Essay

Teaching through a Multilingual Lens: The Evolution of EAL Policy and Practice in Canada

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With some justification, Canadians pride themselves on the creation of a highly diverse society that is characterized by legal protections for the rights and freedoms of all citizens and a degree of intercultural harmony that compares well to most other countries. Students from immigrant backgrounds tend to perform well, on average, in Canadian schools and at considerably higher levels than immigrant background students in the United States and most European countries (McAndrew et al., 2009; OECD, 2010a; Stanat & Christensen, 2006). All provinces have established an infrastructure to support students who are learning English (or French in Quebec) as an additional language (EAL) to acquire proficiency in the language of instruction, and to ensure that teachers charged with specialist language support have appropriate qualifications to fulfill that role.

While acknowledging the progress that has been made during the past 30 years in promoting equitable opportunities for EAL/multilingual learners in Canadian schools, we argue in this paper that policy and instructional practice are lacking in several important respects. First, at the policy level, educational provision for EAL/multilingual students is hampered by the fact that Canada has articulated no coherent (or even incoherent) national policies with respect to the multilingual realities of its population and institutions. The 1971 policy of *multiculturalism within a bilingual framework* omitted any meaningful consideration of languages other than the two official languages, substituting positive rhetoric in relation to the *cultural contributions of the other ethnic groups* for any concrete action to foster Canada's multilingual resources. As we document below, no province has articulated an educational language policy that addresses in a positive way the multilingual realities of its schools, although Alberta at least did consider the

issue in the 1980s (Alberta Government, 1988). Some provinces (e.g., Ontario) have articulated restrictive policies in relation to multilingualism by prohibiting use of languages other than English and French as mediums of instruction except on a short-term transitional basis.

This policy vacuum encourages educators, parents, and even students themselves to view students' home languages as either irrelevant to their schooling or, in some cases, as an impediment to learning the school language. As reflected in terms such as *English language learner* (ELL), students are defined by what they lack—proficiency in the school language—rather than by their emergent bilingual and multilingual abilities. This, in turn, results in the assumption that it is primarily the responsibility of the English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teacher to support students in acquiring proficiency in the language of instruction and catching up academically.

Thus, despite the fact that Canadian urban schools are increasingly multilingual (e.g., approximately 50 percent of students in Toronto and Vancouver have a first language [L1] other than English), most classroom teachers at the elementary level and content teachers at the secondary level have had no pre-service or professional development preparation focused on appropriate instruction for EAL/multilingual students. [1] Expressed differently, educational policies and structures (e.g., teacher education) across Canada have articulated no expectation or requirement that *mainstream* teachers should have any knowledge regarding appropriate ways of scaffolding instruction for second language learners in their classrooms. School principals and vice-principals likewise are not expected to know that there is a knowledge base regarding appropriate instruction for EAL students or to provide leadership in ensuring that teachers in their schools gain access to this knowledge base. Principals' courses typically include no content relating to effective leadership in linguistically diverse schools. Furthermore, the decision-making process within school boards regarding promotion to administrative positions rarely takes account of an individual's ability to provide instructional leadership in multilingual/multicultural schools.

Obviously, many classroom teachers and school administrators have a deep understanding of issues related to language and education and they create schools and classrooms where all students thrive. However, our point is that these teachers and administrators have often gained this expertise in spite of educational policies rather than because of them. They

have chosen to take Additional Qualification courses in ESL or gained their expertise "on the job".

In the sections below, we review the Canadian policy context for teaching EAL/multilingual students in more depth. Then we sketch the knowledge base that does exist regarding (a) trajectories of English (or French in Quebec) language development and (b) instructional practices that affect that development. We trace the evolution of Canadian educational policies and practices in relation to linguistic diversity from an explicitly racist focus on eradicating diverse languages and cultures, which extended into the 1960s, to the emergence in recent years of a pedagogical orientation that we term *teaching through a multilingual lens*. Finally, we profile in some depth how this orientation was realized in the classroom practice of one teacher (Robin Persad).

The Canadian Policy Context

Four phases in relation to educational policies regarding children's home languages can be identified in the Canadian context:

(a) Pre-1971: Social and educational policies across Canada were characterized by *Anglo-conformity* (or *Franco-conformity* in Quebec) and active suppression of languages other than English and French in school. Minority francophone communities outside of Quebec were also frequently denied access to French language instruction in school. First Nations and Inuit students in residential schools were often brutally punished for speaking their home languages, which constituted just one of the ways in which the schools set out to eradicate students' identities.

(b) 1971–mid-1980s: The 1971 federal policy of multiculturalism within the framework of English and French as official languages gave rise to positive multicultural rhetoric but languages other than the two official languages were omitted from consideration. Within schools, the positive multicultural rhetoric was still accompanied by widespread language suppression such as reprimanding students for any use of their L1 in school and advising parents to switch to English (or French in Quebec) in the home.

(c) Mid-1980s–mid-2000's: This period was characterized by a reduction in overt forms of language suppression but implicit school policies reflected a benign neglect of students' languages. Maintenance of home languages was seen as an issue for parents not the school and implicit *English-only zone* policies continued to operate in schools. The ways in which students

internalize subtle *English-only zone* messages can be illustrated in the following teacher's recollection () of one Grade 4 student in a highly multicultural school in the Greater Toronto Area regarding an experience in Grade 1:

> I am not always comfortable speaking Cantonese when I have to go to the office for some reason. I don't like it because a lot of teachers are at the office and I don't like speaking it in front of them. I know that they are listening to me. I get nervous and afraid. For example, once I didn't feel very well in Grade 1. So my teacher sent me to the office to call my grandma. My grandma doesn't speak English and she also can't hear very well, so I had to speak in Cantonese very loudly for her to hear. So when I spoke to my grandma, I felt very nervous. (Cummins, 2011)

(d) Mid-2000's--current: Two overlapping and still emergent orientations can be distinguished in recent years regarding pedagogical approaches to students' linguistic diversity. We label the first *teaching through an EAL lens* and the second, *teaching through a multilingual lens*. Teaching through an EAL lens refers to the adoption and implementation of school-based language policies that highlight the responsibility of *all* teachers to gain the expertise to effectively teach EAL/multilingual students. Collegial support for this goal is provided within the school, and ESL specialist teachers frequently collaborate with and mentor their colleagues in creating effective classroom learning environments. Active leadership from school administrators is essential for the school to move in a coordinated and coherent way in this direction.

Teaching through a multilingual lens incorporates the philosophy and pedagogical practices of teaching through an EAL lens but broadens the pedagogical orientation to take account explicitly of the fact that students' L1s represent intellectual resources and personal accomplishments that are educationally relevant and essential for the full development of students' academic potential. Although still in its early stages, this shift towards pro-active support within schools to enable students to maintain and take pride in their languages represents a major reorientation of Canadian perspectives on language and culture. It is manifested in pedagogical initiatives such as writing and publishing bilingual books, classroom projects carried out in both L1 and L2, fostering metalinguistic awareness by encouraging students to focus explicitly on L1/L2 comparisons, etc. The pedagogical principles underlying this emergent shift have begun to gain traction as a result of collaborations between university and school-based

researchers/educators across Canada. These principles have been articulated in a variety of ongoing projects, which have documented the classroom implementation and outcomes of concrete instructional strategies (e.g., Armand, Sirois & Ababou, 2008; Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012; Cummins & Early, 2011; Marshall & Toohey, 2010; Naqvi et al., 2012; Roessingh, 2011).

Educational Policies in Three Provinces

The Canadian context is complex because education is under provincial jurisdiction and thus different policies and provisions in relation to linguistic diversity exist in different provinces. To illustrate the fact that provincial and school board policies currently span the range of all four phases sketched in the previous section, policies and provision in three provinces are briefly outlined.

