Featured Article

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Teaching for Transformation: What Does It Mean for English Language Arts in a Multilingual School Context?

During the past 20 years, schools in North America and elsewhere throughout the world have been transformed by demographic and technological changes. The demographic changes reflect the fact that the movement of populations from one country to another is at an all-time high in human history. Population mobility is caused by many factors: desire for better economic conditions, the need for labor in many countries that are experiencing low birth rates, a constant flow of refugees resulting from conflicts between groups, oppression of one group by another, or ecological disasters. Demographic statistics from Texas illustrate the dramatic changes that are taking place and their impact on schools. For example, in the 2010/2011 school year, there were almost 2.5 million Hispanic students in Texas schools, representing 50.2% of total enrollment. A large majority (91%) of English language learners in Texas schools report Spanish as their first language (L1), but 120 different home languages are represented among the student body (http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=4537). In the United States as a whole, data for 2007 show that 21% of school children spoke a language other than English at home and about one in four of them had difficulty with English, according to their parents (http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010015/).

The explosion of digital technologies in recent years has similarly transformed how we gain access to information and communicate with each other. Access to computers is increasingly available in schools serving students from all income levels, and cell phone communication (voice and texting) is now the norm among adolescents. However, despite increased access to digital technologies across social and income levels, there is still no consensus among educators or policy-makers about *how* these new technologies can be harnessed effectively to improve academic achievement, particularly among low-income students. Larry Cuban's (2001) caution that computers in schools were being "oversold and underused" still rings true a decade later. The fact that there has been virtually no change in the achievement gap between income and social groups despite dramatically increased availability of powerful new technologies in schools suggests that the problem lies not with the technology but with the pedagogy to which it is being integrated. Powerful technologies need to be aligned with powerful pedagogies if students' learning experiences are to be transformed.

My goal in this paper is to address the challenges and opportunities that these demographic and technological changes entail for the teaching of English language arts in schools. I argue that little progress has been made in closing the achievement gap, despite a major focus on educational reform during the past 20 years, because policy has been dominated by ideological assumptions rather than by empirical evidence. These ideological assumptions have given rise to evidence-free pedagogical approaches for low-income and minority

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group students that frequently fail to ignite imagination or inspire engagement with learning. On the basis of the research evidence in three areas, I suggest a pedagogical framework that addresses the causes of underachievement among low-income and minority group students and proposes instructional interventions that can reverse patterns of underachievement. In the next section, the concept of *evidence-free policy-making* is illustrated by three examples of recent U.S. policy initiatives.

Examples of Evidence-Free Policy-Making

Intensive Standardized Testing

Many commentators have expressed concern that high-stakes standardized tests have come to dominate curriculum and instruction in U.S. schools as a result of the requirement within the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation to test virtually all students between Grades 3 and 8 (see, for example, Beers and Probst, 2010). Within the current policy framework, standardized tests represent a central tool for assessing the extent to which subgroups of students have made adequate yearly progress (AYP). If students in the school as a whole, or any subgroup of students (e.g., English language learners [ELLs], African-Americans, free- and reduced-lunch students, etc.), fail to demonstrate consistent progress toward grade norms on a yearly basis, policy-makers have at their disposal a variety of corrective measures, the most drastic of which is dismissing the school principal and the entire school staff. The impact of this policy can be illustrated by the account of Ryan Monroe (2006), an ESL teacher in a Maryland public school, who calculated that during the 2004/2005 school year, ELL students in the fifth grade classroom where he taught took five different standardized tests, some of them more than once. He noted the instructional consequences: “During the course of the year, my students missed 33 days of ESL classes, or about 18% of their English instruction, due to standardized testing” (p. 1). This figure does not include the 20-60 days per year that schools typically spend on standardized test preparation (Berliner, 2009).

These policies have been implemented in the absence of any evidence that standardized testing contributes to academic performance or effective school reform. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] (2010a), for example, reports an association between school achievement and standards-based external examinations, but their data do “not show the prevalence of standardised tests to be systematically related to performance” (p. 50). Similarly, a recent comprehensive review of test-based accountability programs such as NCLB found that “test-based incentive programs have not increased student achievement enough to bring the United States close to the levels of the highest achieving countries” (Hout & Elliott, 2011, p. 4-26). Finally, a report that compared educational reform initiatives in the United States with those in countries whose students performed significantly higher in international comparisons found that none of the high-achieving countries had grade-by-grade standardized testing, and it recommended that such testing be decreased by choosing only a few grade levels for accountability tests (Tucker, 2011).

In short, there is no evidence that the implementation of intensive high-stakes testing within the United States boosts student achievement. Thus, funds allocated to the purchase of standardized tests (largely on the basis of ideological conviction) might be more effectively allocated to the promotion of instructional strategies that do have empirical credibility for promoting literacy achievement.

