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Second Language Teaching for Academic Success: A Framework for School Language Policy Development

Introduction

Linguistic and cultural diversity has always been characteristic of human societies. However, at no time in human history has there been so much mobility of human populations as in the past 40 years. This population mobility has resulted in unprecedented levels of cross-cultural contact within countries and across countries. The increase in diversity has been fueled by economic migration to Europe, Australia, and North America whose economies expanded rapidly during the 1960s and beyond, and from efforts to resettle refugees from countries devastated by war and famine. At the same time as diversity is increasing within societies, cross-cultural and linguistic contact between countries is increasing as a result of globalization of economic activity together with international attempts to resolve ecological and diplomatic problems.

Falling birthrates and aging populations in many relatively affluent countries have also contributed to the growth of diversity. In Canada, for example, low birth-rates combined with an aging population have resulted in substantial immigration rates during the past decade or more (an average of more than 200,000 immigrants per year, although this is less than the target recommended by demographers of 1 % of the population annually, which would be close to 300,000 immigrants per year). Japan provides an instructive example of the dilemmas faced by countries that have considered themselves to be relatively homogenous with respect to ethnicity.

Japan's birthrate has declined to 1.4 births per woman, far below the 2.1 births required to sustain the population at its current level. Rapid constriction in all levels of education is predicted as fewer young people come to school and go to university. Without a dramatic increase in fertility (which is highly unlikely) or massive increases in immigration (which is currently negligible – foreigners account for

only 1 % of the Japanese population), the economy will shrink and make it difficult to maintain social services to the rapidly increasing elderly population (aged 65+) which will make up 20 % of Japan's population by 2005. The dramatic implications of these demographic trends can be seen in the fact that the working-age population of Japan will drop by about 650,000 a year over the next 50 years.

Thus, Japan is faced with the prospect of dramatically increasing immigration or face economic decline. To increase immigration in such a way that immigrants would want to settle and boost the population would entail significant social changes: reduce widespread discrimination against foreigners, implement effective Japanese L2 language learning programs, and possibly bilingual education in immigrant languages, and generally adjust a social and educational system to promote equity and academic advancement for second language learners. Not simple to do, or even to contemplate, because we are talking about fundamental changes to the culture and power structure of the society.

Northern European and North American societies have faced similar issues during the past 40 years and are still struggling to resolve the educational and social dilemmas that have become associated with increasing diversity. Clearly, population mobility and increasing cross-cultural contact both domestically and internationally have major consequences for schools in urban areas. For example, in cities such as Toronto and Vancouver, Canada, more than half the school population has a home language other than English. In Amsterdam, about 40 percent of the school population was born outside The Netherlands. Other European, Australian, and North American cities show similar trends. Thus, in many countries, educators and policy-makers are grappling with issues such as: What programs and methods will be most effective in teaching bilingual students the primary language of schooling and of the wider society? What role, if any, should students' mother tongues have within the public education system? What initiatives are required to teach additional languages to dominant or majority language group students so that they can operate effectively in a broader European Union or global context? How can persistent patterns of educational failure among certain linguistic and cultural minority groups be overcome?

The dominant educational approach in relation to minority or subordinated groups for most of the past century has been to try to make

them disappear. This was achieved by one of two strategies: *exclusion* or *assimilation*. Although *exclusionary* and *assimilationist* strategies may appear to be opposites insofar as "exclusionary" focuses on segregation of subordinated groups from the mainstream of schools and society while "assimilationist" focuses on total integration into the society, in reality they are frequently two sides of the same coin: both orientations aspire to make subordinated groups invisible and inaudible. Minority groups constructed as "racially different" have historically been subjected to exclusionary rather than assimilationist policies for the simple reason that "disappearance" could not readily be achieved through assimilation. In addition, if assimilationist policies were applied to "racial" minorities, it would imply inter-marriage across "races" within the same "melting pot". Dominant groups saw this mixing of "races" as undesirable and thus "racially different" groups have typically been segregated with respect to both housing and schooling.

