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Editorial

Necessary Paradigm Shifts in Bilingual Education: Rethinking Language

Aida A. Nevárez-La Torre

Editor

Increasingly, scholarly publications assert the impact of movements like globalization and technology in the way schooling is done and the way we interpret teaching and learning nationally. In my estimation, less visible have been conversations among educational scholars and practitioners about the complex nature of language diversity in a global and technological advanced era and its implications for capturing multifaceted interrelationships among language, culture, and learning.

To promote these types of dialogues within multilingual contexts, I am writing a series of three editorials, the first one of which is published in this volume, identifying some of the novel theoretical conceptualizations and research-based advances in re-envisioning the pedagogy of multilingualism and multilingual literacy. My goal is that *JMER's* readership, as well as other bilingual educators across New York and the nation, begin to problematize these advances as a path to take ownership of their implementation and use in multilingual schools. Echoing García's (2010) view, contemporary bilingual education needs to evolve from approaches that are founded on linear and mono dimensional schemes to innovative models (Muller & Baetens Beardsmore, 2004) that consider learning and teaching in more than one language as multidimensional and dynamic processes.

The editorial series explores *paradigm shifts* necessary to achieve transformative education and to embrace visionary ways to teach, to promote students' learning, and to self-direct ongoing professional growth in the field of bilingual education. As the editorials are read, I invite educators to create spaces where teaching, learning, and professional development are designed to respond to the exigencies of a globalized, technological, multilingual, and multiliterate world.

Discussion #1 - Rethinking Language in Bilingual Education

An increasing number of investigations about language, in terms of its structure, use, and function, have uncovered innovative explanations that challenge entrenched beliefs about efficient ways to teach and learn it. Specifically, García (2009) argues for a *linguistic paradigm shift* that actualizes new interpretations of *communication* using one or multiple linguistic repertoires. Canagarajah (2013) expands on this issue by explaining that communication transcends individual languages and words. It is a

process of combining language with other “symbol systems (i.e., icons, images), diverse modalities of communication (i.e., aural oral, visual, and tactile), and environmental resources (i.e., social and material contexts)” to create meaning (p. 1). At present, transferring ideas is done utilizing different and inventive devices and mechanisms which alter inert notions of when, where, and how communication and learning can happen.

The fluid use of different linguistic repertoires is not foreign to this recent interpretation of communication. Various codes, dialects, and discourses are part of *linguaging* practices implemented by learners to make sense of what they experience (García, 2009). Thus, rather than favor the *separation of languages* as the accepted practice in language teaching, scholars propose that languages in authentic settings are *mixed* (code mixing), *switched* (code switching), *shifted* (code shifting) and *meshed* (code meshing) by teachers and learners so that they may use all the available linguistic capital they have to create and convey meaning (Canagarajah, 2013; de Jong, 2011; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Maurais & Morris, 2003; Myers-Scotton, 2006).

These more authentic ways of understanding language, suggest fertile proposals for how to interact and communicate knowledge in multilingual teaching and learning contexts. The integration of social and academic linguaging practices are proposed as scaffolds for learning content across languages. A basic argument put forth is that the rich and elaborate ways that languages are used in emergent bilinguals’ lives outside school should be mirrored in the classroom (Cook, 2001; García & Sylvan, 2011; Zentella, 1997).

Bilingualism and *multilingualism* are concepts that lead us to reflect on the multiple ways we speak and communicate on a daily basis and their significance for our cultural and linguistic identities (de Jong, 2011). Viewing them as a continuum reminds us that “language learning is a continuous developmental process that occurs throughout a lifetime and is recursive and circular” (García, 2009, p. 59). To be clear, these researchers contend that language practices among bilinguals and multilinguals are multifaceted and interrelated and are not always simply linear. Consequently, some argue in favor of schooling approaching bilingualism and multilingualism not purely as linguistic events, but as observable communicative practices across languages that speakers employ (Jorgensen, 2008).

de Jong (2011) elucidates that if we agree that the education for all students should be grounded on their strengths (what they know and are able to do) then, it follows that instruction should encompass forms of *hybrid language use* that serve to create meaning in organized ways. *Translanguaging* (García, 2009) and *translingualism* (Canagarajah, 2012), constructs centered on this understanding, should be adopted as guiding principles of enacted language policies in classrooms and schools. All these terms validate different ways to integrate more than one language to communicate meaningfully within multilingual settings.

Consider, for instance, that this view is applied as an instructional strategy to develop and reinforce learners’ first and second (third, fourth, or fifth) language while learning content (Conteh, Martin, & Robertson, 2007). Creese & Blackledge (2010) signify that it is not uncommon to observe classrooms in Europe where learning is

processed in multiple languages simply by teachers discussing the subject matter in one language and students writing it in another. Celic (2012) suggests using other strategies to teach translingually, such as, implementing multilingual read alouds, multilingual word walls, multilingual writing references, multilingual graphic organizers, multilingual books, Google Translate, and reading thematically in multiple languages. Jordan, 1995 (as cited in de Jong, 2011) highlights the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) as productive in positively impacting student achievement. (KEEP was a language arts program designed for underachieving native Hawaiian children implemented in the 1970's.) One effective practice their educators implemented was when they "learned to match their talk more closely to the ways children were used to interacting with adults at home" (p. 120). Also see Arthur & Martin (2006), Kamwangamalu (2010), and Lin & Martin (2005), for excellent discussions of research that explores codeswitching as a promising instructional practice in multilingual classrooms.

Given contemporary multiple nuances in interpreting language and its use in multilingual school contexts presented above, educators should embrace analyzing the conditions for effective application to support the learning process in more than one language. In rethinking language in bilingual education readers may ponder on these questions and discuss them with colleagues:

1. What is your stance on the best way to teach languages and to teach content through languages?
2. What has influenced your thinking and practice in adopting this stance?
3. Consider some of the scholarly discussions regarding language presented here. How do they support/challenge language use in your classroom and school?
4. How can rethinking language in your bilingual classroom and school enhance your students' development of languages, learning of academic content, and communication of ideas and knowledge?
5. How can you, as a language decision maker (de Jong, 2011), influence change so that bilingual education integrates the use of multiple languages in authentic and dynamic ways to benefit the learning process of all emergent bilinguals in your educational context?

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