Alberta. In 1971, Alberta became the first province to legalize languages other than English or French as mediums of instruction in the public school system. Two years later, the Edmonton Public School Board introduced the English-Ukrainian and English-German bilingual programs at the Kindergarten level (Cummins & Danesi, 1990). Currently Edmonton has 50/50 English/heritage language bilingual programs in American Sign Language, Arabic, Mandarin, German, Hebrew, Spanish, and Ukrainian. Calgary operates similar bilingual programs in Spanish, Mandarin and German. The Spanish program has grown significantly in recent years and currently serves more than 3,000 students.

In a document entitled *Language Education Policy for Alberta* (1988, p. 17), the Alberta Government made explicit its orientation to the multilingual reality of the province:

> The government of Alberta …recognizes and supports a variety of languages other than English and French. These languages are used to fulfill a wide range of social, cultural, economic and educational purposes. They are vehicles of communication for many Albertans and the first language of many children in Alberta. The linguistic pluralism of Alberta is a valuable resource that enriches our cultural and intellectual lives and has potential for use in the international context.

In short, Alberta has been open to the promotion of multilingual skills for more than 40 years as illustrated in its 50/50 bilingual programs involving multiple languages and its significant (80%)

funding of alternative schools operated by community groups that use English and other languages to teach the provincial curriculum.

   Ontario. Unlike Alberta, it is illegal in Ontario for public school boards to offer heritage language bilingual programs except on a transitional basis to help students in the early stages of acquiring the language of mainstream instruction. The International Languages Program, instituted in 1977 (initially termed the *Heritage Languages Program*) provides 2.5 hours of heritage language instruction per week, usually in after-school or weekend contexts. Approximately 100,000 students are enrolled in this program but its effectiveness in promoting heritage language development is considerably less than the more intensive bilingual programs operating in Alberta and elsewhere in western Canada (Cummins & Danesi, 1990).

   Ontario legislation permits the use of a heritage language for short-term transitional purposes in order to help students acquire proficiency in the dominant language of instruction. Transitional bilingual programs in Italian, Cantonese, and Portuguese were offered in the Toronto area during the 1970s and more recently an Arabic/English program has been offered in the city of Windsor and a Mandarin/English program in Hamilton. Both of these programs have been evaluated as successfully meeting their objectives (Cummins et al., 2011a, 2011b). Despite spending about 50 percent of the instructional time through Arabic or Mandarin, which enabled students to develop literacy in those languages, students' English literacy skills developed at least as well as those of comparison groups.

   Despite occasional pressure from community groups, the Ontario government has shown little interest in changing the legislation to permit *enrichment* bilingual programs (which aim to promote bilingualism and biliteracy) in addition to transitional programs. The issue was briefly considered in the report of the Royal Commission on Learning (1994) which was established by a left-of-centre provincial government in the early 1990s to review all aspects of educational provision. The report acknowledged the range of submissions they received supporting an amendment to the Education Act to permit heritage languages to be used as mediums of instruction and they also acknowledged that enrichment bilingual programs were in operation in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. However, they went on to note:

   We do not recommend a change in Ontario's legislation with respect to languages of instruction at this time. We strongly support the use of other languages as a

transitional strategy, which is already permitted ... We also support a learning system
that places more value on languages as subjects, and we hope that many more
students will learn third (and fourth) languages, and take courses in them at
secondary and post-secondary levels. ... But we are very concerned that all students in
Ontario be truly literate in one of the official languages. In our view, the school system is
obliged to help students function at a high level in English or French, and to gain a
reasonable knowledge of the other official language. We appreciate the value of the
existing, optional International- (formerly Heritage-) Language program, elementary, but
we are not prepared to go well beyond that by suggesting that students be educated in an
immersion or bilingual program in any one of a vast number of non-official languages.
(1994, pp. 106-107)

The Commissioners' failure to engage with the research evidence on this issue is,
unfortunately, very obvious. They imply that students who enroll in a bilingual program
involving English and a heritage language (such as the Alberta programs outlined above) will fail
to become *truly literate* in English or French despite the fact that there is not a shred of evidence
related to the Alberta programs or any other bilingual program for minority group students to
support this assumption (Cummins and Danesi, 1990). The Comissioners raise the specter of
demands for bilingual programs from speakers of a 'vast number of non-official languages'
despite the fact that the demand for heritage language bilingual programs in Ontario as well as
the Prairie provinces has been modest and manageable.
In short, Ontario currently finds itself in the embarrassing position of upholding educational
legislation with respect to languages of instruction that is totally evidence-free and based solely
on discredited ideological assumptions.

Quebec. In Quebec, the government provides funding for the *programme d'enseignement
des langues d'origine*, which was originally introduced in 1977. The Commission Scolaire de
Montréal website expresses the rationale for this program as follows:

Le Programme d'enseignement des langues d'origine (PELO) améliore les
conditions d'apprentissage du français et la réussite éducative des élèves en utilisant

les langues d'origine. Le PELO permet aux élèves de faire des transferts d'une langue à l'autre, d'une culture à l'autre.

(The Heritage Language Instruction Program uses students' home languages as a means of supporting them in learning French and succeeding academically. This program enables students to transfer knowledge and skills from one language to the other and from one culture to the other.)

It is worth noting that this rationale focuses on the home language as a resource for learning French and for promoting overall academic success. Historically, as in most other provinces, Quebec schools have provided little encouragement to students to use their home languages within the school. However, in recent years, some school boards have imposed formal prohibitions against the use of any language other than French in school corridors and playgrounds. For example, in November 2011, the Commission Scolaire de Montréal (CSDM), where 47 percent of students speak a home language other than French or English, mandated that all students use only French throughout the school. As reported in an article in the Quebec newspaper *Le Devoir* (Gervais, 2012), this policy was opposed by Françoise Armand a professor at the University of Montreal:

'L'exclusion des autres langues est mise en lien avec l'apprentissage du français. C'est plutôt inquiétant, soutient-elle. D'autant que la recherche menée au cours des 50 dernières années indique tout le contraire.

('The exclusion of other languages is linked to the learning of French. It is rather disturbing', she suggested. Especially since research conducted during the past 50 years demonstrates the opposite reality.)

The article went on to document Professor Armand's view that in an era of globalization this policy reflects a simplistic and outdated view of language learning. It also reported that the CSDM justified the policy on the grounds that, in a survey of parents it conducted, 70 percent were in agreement that students should be required to speak French throughout the school. The

Commission claimed that two-thirds of the respondents were from diverse origins but did not further define the nature of this diversity.

The 86 comments on this article were predominantly in favour of the CSDM's policy to restrict the use of any languages other than French in schools. This ambivalence and insecurity in relation to the perceived threat that linguistic and cultural diversity poses to the integrity of the province is also reflected in the Quebec government's 2013 proposed Charter of Quebec Values that, if passed, would prohibit the wearing of overt and conspicuous religious symbols (e.g., Muslim head scarves) by those offering or receiving public services (including education). Initial polls showed 57 percent support for the Charter among Quebeckers. Thus, in Quebec, provincial policies and those of some school boards have regressed to the pre-1960s phase of overt language (and culture) suppression within the educational system.

Although overt forms of cultural suppression are less obvious in other provinces in comparison to Quebec, there are few grounds for complacency. Ali (2008), for example, points out that second-generation youth growing up in low-income neighbourhoods are likely to experience discrimination when they interact with societal institutions beyond their immediate neighbourhood. Because they interact primarily with other racialized people in their schools and neighbourhoods "they do not experience racial prejudice or discrimination, appreciate the cultural diversity around them, and attribute it to Canada's ideology of multiculturalism" (p. 89). However, as their experiences extend to the broader society, they begin to realize that stereotypes and various forms of prejudice may limit their access to social mobility.