Teaching English Language Learners

Evidence-free policy-making in relation to ELL students is most obvious in the failure to acknowledge the time periods typically required for ELL students to catch up academically to their peers. Under NCLB, ELL students have been exempted from testing only in their first year of learning English. After that period, their scores have been interpreted, along with the scores of other students, as reflective of the quality of instruction in a particular school. This policy is inconsistent with the findings of numerous studies demonstrating that at least five years (and frequently longer) are typically required for ELL students to approach grade norms in reading achievement and other academic areas that are dependent on language proficiency (e.g., Collier, 1987; Cummins, 1981; Hakuta, Butler & Witt, 2000; Klesmer, 1994). Shanahan and Beck (2006) similarly note the differences in acquisition trajectories for word reading as compared to text reading skills for ELL students, stating that “although language-minority students and their native-speaking peers perform at similar levels on measures of phonological processing and word reading, their performance on measures of comprehension falls far below their native-speaking peers” (p. 447).

These trajectories have major implications for policy and classroom practice. For example, Proposition 227, passed in California in 1998, was premised on the assumption that one year of intensive English instruction would be sufficient to enable ELL students to integrate into mainstream classrooms with minimal additional support. In fact, research on the effects of Proposition 227 found that after three years of instruction, only 12% of ELL students in California had acquired sufficient academic English to be re-designated as English-proficient (Parrish et al., 2006).

Thus, ELL students' "underachievement" on English-language tests administered during the period when they are on the normal catch-up trajectory reveals nothing about the quality of instruction they have received; the data simply reflect the time periods required to catch up academically, even under very favorable educational conditions. Yet, policy implemented in the context of NCLB routinely interprets this pattern as a failure of schools and teachers. The consequences of this evidence-free policy-making are low morale among teachers and increased test preparation to enable the school to meet AYP criteria (Beers & Probst, 2010).

Literacy Instruction

Issues related to reading instruction have been controversial in many countries for decades. In the United States, the report of the National Reading Panel [NRP] (2000) ignited the most recent set of controversies about this issue. Established by the U.S. Congress in 1997, the NRP was mandated to review the scientific research on reading instruction and to articulate the implications of that research for improving students' reading achievement. The panel analyzed the experimental and quasi-experimental research literature judged to be of central importance in teaching students to read. A major finding of the NRP was that there is "strong evidence substantiating the impact of systematic phonics instruction on learning to read" (p. 2-132). The hallmark of systematic phonics programs, according to the NRP, "is that they delineate a planned, sequential set of phonic elements, and they teach these elements, explicitly and systematically" (p. 2-99).

However, much less attention was paid to another finding of the NRP, namely that systematic phonics instruction was *unrelated* to the development of reading comprehension among normally achieving and low-achieving students after Grade 1 (see Cummins, 2007, for a review). Despite the lack of relationship between systematic phonics instruction and reading comprehension after Grade 1, the federal government's $6 billion Reading First program predominantly funded interventions for low-income students that relied heavily on systematic phonics, frequently delivered through scripted programs. Phonics programs that were deemed by Reading First adjudication panels as too "balanced" (e.g., because they included an active focus on writing and the provision of classroom libraries) were denied funding (see Cummins, 2007, for documentation). Not surprisingly, the *Reading First Impact Study* (Gamse et al., 2008) reported no impact of Reading First on reading comprehension or reading engagement among students in Grades 1, 2, or 3. Subsequent data from the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) similarly showed virtually no improvement in reading comprehension performance among students at Grades 4 and 8 despite the massive infusion of funds through Reading First in the preceding years (Institute for Educational Sciences, 2010).

An evidence-based approach to policy-making would have acknowledged that decoding skills are probably a necessary condition, but (based on the empirical data) clearly not a sufficient condition for the development of reading comprehension. As noted below, there is considerable research pointing toward the roles of print access and literacy engagement as causal factors in the development of reading comprehension. This research has been largely ignored by policy-makers up to this point, resulting in pedagogy for low-income and minority group students that has failed to promote literacy skills or close the achievement gap.

In the next section, I contrast three broad orientations to pedagogy with the intent of clarifying the notion of "transformative education."

Pedagogical Orientations

Various orientations to pedagogy can be distinguished in the extensive literature on teaching that has accrued during the past century (Dewey, 1963; Freire, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). Different terms have been used by different theorists, and the pedagogical options have frequently been discussed as oppositional binaries (e.g., teacher-centered versus child-centered instruction; traditional versus progressivist pedagogy; phonics versus whole-language, etc). The range of pedagogical options that has been proposed in the literature can be captured by distinguishing among transmission, social constructivist, and transformative orientations (Cummins, 2004; Skourtou, Kourtis-Kazoullis & Cummins, 2006). These three pedagogical orientations are nested within each other rather than distinct and isolated from each other (see Figure 1).

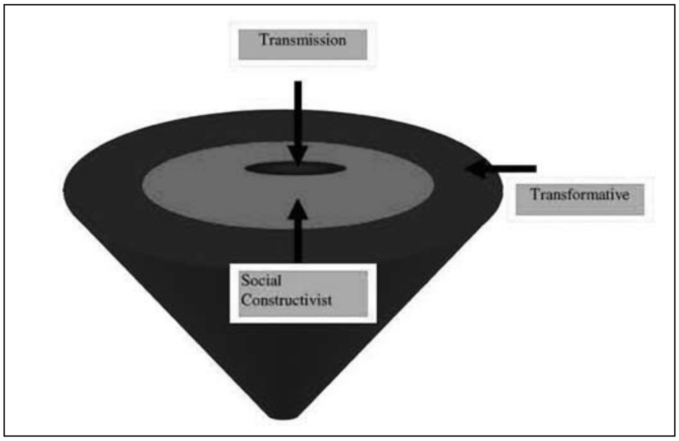

Figure 1. Nested pedagogical orientations.
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Transmission-oriented pedagogy is represented in the inner circle with the narrowest focus. The goal is to transmit information and skills specified in curriculum (and in tests) directly to students. The importance of activating students' prior knowledge and developing learning strategies may be acknowledged within transmission or direct instruction approaches. However, in practice, activation of students' prior knowledge is often operationally defined as revisiting content and skills that were taught in previous lessons. Similarly, learning-strategy instruction tends to be narrowly focused on the content of particular lessons rather than integrated into a broader process of collaborative inquiry and knowledge generation.

