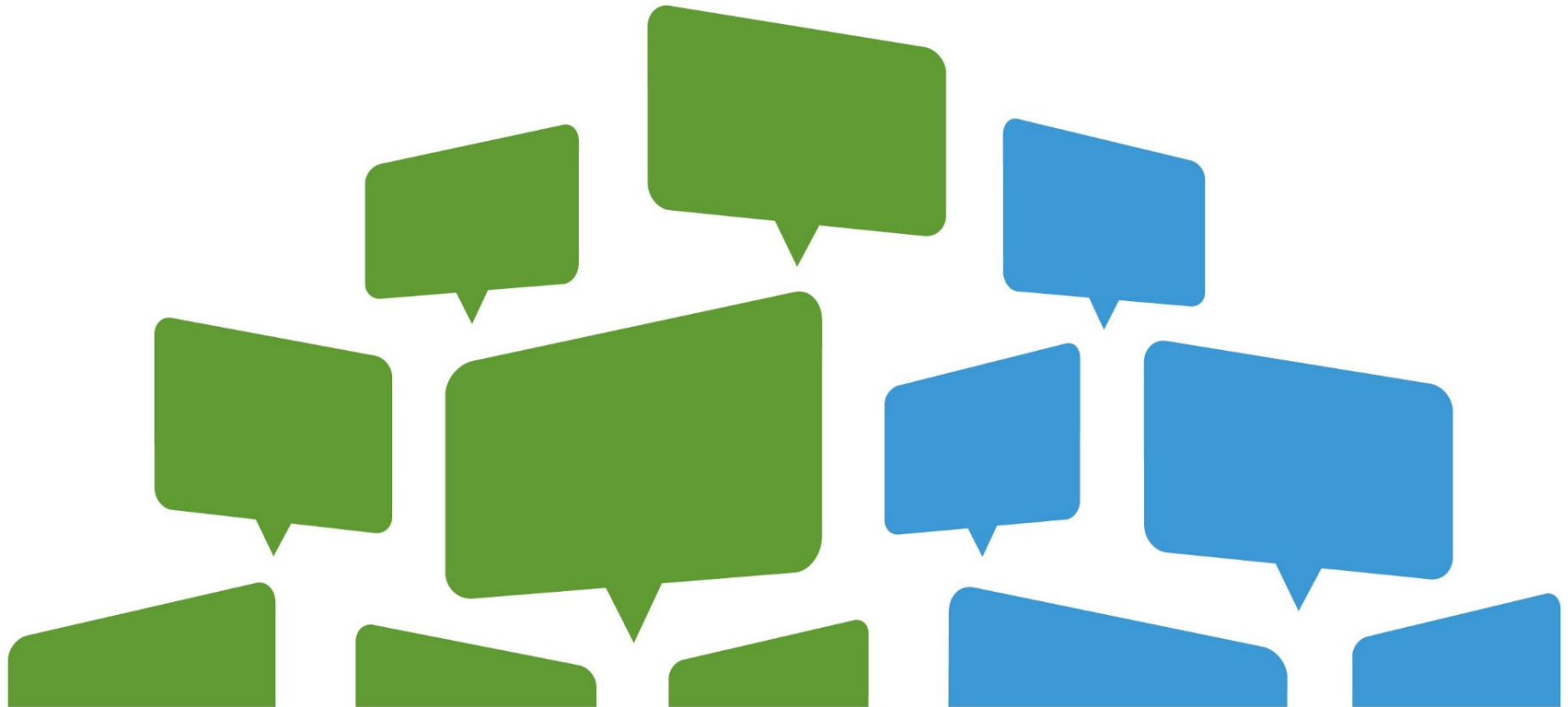
- BL and ESL teachers teaching under stairwells, in broom closets, next to noisy boiler rooms in basements with no windows, or in trailers out back
- BL and ESL teachers who are told their job is to “fix those kids” so that we can teach them
- BL and ESL teachers who teach in five different schools, spend half an hour twice a week with their students, keep their office in their car trunk, and attend no meeting with staff in their schools

**Brainstorming in small groups:  
What are the barriers to being  
an advocate in your school?**





**What are the challenges you face  
with trying to take on more  
innovative roles within your  
school?**



# Your role as an advocate to achieve MLL success (without getting fired!)

- Looking for allies in the administration and among staff
- Seeking partnerships with the “mainstream”
- Helping to encourage the staff knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to serve MLLs, knowing that this will improve learning for all
- Encouraging parents to engage with schools and let their voice be heard
- Seeing your role differently both when you are teaching the kids and when you are working with staff... What is really the best use of my time?

# Advocating for students ...

- Understanding the rules of the game (meta-awareness)
- Being in the real game (access)
- Believing they can stay in the game (identity development)
- Realizing that although it's true the game is some times rigged, opportunities will come their way (contentious times, yes, but with some optimism)
- Appreciating that you don't need perfectly correct English or all the right answers in content classes to stay in the game, but having a clearer idea of what CCR really *does* mean

# New Roles for Language Educators

- Serve as resident language and culture experts (create support networks)
- Penetrate the whole school
- Ensure grade level content learning with differentiated language goals
- Promote engaging spaces for oral and written interaction everywhere



# The role for formative feedback

- Modeling by the teacher at key points
- Looking explicitly at how genres work and talking about the writing
- Peers providing feedback is good but get your input into the mix regularly
- Focus on meta language and discourse more, error correction of speaking, punctuation and grammar rules less (in writing not at the beginning or very end, some place in the middle)
- Clear goals, clear path for what matters (what am I trying to achieve, specific next steps), co-constructed with students

(Nottingham, 2017; MacDonald, Boals et al., 2015)

# Time for a classroom example?



# In your school

- Make spaces for student multilingualism
- Accept that this looks wonderfully messy, but your planning is quite purposeful
- Reaching English proficiency in three years probably NOT better than reaching it in seven. What else is happening?
- Starting one or two other languages early is NOT the issue but sustaining L1 will be.



# How does dedicated “ESL Language Time” get spent?

- Don't let it become remedial language development (a la Arizona) overly centered on language form and correctness
- Keep the focus on grade level language arts goals (i.e., content) but with ESL methodologies as needed reflecting language levels (supported opportunities)
- Key ideas: Aligned, accelerated, scaffolded, engaged learning
- Provide explicit instruction that models the dispositions that CCR require and gives opportunities to rehearse/engage in the practices they will need to succeed in college and career



***Everything in moderation,  
including moderation.***

**--Oscar Wilde**