Summary of Current Cross-Canada Policy Initiatives

In short, across Canada, the only province that has made any attempt to develop and seriously implement a coherent and evidence-based set of policies in relation to linguistic diversity is Alberta. This fact is surprising to many people because Alberta is also widely regarded as the most conservative of Canadian provinces (see Cummins and Danesi, 1990, for discussion of the origins and motivations behind Alberta's heritage language bilingual programs). The federal government has opted out of any involvement in relation to Canada's linguistic diversity since the early 1990s (rationalized on the grounds that education is not within the jurisdiction of the federal government). Thus, contrary to the image Canada projects globally as a leader in language education, Canadian policies and educational practices in relation to its multilingual resources are largely incoherent, with minimal political will (except in Alberta and

to a lesser extent the other Prairie provinces) to pursue imaginative initiatives except when such initiatives serve the interests of the English and French dominant groups. Obviously, the lack of political will to engage with this sphere of public policy reflects the lack of sustained political pressure from both the general public and ethnocultural communities to implement effective policies.

The absence of leadership and vision in the political arena in relation to linguistic diversity does not make these languages disappear. In major urban centres across Canada, schools are increasingly multilingual environments, reflecting more than 20 years of sustained high levels of immigration (approximately 250,000 newcomers have arrived annually during this period). Contrary to the implicit assumptions of many policy-makers and educational leaders, there *is* a knowledge base regarding the educational performance and academic trajectories of EAL/multilingual students and also considerable consensus among researchers regarding effective instruction for these students. This research is outlined in the next section with a focus on research conducted within Canada.

The Knowledge Base Regarding EAL/Multilingual Students' Academic Achievement

We will summarize some of the major findings in the Canadian context under three categories: (a) overall achievement patterns, (b) academic catch-up trajectories, and (c) the instructional conditions necessary to maximize literacy achievement among EAL students.

Overall Achievement Patterns

Research across Canada published since the early 1980s shows that when given sufficient time to catch up academically, English language learners, as a group, perform at least as well as students whose home language is English. However, this pattern masks significant variation across different groups. In general, students from refugee backgrounds experience more academic difficulties than students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds whose families were voluntary immigrants. Students whose home language literacy skills are well-developed also tend to develop stronger English literacy skills, reflecting cross-linguistic transfer of concepts and learning skills.

The overall patterns are captured in the findings of two large-scale studies. The first involved an integrative analysis of data from Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver that focused on students whose home language differed from that of the school (McAndrew et al., 2009). The academic performance of this group (primarily first and second generation immigrants) exceeded

what would be predicted based on various risk factors (e.g., socioeconomic status [SES]) but there were significant differences within each city in the performance of different groups. The major findings were summarized as follows:

> Educational outcomes appear more favourable than one would expect from these risk factors. In some sites, the results of the target group are even slightly higher than that of the comparison group [native-speakers of the school language] with regard to graduation rates, performance in various subjects, and most of all, participation in selective or university-bound courses. This advantage is enhanced, and extended to all sites, when one considers comparative performance through a multivariate regression analysis taking into account the initial characteristics of students. Then, all odds ratios for the target group as a whole, whether for graduation or for participation to selective courses, are higher than for the comparison group. … Nevertheless, this overall positive result masks major inter-group differences, both for linguistic or region of birth subgroups. In the specific case of linguistic subgroups, where descriptive data can be enlightened by a regression analysis, a rather-consistent hierarchy across sites emerges with, on the one hand, the highly achieving Chinese speakers and on the other hand, Spanish and Creole speakers. The profile of other groups is less consistent across sites. (2009, p. 16)

The second study was part of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA) cross-national investigation of achievement patterns among 15-year old students. The OECD (2010) summarized the Canadian profile as follows:

> PISA results suggest that within three years of arrival in Canada, immigrants score an average of 500 on the PISA exam, which is remarkably strong by international standards. For comparison's sake, in the 2006 PISA assessment of reading, Canadian first generation immigrants scored an average of 520 points, as opposed to less than 490 in the United States and less than 430 in France. Canada is also one of very few countries where there is no gap between its immigrant and native students on the PISA. (By contrast in the United States the gap in reading is 22 points, and in France and

Germany it is around 60 points). Second generation Canadians perform significantly better than first generation Canadians, suggesting that the pattern is of progress by all students over time. Finally, Canada is one of the few countries where there is no difference in performance between students who do not speak the language of instruction at home and those who do. (2010, pp. 70-71)

The OECD attributes the relative success of immigrant-background students as a group to the fact that they "have much the same advantages in terms of parental education and socio-economic status as native-born students, and they attend schools that by all measures are relatively equal" (p. 71). They also point to the fact that immigrants are welcomed as part of Canada's commitment to multiculturalism which "provides a distinct philosophy that seeks to both respect the importance of native cultures while also incorporating immigrants into a distinctively Canadian identity" (p. 71).

The variation across groups is clearly captured in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) data that formed part of the three-city synthesis study reported by McAndrew et al. (2009). High-school graduation and drop-out rates for different home language groups are presented in Table 1. It should be noted that the English-L1 groups includes students of English-speaking Caribbean background who showed a higher-than-average drop-out rate (40%). The data are presented in descending percentages with respect to drop-out rate.

The cohort presented in Table 1 represents students who entered Grade 9 in September 2000 and were followed over five years until Autumn 2005. Of the total group, 69% had graduated or received the mandatory 30 credits after five years, 8% had not graduated but were still enrolled in the TDSB, and 23% had dropped out without graduating or transferring to another school system.

Table 1
Toronto District School Board Drop-out Distribution by Home Language

Language	**Number of students**	**% graduated**	**% dropped out**
Portuguese	134	47.8	42.5
Spanish	256	46.9	39.1
Somali	237	52.7	36.7
Punjabi	185	56.2	34.6
Persian (Farsi)	294	61.9	30.6
Arabic	126	64.3	27.8
Vietnamese	236	62.7	24.6
English	9,668	68.5	22.9
Korean	220	71.8	20.0
Russian	368	76.4	19.6
Urdu	365	72.6	19.5
Greek	124	71.8	17.7
Tamil	599	77.5	16.9
Bengali	132	76.5	16.7
Gujerati	105	82.9	14.3
Chinese	1,439	82.2	12.0
Romanian	102	85.3	10.8

Note: based on Table 4 in Brown (2006)

EAL Students' Academic Catch-up Trajectories

The acquisition trajectories for immigrant-background students' English development vary along three dimensions of language proficiency (Cummins, 2000):

- Students typically acquire fluency in **everyday conversational language** with one or two years of exposure to English. This rapid acquisition reflects the fact that there are many clues to meaning in face-to-face conversation--eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, intonation, etc. Additionally, in everyday language interactions, we typically use high-frequency words and common grammatical constructions. Thus, students don't need to know as much of the language to understand or make themselves understood in these contexts.

- In the primary grades, students typically make grade-appropriate progress in acquiring rule-governed aspects of the language such as phonological awareness, decoding, and spelling skills (Geva, 2006; Lesaux & Siegel, 2003). The rules and patterns underlying these **discrete language skills** are typically taught with reference to high frequency words, with the result that English language learners are not disadvantaged as a result of gaps that may exist in their overall knowledge of English vocabulary.

