

# The Social Construction of Academic Expertise in Multilingual School Contexts: Policy Options and Instructional Choices

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Cet article soutient que l'expertise – entendue comme un niveau élevé de compétence dans un domaine particulier – et son contraire, l'incompétence, ne sont pas simplement des caractéristiques statiques appartenant en propre à l'individu, mais sont construites socialement et renvoient à des relations de pouvoir au sein des relations sociales. Dans les classes multilingues, cette construction sociale expertise/incompétence empêche souvent les étudiants nouvellement arrivés de démontrer leurs compétences académiques, potentielles ou réelles, en raison du recours exclusif au langage dominant à des fins pédagogiques. S'appuyant sur les données issues de la recherche-action collaborative menée dans la région de Toronto (Cummins & Early 2011), cet article montre la manière dont les nouveaux arrivants font l'expérience d'une transformation identitaire lorsque l'espace scolaire accueille les idées et les contributions intellectuelles des étudiants sans préjuger des langues. L'article met aussi en évidence les relations de pouvoir sociétales sous-tendant les prétentions problématiques à "l'expertise" invoquées par les professionnels de l'éducation dont la formation professionnelle a généralement exclu toute réflexion sur le développement éducatif des étudiants multilingues et les moyens efficaces de formation de ces étudiants.

## 1. Introduction

When used in everyday contexts, the term *expertise* typically describes an individual's high level of competence in a particular area. As described by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993), most people think of expertise as something that people *have* rather than as something that people *do*. They argue instead that expertise is a process of progressive problem-solving in which people continuously rethink and redefine their task. This orientation was also integral to one of the first detailed psychological studies of expertise, Adriaan De Groot's (1965) book entitled *Thought and Choice in Chess*.

This focus on the individual is somewhat expanded when cognitive psychologists discuss how expertise develops. There is general agreement among researchers that expertise requires an enormous amount of knowledge, but most researchers also highlight the social dimensions of learning and skill development (e.g., Bransford, Brown & Cocking 2000). Sociocultural theory, significantly influenced by Vygotsky's (1962) writings, emphasizes that learners gradually develop and expand their expertise as a result of interaction with more accomplished adults or peers within the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). Within school contexts, the ZPD refers to the difference between what learners can do independently without help and what they can do with the assistance of

an engaged teacher. Bransford and colleagues elaborate on the teacher's role as follows:

Teachers must draw out and work with the preexisting understandings that their students bring with them. ... the teacher must actively inquire into students' thinking, creating classroom tasks and conditions under which student thinking can be revealed. Students' initial conceptions then provide the foundation on which the more formal understanding of the subject matter is built. Bransford, Brown & Cocking (2000: 19).

In this paper, I argue that although this cognitive psychology focus on the nature of expertise within the individual and on the interactive dimensions of the development of expertise is legitimate, it provides an inadequate basis for understanding the development of academic expertise, and its opposite, academic underachievement or failure, within educational contexts. The focus of my analysis is that *expertise*, and its opposite, *incompetence*, are socially constructed and implicated in societal power relations. In typical multilingual classrooms, newcomer students are unable to demonstrate their intelligence, imagination, and linguistic talents because of the exclusive use of the dominant societal language for instructional purposes. Their academic potential is frequently rendered invisible both by the *monolingual habitus* (Gogolin 1994) of instructional practices and the societal stereotypes that frame teachers' perceptions of certain marginalized or vulnerable groups.

In the next section, I provide a brief account of the academic achievement of multilingual students, primarily from migrant backgrounds, in countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

## **2. Academic Achievement in Multilingual Classrooms**

The reading performance of 15-year-old first- and second-generation immigrant-background students from several OECD countries on the Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA) in 2003, 2006 and 2015 is shown in Table 1. There is a clear difference in the pattern of performance in Australia and Canada compared to the European countries represented in Table 1. The stronger performance in Canada and Australia can be attributed to a variety of factors. For example, the educational qualifications of adult immigrants in both countries are as high, on average, as those of the general population. Both countries have encouraged immigration during the past 50 years and have a coherent infrastructure designed to integrate immigrants into the society (e.g. free adult language classes, language support services for students in schools, rapid qualification for full citizenship, etc.). Additionally, both Canada and Australia have explicitly endorsed multicultural policies at the national level, aimed at promoting respect across communities and expediting the integration of newcomers into the broader society.

