Effective Education for Multilingual Students: The Central Roles of Translanguaging, Literacy Engagement, and Identity Negotiation

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Overview

- Brief recap of my connections with CABE (and more recently with Caslon) over the past 40 years;

- This has been a journey, undertaken by many committed educators, to establish the legitimacy of bilingual education including documenting the cognitive, academic and linguistic benefits of bilingualism, crosslinguistic interdependence and the importance of teaching for two-way transfer between L1 and L2, and the necessity for educators, through their instruction, to challenge inequality and what I have called 'coercive relations of power'.

- In order to close the achievement gap, we must ground our policies and practice rigorously in the research evidence regarding causes of underachievement and instructional approaches that respond directly to these underlying causes.
The Original Theoretical Framework:
Schooling and language minority students: A theoretical framework (1981)

- Theoretical papers by Jim Cummins and Stephen Krashen elaborated a research-based rationale for bilingual education. Krashen unpacked the notion of “comprehensible input” and Cummins elaborated on the “interdependence hypothesis” showing how cross-lingual transfer enabled students in bilingual programs to catch up academically.

- David Dolson, Norm Gold, Dan Holt, Judy Lambert, Fred Tempes, Jan Mayer, Dennis Parker, Maria Trejo were part of the original team under the leadership of Guillermo López.
Figure 6.1  EFFECTS OF BILINGUALISM

One wheel (one language) can get you places...

So can a big wheel and a little wheel...

However, when your wheels are nicely balanced and fully inflated you'll go farther....

Provided, of course, the people who made the wheels knew what they were doing.
The Bilingual Advantage:
Just one out of hundreds of examples of recent research studies

- **Marian & Kaushanskaya** *(Psychonomic Bulletin and Review, August 2009)*
  English-Mandarin and English-Spanish bilinguals who had learned both languages prior to schooling were compared to monolingual English speakers in how well they mastered words in an invented language that bore no resemblance to English, Spanish, or Mandarin. The bilingual participants “mastered nearly twice the number of words as the monolinguals”.

People who can speak two languages are more adept at learning a new foreign language than their monolingual counterparts, according to researchers. And their bilingual advantage persists even when the new language they study is completely different from the languages they already know. It’s not about being "good" at learning languages, they say. It is the experience of becoming bilingual itself that makes learning a new language easier. *(ScienceDaily, http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/05/090519172157.htm)*

**Conclusion:** Using 2+ languages is good for your brain

*Here’s a short video you could share with parents and students:*
Different languages don’t occupy separate spaces in our brains: There is overlap and interdependence among languages.
“Previous attempts at educational reform have been largely unsuccessful because the relationships between teachers and students and between schools and communities have remained largely unchanged.

Educators have uncritically (and in most cases unconsciously) accepted rather than challenged the societal discrimination that is reflected in schools.” (1989, p. 51)
The Centrality of Teacher Agency

“Individual educators are never powerless, although they frequently work in conditions that are oppressive both for them and their students. While they rarely have complete freedom, educators do have choices...

They determine for themselves the social and educational goals they want to achieve with their students. They are responsible for the role definitions they adopt in relation to culturally diverse students and communities.

Even in the context of English-only instruction, educators have options in their orientation to students’ language and culture, in the forms of parent and community participation they encourage, and in the way they implement pedagogy and assessment.

In short, through their practice and their interactions with students, educators define their own identities.” (2001, p. 304)
SOCIETAL POWER RELATIONS influence the ways in which educators define their roles (teacher identity) and the structures of schooling (curriculum, funding, assessment, etc.) which, in turn, influence the ways in which educators interact with linguistically and culturally diverse students.

These interactions form an INTERPERSONAL SPACE within which learning happens and identities are negotiated.

These IDENTITY NEGOTIATIONS either Reinforce coercive relations of power or Promote collaborative relations of power
How Can Schools Reverse Underachievement?

- Which groups of students underachieve?
- Why do they underachieve - what causal factors are operating?
- What high-impact evidence-based educational interventions are available?

There are 3 overlapping but conceptually distinct groups that tend to experience disproportionate underachievement:

(a) immigrant-background students who are learning the school language as L2;
(b) socially disadvantaged students;
(c) students from socially marginalized groups who have been subject to racism and various forms of exclusion from educational and social opportunity, often over generations.
The Need for an Integrated Instructional Response

- Researchers concerned with these three sources of potential educational disadvantage have worked largely in isolation from each other.

- The reality is that although the three sources of potential disadvantage are conceptually distinct, a significant proportion of underachieving students fall into all three categories.

- Issues related to linguistically diverse students have been addressed by researchers focused on bilingual education and EL issues (e.g., Virginia Collier, Kathy Escamilla, Stephen Krashen, Wayne Wright, and others);

- Issues related to SES have been addressed by researchers concerned with school improvement in general (e.g., David Berliner, Linda Darling-Hammond, Robert Rothstein, and others);