- In contrast, students typically require *at least five years* to catch up to native speakers in **academic language proficiency** (e.g., Cummins, 1981; Klesmer, 1994; Worswick,

2001). This extended trajectory is a result of: (a) the complexity of academic language, and (b) the fact that English language learners are attempting to catch up to a moving target, namely, native-speakers of English whose academic language and literacy skills are increasing significantly from one grade level to the next. The complexity of academic language reflects (a) the vocabulary in texts that include many low frequency and technical words (typically of Latin and Greek origin) that we almost never use in everyday conversation (e.g., predict, photosynthesis, sequence, revolution, etc.), and (b) increasingly sophisticated lexical patterns (e.g., nominalization) and grammatical constructions (e.g., passive voice) that again are almost never used in everyday conversation.

The EAL catch-up trajectory for academic language can be illustrated by the Cummins (1981 findings for vocabulary knowledge (Figure 1).

Figure 1
EAL catch-up trajectories for written vocabulary knowledge
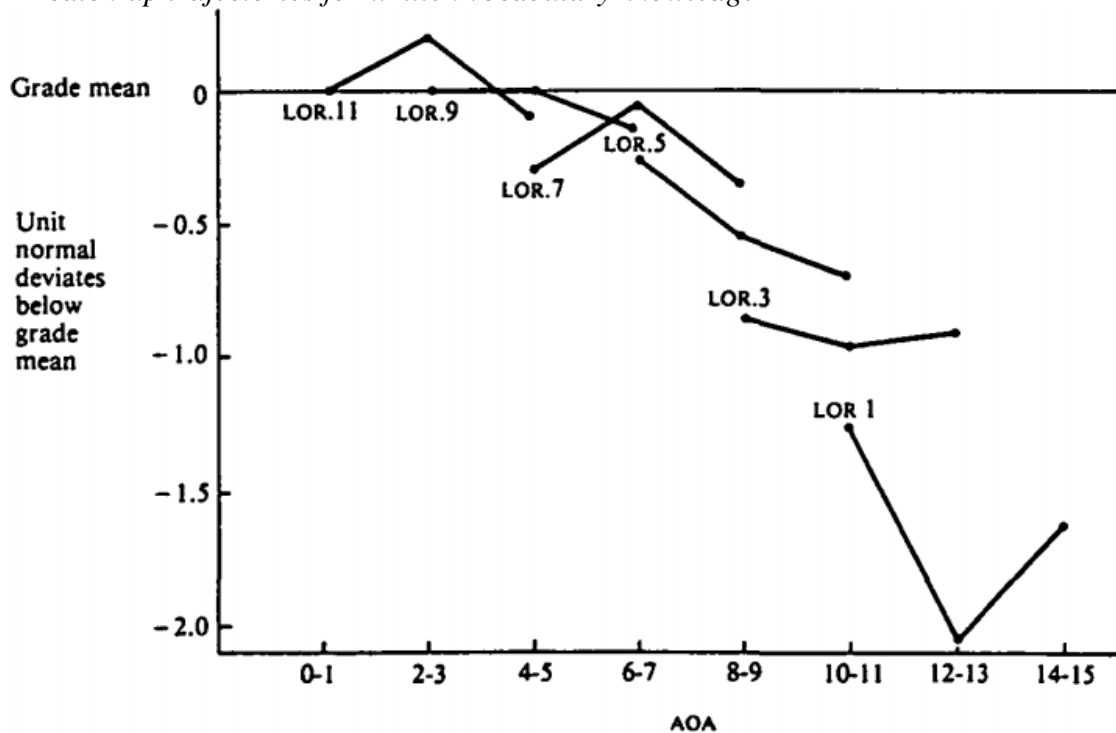
Note: LOR=length of residence; AOA=age on arrival (Cummins, 1981).

In view of these timelines, it is not surprising that many EAL high school students either drop out of school or fail to meet graduation requirements. For example, a multi-year longitudinal study in a Calgary high school reported an overall dropout rate for EAL students of 74 percent (Roessingh, 2001; Watt & Roessingh, 1994). For those who entered grade 9 with minimal English, the dropout rate was more than 90 percent. In Ontario, about 50 percent of students receiving ESL services typically fail the province's Grade 10 literacy test.

In summary, the picture is mixed with respect to Canadian EAL students' academic achievement. On the one hand, together with Australia, Canada emerges as a country where achievement gaps according to immigration status and language spoken at home are minimal or non-existent. On the other, many groups of EAL students do experience academic difficulty and, at the high-school level, drop out of school prior to completing graduation requirements (see also Gunderson, 2007, for Vancouver data on this issue).

The academic catch-up trajectories and the fact that many EAL groups do experience academic difficulties calls into question the common implicit assumption that only ESL teachers are responsible for ESL support. This assumption ignores (a) the timelines required for EAL students to catch up academically, and (b) the fact that even beginning EAL students are likely to spend only one or two periods per day with the ESL teacher while the rest of the time is spent in the mainstream or content classroom.

Instructional Conditions Necessary to Maximize Literacy Achievement

The major research findings relevant to designing evidence-based classroom instruction and broader within-school policies can be summarized under six categories. There is virtually universal consensus among researchers and educators about the relevance of three of these instructional principles but only sporadic acknowledgement of the other three. The three categories about which there is consensus are sketched initially followed by an outline of the research findings that, thus far, have not played a major role in the development of school-based policies for EAL/multilingual students. An excellent source for further elaboration of these instructional conditions is Elizabeth Coelho's (2004) book *Adding English.*

Scaffold meaning. The term *scaffolding* refers to the provision of instructional supports that enable learners to carry out tasks and perform academically at a higher level than they would be capable of without these supports. Some forms of scaffolding focus on modifying and mediating the immediate input so that it becomes more comprehensible to students (e.g., through

use of visuals, demonstrations, dramatization, acting out meanings, interactive and collaborative tasks and explicit explanation of words, linguistic structures and discourse patterns). Other forms of scaffolding operate on students' internal cognitive structures to enable them to develop long-term strategies for effective learning. ESL teachers are likely to be very familiar with scaffolding strategies but many classroom and content teachers have had minimal opportunity to acquire these strategies. This is obviously problematic in light of the fact that most EAL students spend much more time in mainstream instructional settings than in ESL settings.

       Connect to students' lives by activating/building background knowledge. There is universal agreement among cognitive psychologists about the significance of students' background knowledge for learning. We learn by integrating new input into our existing cognitive structures or schemata. Our prior experience provides the foundation for interpreting new information. In reading, for example, we construct meaning by bringing our 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" (p. 62). In the case of EAL students, and particularly those who are in the early stages of learning English, much of their background knowledge is likely to be encoded in their L1. Thus, their L1 is directly relevant to the learning of L2. This implies that students should be encouraged to use their L1 to activate and extend their conceptual knowledge (e.g., by brainstorming in groups, writing in L1 as a stepping stone to writing in L2, carrying out Internet research in their L1, etc.).

       Extend language. As students' progress through the grades, they are required to read increasingly complex texts in the content areas of the curriculum (science, mathematics, social studies, literature). As noted previously, the complexity of academic language reflects: (a) the difficulty of the concepts that students are required to understand, (b) the vocabulary load in content texts that include many low frequency and technical words that we almost never use in typical conversation, and (c) increasingly sophisticated grammatical constructions (e.g., passive voice) and patterns of discourse organization that again are almost never used in everyday conversational contexts. Students are not only required to read this language, they must also use it in writing reports, essays, and other forms of school work. EAL students will develop expertise

in using academic language much more rapidly when content and ESL teachers focus on explicit integration of language and content. This requires that *all* teachers incorporate explicit language objectives into their instruction in subject matter *across the curriculum* in order to draw students' attention to the ways in which meaning is constructed through language.

