

Short Summary of Contribution 12287

ID: 12287

Research Networks

Keywords: adaptations, mainstream classrooms, plurilingualism/pluriculturalism, immigrant/refugee/indigenous learners, “funds of knowledge”

What’s in a name? Mainstream classroom innovations, migrant learners, and epistemological challenges

Organizer: **Shelley K. Taylor** (Western University)

This Research Network colloquium focuses on developing and supporting innovative adaptations to mainstream classrooms for learners from immigrant, refugee and indigenous backgrounds. It frames diverse “knowledgeS” as resources. Seen thus, alternative knowledges – including cultural competences and competences beyond state languages, languages used as medium of instruction, and languages seen as benefiting the global economy, and knowledge flourishing in digital spaces and practices – comprise language learners’ plurilingual/pluricultural resources. This colloquium investigates the extent to which any epistemological challenges these knowledges pose may, like good stress, be harnessed to provide opportunities for language policy-makers, educators and learners to meet the dialectical challenges of language teaching and learning, and reconfigure societal beliefs, in times of social upheaval. The colloquium presenters describe contextual constraints that serve as barriers to developing plurilingualism, pluriculturalism and (digital) literacy in mainstream classrooms; learner/teacher beliefs about, approaches to, acceptance and implementation of educational innovations and, by and large, making the linguistic, cultural and digital knowledge links needed to adapt mainstream learning environments to and for learners from immigrant, refugee and indigenous backgrounds. Educators must believe in the legitimacy and necessity of structuring innovative curriculum, assessment, language policies, and pedagogical approaches that valorize situated learning and experiential knowledge for mainstream learning environments to redesign classroom and curricular spaces. The talks presented in this symposium put a face to a name, illustrating the significance of epistemological challenges facing language teachers and learners in Canada, Colombia, Mexico, and the US. Their combined empirical research suggests that while now is a time of social upheaval, it is also a time when notions of challenges can be turned on their head and re imagined as a time of opportunity to meet societal language teaching and learning needs.

Details of the Symposium Papers

The Implications of a Grassroots Initiative for Other Multilingual Educational Spaces in Colombia

Anne-Marie Truscott de Meija, Nicole Bruskwitz

Universidad de los Andes, Colombia

With at least 68 languages present in the language ecology, Colombia is one of South America’s most linguistically diverse nations. However, over the centuries, monolingual educational policy and practice, which has imposed Spanish as the national language, has played a central role in marginalizing native linguistic and cultural practices. Over the last 25 years the Colombian governmental and legislative entities have taken several important policy decisions that aim at encouraging multilingualism. Indigenous languages were first declared co-official with Spanish in the 1991 Constitution. Later, communities’ rights to define culturally/linguistically appropriate educational practices were guaranteed through Ethnoeducation legislation (Ley 115, 1990). Despite positive efforts towards recognition and reparation for indigenous languages on the legal/policy front, communities still face challenges in realizing their intercultural bilingual education projects.

In this presentation, we will examine the extent to which the Ethnoeducation policy achieves its social justice aims in the case of the Achagua community and how far this has repercussions on mainstream education in Colombia. Findings indicate that the school communities recognize government goodwill in representing indigenous concerns and providing access to opportunities for Colombian students in the globalized world. However, there is a gap between how government and community leaders interpret the policies. In the indigenous case, educación propia does not seek to merely teach local language and knowledge, rather, interculturality is understood as an interweaving of Achagua and other languages and cultures with Spanish/Western perspectives as can be evidenced in certain innovative educational practices.

Problematizing Social Constructs: Migrant Children’s Life Stories

Mario E. López-Gopar, Edwin Nazaret León Jiménez

Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca, Mexico

Similar to North American classrooms populated by newly arrived immigrant children, Mexican classrooms include indigenous children whose families have migrated from rural communities to urban areas of Mexico. These indigenous migrant children often struggle in the current education system in Mexico (Schmelkes, 2002). Their lack of success, however, only seems apparent within the norm of school-valued literacy practices. Indigenous peoples’ multiliteracies and translanguaging practices have not been considered appropriate or valued in schools (López-Gopar, 2007; Menezes de Souza, 2003) and their life stories have been ignored in education and language policy.

This paper presents findings of a critical-ethnographic-action-research (CEAR) project conducted for the last nine years in Oaxaca, the state with the highest number of indigenous migrant children in Mexico. Drawing on theories concerning critical pedagogies (Pennycook, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2004), heteroglossic views of language (García, 2009), identity texts (Cummins, 2006), and colonial difference (Mignolo, 2000), and using children’s life stories and videos constructed from interviews, participant observations and children’s performances, this paper problematizes social constructs such as family, children’s human rights and identity markers. The paper argues that the complex lives and practices of indigenous migrant children in Mexico must be understood and taken into account by teachers, school administrators and policy makers in order to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse student population of Mexico. The findings of this paper may speak to other contexts where minoritized and migrant children face similar issues.