Social constructivist pedagogy, occupying the middle pedagogical space, acknowledges the relevance of transmission of information and skills but broadens this focus to include the development among students of higher-order thinking abilities based on teachers and students co-constructing knowledge and understanding. The focus is on experiential learning, collaborative inquiry, and knowledge building.

Finally, transformative approaches to pedagogy broaden the focus still further by emphasizing the relevance not only of transmitting the curriculum and constructing knowledge but also of enabling students to gain insight into how knowledge intersects with power. Transformative pedagogy uses collaborative critical inquiry to enable students to analyze and understand the social realities of their own lives and of their communities. Students discuss, and frequently act on, ways in which these realities might be transformed through various forms of social action. Students are focused on *generating knowledge* rather than simply learning curriculum content. They use technology creatively to shape and communicate their intellectual work by means of iMovies, e-Books, electronic newsletters, webpages, and so forth. The pedagogical goal is to promote critical literacy among students with a focus on social realities relevant to issues of equity and social justice. Transformative approaches typically draw their inspiration from the work of Freire (1970), while also acknowledging the important influence of Vygotsky (1978).

The rationale for nesting these orientations within each other is to highlight the fact that features of transmission pedagogy are relevant to all kinds of learning. Both in classrooms that are clearly transmission-orientated as well as in communities of critical inquiry among students and teachers, explicit instruction and structured guidelines can play an important role in effective teaching and learning. Transmission of information and skills becomes problematic only when it constitutes the predominant or even exclusive focus of instruction. Exclusive reliance on transmission pedagogy is likely to entail promotion of memorization rather than learning for deep understanding, passive rather than active learning, and minimal activation of students' prior knowledge. Similarly, a transformative orientation is not in any way opposed either to transmission of curriculum content or the co-construction of knowledge between teachers and students. Rather it builds on and expands transmission and social constructivist approaches in order to pursue a wider variety of pedagogical goals and a broader educational vision.

These pedagogical orientations are relevant to current educational reform debates in the United States because there is clear evidence of an increasing pedagogical divide (Cummins, 2007). Low-income students are subjected to predominantly transmission forms of pedagogy oriented toward test preparation and "making AYP," whereas there is less pressure on teachers of middle-income students to "make AYP" because these students are perceived to be less "at risk." As a result, there is more scope for social constructivist and sometimes transformative approaches to pedagogy within schools serving students from more affluent backgrounds. This can be illustrated in the pedagogical philosophy expressed by the Sidwell Friends Middle School in Washington, DC, attended by President Obama's children:

- The rigorous curriculum focuses on basic skills, a disciplined manner of inquiry, individual creativity, and good study habits. Students are encouraged to cooperate rather than to compete and to share their special gifts and talents. (http://www.sidwell.edu/lower_school/academics.asp)

- The School also emphasizes the "frequent discussions of issues of equality, peace, and social justice in our classrooms." (http://www.sidwell.edu/middle_school/lifeinms.asp)

This emphasis on inquiry, creativity, cooperation, and identification of student talents, together with a focus on equality, peace, and social justice are totally absent from the NCLB pedagogical prescriptions. In many schools serving "at risk" low-income and minority group students, these initiatives would be seen as "off-task behavior" because this content is unlikely to appear on standardized tests.

The pedagogical divide entails diametrically opposite images of the student embedded in curriculum and instruction. Students in schools such as Sidwell Friends are seen as capable of rigorous intellectual inquiry, creativity, and engagement with moral and ethical issues. Students internalize this image of who they are and what they are capable of. In contrast, a very different set of messages is typically communicated to students whose education is focused primarily on enabling them to make AYP. For these students, little has changed since Kenneth Sirotnik (1983), on the basis of the findings of John Goodlad's (1984) national survey of American schools, noted that the typical American classroom contained the following:

> a lot of teacher talk and a lot of student listening ... almost invariably closed and factual questions ... and predominantly total class instructional configurations around traditional activities—all in a virtually affectless environment. It is but a short inferential leap to suggest that we are implicitly teaching dependence upon authority, linear thinking, social apathy, passive involvement, and hands-off learning. (1983, p. 29)

How did we end up with a pedagogical divide that few educators, policy-makers, or researchers would explicitly support or endorse? Among the factors that have resulted in this unfortunate state of affairs is the fact that policy-makers have subordinated empirical data to ideological conviction. Thus, a first step in transforming the educational prospects of low-income and minority group students is for policy-makers to pay more than lip service to the research evidence. Specifically, three sets of research findings are of paramount importance for understanding patterns of literacy achievement. These findings relate to (a) the nature of academic language, (b) the causal role of print access/literacy engagement in the development of reading comprehension, and (c) the importance of identity affirmation in promoting literacy engagement among minority group students. These findings are briefly explained in the following sections.