These three instructional principles constitute central dimensions of what we have termed *teaching through an EAL* lens. As noted above, there is a large degree of consensus among researchers, educators and policy-makers with respect to the importance of these three instructional principles. Despite this consensus, policy-makers at various levels of the educational system have been slow to translate these principles into practice (e.g., by ensuring that all teachers have a basic knowledge of how to teach EAL students effectively). Equally strong research support is available for the following three principles despite the fact that they have not yet been explicitly integrated into school improvement policies in Canada or elsewhere.

Maximize print access and literacy engagement. There is extensive empirical support for the relationship between literacy engagement and attainment (e.g., Brozo, Shiel, & Topping, 2007; Guthrie, 2004; Krashen, 2004; Lindsay, 2010; OECD, 2004, 2010b). Successive PISA studies have reported a strong relationship between reading engagement and reading achievement among 15-year old students. The 2000 PISA study (OECD, 2004) reported that the level of a student's reading engagement is a better predictor of literacy performance than his or her socio-economic background. The authors point out that "engagement in reading can be a consequence, as well as a cause, of higher reading skill, but the evidence suggests that these two factors are mutually reinforcing" (p. 8). More recent PISA findings (OECD, 2010) confirm these trends. Engagement in reading was assessed through measures of time spent reading various materials, enjoyment of reading, and use of various learning strategies. Across OECD countries, approximately one-third of the association between reading performance and students' socio-economic background was mediated by reading engagement. *The implication is that schools can significantly mitigate the negative effects of socioeconomic disadvantage by ensuring that students have access to a rich print environment and become actively engaged with literacy.*

Canadian studies of predictors of EAL students' literacy achievement are consistent with the international research (Cheng, Klinger, & Zheng, 2009; Zheng, 2005). Zheng analyzed the relationship between background variables and EAL students' performance on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Tests (OSSLT) administered in October 2003. The EAL sample

consisted of 4,311 students. She reported that after-school literacy activities accounted for 17% of the variance in students' reading scores. Specifically, "e-literacy activities, literature literacy activities, non-fiction literacy activities, newspaper and magazine literacy activities, literacy hours were positive predictors of ESL/ELD students' performance" (p. 54).

Further analyses of the same data set by Cheng et al. (2009) compared four groups of students: EAL and non-EAL students who passed and failed the OSSLT. They found that:

> Students in the two fail groups generally reported much less engagement in after-school reading. The ESL/ELD students who passed the OSSLT reported higher engagement in reading than the two groups of students who failed the OSSLT but less reading than the non-ESL/ELD students who passed the OSSLT (p. 139).

In short, there is extensive evidence from large-scale studies that engagement with literacy both in-school and out-of-school is strongly related to literacy attainment. This finding is entirely logical in view of the fact that academic language is found primarily in written texts rather than in everyday conversation.

Affirm students' identities. Extensive research from the fields of anthropology and sociology has documented the role of societal power relations in explaining patterns of minority group achievement (see Cummins, 2001, for a review). Groups that experience long-term educational underachievement (e.g., indigenous students in many contexts) tend to have experienced material and symbolic violence at the hands of the dominant societal group over generations. A direct implication is that in order to reverse this pattern of underachievement, educators, both individually and collectively, must challenge the operation of coercive power relations in the classroom interactions they orchestrate with minority group students.

Within the classroom, societal power relations are expressed in the negotiation of identities between teachers and students. The ways in which teachers negotiate identities with students can exert a significant impact on the extent to which students will engage academically or withdraw from academic effort. Curran (2003), for example, points out:

Creating a classroom environment where students feel safe, secure, and a sense of belonging will help reduce fear and anxiety. This is especially important for ELLs who may have recently immigrated under very stressful or traumatic conditions (p. 337).

As we discuss in a later section, the publication of student writing and creative project work (e.g., on a school web site and ideally in both English and students' home languages) is highly effective in reinforcing students' academic and cultural identities.

Implement bilingual instructional strategies. In recent years, numerous research studies have documented various forms of cross-lingual transfer. These include transfer of morphological knowledge (Deacon, Wade-Woolley & Kirby, 2007), phonological knowledge (Bialystok, Luk, & Kwan, 2005) and overall metalinguistic awareness (Demont, 2001). There is also considerable evidence that development of bilingual skills results in a variety of cognitive advantages for bilinguals (Adesope et al., 2010) as well as more accomplished acquisition of additional languages. In general, however, these effects of cross-linguistic transfer have been observed in additive bilingual social contexts where L1 and L2 are valued in the society and used extensively by bilingual individuals. Cenoz (2003), for example, notes that "most studies on general aspects of proficiency indicate that bilingualism has a positive effect on third language acquisition when L3 acquisition takes place in additive contexts and bilinguals have acquired literacy skills in both their languages" (p. 83). By contrast, there is less evidence of linguistic and cognitive benefits in contexts in which the first or heritage language is less valued in the wider society in comparison to the L2. This raises the issue of how educators in highly diverse schools can communicate strong positive messages to students and their families about the cognitive and social benefits of developing literacy in L1 in addition to L2. In the final section of this paper, we illustrate how teachers can implement bilingual instructional strategies that position students' L1 as a cognitive resource and a tool for learning, even in multilingual school contexts where teachers do not speak most of the languages of their students. This pedagogical orientation has been endorsed by the OECD (2010a) as an important component of school-based policies for promoting immigrant students' achievement: "Valuing the mother tongue of immigrant students is an essential part of developing a positive and appreciative approach to diversity and identity" (p. 49).

An Evidence-based Framework for School Policy and Classroom Instruction

The framework presented in Figure 2 integrates the research findings that have been outlined up to this point. The framework posits print access/literacy engagement as a direct determinant of literacy attainment. As noted above, this proposition is strongly supported by empirical research. The framework also specifies four broad instructional dimensions that are critical to enabling all students (and particularly those from socially marginalized groups) to engage actively with literacy from an early stage of their schooling. Literacy engagement will be enhanced when (a) instruction scaffolds meaning to support academic language comprehension and production, (b) instruction connects curriculum to students' lives, (c) instruction affirms students' intellectual, academic and personal identities, and (d) instruction deepens and extends students' understanding of academic language across the curriculum. Although not explicitly highlighted, bilingual instructional strategies are implied throughout the framework. Literacy engagement should be promoted in students' L1 as well as L2 because there is extensive evidence that positive transfer occurs across languages. Additionally, use of L1 can scaffold higher performance in L2 and encourage students to compare L1 and L2 and deepen their overall awareness of language and how it works.

The distinctions captured in the framework are frequently fused in classroom practice. For example, connecting instruction to students' lives and acknowledging their prior experience simultaneously affirms the legitimacy of that experience and, by extension, the legitimacy of students' identities. Bilingual students' identities are also affirmed when they are encouraged to use their L1 writing abilities as a stepping stone or scaffold to writing in L2.

