Introduction

Constructing Pedagogies of Empowerment in Multicultural and Multilingual Classrooms

Implications for Theory and Practice

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Unequivocally, more students from diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds are flowing into classrooms all across the United States (Nieto, 1999). Legal immigration between 1980 and 1990 was almost 9 million, equaling the number of immigrants from 1900 to 1910 (Nieto, 1996). In 1994 there were an estimated 9.9 million language-minority students in the United States. The number of students with limited English proficiency, whose lack of facility in English causes academic difficulties, is dramatically increasing. From 1986 to 1992 the number of such students increased from 1 million to 2.5 million. By the year 2020, the number of children in the United States with limited English proficiency is expected to increase to 6 million (Nieto, 1996). Nieto (1996) states, "The largest numbers of new immigrants are now from Asia and Latin America, a marked departure from previous times when they were overwhelmingly from Europe" (p. 189).

Although the number of children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in U.S. schools is growing exponentially, the ethnic and linguistic makeup of the teaching force in U.S. schools is largely Euro-

pean American. In fact, approximately 90% of the U. S. teaching force comprises European American teachers, primarily women from working- and middle-class backgrounds, who speak only English (Howard, 1999). Clearly, a large and growing mismatch exists between the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children attending U.S. public schools and those of their teachers. Given the mismatch between student and teacher backgrounds, and the significant and growing changes in student demographics, questions arise: Does the mismatch between the children and teachers in U.S. schools matter? What might the changing student demographics mean for multicultural and multilingual literacy and language practices? What might all of these changes mean for children in U.S. schools, and for children from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, who are learning to speak English? What knowledge about ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity do educators and scholars need to serve students more effectively? The answers to these four questions are complex and just as varied as the statistics we have quoted. Moreover, there is "no quick fix" (Allington & Walmsley, 1995) to what we, as educators, must do to enable all children to be successful literacy and language learners. We elaborate on answers to these questions in the remainder of our Introduction. The chapters in this volume continue to address these questions in more detail.

First, many scholars argue that linguistic and cultural diversity are inextricably linked and include cultural diversity among students whose first language is English (e.g., Delpit, 1988; Moll, 1997; Obidah, 1998; Perry & Delpit, 1998). Obidah (1998), for example, examined African American students' use of what she termed *literate currency* to describe the "multiple and interactive forms of literacy that students and teachers bring into the classroom, and that have a significant impact on the encounters between these two groups in the course of everyday schooling" (p. 51). She argued that African American students' literate currencies are brought into classrooms and the schooling process, but are often ignored by their teachers. The lack of acknowledgment of the diverse and rich perspectives that African American students bring to classrooms is part of a history of sanctioned injustices. Obidah's research reveals a dire need for multicultural reform efforts that go beyond the mere inclusion of culturally relevant literature in classrooms. Educators must find ways to include the knowledge, skills, and dispositions for literacy and language learning that African American students—and students from other cultural backgrounds—bring into classrooms. Similarly, Moll (1997) argued that educators have much to learn from the linguistic and cultural "funds of knowledge" that children bring to classrooms. These challenges suggested by Obidah and Moll call for teachers to remain life-

long learners, because the composition of students has changed historically in this country and will unequivocally continue to change. Clearly, we have much to learn about the complex cultural and linguistic backgrounds that children bring to classrooms, and how we might structure schools, and the literacy and language practices within them, to accommodate the children.

Second, the changing demographics and the mismatch between children and their teachers both matter, because teachers are often underprepared to teach effectively students whose backgrounds are different from their own (Howard, 1999; Nieto, 1999). Historically, and even in the 21st century, a one-size-fits-all model for teaching and learning has been enacted in U.S. schools. This approach involves language practices, literacy instruction, and literature geared toward the backgrounds and experiences of middle-class European American children (Connell, 1994; Jimenez, 2003; Labov, 2003). When children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds bring different languages, home literacy experiences, and sociocultural backgrounds to U.S. classrooms, educators may perceive them as being "behind" their mainstream peers in language and literacy development, because their backgrounds and experiences do not match mainstream school practices and expectations. As we in the educational community work to sort out ways to educate *all* children in U.S. schools, we must direct our gaze in the appropriate direction. Our attention should not be directed toward trying "to find out what is wrong with the children but what can be done to improve the educational system" (Labov, 2003, p. 129).