	PISA 2003 Gen 1	PISA 2003 Gen 2	PISA 2006 Gen 1	PISA 2006 Gen 2	PISA 2015 Gen 1	PISA 2015 Gen 2
<b>Australia</b>	-12	-4	+1	+7	-3	+21
<b>Austria</b>	-77	-73	-48	-79	-72	-37
<b>Belgium</b>	-117	-84	-102	-81	-51	-42
<b>Canada</b>	-19	+10	-19	0	+3	+11
<b>Denmark</b>	-42	-57	-79	-64	-51	-52
<b>France</b>	-79	-48	-45	-36	-76	-30
<b>Germany</b>	-86	-96	-70	-83	-78	-31

Table 1. PISA Reading scores 2003, 2006, 2015. Gen 1 = first generation students, Gen 2 = second generation students. Negative scores indicate performance below country mean, positive scores indicate performance above country mean; 100 points represents one standard deviation. (Source [www.oecd-ilibrary.org](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org)).

By contrast, first- and second-generation immigrant students tend to perform less well in countries that have larger numbers of immigrants from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds and where social attitudes towards immigrants tend to be largely negative. In some cases (Denmark and Germany in 2003; Austria and Germany in 2006) second-generation students who received all their schooling in the host country performed more poorly than first-generation students who arrived as newcomers and would likely have had less time and opportunity to learn the host country language. Thus, sociological factors other than simply opportunity to learn the host country language are clearly operating to limit achievement among second-generation students in these countries.

How should we interpret the underachievement of immigrant-background students in many European countries? According to the OECD (2010), some, but not all, of the differences can be attributed to social disadvantage among communities from immigrant backgrounds. The classroom examples discussed in the next section suggest that patterns of social interaction and identity negotiation within the classroom potentially play an important role in constructing (or constricting) the development of academic expertise among multilingual students. These examples, together with an emerging body of research, illustrate that a very different image of the student can emerge when the teacher chooses to open up the instructional space to promote a multilingual rather than a monolingual habitus (see, for example, Auger 2010, 2014; Cummins in press; Hélot & Young 2006; Kádas 2017; Mary & Young 2017; Pickel & Hélot 2014; Prasad 2016; Stille & Prasad 2015; Young 2014). An implication of the data discussed in the following sections is that *ideological* barriers to the development of academic expertise among marginalized multilingual students are just as significant as *instructional* barriers in a narrow sense.

### 3. Negotiating Identities of Competence in Multilingual Classrooms

The role of social stereotypes and societal institutionalized racism in undermining the development of academic expertise was articulated vividly by Bernard Coard in the United Kingdom (UK) in his short 1971 book entitled *How the West Indian Child Is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System: The Scandal of the Black Child in Schools in Britain*. Coard highlighted both the role of low teacher expectations and biased curriculum and assessment in the reproduction of inequality for black students in the British school system. The reproduction of societal intergroup power relations within the schools has been well documented in many research-based analyses since that time (e.g., Cummins 2001; Ladson-Billings 1995; Ogbu 1978; Steele 1997). This reality implies that in order to reverse underachievement among marginalized group students, educators must be prepared (in both senses of the word) to challenge the operation of coercive power relations within their classrooms and schools (Paia, Cummins, Nocus, Salaün & Vernaudon 2015).

One significant way in which societal power relations get expressed within schools is in the policies and instructional practices that implicitly or explicitly exclude students' home languages from instruction. The following examples, drawn from one teacher's practice, illustrate the transformational impact on students' academic identities and performance when the instructional space is expanded to include students' home languages.

In the quotations below, newcomer students, Tomer who arrived in Canada from Israel in grade 6 (age 12) and Madiha who arrived in grade 7 (age 13) from Pakistan, reflect on their experiences in teacher Lisa Leoni's classroom where they were encouraged to use their home languages to carry out academic and cognitive tasks. Specifically, Tomer reflects on his experience of writing the Hebrew/English dual language book *Tom Goes to Kentucky* and Madiha discusses writing the Urdu/English book *The New Country* with two of her friends, Kanta and Sulmana, both of whom had been in Canada for about 3.5 years and were relatively fluent in English as well as Urdu. By contrast, Madiha had minimal English, having been in Canada for less than two months when she and her friends started the project.