Figure 2
The Literacy Engagement Framework

Literacy Achievement

↑

Print Access/Literacy Engagement

↑

| Scaffold Meaning (input and output) | ↔ | Connect to students' lives (activate/build background knowledge) | ↔ | Affirm identity | ↔ | Extend language |
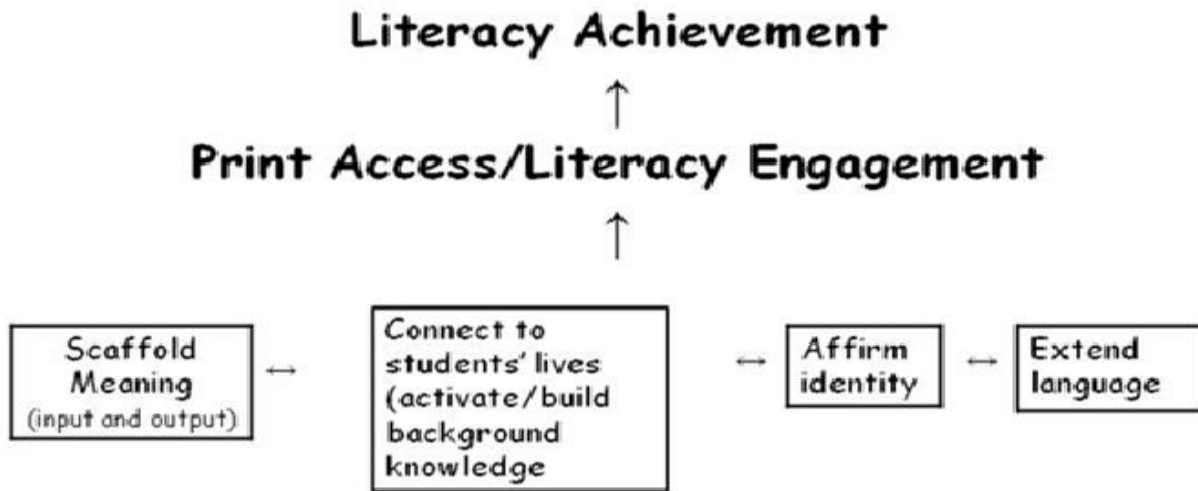
Teaching through a Multilingual Lens: Illustrative Classroom Practice

Several school-university collaborations implemented across Canada during the past 15 years illustrate how bilingual instructional strategies can be implemented in linguistically diverse classrooms. These are outlined below:

- The *ÉLODiL* project (Éveil au Langage et Ouverture à la Diversité Linguistique—Awakening to Language and Opening up to Linguistic Diversity) (http://www.elodil.com/) has developed a variety of classroom activities to develop students' awareness of language and appreciation of linguistic diversity. This project has been undertaken both in Montreal (Dr. Françoise Armand, Université de Montréal) and Vancouver (Dr. Diane Dagenais, Simon Fraser University) (Armand & Dagenais, 2012; Armand, Sirois and Ababou, 2008).

- The *Dual Language Showcase* (http://www.thornwoodps.ca/dual/index.htm) was created by educators at Thornwood Public School in the Peel District School Board to demonstrate the feasibility of enabling elementary grades students who were learning English as an additional language to write stories in both English and their home languages (Chow & Cummins, 2003; Schecter & Cummins, 2003).

- The *Multiliteracies* project involved a series of collaborations between educators and university researchers Dr. Margaret Early at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and Dr. Jim Cummins at the University of Toronto (www.multiliteracies.ca). Drawing on the construct of *multiliteracies* (New London Group, 1996), the projects focused on broadening conceptions of literacy within schools both with respect to modality and language.

- The *Multiliteracies Pedagogy* project initiated in 2003 by Dr. Heather Lotherington of York University in Toronto involved a range of collaborations between educators in Joyce Public School and researchers at York University to explore how the concept of plurilingualism could be translated into pedagogical design. The professional learning community at Joyce P.S. worked with students to rewrite traditional stories from a critical perspective using multimodal and multilingual forms of representation (Lotherington, 2011, 2013; Lotherington, Paige, & Holland-Spencer, 2013; Lotherington & Sinitskaya Ronda, 2012).

- *Linguistically Appropriate Practice (LAP)* is an approach to working with immigrant-background children in preschool and primary grades. Pioneered by Dr. Roma Chumak-Horbatsch (2012) at Ryerson University in Toronto, LAP consists of both an educational philosophy and a set of concrete instructional activities that builds on children's home language and literacy experiences in order to encourage them to use their home languages in the classroom, take pride in their bilingualism, and continue to develop their home language as they are acquiring fluency and literacy in the dominant language of instruction.

- *The Dual Language Reading Project* was initiated by Dr. Rahat Naqvi of the University of Calgary and colleagues in the Calgary Board of Education. It documented the impact of teachers and community members reading dual language books to students both in linguistically diverse schools and in the Calgary Board of Education's Spanish-English bilingual program (see www.rahatnaqvi.ca and Naqvi et al., 2012).

- The *Family Treasures and Grandma's Soup* dual language book project was initiated by Dr. Hetty Roessingh at the University of Calgary in collaboration the Almadina Language Charter Academy. [2] Its goal was to enable Kindergarten and Grade 1 students to create dual language books to enhance their early literacy progress (see http://www.duallanguageproject.com/ and Roessingh, 2011). At Simon Fraser University, Dr. Diane Dagenais and Dr. Kelleen Toohey have collaborated for many years with educators in the implementation of projects focused on developing students' awareness of language and promoting their multilingual and multiliteracy skills (see, for example, Marshall and Toohey, 2012). This work has resulted in the website *ScribJab* (www.scribjab.com) which is described on the website as follows: "*ScribJab* is a web site and iPad application for children (age 10 – 13) to read and create digital stories (text, illustrations and audio recordings) in multiple languages (English, French and other non-official languages). *ScribJab* creates a space for children to communicate about their stories, and come to an enhanced appreciation of their own multilingual resources."

The Beyond Boundaries Project

The Beyond Boundaries Project was initiated by a Peel District School Board based ESL educator, Robin Persad, in his Grade 4 ESL classroom. It was part of a broader school-university collaboration, entitled *Pushing the Boundaries,* which was a collaborative pilot project between the University of Toronto and Thornwood Public School in the Peel District School Board. The *Beyond Boundaries* project was implemented in a highly multilingual school and as a result drew on a combination of students' dual language skills and a variety of technology resources. The goal was to promote students' literacy skills as well as develop a feeling of belonging, intercultural sensitivity, language awareness and sense of community through connecting curriculum to students' lives.

Persad (www.oise.utoronto.ca/lar/) articulates the philosophy behind this instructional approach as one of respect for students. The learning experience must reflect students' realities and identities and failure to work in this way with students represents a lost opportunity. When students produce their own dual language texts, they take pride in their creative work and in what they are learning and can share with others. This is particularly important for refugee students who may never have been to school or have experienced interrupted education. Some of these students have come from war-torn areas where the entire society is so disrupted that there are no

safe schools for children. The instructional challenge which Persad attempted to address was: How can we use multimodality and students' emerging multilingual realities to meet the needs of English language learners (ELLs) and also curriculum expectations mandated by the provincial curriculum? Related to this question is how we can address the needs of students who may have English as their L1 or be fluent in that language but who come from cultural backgrounds that are highly diverse, such as children from First Nations, Black and Indo Caribbean, and Asian backgrounds?

Persad found that his Grade 4 students were eager to tell their own stories and incorporate their own identities and cultures into their work. Discussions about religion, food, transportation, lifestyles, growing up in their place of birth, and daily routines allowed students to connect their own cultural background and communities to the language and literacy curriculum. Learning became more enjoyable and valued by the students. This instructional openness to the cultures of the students also helped to build the classroom community and to allow all of the students to recognize difference and similarity between self and others, which served to build a sense of belonging with peers.

Although this approach to teaching and learning was new and unexpected for the students, they quickly realized that their own stories are relevant, valid and important as ways to share their experiences with others. Their capacity for communication expanded as they told stories orally, in writing, in theatre, in blog-making, or through visuals they created. The fact that they were encouraged to use their L1 in these language and literacy activities validated that language and the multilingual realities of students' lives. Cultural validation was also achieved by providing simple images (readily available through the Internet) that reflected different cultural realities (e.g., for India, Mendhi [henna paste used for skin decoration], Indian sweets, temples, etc.).