Both exclusionary and assimilationist policies have been challenged since the 1960s as a result of the increased prominence of human rights and equity provisions in national and international policies and covenants (see Phillipson 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1995). However, there is still no consensus among policy-makers and educators regarding the appropriate provision to ensure educational equity for linguistically and culturally diverse students.

In this paper, I try to pull the research and theory on academic language learning together in such a way that major controversies are resolved and the implications for instruction of second language learners (SLL) become apparent. Initially, I highlight the need for *school-based language policies* (Corson 1999) to set in motion a process of working towards change at the level of the individual school. Then I describe a framework that attempts to integrate theory, research and practice in this area and which might represent a starting point for the process of developing school language policies.

The Need for School Language Policies

The demographics of diversity together with the length of time required for SLL students to catch up academically (usually at least 5

years – see below) means that a significant percentage of teachers in urban areas will be required to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students in their "mainstream" classrooms. In order to implement effective instruction in this context, educators must re-define their roles both individually and collectively. This implies that schools must take seriously the fact that they are "learning institutions." In other words, in addition to being places where students learn, schools must also acknowledge that they are required to adapt to changing demographic and social circumstances if they are to carry out their mission effectively. In particular, schools must learn how to teach a diverse student body that is dramatically different from the "generic" white, middle-class, monolingual, monocultural students for whom state curricula were developed in the past. In the absence of a school-wide policy with respect to language and diversity issues, schools will typically assume that the task of teaching SLL students belongs to the specialized Swedish-as-a-second-language teacher in the school. Under these circumstances, SLL students are unlikely to receive appropriate instruction (comprehensible input) from the "mainstream" classroom teachers in whose classrooms they may be for most of the school day.

This pattern can be illustrated in the vignette below taken from a letter to the *Toronto Star* newspaper in April, 1994, written by a secondary school science teacher called B. Dudley Brett:

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 a multi-racial classroom", B. Dudley Brett, Letter of the Week, *Toronto Star*, 1994, April 2, p. B3).

B. Dudley Brett's letter expresses well the dilemmas experienced by committed and caring educators faced with rapidly increasing numbers of SLL students in their schools and classrooms. As in other countries, immigration to Canada has increased substantially during the past 15 years, with the result that many schools in urban centers have large numbers of SLL students whose knowledge of the language of instruction varies widely. Many teachers, particularly at the secondary level, are confused and often frustrated at the new challenges they are facing. They feel prepared and competent to teach science, mathematics, or regular English courses but totally unprepared to teach these courses to students who are still in the process of acquiring the language of instruction. Many, like B. Dudley Brett, would like to see more intensive and prolonged instruction in English as a second language so that students would be fluent in English by the time they enter "mainstream" classes.

Brett's letter also illustrates well, however, the consequences of viewing the education of ELL students only as a technical instructional problem rather than as a sociopolitical issue related to power relations in the broader society. Although he acknowledges his own "incompetence" to help SLL students, Brett fails to problematize the system that gave rise to, and perpetuates, his incompetence. Instead, he sees the "problem" as residing almost exclusively with SLL students themselves (through no fault of their own) and his "solution" is to keep students out of the "mainstream" until they can cope with the instructional demands of the regular curriculum.

It is clear that despite his frustration, Brett is positively oriented towards his students and probably attempts to communicate this respect to them in his classroom interactions. However, this positive orientation may amount to very little in comparison to the message commu-

nicated to them as a result of their failure to pass his science course. They fail not because they do not know the content nor make the effort to learn, but because they are unable to demonstrate their learning in English.

Brett clearly defines his role as a committed and caring teacher, but nowhere in his letter is there a sense of the need to address his own acknowledged "incompetence." It is the SLL student who requires "fixing" through more intensive and extensive English-as-a-second-language (ESL) instruction rather than Brett's own teaching abilities or strategies. Brett does not problematize his own identity as a competent science teacher despite the fact that he is unable to teach science to almost half of the students in his science class. He also shows no awareness of the time periods typically required for SLL students to catch up academically (5+ years) despite the fact that much of this research was carried out in Toronto (Cummins 1981; Klesmer 1994) and widely publicized among ESL teachers for more than 15 years. Had he, or the administrators in his school, been aware of these data they might have reflected more on the need for *all* teachers, rather than just the ESL teacher, to provide English language learning support.

