




2021

Socio-cultural and Educational Aspects of Multilingual Multicultural Learners and Communities

Miriam Eisenstein Ebsworth
NYU Steinhardt, miriam.ebsworth@nyu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://research.library.fordham.edu/jmer>

 Part of the [Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ebsworth, Miriam Eisenstein (2021) "Socio-cultural and Educational Aspects of Multilingual Multicultural Learners and Communities," *Journal of Multilingual Education Research*: Vol. 11 , Article 2.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5422/jmer.2021.v11.5-8>

Available at: <https://research.library.fordham.edu/jmer/vol11/iss1/2>

This Editorial is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Fordham Research Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Multilingual Education Research by an authorized editor of Fordham Research Commons. For more information, please contact considine@fordham.edu, bkilee@fordham.edu.



Socio-cultural and Educational Aspects of Multilingual Multicultural Learners and Communities

Cover Page Footnote

Acknowledgment:

Special appreciation to Dr. Chencen Cai for technical and editorial support through the evolution of this special volume of JMER.

About the Author:

Miriam Eisenstein Ebsworth, PhD, is Associate Professor of English Education in the Multilingual Multicultural Studies unit of NYU Steinhardt where she also serves as Academic Director of the International Spouses English Program. Dr. Ebsworth is a member of the Executive Board of the National Association for Bilingual Education. She is co-editor of the text, *Language Maintenance, Revival and Shift in the Sociology of Language and Religion* and was research editor of *Writing and Pedagogy*. Her research interests include language learning and technology, language variation, second language writing, and intercultural pragmatics.

Editorial

Socio-cultural and Educational Aspects of Multilingual Multicultural Learners and Communities

Miriam Eisenstein Ebsworth, Guest Editor
New York University Steinhardt

Keywords: multilingual education, multilingual multicultural learners

In our “post-truth world,” (Peters, 2017), the importance of educational approaches based on research and equity cannot be overstated. Concomitantly, the question of how to support multilingual learners’ academic and psycho-social development successfully and compassionately continues to engender controversy in political and educational fora. While research overwhelmingly favors the use of the first language and a bilingual approach in teaching multilingual learners, many continue to oppose it, with views reported in the media dramatically less positive than the science would indicate (Lewis & Davies, 2018). Indeed, as Chinn, Barzilai and Duncan (2021) urge, we must accept the challenge of breakdowns in how we understand and analyze educational issues and develop “new directions for research and practice” (p. 51).

This volume of *JMER* represents a research-based consideration of several elements of language acquisition and use and seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how multilingual learners acquire and apply their knowledge of language and culture. Inspired by presentations at the annual Research Institute of the National Association for Bilingual Education, each paper addresses the process of how teachers, teachers in training, and/or multilingual learners can understand and enhance their development of communicative competence defined broadly as they approach an additional “languaculture” (Agar, 2006).

The three research-focused articles presented here each address learners of contrasting ages and backgrounds and incorporate teacher and/or learner voices as well as those of the researcher(s). Ebsworth, Ebsworth, and Cai (2021) use the lens of a critical incident to explore how university students from China confront a face threatening situation involving gossip. This sensitive dilemma is drawn from the participants’ experiences and uses a mixed design to capture contrasts in how the Chinese students and their American peers weigh alternative strategies and their implications. What is our responsibility to a friend who is not present about whom

others are gossiping? How do we balance honesty and sensitivity while considering the feelings of others in the group? There is no glossary of semantic formulas that will answer this question. Rather, teachers and learners must become researchers and observers of intercultural pragmatics. Individuals will resolve for themselves how to balance their own sense of what is “right” with how what they say may be interpreted by a member of a different sociolinguistic community. The interview portion of this research reveals how responses to such critical incidents encode socio-cultural norms and values along with their potential for either contributing to pragmatic failure or building bridges of understanding.

Young multicultural learners are the focus of Wu and Opstad’s (2021) study of “satellite children” (Bohr & Tse, 2009) who have been encultured in China by family members and then find themselves in the United States with their parents. These vulnerable youngsters require extraordinary understanding as they transition to a completely new existence, language, educational, and social universe. The insights offered by this research are invaluable not only for teachers and researchers but also to provide insights for building parental and community awareness of the support needed by children and families. If “it takes a village,” (Clinton, 1996) what are the roles of parents versus those of the extended family? How can all involved help ease the children’s transitions, both in advance of travel and once they have arrived? How can we use the affordances of technology to continue the contact with those who initially raised them? How can all stakeholders become positively engaged in this process?

Hurwich’s (2021) research looks at young high school women and their responses to biblical female figures when they are encountered through graphic novels as opposed to traditional biblical settings. How can such students be encouraged to utilize their agency to look critically at gender roles? While all reading involves a transaction between reader and writer (MacMillan, 2014), this special context adds a critical cultural and religious dimension. Presentation in the graphic novel format may allow young women to look at text more creatively and interactively. The implications of this work go far beyond the particular population and setting presented here by problematizing the issue of textual authority and the role of the second language reader in making meaning. Broader questions include: What do we do as a secular culture when gender roles prescribed through religious and cultural authority may be in conflict with values of equality in the secular world? How do such insights help us to transcend religious, cultural, and national boundaries while remaining respectful of cultural diversity?

The two practice-focused articles are also grounded in research. Zhou’s (2021) study considers what happens when a teacher is told to use a total immersion approach to teach content to students whose target language knowledge is insufficient to provide them with comprehensible input (Krashen, 2013). The “dual language” label of the program does not reveal its internal conflicts. This case study highlights the courage of a teacher who privileges students’ learning over institutional policy and uses a translanguaging approach (García et al., 2017) to help learners successfully understand complex content through their first language as underpinning to acquiring the needed information while learning how to use the target language to encode the content. Again, this issue transcends the specific setting and adds data-based support to the use of a

translanguaging approach so that learners can successfully draw on all resources to make meaning in both their first and second languages. It also concerns the dilemmas often faced by teachers when their experience, care for their learners, and basic common-sense contrast with policy that is simply not working (Harper & de Jong, 2009).