In a typical Canadian classroom where English is the only language used by the teacher and students, newcomers Tomer and Madiha would have been able to write only a few sentences in English even with considerable teacher support. However, when the instructional space was opened up from an English-only to a multilingual zone, both Tomer and Madiha were able to demonstrate dramatically different levels of intellectual, creative, and academic expertise. In Tomer's case, he wrote the story initially in Hebrew and then collaborated in translating it into English with a teacher who could read Hebrew. Madiha was fully involved in planning and organizing the story which she, Kanta and

Sulmana discussed initially in Urdu. They then wrote the initial draft in English, received feedback from the teacher, and then translated the English version into Urdu, with Madiha again being fully involved in crafting the Urdu version. The covers of the two books are displayed in Figure 1. Both stories can be viewed at <http://www.multiliteracies.ca/index.php/folio/viewProject/8>.



Fig. 1. Covers of *The New Country* and *Tom Goes to Kentucky*.

Tomer's story reflects the fact that he knew a lot about horses as a result of growing up on a farm with 12 horses in Israel. His reflections presented (in English) to an audience of educators at a language teaching conference in Toronto about 18 months after writing his dual language book, include vivid insights about the feelings of incompetence that result from not knowing the language of instruction (*It's like beginning as a baby*) and about the role of students' L1 as a foundation for stronger performance in L2 (*It makes it more faster to be able to use both languages instead of just breaking your head to think of the word in English when you already know the word in the other language*).

I think using your first language is so helpful because when you don't understand something after you've just come here it is like beginning as a baby. ... It makes it more faster to be able to use both languages instead of just breaking your head to think of the word in English when you already know the word in the other language, so it makes it faster and easier to understand. ... The first time I couldn't understand what [my teacher] was saying except the word Hebrew, but I think it's very smart that she said for us to do it in our language because we can't just sit on our hands doing nothing" Leoni *et al.* (2011: 52-53)

A similar point was expressed by Madiha. Her story draws on the immigration experiences of the three authors in describing the transition from Pakistan to

Canada of a fictional character named Sonia. Madiha's accomplishment of writing a 20-page dual language book, after only six weeks of learning English, was made possible by the fact that her teacher adopted a multilingual instructional orientation that encouraged students to work together and use their L1 as well as English to produce a dual language text. As a result of writing the story and sharing it with friends, teachers, university professors, and thousands of people who have read it on the Internet, Madiha's identity was transformed from an identity of incompetence to an identity of confidence, accomplishment, and expertise. This transformation is evident in her reflections shared with an audience of educators at the same language teaching conference in Toronto (about 30 months after writing the dual language book):

I think it helps my learning to be able to write in both languages because if I'm writing English and Ms. Leoni says you can write Urdu too it helps me think of what the word means because I always think in Urdu. That helps me write better in English. When I came here I didn't know any English, I always speak Urdu to my friends. Other teachers they said to me "Speak English, speak English" but Ms. Leoni didn't say anything when she heard me speak Urdu and I liked this because if I don't know English, what can I do? It helps me a lot to be able to speak Urdu and English. Leoni *et al.* (2011: 53)

The relevance of these examples in the present context is that this simple change in classroom routines enabled students to demonstrate their literacy and intellectual expertise to the teacher, other students, and to themselves. If Tomer or Madiha had been asked to read the English versions of their stories before they had written them, they would not have been able to do so. However, after they had written both the L1 and English versions (with the classroom supports provided by the teacher), they were fully able to read the English versions of what they had written.

Many other Canadian examples could be described to demonstrate that when the classroom *ideological* space shifts from an implicit or explicit English-only zone to a multilingual zone that welcomes ideas and participation in diverse languages, newcomer students experience an identity transformation. Their sense of self shifts from an identity of incompetence (due to their limited knowledge of English) to an emerging identity of competence (Manyak 2004) fueled by opportunities to showcase and share their multilingual intellectual accomplishments.