Also unquestioned is the educational structure encompassing curriculum, assessment, pre-service education, in-service education, criteria for advancement to leadership positions in the school district, etc. that has largely ignored issues related to diversity and second language learning. In Ontario, as in most other jurisdictions, these issues, if considered at all, remain 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). Thus, Brett questions why SLL students are admitted to his science class before they have minimal English, rather than questioning the structure of a school system and a policy framework that excludes SLL students from any meaningful participation in the instructional process.

Many of the adjustments that might begin to address the blatant inequities of access would cost nothing to implement. For example, faculties of education could ensure that *all* new teachers who graduate have had at least some preparation with respect to making academic content comprehensible to SLL students. Similarly, school systems could institute as a criterion of advancement to principal and vice-

principal positions, some demonstrated expertise or success in working with SLL students. If such expertise is not a criterion of advancement, why should we expect any leadership in our schools in relation to issues of diversity and academic language learning? Had B. Dudley Brett been in a school where the "problem" of SLL students was at least being discussed under the leadership of a knowledgeable principal, ESL teachers and content teachers might have been able to collaboratively design strategies to facilitate SLL students' comprehension and participation in the "regular" classroom. These strategies might have ranged from the simple use of graphic organizers to cooperative planning of lessons between ESL and content teachers so that the same content is being reinforced in both settings.

None of this appears to have happened in the school setting described by Brett. This lack of collaborative action to address the learning needs of ELL students is not surprising. Issues related to diversity and educational equity for SLL students remain marginal in the priorities of the wider society. The good intentions and commitment of B. Dudley Brett and his equally committed colleagues are not enough by themselves to provide an equitable and effective education for linguistically- and culturally-diverse students. Change requires that educators become aware of, and be willing to challenge, the power relations operating in the wider society and in the school as a reflection of that society. When they fail to problematize their own identities and the structure within which they operate, educators inadvertently reinforce the operation of coercive relations of power.

It is important to emphasize that a *school language policy* is a process rather than a product. Such a policy must address the causes of second language learners' (SLL) educational underachievement. It must also attempt to create organizational structures and patterns of educator-student interactions in the school that will promote active student participation in the learning process. In charting directions for change, school language policies will take account of the relevant research on second language learning and academic success and integrate this research with the specific circumstances of their school communities and their experience over time in working within these school communities. School language policies relate to the roles not only of specialized language teachers but of *all* teachers in the school. If all teachers are to buy into these policies, then they should have a

role in formulating and monitoring them within the school. In other words, effective instruction for SLL students requires that all educators within a school become informed about relevant research and theory and take responsibility for implementing appropriate practices that address students' language learning and academic needs. This process of school improvement takes time and the process is probably never complete.

The instructional framework in the present chapter is intended to serve as a convenient starting point for discussing the development of language and equity policies in schools. It represents just the beginning, not the end-point, of such a process. Any policy should be dynamic rather than static; in other words, it should draw on the collective experience of educators in the school and be subject to ongoing refinement and modification based on that collective experience (Corson 1999). The framework incorporates an emphasis on identity negotiation and cognitive challenge, and their intersection with patterns of societal power relations. It also highlights three focus areas for instruction aimed at developing academic language proficiency: instruction must incorporate a focus on meaning or message (comprehensible input), it must aim to demystify how academic language works and develop a critical language awareness among students, and finally, it must provide ample opportunities and encouragement for students to express *themselves* – their developing identities – through varied forms of creative oral and written language use.

A Framework for Academic Language Learning

The Interpersonal Space of Cognitive Engagement and Identity Investment

The central sphere in Figure 1 represents the interpersonal space created in the interactions between teachers and students. Within this interpersonal space or what Vygotsky (1978) termed the *zone of proximal development*, knowledge is generated (learning occurs) and identities are negotiated. In contexts of cultural, linguistic, or economic diversity where social inequality inevitably exists, these interactions are never neutral: they either challenge the operation of coercive relations of power in the wider society or they reinforce these power relations. At the other end of the sphere, we can visualize the discourse of soci-

etal power relations which is broadcast into the classroom and directly affects how identities are negotiated between teachers and students. For example, the discourse that asserts bilingual children need to assimilate and give up their L1 if they are to succeed in the society is not a neutral scientific statement of fact; on the contrary, it contradicts the scientific data on this issue (Cummins 2000) and derives directly from patterns of coercive power relations in the wider society. This construction of children's bilingualism as a problem to be resolved frequently results in patterns of teacher-student interaction that communicate to students that they should leave their language and culture at the schoolhouse door.