Numerous activities were undertaken, including the following:

Students created healthy eating guides that reflected foods with which they were familiar. They carried out research, interviewed their parents, and used Google images to depict their food choices. As Robin Persad reflecting on the reason for the guides states: (www.oise.utoronto.ca/lar/):

We have created healthy food guides to be reflective of their own cultural cuisines. Students created many ethnic healthy food guides, understanding what was healthy from the foods they eat. While completing this lesson, many students in my class could not relate to the foods on the food guide shown. For instance, they have never seen or have heard of cabbage (Figure 3).

Another purpose of creating healthy eating guides and discussing cultural foods and the places we find different foods--whether in special shops where these foods are bought or in restaurants where people from many cultures come together--is to simply reflect with our students on diversity itself. We learn about one another through sharing our cultural backgrounds and participating in a dialogue that can extend from the topic of food to other deeper concerns— for example, how we are the same, in what ways are we different, and how did these differences come about? This can engender reflections and discussion about the concept of multiculturalism itself, about why we feel good or bad about ourselves, and the extent to which we feel accepted or alienated, alone or connected to others. Students can discuss how we can better understand the cultures of others and become responsive to the realities of difference without creating unneeded conflict, separation or negative perceptions and stereotypes in the process. In short, language learning and fun activities can be part of a broader intellectual, emotional, and political citizenship development process that is critical and reflective. Under these conditions, the curriculum shifts effortlessly from a Eurocentric orientation to one that is truly international and reflective of students' individual and collective realities.

Figure 3
Example of student created Healthy Eating Guide

Students used computer translation programs and online keyboards (e.g., in Arabic) which enabled them to use their existing L1 literacy skills and develop awareness of the differences between languages. For example, students used Google Translate to translate a story from English to Arabic and then they used the online keyboard to respond to the story. Their Arabic responses were much more detailed than their previous responses to the story in English. Figure 4 shows a student using an Arabic online keyboard and Figure 5 shows the work of one group of students who compared linguistic features of English and Arabic.

Figure 4
Student using online Arabic keyboard

Figure 5
Comparison of features of Arabic and English

A comparative and intercultural approach to social studies teaching was adopted. In order to reinforce their cultural knowledge and provide a foundation for exploring aspects of

Canadian social studies, students worked with their parents and used tools such as Google

Earth/Google Maps to identify salient aspect of their countries and cultures of origin. Robin

Persad describes the process as follows:

> We were currently working on Social Studies by examining the regions of Canada as well
> as resources available in particular provinces. … Students were to interview their parents
> and conduct research about their parents' identity, home country and/or country of birth
> (how it differs from Canada), what resources were available, how the economy was, what
> was different from life in Canada, and why should others visit. … Google Maps was
> used as well throughout the unit to see landform regions of their/family home country and
> to explore the names of streets and cities that they may want to use in their stories – what
> was familiar to them when living in a specific country. (http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/lar/).

Figure 6
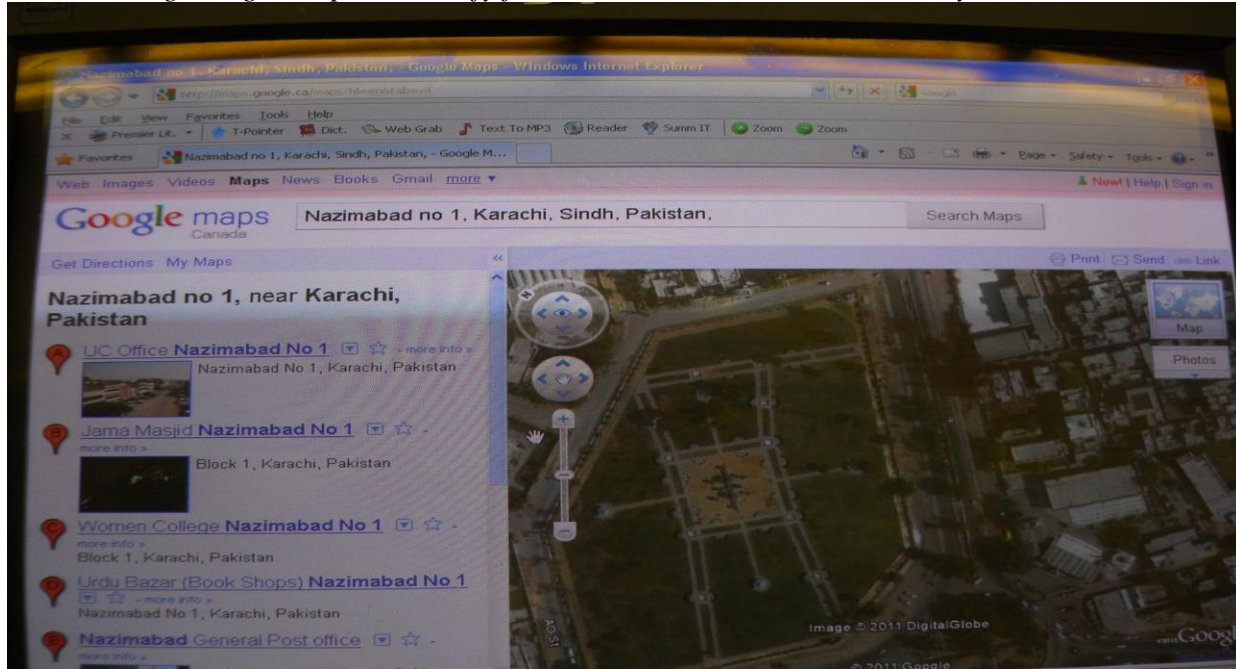*Comparative approach to social studies research by students*

Србија је највећи извозник
малина, рачуноводство за једну
трећину свих малине у свету.

Serbia is the largest raspberry exporter, accounting for one third of all the
raspberries in the world

Figure 7
Student using Google Maps to identify familiar areas in their home country

Students wrote dual language "fractured fairytales". Fractured fairy tales were a way to integrate cross curricular content such as health, art, drama, readers' theatre and technology. They were created on Toondoo, Bitstrips, Comic Life and other applications and then published using programs such as Desktop Author, Voice Thread, and Powerpoint. Students used words and phrases from their L1, creating through the fairytale writing process a kind of cross-coded language exercise enabling comparing and integration of the L1 with English. In a Toronto Star article that profiled Robin Persad's instructional strategies, Pecar (September 29, 2011) described the approach as follows:

> Students reconstruct classic stories into their own tales, using familiar customs, settings, dress and traditions — but combined with their new English skills. The stories are transferred into a comic-book format and other art forms, or, in some cases, acted out in short skits.
>
> (http://www.thestar.com/life/parent/2011/09/29/a_multicultural_fairy_tale.html)

Students used graphic organizers to brainstorm ideas for their stories (Figure 8). Voice Thread was a valuable technology for the production of the fairy tales because the students could record and hear their own voices with the accompanying uploaded pictures in English and in their L1 while also playing with and using various accents that characterize the English spoken in various parts of the world. An example of a Voice Thread story in Arabic can be viewed at: http://voicethread.com/share/1794492/. An example of a story board used by students to plan their stories is shown in Figure 9 and an example of a *fractured fairytale* in two languages is shown in Figure 10.