The Knowledge Base for Transformative Education

The nature of academic language. It is important for policy-makers and educators to distinguish three dimensions of proficiency in a language: *conversational fluency*, *discrete language skills,* and *academic language proficiency* (Cummins, 2001). These dimensions of proficiency follow very different developmental paths among both second language learners and native-speaking students, and each responds differently to particular kinds of instructional practices in school.

Conversational fluency represents the ability to carry on a conversation in familiar face-to-face situations. The vast majority of native speakers of English have developed conversational fluency when they enter school at age 5. This fluency involves use of high-frequency words and simple grammatical constructions. ELL students generally develop fluency in conversational aspects of English within a year or two of intensive exposure to the language either in school or in the environment.

Discrete language skills reflect specific phonological, literacy, and grammatical knowledge that students can acquire in two ways: (a) through explicit instruction; (b) through immersion in a literacy- and language-rich environment either in home or in school. Students exposed to a literacy-rich environment in the home generally acquire initial literacy-related skills, such as phonological awareness and letter-sound correspondences, with minimal difficulty in the early grades of schooling. ELL students can learn these specific language skills associated with word reading concurrently with their development of basic vocabulary and conversational fluency. However, little direct transference to other aspects of language proficiency such as linguistic concepts, vocabulary, sentence memory, and word memory is observed (Geva, 2000). These dimensions of proficiency are more related to the development of academic language skills.

Academic language proficiency includes knowledge of the less frequent vocabulary of English as well as the ability to interpret and produce increasingly complex written language. As students progress through the grades, they encounter far more low-frequency words (primarily from Greek and Latin sources), complex syntax (e.g., passives), and abstract expressions that are virtually never heard in everyday conversation. Students are required to understand linguistically and conceptually demanding texts in the content areas (e.g., literature, social studies, science, mathematics) and to use this language in an accurate and coherent way in their own writing. The nature of academic text and its distance from conversational language is clearly expressed by Corson (1997):

> Academic Graeco-Latin words are mainly literary in their use. Most native speakers of English begin to encounter these words in quantity in their upper primary school reading and in the formal secondary school setting. So the words' introduction in literature or textbooks, rather than in conversation, restricts people's access to them. Certainly, exposure to specialist Graeco-Latin words happens much more often while reading than while talking or watching television.... Printed texts provided much more exposure to [Graeco-Latin] words than oral ones. For example, even children's books contained 50% more rare words than either adult prime-time television or the conversations of university graduates; popular magazines had three times as many rare words as television and informal conversation. (p. 677)

In a similar vein, Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin (1990) have pointed to the increasing linguistic demands of the curriculum as students progress through the elementary grades. They note that at Grade 4 and beyond, "the reading materials become more complex, technical, and abstract and are beyond the everyday experiences of most children" (p. 45). But in the earlier grades, vocabulary and reading tests assess students' knowledge of common, familiar, and concrete words. Chall et al. (1990) note the following:

> Whereas the major hurdles prior to grade 4 are learning to recognize in print the thousands of words whose meanings are already known and reading these fluently in connected texts with comprehension, the hurdle of grade 4 and beyond is coping with increasingly complex language and thought. (p. 45)

Acquiring academic language is challenging for all students. The longer period of time typically required by ELL students to catch up academically to their peers in comparison to the catch-up trajectories for conversational fluency and the discrete language skills can be attributed (a) to the complexity of academic language and (b) to the fact that ELL students are attempting to catch up to a moving target. Native-speakers of English are also advancing every year in their knowledge of vocabulary and reading and writing skills.

If academic language is found primarily in printed texts, then it is hardly surprising that reading extensively in a wide variety of genres is essential for developing high levels of both vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension (Krashen, 2004; Lindsay, 2010). The research supporting this reality is considered in the next section.

The role of print access/literacy engagement in promoting reading comprehension. Guthrie (2004) notes that the construct of literacy engagement incorporates notions of time on task (reading extensively), affect (enthusiasm and enjoyment of literacy), depth of cognitive processing (strategies to deepen comprehension), and active pursuit of literacy activities (amount and diversity of literacy practices in and out of school). He points out that engaged readers are active and energized in reading and use their minds with an emphasis on either cognitive strategies or conceptual knowledge. Furthermore, he notes that engaged reading is often socially interactive insofar as engaged students are capable of discussion or sharing with friends despite the fact that much of their reading may be solitary.

The research basis for specifying print access/literacy engagement as a strong predictor of literacy achievement comes from numerous studies showing strong relationships between reading comprehension and both access to print and extensive reading (for reviews see Krashen, 2004; Lindsay, 2010) as well as the large-scale data from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The PISA studies 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). The more recent PISA findings (OECD, 2010b) confirm these trends. Engagement in reading was assessed through measures of time spent reading various materials, enjoyment of reading, and use of various learning strategies. Across OECD countries, reading engagement was significantly related to reading performance and approximately one third of the association between reading performance and students' socioeconomic background was mediated by reading engagement. This latter finding can be attributed to the fact that students from lower-income communities have significantly less access to print in their schools and homes than is the case for students from middle-income communities (Duke, 2000; Neuman & Celano, 2001). Without access to print, literacy engagement is unlikely.