The framework argues that within the interpersonal space of teacher-student interactions, students' cognitive engagement must be maximized if they are to progress academically. Similarly, teacher-student interactions must affirm students' cultural, linguistic, and personal identities in order to create classroom conditions for maximum identity investment in the learning process.

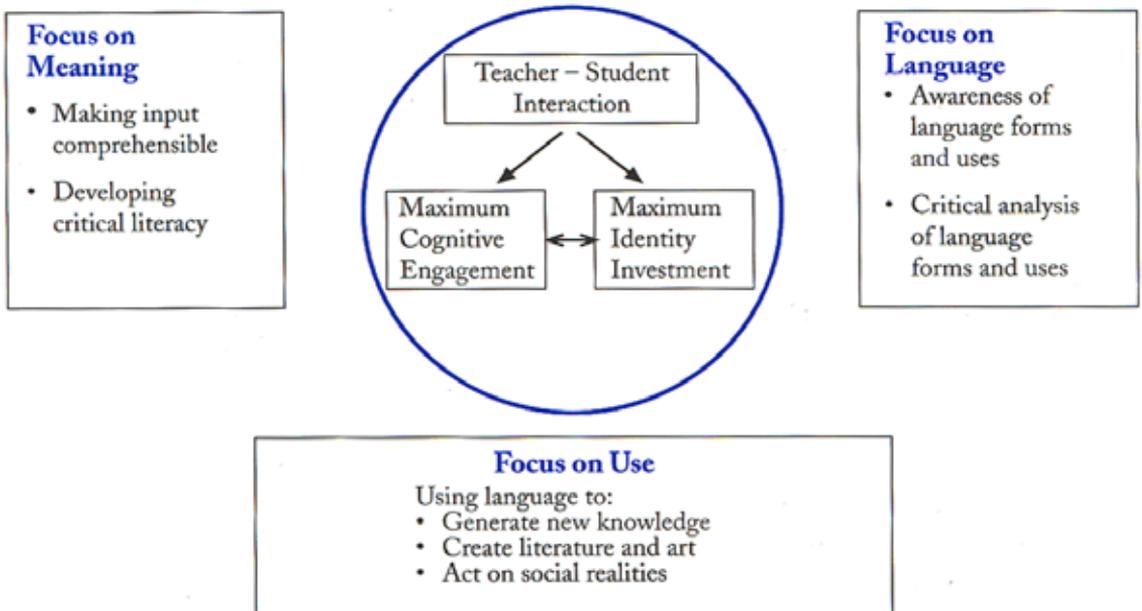


Figure 1. The Development of Academic Expertise

There is a reciprocal relationship between cognitive engagement and identity investment. The more students learn, the more their academic self-concept grows, and the more academically engaged they become. However, students will be reluctant to invest their identities in the learning process if they feel their teachers do not like them, respect them, and appreciate their experiences and talents. In the past, students from marginalized social groups have seldom felt this sense of affirmation and respect for language and culture from their teachers. Consequently their intellectual and personal talents rarely found expression in the classroom.

In short, a starting point in the framework is the assertion that the learning process must be observed through the twin lens of cognitive engagement and identity investment. What this means in practice can be illustrated with respect to the process of activating students' prior knowledge.

Activating prior Knowledge/ Building Background Knowledge

There is general agreement among cognitive psychologists that we learn by integrating new input into our existing cognitive structures or schemata. Our prior experience provides the foundation for interpreting new information. No learner is a blank slate. In reading, for example, we construct meaning by bringing our prior knowledge of language and of the world to the text. As Fielding and Pearson (1994) point out, research conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s consistently revealed a strong reciprocal relationship between prior knowledge and reading comprehension ability: "The more one already knows, the more one comprehends; and the more one comprehends, the more one learns new knowledge to enable comprehension of an even greater array of topics and texts" (1994, p. 62).