As an educational community, we *must* follow the lead of scholars such as Moll, Connell, Obidah, and Labov by attending to ways in which schools need to be reconceptualized to address issues of linguistic and cultural diversity; the changing demographics in U.S. schools make this a necessity rather than an option. If all students are to be taught effectively, educators must recognize, value, and build instruction on the language practices and life experiences of students from diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds (Au & Raphael, 2000). Scholars (e.g., Hones, 2002) alert us to the urgency of working toward these ends. Educators at all levels, in all positions, must become aware of the positive and effective changes that can be made, and have been made, in some classrooms, school districts, universities, and communities. The chapters in this book point us in a direction of positive change as an educational community. The chapter contributors draw on their own experiences with teachers, students, and the scholarly literature to provide concrete and specific suggestions to educators at all levels about ways to rethink, recraft, reshape, and restructure educational beliefs and prac-

tices to meet the needs of the growing numbers of children from diverse backgrounds in U.S. schools.

SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY AS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In sociocultural theory (e.g., Au, 1993; Au & Carroll, 1997; Au & Raphael, 2000; Moll, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991, 1998), the lens that we used to conceptualize the organization and structure of this text, a central tenet is that the mind is social in nature (Wertsch, 1991, 1998); that is, the human mind is constituted through, and originates from, language-based social interactions with others. Vygotsky (1978) argued that higher psychological processes, such as those involved in literacy teaching and learning, take place first in social interactions between people, then over time are appropriated within the individual. If educators take seriously this premise, then the social interactions we structure in our school and university classrooms and communities deserve our careful and thoughtful attention, because they serve as the very foundation of learning. The authors of the chapters in this book present a variety of ways to think carefully about structuring social interactions to promote the learning in children from diverse backgrounds. For example, in Chapter 3, Claudia Haag and Joan Williams ask us to look carefully at the ways we use various participation structures in our classrooms to influence the multiple types of interactions. Judy Wallis and Elizabeth Rosado (Chapter 14) take a much broader look at how district-level interactions should be structured to promote teacher and student learning.

Sociocultural theorists also emphasize that language in use plays a central role in mediating our actions as humans. Vygotsky (1978) asserted that human cognition is constituted through meaningful, language-based social interactions. Consequently, the use of language in the context of interactions, and the various analytical ways of looking at that language, become central when considering human learning. Moreover, the ways that discussions are constructed in classroom contexts between students and students, as well as teachers and students, vary in dynamic and evolving ways. Examining carefully the ways that different conversational moves shape encounters between classroom participants impacts the literacy learning opportunities constructed through oral and written language in classrooms (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). The chapter authors invited to contribute to this book look carefully at language and how language use impacts children's learning opportunities. For exam-

ple, in Chapter 5, Nancy Anderson examines the way she structured interactions and used language to impact the learning of an African American child she tutored in an intensive reading intervention. Initially, she was unsuccessful in helping her student to learn to read. Through careful analysis of the language-based interactions she structured during literacy lessons, however, she found a way to reach her student to promote his literacy learning.

An important strength of sociohistorical theory is that it grounds issues pertaining to human learning in social, cultural, and historical contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). This point is significant in contexts in which teachers and children represent different cultural and linguistic backgrounds; a sociocultural theoretical lens calls attention to cultural and linguistic differences. According to Moll and others (e.g., Moll, 1997; Moll & Whitmore, 1993), when educators seek to understand the lives of children and their families from diverse cultural backgrounds, they can better understand the rich cultural and linguistic resources these families bring to schools. Moreover, when educators better understand the cultural backgrounds of the children they serve, they can design classroom instruction that builds on and values these differences. A variety of chapter contributors address this important concern. For example, in Chapter 4, Debbie Diller, a European American teacher, chronicles her struggles and learning as she moved from teaching in a middle-class, predominantly European American school in the Midwest, to an inner-city school in Houston. In Chapter 16, Guofang Li looks carefully and in depth at the literate activities of one Chinese family living in British Columbia, and presents her readers with ways to think about drawing on the home experiences and cultures of children of Chinese heritage. These, and other chapter contributors to this text, demonstrate that viewing children from diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds as bringing different but rich experiences to the table, rather than perceiving them as deficient, is a crucial first step in the process of changing schools to serve children better. We must stop assuming that these children and their families need to change to serve the often static and outdated institutional needs of schools (Connell, 1994).

These tenets of sociocultural theory have profound implications for facilitating students' literacy learning in multilingual and multicultural classrooms. The ways educators construct classroom communities—including the nature and type of interactions fostered, and the conceptual content constructed—impact what students have an opportunity to learn. This point is exceedingly important for teachers to consider when their cultural and linguistic backgrounds differ from those of the children they serve. Educators must realize that different cultural groups use

language to act and interact in different ways, and these different "ways with words" significantly impact children's learning opportunities (Heath, 1983; Philips, 1983).