Tomer and Madiha's teacher, Lisa Leoni, expressed the transformative effect of what I have called *teaching through a multilingual lens* in the following way:

When Tomer entered my class last year, a lot of the work he produced was in Hebrew. Why? Because that is where his knowledge was encoded, and I wanted to make sure that Tomer was an active member and participant in my class. It was also a way for me to gain insight into his level of literacy and oral language development. As I watched Tomer carry out various writing tasks, it became clear to me that Tomer had very strong literacy skills in his first language. For example, I asked Tomer to do a creative writing piece based on three pictures that he himself could select. During the writing his pencil didn't stop moving, there was little hesitation, and it was apparent that his ideas flowed easily. Next, I had Tomer read aloud to me [in Hebrew] what he had written and there I saw the fluency, intonation, and the ease with which he read. (Leoni *et al.* (2011: 51)

Contrast this instructional mindset with the formal educational policies and instructional practices that remain dominant in many European and North American countries. With only a few exceptions (e.g., Auger 2010, 2014; Hélot & Young 2006; Little & Kirwan 2019; Young 2014), instruction and assessment are conducted exclusively through the dominant language. Students' home languages are either ignored or sometimes viewed through a hostile lens. For example, Orhan Agirdag's (2010) research in Belgium documented the fact that educators continue to prohibit students from using their L1 within the school, thereby communicating to students the inferior status of their home languages and devaluing the identities of speakers of these languages. In a study of Turkish-background students in Flemish secondary schools, Agirdag reported:

[O]ur data show that Dutch monolingualism is strongly imposed in three different ways: teachers and school staff strongly encourage the exclusive use of Dutch, bilingual students are formally punished for speaking their mother tongue, and their home languages are excluded from the cultural repertoire of the school. At the same time, prestigious languages such as English and French are highly valued. Agirdag (2010: 317)

In a more recent study, Pulinx, Van Avermaet, & Agirdag (2016) documented the fact that 77 percent of Flemish teachers were of the opinion that immigrant-background students should not be allowed to speak a foreign language at school and almost one-third believed that students should be punished for speaking their L1 in school.

As Pulinx and colleagues (2016) point out, these teachers are well-intentioned. They believe that emergent bilingual students require maximum exposure to and encouragement to use the school language. In light of this assumption, it is not surprising that they view students' use of L1 in the school as counter-productive. The benign intentions of these teachers, however, do not alter the fact that their beliefs are purely *ideological* and totally unsupported by any research. The fact that these beliefs persist in many societal and educational contexts reflects what I have called *coercive relations of power*, where power is exercised by a dominant individual, group, or country to the detriment of a subordinated individual, group, or country (Cummins 2001). Policy-makers, teacher educators, and sometimes even researchers have enabled these evidence-free ideological beliefs to persist, thereby contributing to the devaluation of student identities and the constriction of multilingual students' cognitive and academic resources.

In summary, efforts to reverse patterns of underachievement among socially disadvantaged multilingual students are unlikely to be successful until the evidence-free ideological substrate of current policies and instructional practices is addressed. Monolingual ideologies result in instructional practices that erect barriers to the development and expression of students' academic expertise.

#### 4. Problematic Claims to Expertise among Education Professionals

In many countries around the world, school systems have tolerated a situation where multilingual students from immigrant backgrounds are taught by mainstream classroom teachers who have had minimal opportunities to develop expertise in implementing instructional strategies appropriate to teaching a linguistically and culturally diverse student body. The Canadian context serves as a typical example. In Canada, there has been a serious focus on the education of immigrant-background students since the early 1970s. However, the dominant response across Canadian provinces outside of Quebec has been the funding of 'add-on' English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teachers who support students in developing their academic English skills (typically for only one class period per day over one or two years). The mindset within most schools has been that the ESL teacher will take care of developing students' English language skills and thus mainstream classroom teachers are not required to have any special expertise with respect to teaching multilingual students.

The following example, extracted from a high school science teacher's letter to a newspaper illustrates the consequences of these assumptions:

In recent years, increasing numbers of ESL students have come into my [science] classes. This year, one of my classes contains almost as many non-English speaking students as there are English speaking ones. Most of the ESL students have very limited English skills, and as a result are not involved in class discussions and cannot complete assignments or pass tests.

I respect these students as I recognize that often they have a superior prior education in their own language. They are well-mannered, hard-working and respectful of others. I enjoy having a multiracial society in my classroom, because I like these students for themselves and their high motivational level. However, I am troubled by my incompetence in adequately helping many individual students of that society. Because of language difficulties, they often cannot understand me, nor can they read the text or board notes. Each of these students needs my personal attention, and I do not have that extra time to give.