Thus, a major rationale for activating students' prior knowledge, or if there is minimal prior knowledge on a particular topic or issue, building it with the students, is to make the learning process more efficient. Prior knowledge represents one central aspect of what students bring to the learning situation that makes input more context-embedded and comprehensible. It is important to *activate* students' prior knowledge because students may not explicitly realize what they know about a particular topic or issue; consequently, their prior

knowledge may not facilitate learning unless it is brought to consciousness.

In a classroom with second language learners from diverse backgrounds, prior knowledge about a particular topic may vary widely. Thus, simple transmission of the information or skill will fail to connect with the prior knowledge and previous experience of many students. As a result, the input will be much less comprehensible for those students. Some students may have relevant information in their L1 but not realize that there is any connection with what they are learning in their L2. In other cases, there may be a considerable cultural gap between what is assumed by the text and what students know from their prior experience. This is particularly the case for older students whose previous schooling has been interrupted and who may have minimal L1 literacy skills.

Thus, a first step in making any input more context-embedded is to activate students' prior knowledge through brainstorming as a whole class, or in small groups or pairs. This is an appropriate situation for students to use their L1 in small groups or in pairs when their proficiency in English is limited.

Finding out what students know about a particular topic allows the teacher to supply relevant concepts or vocabulary that some or all students may be lacking but which will be important for understanding the upcoming text or lesson. Building this context permits students to understand more complex language and to pursue more cognitively demanding activities. It frees up brain power. In short, activation of students' prior knowledge and building background knowledge increases students' cognitive engagement and enables them to function at an intellectually and linguistically higher level. Students understand more and consequently they learn more language and academic content.

However, just as important for the learning process as these cognitive considerations is the fact that activation of prior knowledge enables teachers to validate culturally diverse students' background experiences and affirm their cultural knowledge. Inviting students to contribute what they already know to the class discussion communicates to students that the cultural and linguistic knowledge they are bringing into the classroom is important. Both the teacher and other students are interested in the unique cultural experiences of individual students. A community of sharing is created in the classroom; iden-

tity is being negotiated in ways that motivate students to express their growing sense of self and participate actively in the learning process.

In summary, activating bilingual students' prior knowledge:

- Increases cognitive engagement and makes language and concepts more meaningful to students by enabling them to interpret new information in relation to what they already know;
- Enables teachers to get to know their students better as individuals with unique personal histories; in turn, this permits teachers to tune their instruction to the needs and interests of individual students;
- Creates a context in the classroom where students' cultural knowledge is expressed, shared and affirmed, thereby motivating students to invest themselves more fully in the learning process.

The reciprocal relationship between affirming students' identity and maximizing their cognitive engagement is also evident in many other aspects of instruction. For example, when students write, revise, and publish stories in the classroom, they are simultaneously stretched cognitively and also affirmed as individuals with something important and interesting to contribute. Identity investment and cognitive engagement are two sides of the same coin.

The Teacher's Role in Maximizing Cognitive Engagement and Identity Investment

If students are primarily involved in rote memorization in the classroom, only a fraction of their cognitive capacity is engaged in learning. From an academic perspective, they are driving their intellectual motors in second gear. Engagement of higher level cognitive processes such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation – critical thinking – is clearly likely to produce much more learning for the simple reason that much more of students' brains are involved in the process of learning. By the same token, this kind of stimulation will develop students' brains, and their cognitive capacity, much more than instruction that involves only low-level cognitive processes. This clearly points to a major limitation of traditional orientations to pedagogy that focus primarily on low-level memorization and application skills.

The teacher's role in promoting academic and cognitive engagement goes beyond just implementing a set of techniques or strategies for making input comprehensible to students and developing their literacy skills. Effective classroom implementation of techniques such as use of graphic organizers, cooperative learning, developing learning strategies, peer tutoring, dialogue journals, authentic assessment, and so on are important but they do not necessarily translate into effective instruction. Much more crucial is the recognition that human relationships are fundamental to students' academic engagement. This is true for all students, but particularly so in the case of second language learners who may be trying to find their way in the borderlands between cultures. They frequently don't have either the means or the desire to go back to their original culture but don't yet have the language skills or cultural understanding to participate fully in their new culture. For students to invest their sense of self, their identity, in acquiring their new language and participating actively in their new culture, they must experience positive and affirming interactions with members of that culture.