Lindsay's (2010) review of the impact of print access/literacy engagement on students' literacy achievement revealed a strong causal impact:

> The results of this meta-analytic review provide firm support for consistent and reliable relationships between children's access to print material and outcomes. Separate meta-analytic procedures performed on just those effects produced by "rigorous" studies suggest that children's access to print materials plays a causal role in facilitating behavioural, educational, and psychological outcomes in children—especially attitudes toward reading, reading behaviour, emergent literacy skills, and reading performance. (p. 85)

The relevance of these data for policy can be illustrated with reference to the application by New York City schools in 2004 for funding under the Reading First program. In order to receive $34 million in Reading First funding, New York City was forced to abandon its preferred reading curriculum in 49 elementary schools and instead adopt a "scientifically based" program that taught phonics in a more highly structured way (Goodnough, 2003; Herszenhorn, 2004). The program of choice for New York City was Month-by-Month Phonics (Cunningham & Hall, 2003), which included an active focus on writing and the use of classroom libraries in addition to systematic phonics instruction. Clearly, the focus on writing and extensive reading within the Month-by-Month Phonics program is consistent with the data reviewed above on the role of print access/literacy engagement in promoting reading comprehension. But because the program was considered too "balanced" by the Reading First adjudication panel, these elements had to be abandoned (Cummins, 2007).

In short, costly policy initiatives during the past decade aimed at boosting literacy achievement have largely ignored the role of print access/literacy engagement in promoting reading comprehension. As a consequence, no improvement in literacy achievement has resulted from these policy initiatives.

Identity matters. The construct of identity generally has not been considered in models of school effectiveness for the simple reason that this construct is difficult to quantify and thus has not been amenable to statistical manipulation. However, there is an extensive body of research from the disciplines of sociology and anthropology that discusses how minority students' academic engagement is affected by patterns of teacher-student identity negotiation (see Cummins, 2001; Cummins & Early, 2011, for reviews). The core of the issue was succinctly expressed by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) with reference to African-American students: "The problem that African-American students face is the constant devaluation of their culture both in school and in the larger society" (p. 485). The influence of broader societal power and status relations on teacher expectations and classroom interactions was documented many years ago by research in the American Southwest which reported that Euro-American students were praised or encouraged 36% more often than Mexican-American students and their classroom contributions were used or built upon 40% more frequently than those of Mexican-American students (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1973). Under these conditions, students very quickly pick up and internalize the message about who is seen as intelligent and who is seen as less intelligent. In the absence of identity affirmation in the classroom, many of these marginalized students find identity affirmation on the street.

Bishop and Berryman (2006) similarly invoke the relationships between societal power relations and patterns of teacher-student identity negotiation in exploring patterns of educational engagement among Maori youth in New Zealand. Very different perspectives on causes of student engagement (or lack thereof) emerged from interviews with educators, the students themselves, and community members. Bishop and Berryman (2006) describe the varying perspectives as follows:

> A large proportion of the teachers we interviewed took a position from which they explained Maori students' lack of educational achievement in deficit terms [i.e., Maori students themselves and their homes]. This gave rise to low expectations of Maori students' ability or a fatalistic attitude in the face of "the system," creating a downward-spiralling, self-fulfilling prophecy of low Maori student achievement and failure. In terms of agency, this is a helpless position to take, because it means that there is very little any individual teacher can do about the achievement of the Maori students in his or her classroom. (p. 261)

They point out that in contrast to the perspective of teachers, students themselves, their family members, and school principals identified the major influences on students' achievement in terms of relationships and interactions. Bishop and Berryman (2006) note that those who take this position "are putting forward explanations based on the power differentials and imbalances between the various participants in the relationships and focusing on how they can and must be managed better" (p. 263). They highlight the influence of the imagery that teachers hold of Maori children:

> Simply put, if the imagery held of Maori children (or indeed of any children) and the resulting interaction patterns stem from deficits and pathologies, then teachers' principles and practices will reflect this, and the educational crisis for Maori students will be perpetuated. (p. 263)

They point out that effective instruction challenges the devaluation of Maori identity in the school and wider society. The elements of effective instruction "involve the teacher creating a culturally appropriate and responsive learning context, where young people can engage in learning by bringing their prior cultural knowledge and experiences to classroom interactions, which legitimate these, instead of ignoring or rejecting them" (pp. 264-265).

Identity affirmation is closely tied to the orientation within schools toward ELL/bilingual students' L1. The use of students' L1 as a medium of instruction (bilingual education) and the instructional incorporation of students' L1 into L2-medium (monolingual) programs can play a significant role in affirming student identities and enabling them to engage actively with literacy more rapidly than would otherwise have been the case (Cummins, 2001; Cummins & Early, 2011). However, encouraging ELL/bilingual students to assimilate linguistically by prohibiting them from using their L1 within the school not only denies students access to what has been their primary cognitive tool for learning up to this point (their L1) but also reinforces the stigma of belonging to a group perceived as inferior. For Spanish-speaking students, these "English-only zone" policies are likely to discourage students from exploring cognate relationships between English and Spanish, which research suggests can play a significant role in promoting English vocabulary acquisition (Proctor & Mo, 2009).