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

We invited educators and researchers to contribute to this book based on their understanding of research, their reflective pedagogical practices, and their careful attention to students' interests and instructional needs. We have organized the chapters around four overarching, foundational themes in effective literacy instruction for children from diverse backgrounds. These themes include (1) language, text, and context; (2) teacher ideologies and motivation for change; (3) listening to students' voices on issues of diversity and literacy learning; and (4) exploring out-of-classroom influences on literacy learning. Together, the chapters categorized within these themes shed light on how teachers, teacher educators, researchers, language arts specialists, English as a second language (ESL) coordinators, and district-level administrators at all levels might construct meaningful, challenging, and dynamic literacy and language learning communities in multicultural and multilingual classrooms.

Part I, *Language, Texts, and Contexts*, comprises three chapters in which readers are asked to look carefully at the ways they make decisions about using language and texts, and structuring classroom contexts to promote the literacy learning of children from diverse backgrounds. Beginning with Chapter 1, Cynthia H. Brock, Laura A. Parks, and Dorothy K. Moore raise a key question: How do the varieties of languages that children speak and write impact their literacy learning opportunities? The authors address this question by asking readers to engage in a thought experiment that conveys the complexity of language variation. Then, they present scholarly literature to help readers understand language variation and ways that classroom teachers can honor varieties of languages that children speak, while simultaneously teaching children the language of power in U.S. classrooms and society (Edwards, 2003).

Elfreida H. Hiebert, Zoe Ann Brown, Cheryl Taitague, Charles W. Fisher, and Martha A. Adler, in Chapter 2, look at text features and apply them to the design of beginning reading textbooks for English language learners (ELLs). The authors describe the features of current beginning reading texts, review existing research on text features that support language and literacy learning of ELLs, and describe the features of a set of beginning reading texts designed for ELLs. Chapter 3, by Claudia Christensen Haag and Joan Williams, emphasizes that meaningful talk in classrooms enhances students' literacy learning opportunities.

They describe various classroom participation structures and activities—such as read-alouds, art, and drama—that provide venues for ELLs to participate successfully in classroom literacy learning.

Part II, *Teacher Ideologies and Motivation for Change*, consists of four chapters, each of which is a powerful testimony to the impact that meaningfully changing one's beliefs and practices can have on the literacy learning of children from diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. The authors tell their readers *why* and *how* they changed their beliefs and practices to improve their students' literacy learning. Chapters 4 and 5 both illustrate how European American educators shifted their thoughts and actions as they worked directly with children of color in specific classroom contexts. In Chapter 4, Debbie Diller writes about her own process of changing her beliefs and raising her cultural awareness as a classroom teacher. In Chapter 5, Nancy Anderson, a teacher–educator, examines how she changed her teaching practices better to meet the needs of an African American child with whom she worked.

The next two chapters take somewhat different slants—with respect to contexts and issues explored—on the topic of teacher ideology and education in multicultural and multilingual contexts. In Chapter 6, Mary McVee, a teacher–educator, examines the provocative personal narrative of Cathy, a European American teacher. Cathy raised an important question in McVee's graduate course: "What can I, as a white teacher, do to be a better teacher for my students who are black?" In addition to addressing Cathy's question, McVee encourages her readers to think about narrative as a tool for exploring complex questions and concerns about issues of diversity and literacy instruction. In realizing her own differences as a black African immigrant to the United States, Elavie Ndura—in Chapter 7—decided to teach her junior high English language arts classes from a multicultural perspective, because she believed that her mostly European American students required a broader educational perspective. Her decision to change her instructional approach came about when she, herself, endured numerous racist and bigoted comments and situations.

We end Part II of this text with Chapter 8, by Laurie MacGillivray, Robert Rueda, and Ana Maritza Martinez, which offers a valuable synthesis of key issues and concerns facing teachers who strive to make meaningful changes in their classrooms. The authors present what they learned from teachers in inner-city Los Angeles about high-quality instruction for poor ESL learners. Their work challenges administrators and educational policymakers to listen to teachers, because they are on the "front lines" in working with children from various socioeconomic and sociocultural backgrounds.