Nobody is more important in this process than the teacher. Teachers have the opportunity to nurture students' growing understanding of who they are and who they want to be. It is the teacher who guides students towards powerful ways of expressing themselves in their new language and communicates to them possibilities of who they can become and the roles they might play within their new society.

In other words, techniques and strategies will be effective only when teachers and students forge a relationship of respect and affirmation; when students feel that they are welcomed into the learning community of the classroom and supported in the immense challenges they face in catching up academically; and when students feel that their teachers believe in them and expect them to succeed in school and in life.

Respect and affirmation are the basis of any relationship and, in classroom interactions, respect and affirmation are central to motivating second language learners to engage actively and enthusiastically in academic effort. This perspective entails two implications for how teachers define their role: first, it implies that teachers must see their role as creating instructional contexts in which second language learners can become active partners in the learning process; second, it implies that teachers must view themselves as learners—in order to teach

effectively they must learn from their students about students' culture, background, and experience.

When we look at the learning process through the twin lens of cognitive engagement and identity investment, what comes into focus are teacher-student interactions that:

- provide ample opportunities for students to process meaningful language and concepts;
- provide ample opportunities for students to deepen their awareness of how their languages work and how language use intersects with power relations to affect their lives (e.g. through advertisements, political rhetoric, etc.);
- provide ample opportunities for students to use their languages in powerful ways to connect with other people and make a difference in their world.

These three focus areas are discussed below.

Focus on Meaning

The framework highlights the fact that effective instruction in a second language must focus initially on meaning or messages. Virtually all applied linguists agree that access to sufficient comprehensible input in the target language is a necessary condition for language acquisition; most applied linguists, however, also assign a role to (a) a focus on formal features of the target language, (b) development of effective learning strategies, and (c) actual use of the target language. These components are incorporated in the Focus on Language and Focus on Use components of the framework.

The Focus on Meaning component argues that the interpretation of the construct of *comprehensible input* must go beyond just literal comprehension. Depth of understanding of concepts and vocabulary as well as critical literacy are intrinsic to the notion of comprehensible input when we are talking about the development of academic language proficiency. This implies a process whereby students relate textual and instructional meanings to their own experience and prior knowledge (i.e. activate their cognitive schemata), critically analyze the information in the text (e.g. evaluate the validity of various argu-

ments or propositions), and use the results of their discussions and analyses in some concrete, intrinsically-motivating activity or project (e.g. making a video or writing a poem or essay on a particular topic). In short, for learning of academic content, the notion of *comprehensible input* must move beyond literal, surface-level comprehension to a deeper level of cognitive and linguistic processing. Again, this depth of processing seldom occurs when second languages are taught within a traditional orientation.

The following approach to developing critical literacy (Figure 2) attempts to show how interpersonal spaces can be created between teachers and students that encourage students to share and amplify their experience within a collaborative process of critical inquiry. Each of the five phases below progressively opens up possibilities for the strengthening of students' personal and academic identity. The "texts" that are the focus of the interaction can derive from any curricular area or from newspapers, popular songs, or current events. The process is equally applicable to students at any grade level and the phases can be intertwined rather than follow a strict sequence. A basic assumption is that collective action to transform aspects of our social realities results in a deeper understanding of those realities.

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- **Experiential Phase.** Activate prior knowledge and build background knowledge; For example, in a science unit on photosynthesis, teachers and students brainstorm on "What makes plants grow?"
 - **Literal Phase.** Focus is on information contained in the text; Typical questions might be: When, where, how, did it happen? Who did it? Why?
 - **Personal Phase.** Students relate textual information to their own experiences and feelings; Teachers might ask: Have you ever seen (felt, experienced) something like this? Have you ever wanted something similar?
 - **Critical Phase.** Critical analysis of issues or problems arising from the text; involves drawing inferences and exploring generalizations. Teachers might ask: Is what this person said valid? Always? Under what conditions? etc. Are there any alternatives to this situation?