As well, I have to evaluate their ability to understand science. They cannot show me their comprehension. I have to give them a failing mark! I question the educational decisions made to assimilate ESL students into academic subject classes before they have minimal skills in English.

Extracted from *A teacher's daily struggle in multi-racial classroom*, B. Dudley Brett, Letter of the Week, *Toronto Star* (1994, April 2: B3); see Cummins (2000).

This letter expresses well the fact that many teachers feel prepared and competent to teach science, mathematics, or regular English courses to students fluent in the language of instruction but totally unprepared to teach these courses to students who are still in the process of acquiring the language of instruction. The teacher is unusually open about acknowledging his own 'incompetence' to help English language learners (ELLs), but he fails to problematize the system that gave rise to, and perpetuates, his incompetence. Instead, he sees the 'problem' as residing almost exclusively with ELL students

themselves (through no fault of their own) and his proposed solution is to keep students out of the mainstream until they can cope with the instructional demands of the regular curriculum. In making this proposal, the teacher shows no awareness of the well-established time periods typically required for ELL students to catch up academically (5+ years).

The educational structure that enables incompetence to persist encompasses curriculum, assessment, pre-service education, professional development, and criteria for advancement to leadership positions in school systems. With respect to leadership, we might ask why leaders in schools that have large numbers of multilingual students do not prioritize professional development for mainstream teachers who have not had opportunities to acquire the expertise to teach these students effectively. Again, the answers are ideological rather than financial or logistical—effective education for multilingual students is simply not seen as a priority. Within this structure, issues related to diversity and second language learning have, until recently, remained as footnotes to more general policies designed to address the needs of the 'generic' or typical student who is still imagined as white, middle-class, and monolingual (despite massive evidence to the contrary).

In short, this example, which is still largely reflective of current educational realities across Canada, illustrates the fragile nature of claims to 'expertise' on the part of educational professionals whose professional credentials include minimal, if any, focus on the academic development of multilingual students<sup>1</sup>.

## **5. Framing the Development of Academic Expertise among Multilingual Students**

Two theoretical frameworks that incorporate conceptions of academic expertise as socially and educationally constructed are briefly presented in this section. In both cases, the development of academic expertise among immigrant-background and marginalized group students is conceptualized as directly related to patterns of teacher-student identity negotiation. The motivation underlying the articulation of these frameworks is to provide an evidence-based

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<sup>1</sup> Over the past five years, some Canadian Ministries of Education and university faculties of education that prepare teachers have acknowledged the need for 'mainstream' teachers to develop some knowledge about how to teach immigrant-background students who lack proficiency in the school language. Pre-service teacher education in several universities now includes at least one mandatory course on this issue. However, there is still little acknowledgement that school leaders should have even basic knowledge of how to provide leadership in highly diverse schools. This reality has persisted for more than 50 years in cities such as Toronto and Vancouver, where more than 50% of students come from non-English-speaking home backgrounds. The lack of attention to these issues has resulted in a situation where some school principals learn quickly 'on the job' and provide effective leadership. However, many do *not* learn on the job and provide minimal leadership to teachers, most of whom are similarly unprepared, regarding ways of promoting academic expertise among their multilingual students.

heuristic for educators to critically examine their own pedagogical practice and to discuss organizational and pedagogical directions that might be effective in reversing patterns of underachievement in their own school contexts.

The *Literacy Expertise* framework incorporates Vygotskian notions of a zone of proximal development or pedagogical space for knowledge generation and identity negotiation created in teacher-student interactions but also specifies some central dimensions of language pedagogy that contribute to the development of academic language expertise. The *Reversing Underachievement* framework highlights the fact that *potential* sources of educational disadvantage deriving from students' background experiences (e.g., home use of a language other than the school language) are transformed into actual educational disadvantages only when the school fails to implement effective evidence-based instruction.

Frameworks such as those outlined in Figures 2 and 3 provide interpretive perspectives on educational phenomena. In this case, the phenomenon under discussion is the frequent underachievement of immigrant-background and marginalized group students and ways of reversing these patterns of underachievement. The frameworks are entirely compatible and consistent with each other (and related frameworks proposed – see Cummins & Early [2011] Chapter 2); they simply highlight different dimensions of the issues in the same way that people looking at an elephant will see apparently very different things when they view the elephant from its front as opposed to its side.