In short, broader patterns of societal power relations are reflected in the patterns of identity negotiation that are played out between teachers and minority group students in school. When instruction focuses primarily on test preparation and transmitting curriculum content in a one-size-fits-all manner, students are unlikely to develop what Manyak (2004) has termed "identities of competence." But when instruction becomes aligned with the research evidence and focuses on maximizing minority group students' academic, linguistic, and intellectual potential, then students are likely to be transformed in association with active literacy engagement.

The literacy engagement framework outlined in the next section synthesizes the research in such a way that discussion of the knowledge base by educators and administrators can act as a catalyst for the development of school-based instructional policies.

The Literacy Engagement Framework

The literacy engagement framework is designed to highlight the neglected finding that print access/literacy engagement is a major determinant of students' literacy achievement, particularly the achievement of low-income students whose access to print in both home and school is frequently limited (Duke, 2000; Neuman & Celano, 2001).The framework also specifies four broad instructional dimensions that are critical to enabling ELL students to engage actively with literacy from an early stage in their learning of English. Typically, newcomer students who arrive in the host country after the early grades are delayed several years before they can engage actively with L2 reading and writing at their cognitive and chronological age level. This is because age-appropriate L2 reading materials are beyond their comprehension in the early stages of learning, and their L2 proficiency is inadequate to write extensively and coherently in their L2.

The core propositions that underlie the literacy engagement framework can be stated as follows: *In order to teach ELL students effectively, teachers need to maximize the students' opportunities to become actively engaged with reading and writing. Literacy engagement will be enhanced when (a) students' prior knowledge is activated, (b) their ability to understand and use academic language is supported through specific instructional strategies, (c) their identities are affirmed, and (d) their knowledge of, and control over, language is extended across the curriculum.*

Activate prior knowledge/build background knowledge. Effective instruction for ELL students activates students' prior knowledge and builds background knowledge as needed. Learning can be defined as the integration of new knowledge or skills with the knowledge or skills we already possess. Therefore it is crucial to activate students' preexisting knowledge so that they can relate new information to what they already know. Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) express the centrality of background knowledge as follows:

> Every opportunity should be taken to extend and enrich children's background knowledge and understanding in every way possible, for the ultimate significance and memorability of any word or text depends on whether children possess the background knowledge and conceptual sophistication to understand its meaning. (p. 219)

This implies that when ELL students' background knowledge is encoded in their L1, they should be encouraged to use their L1 to activate and extend this knowledge (e.g., by brainstorming in groups, writing in L1 as a stepping stone to writing in L2, carrying out Internet research in their L1).

Scaffold meaning. The term *scaffolding* refers to the provision of temporary supports that enables learners to carry out tasks and perform academically at a higher level than they would be capable of without these supports. Activation of students' prior knowledge and the building of background knowledge represent one form of scaffolding that operates on students' internal cognitive structures. Other forms of scaffolding focus on modifying the input so that it becomes more comprehensible to students. These include the use of visuals, demonstrations, dramatizations, acting out meanings, and explanations of words and linguistic structures. Scaffolding also supports students in using the target language in both written and oral modes. This includes use of bilingual instructional strategies such as encouraging newcomer students to write initially in their L1 and then work with teachers, peers, and/or community volunteers to generate a parallel version of their work in English. We have found that this strategy results in significantly more accomplished English performance than if newcomer students had been confined to using only English (Cummins & Early, 2011).

Affirm identity. As noted above, identity affirmation is also crucial for literacy engagement. Students who feel that their culture and identity are validated in the classroom are much more likely to engage with literacy than those who perceive that their culture and identity are ignored or devalued. When students feel that their intelligence, imagination, and multilingual talents are affirmed in the school and classroom context, they invest their identities much more actively in the learning process. The affirmation of identity in the context of teacher-student interactions explicitly challenges the devaluation of student and community identity in the wider society.

"... there is considerable research pointing toward the roles of print access and literacy engagement as causal factors in the development of reading comprehension."

Extend language. As students progress through the grades, they are required to read increasingly complex texts in the content areas of the curriculum (science, mathematics, social studies, literature). The complexity of academic language reflects (a) the difficulty of the concepts that students are required to understand, (b) the vocabulary load in content texts that include many low-frequency and technical words that we almost never use in typical conversation, and (c) increasingly sophisticated grammatical constructions (e.g., passive voice) and patterns of discourse organization that again are almost never used in everyday conversational contexts. Students not only are required to read this language, but they must also use it in writing reports, essays, and other forms of school work. Thus, in order to develop students' academic language, it is essential to reinforce language across the curriculum. Once again, bilingual instructional strategies (e.g., drawing attention to cognate relationships) can enhance ELL students' awareness of language and how it operates.

Transforming Schools From the Inside Out

The categories in the literacy engagement framework can serve as a catalyst for discussion within the school focused on the extent to which current instructional practices are effective in promoting sustained growth in literacy. It is clearly important that school administrators initiate and legitimize this process of collaborative critical inquiry in order to communicate to teachers the shift away from top-down, one-size-fits-all, authoritarian models of leadership. An essential part of the process involves developing awareness of the power that teachers have individually and collectively to make *pedagogical choices*.