- **Creative Phase.** Translating the results of previous phases into concrete action; How can the problem or issues be resolved? What role can we play in helping resolve the problem. This phase might involve drama, role play, letters to editor, school principal, etc., web site or newsletter publication of research/analysis/art, etc.

Figure 2. Focus on Meaning: From Comprehensible Input to Critical Literacy

Focus on Language

The Focus on Language component in Figure 1 attempts to put controversial issues such as the appropriate time and ways to teach L2 grammar, the role of phonics in reading instruction, etc. under the "umbrella" of *Language Awareness*. The development of language awareness includes not just a focus on formal aspects of the language but also the development of *critical language awareness* which encompasses exploration of the relationships between language and power. Students, for example, might carry out research on the status of different varieties of language (e.g. colloquial language versus formal "standard" language) and explore critically why one form is considered by many educators and the general public to be "better" than the other. They might also research issues such as code-switching and the functions it plays within their own lives and their bilingual communities. Or they might analyze letters to the editor on controversial issues such as immigration and examine how the language used in these letters positions and potentially stereotypes minority group learners such as themselves and their parents.

In short, a focus on formal features of the target language should be integrated with critical inquiry into issues of language and power. Also, to be effective, a focus on language must be linked to extensive input in the target language (e.g. through reading) and extensive opportunities for written and oral use of the language.

A number of scholars and educators have focused on the importance of developing language awareness not only as a means of demystifying language and how it works but also as a way of reinforcing students' sense of identity. Lisa Delpit (1998), for example, talks about encouraging African American speakers of Ebonics (i.e. African

American varieties of English) to become "language detectives" investigating similarities and differences between their own vernacular and other forms of English such as that found in school texts. For example, groups of students can work together to create bilingual dictionaries of their own language forms and Standard English. A significant goal is to reinforce students' understanding that their language is legitimate and powerful in its context of use but that other forms of English are necessary in different contexts of use.

Figure 3 outlines some of the activities that might constitute a Focus on Language. These activities clearly go beyond just the teaching of forms and functions of the language. The goal is to develop among students a culture of inquiry into language and how it works in different social situations.

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- The structure of language systems (e.g. relationships between sounds and spelling, regional and class-based accents, grammar, vocabulary, etc.);
 - Ways of accomplishing different functions and purposes of language;
 - Conventions of different musical and literary forms (e.g. rap, rock, folk music, poetry, fiction, etc.);
 - Appropriateness of expression in different contexts (cultural conventions of politeness, street language versus school language, the language of everyday speech versus the language of books, language variety as a badge of identity in groups as diverse as gangs, political parties, fraternities, etc.);
 - Ways of organizing oral or written discourse to create powerful or persuasive messages (e.g. oratorical speeches, influential written documents, political rhetoric, advertisements, etc.);
 - Cross-lingual comparison of languages (e.g. cognates between Swedish, students' L1, and English, proverbs, orthography, etc.);
 - Diversity of language use in both monolingual and multilingual contexts (code-switching in bilingual communities, language maintenance and loss in families, political controversies surrounding language).
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Figure 3. Collaborative Inquiry to Develop Critical Language Awareness

A systematic focus on developing critical language awareness requires that teachers organize instruction to enable students to *harvest the language* so that it becomes available for their use. Computer technology can be useful in helping students (either individually or in groups) to collect, internalize, and consolidate their knowledge of language and then use it powerfully to extend their intellectual horizons and personal identities. For example, extrapolating from the paper-and-pencil activities suggested by Norah McWilliam's (1998) *word-weaving* project, students could set up templates in computer files to enter words that they have come across in their reading or everyday experiences that they want to explore. The templates might include categories such as *synonyms, L1 equivalents, proverbs and idioms in which the word appears, advertisements, puns, jokes in which the word appears, relevant grammatical information*, etc.