- Issues related to racialized/marginalized students have been addressed by researchers focused on critical pedagogy and culturally responsive/relevant instruction (e.g., Geneva Gay, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Sonia Nieto, Django Paris, Joan Wink, and others).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student background</th>
<th>Linguistically Diverse</th>
<th>Low-SES</th>
<th>Marginalized Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sources of potential disadvantage</td>
<td>- Failure to understand instruction due to home-school language differences;</td>
<td>- Inadequate healthcare and/or nutrition;</td>
<td>- Societal discrimination;</td>
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<td>- Housing segregation;</td>
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<td>- Low teacher expectations;</td>
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<td>- Lack of cultural and material resources in the home due to poverty;</td>
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<td>- Stereotype threat;</td>
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<td>- Limited access to print in home and school;</td>
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<td>Evidence-based instructional response</td>
<td>- Scaffold comprehension and production of language across the curriculum;</td>
<td>- Maximize print access and literacy engagement;</td>
<td>- Connect instruction to students’ lives;</td>
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<td>- Engage students’ multilingual repertoires;</td>
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<td>- Decolonize curriculum and instruction through culturally sustaining pedagogy;</td>
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<td>- Reinforce academic language across the curriculum;</td>
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<td>- Valorize and build on L1/L2 language varieties;</td>
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<td>- Affirm student identities in association with academic engagement;</td>
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<td>- Identify devaluation;</td>
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</tbody>
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Linguistically Diverse Students

- **Source of potential disadvantage**
  
  Failure to understand instruction due to home-school language differences.

- **Evidence-based instructional responses**
  
  Scaffold comprehension and production of language across the curriculum;

  Engage students’ multilingual repertoires;

  Reinforce academic language across the curriculum
About The Authors

We are three best friends. Our names are Madiha Bajwa, Kanta Khalid, and Sulmana Hanif. We are in grade 7 at Michael Cranny E.S. in Maple, Ontario. This story we wrote mostly describes how hard it was to leave our country and come to a new country.
Students from Socially Disadvantaged Backgrounds

- The OECD PISA research has consistently demonstrated that students from low-SES backgrounds perform at significantly lower academic levels than those from higher-SES backgrounds both with respect to the SES of individual students and the collective SES of students within particular schools.

- **Sources of potential disadvantage**
  Multiple factors that will vary across contexts; for example, housing/school segregation; overcrowding; nutritional/medical issues; lack of access to books and other forms of print etc.

- **Evidence-based instructional responses**
  Immerse low-SES students in a print-rich pre-school and school environment;

  Reinforce academic language across the curriculum.
Data on the reading attainment of 15-year-olds in 27 countries showed that “the level of a student’s reading engagement is a better predictor of literacy performance than his or her socioeconomic background, indicating that cultivating a student’s interest in reading can help overcome home disadvantages” (OECD, 2004, p. 8).

OECD (2010) - about one-third of the negative impact of SES is mediated through reading engagement (or lack thereof). In other words, schools can significantly reduce the negative effects of low-SES by strongly promoting literacy engagement.
Students from Socially Marginalized Communities

- **Sources of potential disadvantage**
  - **Societal discrimination:**
  - **Stereotype threat** (students’ task performance deteriorates when negative stereotypes are communicated to them);
  - **Stigmatization** of L1/L2 language varieties
  - Low teacher expectations;
  - = Devaluation of identity reflecting coercive societal power relations.

**Gloria Ladson-Billings:**
“The problem that African-American students face is the constant devaluation of their culture both in school and in the larger society” (1995, p. 485).

- **Evidence-based instructional responses**
  - **Connect** instruction to students’ lives;
  - **Decolonize** curriculum and instruction (e.g., Indigenous students);
  - **Valorize** home language varieties;
  - **Affirm** students’ identities in association with literacy development;
  - **Enable** students to use language (L1/L2) in powerful (identity-affirming) ways;
Take away identity and what do you have?
If you have a student that doesn’t know who they are, do you think they care about what goes on in the classroom?

*Cassandra Bice-Zaugg, Mississauga of the New Credit First Nations, Ontario*
This experience gave me a gift of poetry. I started to develop a passion for poetry during this project. I didn’t know I had this passion. Since this project I have written and shared many pieces of poetry. …

Participating in this project was like hearing a collective voice telling me: ‘We are proud of you. We care about you. You have a future.’

Being able to express my thoughts about who I am as an Anishinaabekwe (an Ojibwe woman) made me feel like I belonged and was connected to a larger community. (Montero et al., 2013, p. 88)
More than simply language issues are relevant to ELs academic difficulties; many ELs come from low-income backgrounds and from socially marginalized groups.

This implies that in addition to providing language support, schools must also immerse students in a rich literacy environment and create contexts where students can use language and literacy for powerful identity-affirming purposes.
Fundamental Principle

If you want students to emerge from schooling after 12+ years as intelligent, imaginative, and linguistically talented,

then treat them as intelligent, imaginative, and linguistically talented from the first day they arrive in school.

This implies collaborative planning by teachers across the curriculum to ensure that students have opportunities to engage in intellectually challenging and creative projects in both L1 and L2 that affirm their identities as powerful language users.
... Isola and Cummins describe the processes and strategies employed by educators to transform this school into one capable of addressing the varied and complex needs of its students. Educators will appreciate the detailed nature of the analysis presented. Instead of simply offering platitudes and “research-based” practices, the authors take a practical approach in describing the obstacles the school encountered on its journey toward progress and how these were addressed. Thoughtful, insightful, and accessible, this book will be a useful resource and a helpful guide to educators who genuinely seek to make a difference.

—PEDRO A. NOGUERA, PhD
Distinguished Professor of Education, UCLA
Faculty Director, Center for the Transformation of Schools


Research Supporting the Role of Literacy Engagement

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