### 5.1 *The Literacy Expertise Framework*

The Literacy Expertise framework posits that teacher-student interactions create an interpersonal space within which knowledge is generated and identities are negotiated. Students' literacy development will be optimized when these interactions maximize both cognitive engagement and identity investment. The framework attempts to express in a very concrete way the kinds of instructional emphases and language interactions required to build students' literacy expertise. Optimal instruction will include a Focus on Meaning, a Focus on Language, and a Focus on Use. The *focus on meaning* entails not just understanding of instructional content but also the development of critical literacy rather than surface-level processing of text. The *focus on language* involves (a) promoting explicit knowledge (metalinguistic awareness) of how the linguistic system operates and (b) enabling students to become critically aware of how language functions within society. If students are to participate effectively within a democratic society they should become aware of how language is used to achieve social goals: to elucidate issues, to persuade, to deceive, to include, to exclude. The *focus on use* component argues that optimal instruction will enable students to generate knowledge, create literature and art, and act on

social realities using language and other modalities to explore and express meaning.

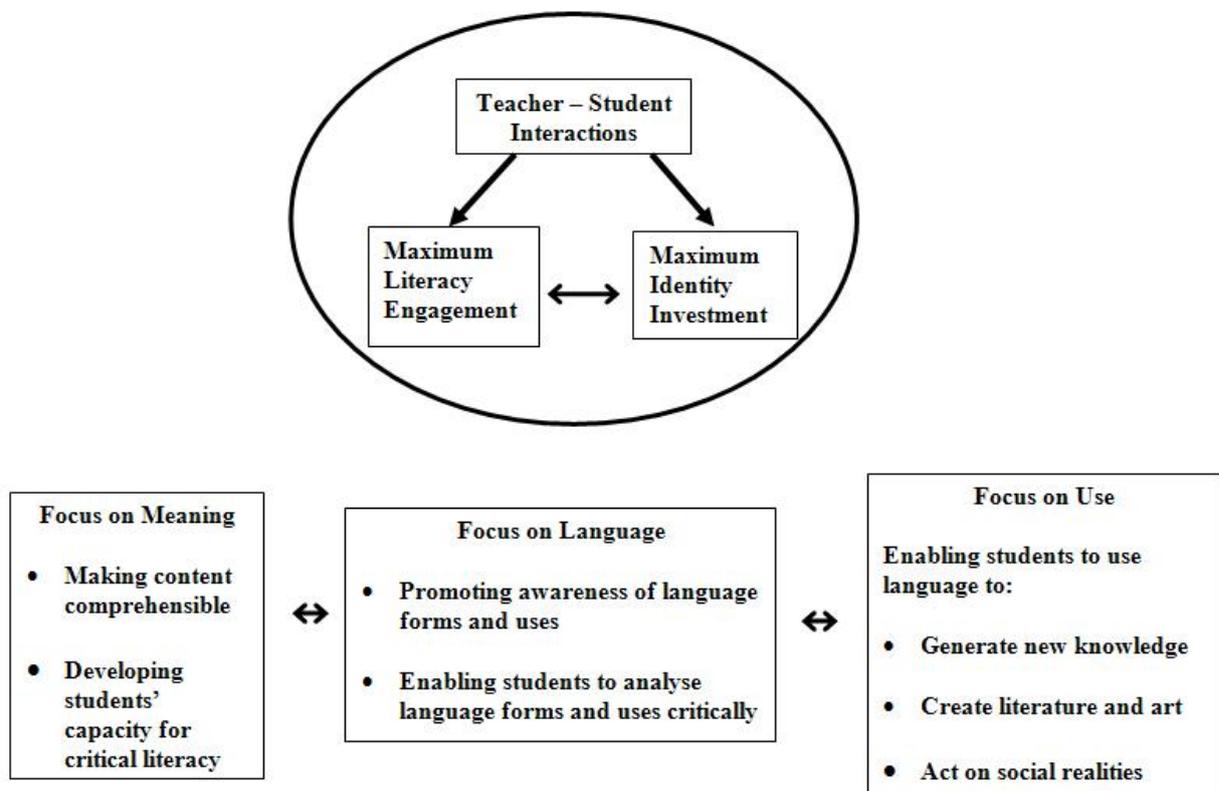


Figure 2. The Literacy Expertise framework. Adapted from *Negotiating identities: Education for empowerment in a diverse society* by J. Cummins (2001: 125). Copyright 2001 by J. Cummins. Reprinted with permission.