Focus on Use

The Focus on Use component is based on the notion that L2 acquisition will remain abstract and classroom-bound unless students have the opportunity to express themselves—their identities and their intelligence—through that language. In order to motivate language use there should ideally be an authentic audience that encourages two-way communication in both oral and written modes. The three examples of language use presented in Figure 1 (*generate new knowledge, create literature and art, act on social realities*) are intended to illustrate important components of critical literacy. Language must be used to amplify students' intellectual, aesthetic, and social identities if it is to contribute to student empowerment, understood as the collaborative creation of power. Unless active and authentic language use for these purposes is promoted in the classroom, students' grasp of academic (and conversational) aspects of their second language is likely to remain shallow and passive.

In addition to its cognitive and linguistic benefits, active language use in the classroom encourages students to express *themselves*; in other words, to explore their feelings, ideas, and experiences in a supportive context and thereby become more aware of their goals, values, and aspirations. Two examples of language use that have the poten-

tial to strongly promote affirmation of identity are drama/role-play and creative writing.

Another example of a language use activity that clearly promotes identity exploration together with literacy skills development is the writing of critical autobiographies in which culturally- and linguistically-diverse students write about experiences and events in their lives (e.g. Brisk 1998; Brisk & Harrington 2000). Brisk points out that in writing the autobiographies, students should examine and discuss their lives from a variety of perspectives: linguistic, cultural, political, economic, sociological, and psychological, and try to understand why things are the way they are. In the course of class discussion exploring various themes, teachers can ask questions to students to probe deeper into issues. Parents can also be interviewed for relevant information and resources (e.g. photographs).

A variation of the critical autobiography is to have pairs of students collaborate to write each others' biography. In some cases, a more fluent speaker of the target language will collaborate with a less fluent student to construct and write the biography of the less fluent student. Publication of the biographies in paper or electronic format (e.g. class web page) can also be pursued for sharing with a wider audience (e.g. parents, other students, etc.). Immigrant students can also be encouraged to write in their stronger language and then work with other students or the teacher or a volunteer to produce a bilingual or trilingual text.

Conclusion

A framework for academic language learning has been outlined that views the interactions between educators and students as the most immediate determinant of student success or failure in school. These interactions can be viewed through two lens: the lens of *the teaching-learning relationship* in a narrow sense, represented by the strategies and techniques that teachers use to provide comprehensible input and reading instruction as well as promote content knowledge and cognitive growth. Effective instruction viewed through this lens will maximize students' cognitive engagement.

The second lens is the lens of *identity negotiation* which is represented by the messages communicated to students regarding their

identities – who they are in the teacher’s eyes and who they are capable of becoming. Perhaps the most important thing that teachers can do to promote students’ mastery of academic English is to organize the classroom as a learning community where the voices of all students can be heard. When students feel strong respect and affirmation from their teachers and peers, it generates a powerful sense of belonging to the classroom learning community and motivation to participate fully in the society beyond.

Maximum cognitive engagement and maximum identity investment are realized in instruction that provides opportunities for students to focus on meaning, language, and extensive use of both oral and written language. In this regard, the importance of extensive reading and writing in the development of both academic self-confidence and academic language proficiency cannot be over-emphasized. Reading texts (ideally in both L1 and L2) that students can relate to their personal histories or their understanding of the world generates the motivation to keep on reading. Writing narratives and analyses (in L1 and L2) that express their growing sense of self, their identity, allows students to map out where they have come from and where they are going. However, students will also benefit from an explicit focus on developing an awareness of language and its pervasive role in all aspects of our society. This focus on language itself and its intersection with various kinds of power relations in society encourages students to *harvest the language*. In this way, they absorb much more academic language from what they read and are enabled to use this language powerfully and effectively in their own speaking and writing.

School language policies are an important tool to enable schools to move in these directions. The process of engaging in school policy discussions permits all teachers’ voices to be heard and provides a means to bring relevant research and experience (e.g. successful practice) to the table. By contrast, when such a process is absent (as illustrated in the case of B. Dudley Brett’s classroom and school) teachers’ role definitions and the organizational structures within the school are likely to locate the “problem” within the immigrant student or community, thereby perpetuating both the intellectual segregation of the student and the devaluing of the cultural and linguistic capital that she brings to the school.

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