Exploring Relationships between Teaching Practice and Immigrant Student Learning: Case Studies from Urban Elementary Classrooms

Nancy Dubetz, Jennifer Collett

Lehman College, City University of New York

Findings are presented from a qualitative investigation into the relationship between teachers' theories of practice and immigrant student learning and identity in mainstream elementary classrooms in the United States where English is the primary instructional language. The term theory of practice is used in this study to describe the relationship between the beliefs a teacher holds about teaching and learning and her enacted practice. The research offers insights into how a teacher's theory of practice reveals a negotiation between a school's cultural norms and the needs of the multilingual immigrant learners in her classroom. Student learning is defined in the study as shifts in participation and engagement across academic, social and cultural activities. Student identity refers to students' understandings of themselves as learners in general, and more specifically as bilingual learners.

In the study, teaching and learning are explored in two classrooms where teachers use curricula published in English. The classrooms were located in two urban public schools in the same neighborhood with a large population of immigrant families. The participating teachers had at least 3 years of teaching experience and were selected based on observations of their practice in their first two years of teaching. The participating learners were students who had been identified as "English Learners" based on a standardized state-mandated language proficiency test or were "former ELs", a designation for students who have previously been identified as "English Learners" but have passed the standardized measure of English language proficiency within the last two years. Data collection occurred across an eight-month period and included field notes of bi-monthly classroom observations and multiple semi-structured interviews with each teacher and immigrant learner.

Results of the data analysis offer insights into core teaching practices that promote positive academic and language identities in immigrant learners.

Inquiry-based Pedagogies and Multimodalities: Challenges and Opportunities for Supporting English Language Learners

Margaret Early, Maureen Kendrick

University of British Columbia, Canada

Inquiry approaches that provide learning environments wherein students explore "big ideas" and form their own "essential questions" related to their personal interests and to real world issues (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) have become increasingly prominent in school districts and classrooms across Canada. These 21st Century innovative approaches that call for critical inquiry, academic and social language and literacies, and advanced digital literacies present epistemological and pedagogical challenges for mainstream (and language) teachers nationwide. This is particularly so for teachers of students from immigrant, refugee, and indigenous backgrounds and for many of the students themselves who are new to learning the wide-ranging repertoire of academic communication (Haneda, 2014) required for success in school. This presentation draws on data from an analysis of the demands of a sample of the new provincial subject-area curricula; teacher/expert interviews; and from classroom projects where English Language Learners' (ELLs) multilingual and multimodal diverse "knowledges" are framed as resources. The presentation considers the constraints, challenges, and opportunities regarding how researchers, teachers and plurilingual/pluricultural/ plurimodal students might collaboratively engage in a transformative multiliteracies (Cummins, 2009) inquiry model to support and mobilize student diversity as resources for all. Specifically, in keeping with the theme of the colloquium, we explore the extent to which the challenges that diverse "knowledges", diverse ways of knowing, and realizing knowledge (across languages and modes) pose can be harnessed to provide opportunities for multiple stakeholders to advance diverse students' individual achievement and to promote personal and societal well-being.

Challenges and Prospects in Transforming Mainstream Classrooms for English Learners: The Case of Indiana, USA

Wayne E. Wright

Purdue University, USA

Despite what we know from research about providing quality language and content-area instruction for students who are not yet proficient in the dominant language of society and schooling, most schools fall far short. In many schools such students are simply placed in regular "mainstream" classrooms and left to "sink-or-swim." This is especially true in nations and states that have historically been more homogeneous, but now face a rapidly growing linguistically and culturally diverse student population. Such is the case in the state of Indiana, located in the Midwest region of the United States of America. In this presentation I will focus on the challenges of transforming Indiana's mainstream classrooms into programs and instruction that are better suited to meeting the language and academic needs of the growing number of English language learners (ELLs) from immigrant and refugee backgrounds. Taking an interpretive policy analysis approach, data will be drawn from federal, state, and local school district policy documents; media reports; student language and academic achievement data; reports from teachers and administrators throughout the state; and observations in local schools. The findings suggest Indiana has been slow in establishing and implementing needed policies, has lacked leadership at the state and local levels, and has lacked enforcement mechanisms. However, increasing diversity, poor student performance, and Indiana's recent membership in a multi-state consortium (WIDA) to share common English language proficiency development standards and assessments are opening up new prospects for transforming the education of English language learners.