The Literacy Expertise framework also makes explicit the fact that classroom instruction always positions students in particular ways that reflect the implicit (or sometimes explicit) image of the student in the teacher's mind. How students are positioned either expands or constricts their opportunities for identity investment, cognitive engagement, and the development of literate and academic expertise.

## 5.2 *The Reversing Underachievement Framework*

The international research literature on educational disadvantage typically identifies three categories of students (in addition to those with special needs) who are at risk of underachievement: (a) linguistically diverse students whose L1 is different from the dominant language of school and society, (b) students from low-socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds, and (c) students from communities that have been marginalized or excluded from educational and social opportunities (often over generations) as a result of discrimination in the wider society (e.g., many indigenous communities around the world). Although these three groups frequently overlap, they are conceptually distinct. Some

students may fall into all three categories of potential disadvantage (e.g., many Spanish-speaking students in the United States), while others may be characterized by only one dimension (e.g., immigrant students from highly educated parents learning English in the United States).

<b>Student background</b>	<b>Linguistically Diverse</b>	<b>Low-SES</b>	<b>Marginalized Status</b>
<b>Sources of potential disadvantage</b>	-Failure to understand instruction due to home-school language differences;	-Inadequate healthcare and/or nutrition; -Housing segregation; -Lack of cultural and material resources in the home due to poverty; -Inadequate access to print in home and school;	-Societal discrimination; -Low teacher expectations; -Stereotype threat; -Identity devaluation;
<b>Evidence-based instructional response</b>	-Scaffold comprehension and production of language across the curriculum; -Reinforce academic language across the curriculum -Engage students' multilingual repertoires	-Maximize print access and literacy engagement; -Reinforce academic language across the curriculum;	-Connect instruction to students' lives; -Affirm student identities in association with literacy engagement; -Decolonize curriculum and instruction

Figure 3. High-Impact instructional responses to sources of potential academic disadvantage.

The relationships outlined in Figure 3 highlight the fact that these dimensions of students' background experiences are transformed into *actual* educational disadvantages only when the school fails to implement effective evidence-based instruction. For example, a home-school language switch becomes an educational disadvantage only when the school fails to support students effectively in learning the school language (e.g., Cummins 2001). Similarly, the effects of racism in the wider society can be significantly ameliorated when the school implements instruction that affirms students' identities and challenges the devaluation of students and communities in the wider society.

*Linguistically diverse students.* There is a large degree of consensus among researchers that effective instruction for second language learners requires that teachers scaffold meaning and reinforce academic language across the curriculum (e.g., Gibbons 2002). There is also considerable research that documents the positive role that students' L1 can play in promoting achievement both in the context of bilingual and non-bilingual programs. Several recent comprehensive research reviews on bilingual education for underachieving

minority language students suggest that in contexts where bilingual education is feasible (e.g., high concentration of particular groups), it represents a superior option to immersion in the language of the host country (e.g., Francis, Lesaux & August 2006). In cases where bilingual education is not feasible or is excluded from consideration for ideological reasons, instruction that engages students' multilingual repertoires represents an effective tool for teachers to scaffold meaning, connect to students' lives, affirm their identities, and enhance awareness of how academic language works. The dual language books discussed in a previous section illustrates one way that teachers can engage students' multilingual repertoires.

*Students from low-SES backgrounds.* The OECD PISA studies have consistently demonstrated a negative relationship between low-SES and achievement both with respect to the SES of individual students and the collective SES of students within particular schools (e.g., OECD, 2010). Some of the sources of potential educational disadvantage associated with SES are beyond the capacity of individual schools to address (e.g., housing segregation) but the potential negative effects of other factors *can* be reduced by school policies and instructional practices. In this regard, it is clearly feasible for schools serving low-SES students to address the limited access to print experienced by many low-SES students in their homes, neighborhoods and schools (e.g., Duke, 2000) by immersing them in a print-rich environment in order to promote literacy engagement across the curriculum. An extensive body of research (e.g., OECD, 2010) demonstrates a consistently strong relationship between reading engagement and reading achievement.