Planned change in educational systems always involves *choice*. Administrators make choices at a broad system level, school principals make choices at the level of individual schools, and teachers make choices within their classrooms. Thus, individual educators always have the power to exercise agency—they 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 determine for themselves the social and educational goals they want to achieve with their students. They always have options with respect to their orientation to students' language and culture, the forms of parent and community participation they encourage, and in the ways they implement pedagogy and assessment.

Collaborative Pedagogical Inquiry Image of the Child

What image of the child are we sketching in our instruction?

- Capable of becoming bilingual and biliterate
- Capable of higher level thinking and intellectual accomplishments
- Capable of creative and imaginative thinking
- Capable of creating literature and art
- Capable of generating new knowledge
- Capable of thinking about and finding solutions to social issues

Figure 2. Collaborative inquiry about the image of the child embedded in instruction.

The process of articulating pedagogical choices and engaging in a collaborative pedagogical inquiry might start with discussion of what image of the child is embedded in our current instructional policies and practices. Among the questions that might be discussed are those in Figure 2.

Teachers might consider examining the extent to which ELL/bilingual students are actively engaged with literacy. To what extend are students immersed in a literacy-rich environment throughout elementary school? Specifically,

- Are they listening to and dramatizing stories from the earliest days of schooling?
- Are teachers developing students' reading strategies as they listen to stories being read in Kindergarten and pre-Kindergarten (e.g., the strategy of prediction can be developed by the teacher pausing in the story to ask "What do you think is going to happen next?").
- Do students have access to a well-stocked classroom library and the opportunity to borrow books to take home to read with their parents?
- Does the school library have books in the multiple languages of the school and /or dual language books?
- Does the school library encourage parents to come in and check out books with their children (e.g., by staying open one or two days a week after school hours to accommodate parents' schedules)?
- Are students discussing books they are reading on a regular basis within the classroom?
- Is technology being used in creative ways? For example, are students uploading book reviews to appropriate websites? Are they videotaping scenes they have dramatized or adaptated from books they have read?
- Has the school forged connections with the local public library to explore ways of promoting literacy engagement? Etc.

Issues concerning identify affirmation should also be examined. To what is the school enabling students to connect academic work to their own developing identities with the result that students develop a sense of pride in their linguistic talents and intellectual and literary accomplishments? Specifically,

- To what extent are signs and student work in multiple languages displayed at the school entrance and in other public areas throughout the school?
- To what extent are bilingual/ELL students given opportunities to generate new knowledge through intellectually rigorous inquiry?
- To what extent are newcomer students encouraged to use their L1s for completion of academic work and creative writing?
- To what extent are students' dual language books or projects displayed publicly (e.g., on a school website) and showcased for multiple audiences (e.g., on parents' nights, etc.)?
- To what extent are students enabled to engage in sister class projects with students from other countries or regions using multiple languages to carry out collaborative projects?
- To what extent are students encouraged to compare their L1 with the school language in order to develop greater language awareness?

Creating an Identity-Affirming School Environment

Validating Home Language and Culture

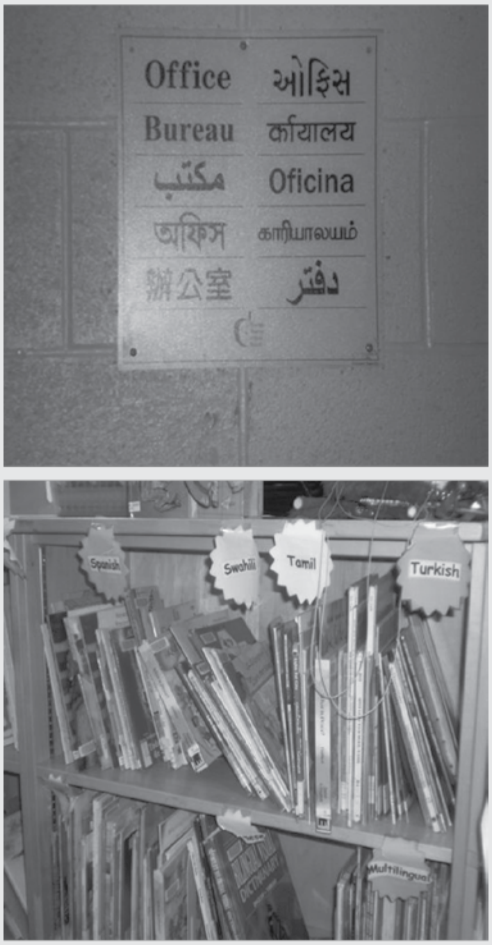
Office
ઓફિસ
Bureau
कार्यालय
مكتب
Oficina
অফিস
காரியாலயம்
辦公室
دفتر
Spanish
Swahili
Tamil
Turkish
Multilingual

Figure 3. Examples of multilingual signs and libarary books in Crescent Town Elementary School in Toronto.

Creating an Identity-Affirming School Environment

To what extent are ELL students capable of higher-order thinking in relation to complex social issues?