Collaborative Inquiry: Listening to Multilingual Voices to Inform Understanding of Change in Canadian Elementary Schools

Saskia Van Viegen Stille

York University, Canada

Current perspectives on language in education highlight multiple ways in which students' home languages can serve as resources for learning. This body of research demonstrates that instruction that draws on students' cultural and linguistic skills and abilities, which comprise students' "funds of knowledge", supports academic achievement, affirms students' identities, and promotes connections between home and school communities (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Cummins & Early, 2011; Dagenais, Walsh, Armand, & Maraillet, 2008 ; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Stille & Cummins, 2013; Taylor & Cutler, 2016). Engaging with these perspectives, the presentation highlights research findings relating to a recent initiative to build capacity and support professional learning among educators to meet the needs of English language learners (ELLs) at the elementary level in Ontario, Canada schools. Specifically, the initiative took a collaborative inquiry approach to facilitate teacher learning (Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008). This process of inquiry emphasized the importance of understanding multilingual students and their language and learning needs, through observation, analysis of student work, interviews with students and parents and discussion with colleagues. Drawing on data from case studies of educator teams in 16 school districts, the paper explores whether and how collaborative inquiry promoted effective professional learning and enhanced student learning. In particular, these findings suggest that engaging in collaborative inquiry shifted teacher attitudes, perspectives, and beliefs about language in education, deepened understanding of students' bilingual learning processes, and generated openness to the value of home languages and translanguaging for content curriculum learning. Implications for education policy will be discussed, including how educators might engage with the rich linguistic resources present in multicultural, multilingual classrooms to meet language, literacy and curriculum learning goals.

The Mobility of Semiotic Resources: The Case of Mexican-American Students in Mexican Schools

Colette Despagne Broxner

Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP), Mexico

After having long been a nation of emigrants to the United States, Mexico has now become a country of immigrants. Over the past ten years, mass deportations and economic crises have resulted in an important return flow of people from the United States to Mexico (Hernández-León & Zúñiga, 2016). Under the Trump government, returnees are becoming a constant focus of attention in the Mexican political agenda. Research has shown that Mexican-American returnee students are invisible in Mexican schools (Zúñiga, Hamann & Sánchez, 2008; Zúñiga & Hamann, 2013) and that they have to cope with many linguistic and identity challenges (Despagne & Jacobo, in press).

This qualitative research analyzes how twenty Mexican-American students currently studying in a public school in the central Mexican state of Puebla, who lived abroad for many years, had to shift their subject positions to adapt to Mexico's national identity developed through its centering institutions (Silverstein, 1998). The study views identities as a semiotic potential (Blommaert, 2005). It aims to analyze students' relational identities, and how they learn the new orders of indexicality once in Mexico to create a sense of belonging and succeed academically. Findings show that students shift from a position of silence to one of claims and performance. For example, at first they do not understand why they are simultaneously perceived as being "superior" yet are discriminated against for being "gringos". Once they understand Mexico's stratified indexicalities, they come to see themselves as bicultural/bilingual Mexicans with specific identities in their own right. The results indicate how Mexico's centering institutions impose a monolithic perspective of languages that students resist by drawing on their pretextualities, including their knowledge of English, as a powerful social resource; thereby developing a hidden transcript (Scott, 1990) to resist monolithic hegemonic powers in schools.

Adapting Mainstream Learning Environments to and for the Refugees of Shangri La

Shelley K. Taylor

Western University, Canada

Folk beliefs abound in discussions of educating other people's children (Delpit, 1995). One such belief holds that treating all children 'the same' provides them all with equal access to resources and equitable instruction; internationally however, instruction based on the equality principle, and assimilationist educational policies, has resulted in educational inequities (Noar, 1974; DES, 1985; Schierup, 1991). Furthermore, 'treating them all the same' has led some (dominant group) educators to develop stereotypical or ill-formed classifications of minority language children, and to ignore their linguistic, cultural and social 'funds of knowledge' (Biggs & Edwards, 1991; Moll & González, 1997; Stewart, 2015). Another set of beliefs distinguishes between 'good' and 'bad' language learners without investigating their L2 teaching/learning environments. The qualitative case study reported on in this talk investigates how teachers define their roles—including their stance towards children's background knowledges (Cummins, 1996 & 2015), and how they shape their pedagogy and orchestrate learning environments for all, but particularly for Nepali-Bhutanese refugee youths newly arrived in Canada. Bramante and Weinfurter (2013) have referred to this group as 'the refugees of Shangri La.' Ways in which the teachers in this study drew on the linguistic and sociocultural knowledge the children gained while growing up in refugee camps, and framed their identities in empowering ways are discussed (Cummins & Early, 2011). The findings suggest that educators who frame children's (alternative) traditional indigenous knowledges as key resources, and adapt classroom learning environments to draw on refugee children's distinct background knowledge while creating bridges to curricular matter teaching contribute to their socioemotional well-being, engagement and learning outcomes (Bond et al., 2007).