Cardenas Curiel and Ponzio's (2021) micro-ethnographic study also echoes the centrality of meaning in acquiring second language skills. In this case, an authentic genre-based form is used as an anchor for learners in developing their second language writing through an adaptation of the Writers' Workshop model (Calkins & Hartman, 2013) and the use of multimodal scaffolding to develop background knowledge. Learners were challenged to be creative while exploring a culturally embedded discourse event as a form of expression, namely a literary calavera, an authentic Latino Spanish poetic form focused on a deceased individual associated with The Day of the Dead. Students were invited to enter the framework of the holiday through a multimedia approach, incorporating video and shared experiences to build background knowledge. Taking advantage of peer support and scaffolding, students drew a concept map reflecting this context that led to their creation of authentic texts in their second language. This paper illustrates the power of multimedia to engage learners and build background knowledge relevant to a discourse form associated with the holiday while taking advantage of support offered by peer interaction and translanguaging, and the production of a concept map as a visual representation of shared understanding.

Finally, Martinez (2021) positively reviews the film series directed and produced by Kleyn (2019), *Supporting Immigrants in Schools* and the associated resource guide, also developed by Kleyn (2019). The films: *Key Immigration Issues*, *Approaches to Educating Refugees and Immigrants*, *Immigration in Elementary Schools*, and *Immigration in Secondary Schools* highlight the voices of the students and their teachers, recent immigrants, and dreamers, providing a window to appreciate this vulnerable population. As explained by Martinez, the series is an invaluable tool to deepen our understanding as practitioners, leaders, and researchers while offering resources and practical suggestions for the development of culturally sustaining, psycho-socially sensitive, and trauma-informed pedagogy and interaction (Castellanos, 2018).

References

- Agar, M. (2006). Culture: Can you take it anywhere? *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(2), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500201>
- Bohr, Y., & Tse, C. (2009). Satellite babies in transnational families: A study of parents' decision to separate from their infants. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 30(3), 265-286. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.20214>
- Calkins, L., & Hartman, A. (2013). *Launching the writing workshop*. Firsthand.
- Castellanos, F. (2018). *Teaching refugee children: Increasing teacher self-efficacy through trauma-informed trainings*. [Masters report, University of Texas at Austin, Texas.]
- Chinn, C. A., Barzilai, S., & Duncan, R. G. (2021). Education for a 'post-truth' world: New directions for research and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 50(1), 51-60. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20940683>

- Clinton, H. R. (1996). *It takes a village: And other lessons children teach us*. Simon & Schuster.
- Curiel, L. C., & Ponzio, C. M. (2021). Imagining multimodal and translanguaging possibilities for authentic cultural writing experiences. *Journal of Multilingual Education Research*, 11, 79-102. <https://doi.org/10.5422/jmer.2021.v11.79-102>
- Ebsworth, M. E., Ebsworth, T. J., & Cai, C. (2021). Everybody does it: The pragmatics and perceptions of international Chinese graduate students and their American peers regarding gossip, *Journal of Multilingual Education Research*, 11, 9-34. <https://doi.org/10.5422/jmer.2021.v11.9-34>
- García, O., Johnson, S. I., & Seltzer, K. (2017). *The translanguaging classroom: Leveraging student bilingualism for learning*. Caslon.
- Harper, C. A., & de Jong, E. J. (2009). English language teacher expertise: The elephant in the room. *Language and Education*, 23(2), 137-151. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500780802152788>
- Hurwich, T. (2021). "It kind of shows the terrible morality of this scene": Using graphic novels to encourage feminist readings of Jewish Hebrew texts with religious significance. *Journal of Multilingual Education Research*, 11, 59-78. <https://doi.org/10.5422/jmer.2021.v11.59-78>
- Kleyn, T. (2019). *Supporting immigrants in schools*. The City College of New York and the New York State Education Department. <https://www.cunyie.org/videos>
- Kleyn, T. (Ed.). (2019). *Supporting immigrants in schools: Resource Guide*. The City College of New York and New York State Education Department. 54p. Available as download from <https://cuny-ije.org>
- Krashen, S. (2013) The case for non-targeted, comprehensible input. *Journal of Bilingual Education Research & Instruction*, 15(1), 102-110.
- Lewis, K., & Davies, I. (2018). Understanding media opinion on bilingual education in the United States. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 17(4), 40-67.
- MacMillan, M. (2014). Student connections with academic texts: A phenomenographic study of reading. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 19(8), 943-954. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2014.934345>
- Martínez, P. D. (2021). Education as advocacy: The foundations of support for immigrant youth, *Journal of Multilingual Education Research*, 11, 134-143. <https://doi.org/10.5422/jmer.2021.v11.134-143>
- Peters, M. A. (2017). Education in a post-truth world. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 49(6), 563-566. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2016.1264114>
- Wu, M-H., & Opstad, S. L. (2021). Changing worlds, changing classrooms: Satellite children and their teachers in the transnational era, *Journal of Multilingual Education Research*, 11, 35-57. <https://doi.org/10.5422/jmer.2021.v11.35-57>
- Zhou, X. (2021). On the road to translanguaging in a dual language classroom: Teaching math and science In Mandarin and English, *Journal of Multilingual Education Research*, 11, 103-131. <https://doi.org/10.5422/jmer.2021.v11.103-131>