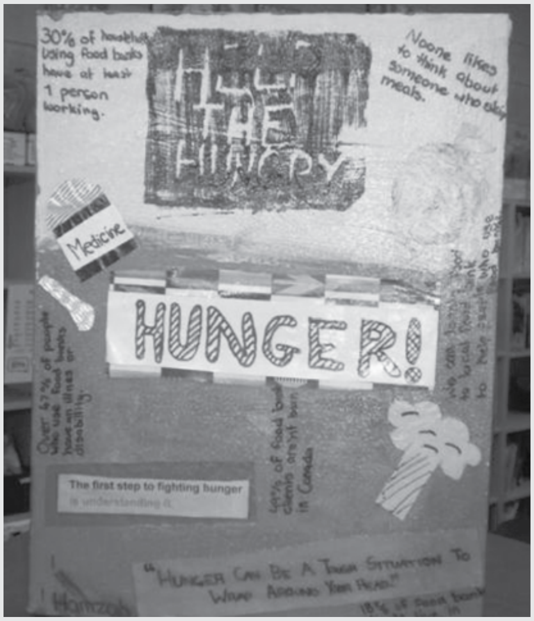
30% of households using food banks have at least 1 person working.
Noone likes to think about someone who skips meals.
HELP THE HUNGRY
Medicine
HUNGER!
Over 47% of people who use food banks have an illness or disability.
The first step to fighting hunger is understanding it.
"Hunger Can Be A Tough Situation To Wrap Around Your Head"

Figure 4. Example of a transformative education project carried out by students in Crescent Town Elementary School in Toronto.

Examples from one elementary school in the Toronto area are shown in Figures 3 and 4. The Appendix presents a Collaborative Inquiry template designed to guide teachers and other educators in articulating the pedagogical choices that they are currently making in their classrooms and schools and to consider alternative choices that might increase student engagement and instructional effectiveness. The categories in the template are suggestive, and thus teachers in any particular school can modify the issues for discussion according to their particular circumstances and priorities.

Conclusion

We have known for many years that educational underachievement in U.S. schools is concentrated among low-income and minority group students (e.g., OECD, 2010a). In the OECD's PISA studies of reading achievement among 15-year-old students, middle-class students in U.S. schools perform at similar levels to equivalent students in other high-achieving countries, but the inferior performance of low-income students brings down the overall average of American students' reading performance. This effect is exacerbated by the high percentage of children living in poverty in the United States compared to many other economically developed countries (more than 20% compared to less than 4% in Finland, the country with the highest performance in reading).

There is likely to be little improvement in overall educational performance in the United States as long as low-income and minority group students are subjected to educational policies and practices that ignore the research evidence related to effective pedagogy. There is a complete absence of research evidence supporting the intensive use of high-stakes standardized tests in schools, and yet these tests continue to dominate curriculum and instruction in schools serving low-income students. Little attention has been paid by policy-makers to the centrality of print access/literacy engagement in promoting reading comprehension despite the clear evidence that (a) many low-income students have very limited access to print in their homes and schools, and (b) literacy engagement is among the strongest predictors of reading achievement. No attention has been paid to the construct of identity investment despite equally strong, albeit primarily qualitative, evidence that marginalized group students will withdraw from academic effort when they perceive their identities devalued in the school and wider society.

Educators who aspire to transform the educational experiences and life prospects of their students are likely to remain disempowered if they wait for enlightened change to come from top-down initiatives. However, educators *do* have the power to change the lives of their students despite significant external constraints, but it requires them to reclaim agency—the power to act—and push back against evidence-free policies. By collectively articulating their instructional choices through a process of collaborative pedagogical inquiry, educators can align their practice with the research evidence. They can expand their instruction into social constructivist and transformative pedagogical orientations, thereby reducing the pedagogical divide that is inevitable when pedagogy relies only on transmission of information and skills. They can also gain the confidence to move in these directions from the research showing that low-income students who engage actively with literacy perform significantly better on standardized tests than those whose literacy engagement is minimal (OECD, 2010b).

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Appendix

Collaborative Pedagogical Portfolio: Articulating Choices and Taking Collective Action

Instructional Options	Current Realities Where Are We?	Vision for the Future Where Do We Want To Be?	Getting it Done How Do We Get There?
Content How do we adapt curriculum materials so that students can make connections to their prior knowledge and cultural background? Can we meet curriculum expectations in creative ways that generate more identity investment among students?			
Cognition How can we modify instruction to evoke higher levels of literacy engagement and critical thinking particularly among early stage ELL students? For example, should we encourage newcomer students to use their L1 to carry out projects?			
Tools How can we use tools such as computers, digital cameras, camcorders, web pages, and various programs to enable bilingual students to generate knowledge and create literature and art?			
Assessment How can we complement mandated standardized assessments in order to present to students, parents, and administrators a more valid account of student progress? (e.g., is there a role for portfolio assessment?)			
Language/Culture What messages are we giving students and parents about home language and culture? How can we enable students to use their L1 as a powerful tool for learning? Can we increase students' identity investment by means of bilingual instructional strategies (teaching for transfer)?			
Parental Involvement How can we engage parents as co-educators in such a way that their linguistic and cultural expertise is harnessed as fuel for their children's academic progress?			