Part III, *Students' Voices on Issues of Literacy Learning and Diversity*, offers readers an opportunity to hear about issues of diversity and literacy from students' perspectives. Traditionally, adult experts in the field—teachers, teacher–educators, researchers, administrators, and policymakers—make decisions about teaching language and literacy. However, authors of the chapters in this section remind us that students' voices must be added to the list of those we consult as we make decisions about fostering the literacy learning of children from diverse backgrounds (Pearson, 1997). The authors of Chapters 9 and 10 consulted adolescent and upper-elementary-level readers and writers about their literacy learning experiences in a variety of contexts. In Chapter 9, Fenice B. Boyd examined one ninth-grade student's literacy learning experiences during a unit centered on multicultural literature. The student examined a videotaped oral presentation to interpret her experiences in the focus unit of study. Boyd argues that listening to students talk about their own literacy learning opportunities offers teachers important insights into instructional decision making. Leila Flores-Dueñas, in Chapter 10, reports the results of a study in which four Mexican American bilingual students responded to literature written by Mexican American and non–Mexican American authors. She illustrates how culturally relevant literature, and meaningful interactions around that literature, can impact positively children's literacy learning opportunities.

The next two chapters remind us, as teachers, that even very young children have much to tell and show us about their literacy learning. In Chapter 11, Eurydice Bouchereau Bauer presents an ethnography of Elena, her daughter, who learned to read and write in English and German simultaneously. Bauer records her daughter's writing development between the ages of 3 years, 10 months and 4 years, 10 months, and highlights how Elena's bilingualism influenced her writing. Laura Klenk, in Chapter 12, describes what she learned from Carmen, a young ELL in kindergarten, that helped her to support Carmen's literacy learning. Woven throughout the chapter is a discussion of the theoretical principles of language and literacy development that guided Klenk's decision making as Carmen's teacher.

Part IV, *Out-of-Classroom Influences on Literacy Learning*, looks at literacy teaching and learning from a variety of different venues. Many scholars have written about the impact of literacy learning in out-of-school contexts (e.g., Hull & Schultz, 2002). The chapters in this section make important contributions to the professional literature pertaining to out-of-school influences on the literacy learning of children from diverse backgrounds. Authors of the first two chapters, both situated in Texas, address ways that state and district mandates and planning can influence—for better or worse—instructional decisions in

inner-city schools. Julie L. Pennington begins Chapter 13 by asking "tough questions" about the impact the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) has had on literacy teaching and learning in one inner-city Texas school. Over time, rather than emphasizing the complexity and culture of the students, and seeking to maintain their native languages as much as possible, the school became highly focused on streamlining the curriculum to match the state's objective of passing the TAAS test.

Allington (2002) states, "Few school districts (or state education agencies) seem to have a plan for creating expert teachers. In other words, while most school districts have a long-term plan, and a funding stream, for replacing or rehabilitating the roofs of school buildings, almost none has a plan, or the funding, for developing teacher expertise through professional development activities" (p. 30). This is not the case for Spring Branch Independent School District (ISD) in Houston, Texas. Spring Branch ISD stands out as an example of the kind of instructional planning for which Allington argues. In Chapter 14, Judy Wallis and Elizabeth Rosado-McGrath present the story of how they set out to create a comprehensive, districtwide literacy plan that would place at its heart the needs of all students and teachers in their diverse, inner-city school district.

The authors of Chapters 15 and 16 look carefully inside various cultural contexts—an African American church and a Chinese family—to help readers see the complex literacy practices enacted in these different contexts. We realize that these contexts represent only two of the myriad contexts that influence the lives and literacy of children from diverse backgrounds in our schools. Peshkin (1985) reminds us, however, that careful and thoughtful attention to one context may help us to attend carefully and thoughtfully to other contexts. He writes, "When I disclose what I have seen, my results invite other researchers to look where I did and see what I saw. My ideas are candidates for others to entertain, not necessarily as truth, let alone Truth, but as positions about the nature and meaning of a phenomenon that may fit their sensibility and shape their thinking about their own inquiries" (p. 280). We suspect that the thoughtful work of the authors of Chapters 15 and 16 will help you to "shape your thinking about your own inquiries" into the myriad contexts that influence the literacy learning of children that you may encounter from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Chapter 15, written by Gwendolyn Thompson McMillon, a teacher–educator, and her husband Vincent Duane McMillon, a minister, takes readers through a 3-year journey that explores the empowering literacy practices of an African American church in an urban neighborhood. Specifically, they provide a historical backdrop of the literacy practices in black churches, discuss student and teacher relationships, and describe

empowering, authentic opportunities provided by the church that motivate students to practice their literacy skills within the church setting. Guofang Li offers another unique and valuable perspective on literacy practices in out-of-classroom settings in Chapter 16. Li studied a Chinese immigrant student's (i.e., Yang Li's) home literacy practices and explored ways his family supported his school literacy learning. In Chapter 17, Cynthia Brock concludes by looking back across lessons learned from the contributors to this volume. As well, she looks ahead to work that needs to be done as we continue to work together to improve the literacy learning opportunities of children from diverse ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds in U.S. schools.

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