*Students from socially marginalized backgrounds.* How can schools counteract the negative effects of societal power relations that devalue minority group identities? The mechanisms through which societal power relations influence both teacher-student interactions and patterns of academic performance are evident in the well-documented phenomenon of *stereotype threat* (Steele, 1997), which refers to the deterioration of individuals' task performance in contexts where negative stereotypes about their social group are communicated to them.

Ladson-Billings expressed the essence of an effective instructional response to the negative impact of societal power relations as follows: "When students are treated as competent they are likely to demonstrate competence" (1994: 123). In other words, educators, both individually and collectively, must challenge the devaluation of students' language, culture, and identity in the wider society by implementing instructional strategies that enable students to develop identities of competence (Manyak 2004) in the school context. These instructional strategies will communicate high expectations to students regarding their ability to succeed academically and support them in meeting these academic demands by affirming their identities and connecting curriculum to their lives. In the context of communities that have experienced conquest and/or colonization by

a dominant group, affirmation of identity will require a process of decolonizing the structures of formal education and actively challenging the historical and current power relations associated with these colonial structures (e.g., Battiste 2013; Fanon 2008).

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper has problematized notions of 'expertise' that focus only on the individual in isolation. While it is legitimate to focus on individual cognitive and affective variables, this individualistic orientation is inadequate to account for the development of academic expertise among vulnerable and/or marginalized students in educational contexts. In order to account for the empirical data and articulate evidence-based directions for reversing underachievement, the development of students' academic expertise in educational contexts must be conceptualized from both individual-oriented and social-oriented perspectives. Specifically, patterns of teacher-student identity negotiation, which always either challenge or reinforce societal power relations to varying degrees, will play a highly significant role in determining the extent to which vulnerable and marginalized group students develop academic expertise.

If schools are to build capacity and develop the collective expertise to reverse underachievement, conceptions of educator expertise must also be problematized in relation to societal power relations. Teachers, principals, school inspectors, psychologists, and policy-makers whose professional credentials include minimal focus on teaching multilingual and marginalized group students cannot automatically claim expertise to work with these students simply because they have general educational or psychological qualifications. The lack of concern, until recently, to ensure that educators have the knowledge and instructional expertise to teach multilingual students effectively clearly suggests that effective education of these students is not a priority for many societies and school systems. In other words, these educational structures reflect coercive relations of power.

The fact that the persistence of these structures is ideological rather than due to financial or logistical constraints is evident in availability of a variety of no-cost solutions to address at least some of the gaps in provision. For example, it would be very simple to ensure that those aspiring to school leadership positions develop the expertise required to demonstrate leadership in diverse schools. The school authorities responsible for making appointments could simply insert this requirement into the job description. The specified knowledge and expertise might include core information regarding (a) trajectories of school language acquisition among newcomer students, (b) the positive role of students' L1 in facilitating L2 development, and (c) instructional strategies (e.g., scaffolding) required to teach academic content effectively to students who are in the process of developing proficiency in the language of instruction. Policy-makers

could then make clear to aspiring school leaders (e.g., in the job description or advertisement for the leadership position) that specific questions regarding pedagogical approaches to educating newly arrived and multilingual students will be asked in interviews for appointment to school leadership positions.

The same logic applies to the appointment of school inspectors, teachers, psychologists and others who aspire to teach in school systems characterized by diversity. Although other important components of building collective expertise in schools are potentially costly (e.g., professional development), considerable capacity-building could be achieved at minimal cost by simply implementing policies that state explicitly that all new teachers and leaders in schools will be expected to demonstrate expertise related to the education of linguistically and culturally diverse students. This policy change however, would require an ideological shift at multiple levels of the educational and social hierarchy from a monolingual, nativist orientation to an inclusive multilingual orientation. An important conceptual step in this direction is to problematize the construct of 'expertise' with respect to both educators and students in order to uncover ideological assumptions and instructional gaps that are currently constricting the development of student and educator expertise. With these understandings, schools could take significant steps to create structures and patterns of interaction that expand rather than constrict student and teacher expertise.

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