Figure 8
Student created graphic organizer to brainstorm ideas for "fractured fairytales"
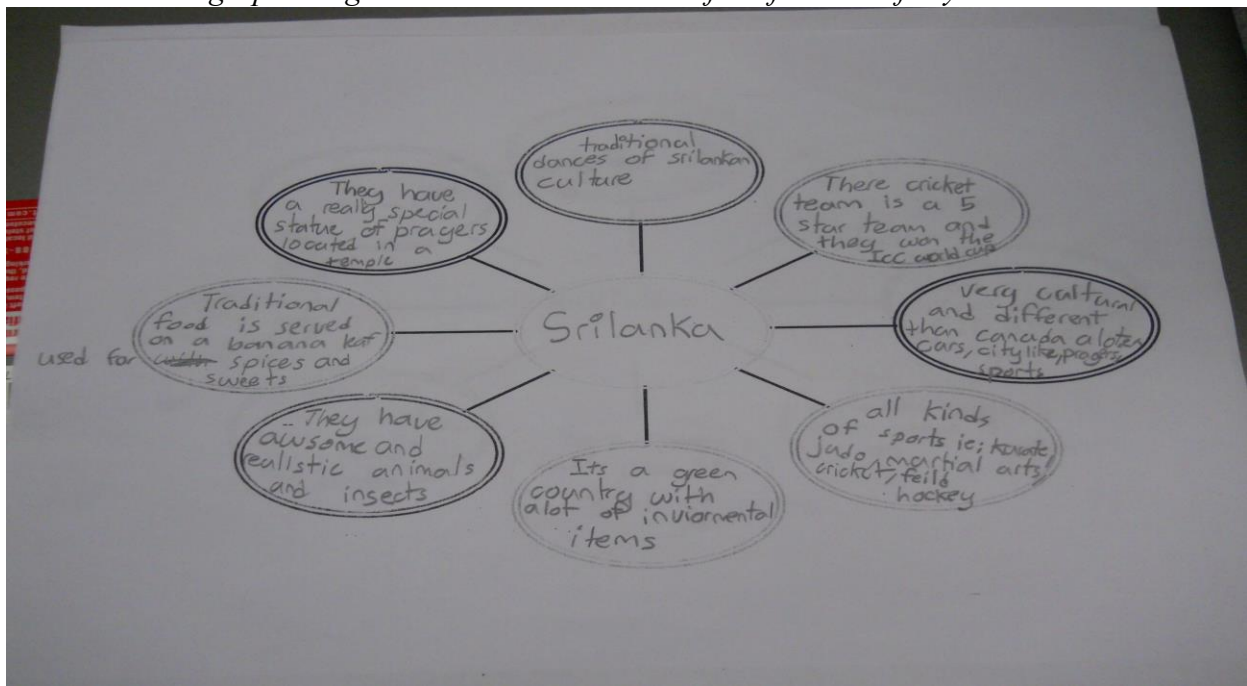
Figure 9
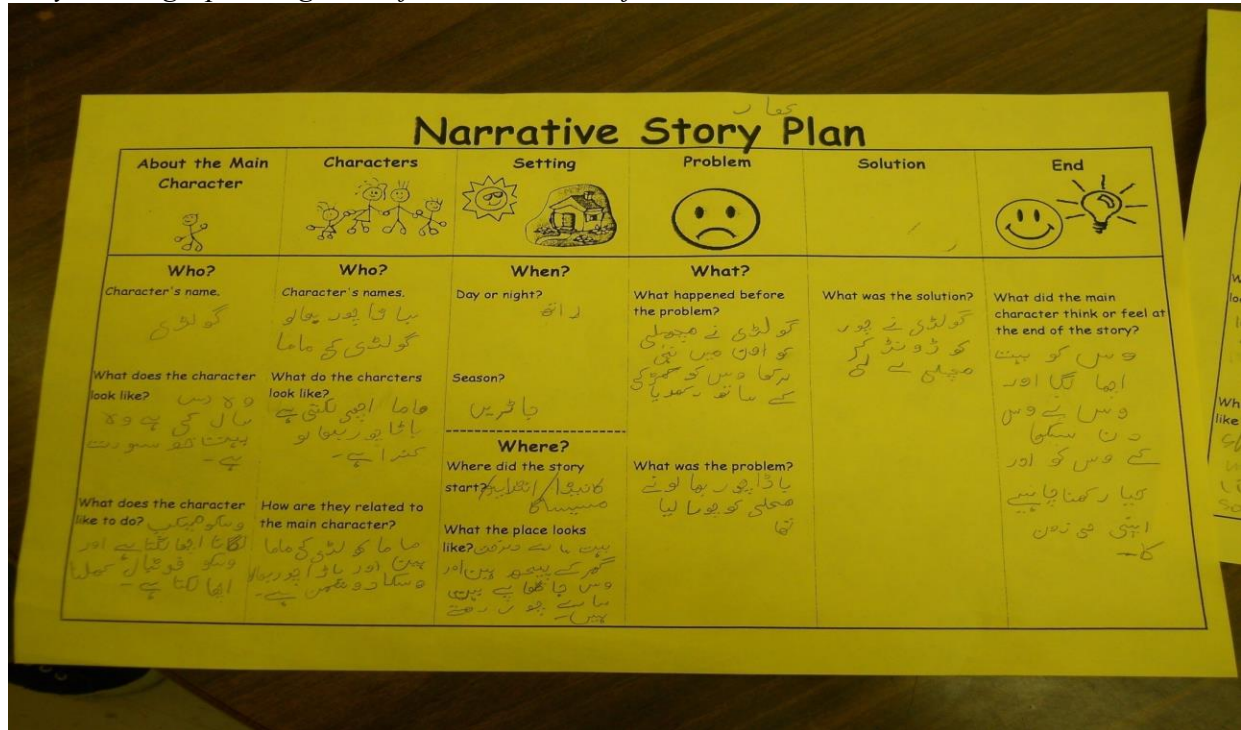*Story board graphic organizer for the creation of students' stories*

Figure 10
English and Hindi versions of students' fractured fairytale

तीन छोटे गाय

By *Charmi* and *Nishant*

Conclusion

Although EAL/multilingual students tend to perform relatively well in Canadian schools, there remain significant gaps in the extent to which educational policies and practices conform to what is implied by the research evidence. For example, there has been a lack of serious policy consideration at all levels of the educational system (provincial ministries, school boards, university-level teacher education programs, and individual schools) regarding the pedagogical implications and opportunities of linguistic diversity. Home languages other than English or French are still viewed by many educators as largely irrelevant to children's schooling. Consequently, many schools do not encourage bilingual students to showcase their linguistic accomplishments, thereby missing an important opportunity both for identity affirmation and enabling students to use their L1 as a cognitive tool.

The policy vacuum in relation to linguistic diversity at the level of provincial ministries, school boards, and individual schools is paralleled by the absence of any required courses in most faculties of education that focus specifically on linguistic diversity issues. Thus, it is legitimate to ask 'How well prepared are classroom teachers in elementary and secondary schools to support EAL/multilingual students during the five or so years they are catching up academically'? In an education context characterized by linguistic diversity and high rates of

immigration, it is no longer sufficient to be an excellent Science or Mathematics (or other content areas) teacher in a generic sense; excellence must be defined by how well a teacher can teach Science or Mathematics to the students who are in his or her classroom, many of whom may be in the early or intermediate stages of English (or French in Quebec) language acquisition.

Despite the absence of any coherent language policies at federal and provincial levels and the gaps in provision that exist, some positive trends have emerged in recent years. We have labeled these *teaching through an EAL lens* and *teaching through a multilingual lens*. The projects that we have identified earlier in the paper and the more detailed examination of Robin Persad's classroom practice provide *proof of concept* for these trends. They show that teachers can orchestrate instruction that enables EAL/multilingual students to use their L1 as a cognitive tool to engage with literacy, understand content and deepen their knowledge of language despite the fact that the teachers themselves do not speak most of the languages represented in their classrooms.

Teaching through a multilingual lens entails a transformation in the ways in which teachers and students negotiate identities. Traditionally EAL students have been defined by their lack of English. Peers and teachers often see only the EAL student not the person within, for the simple reason that students are unable or discouraged to communicate who they are, what they have experienced, what they are good at, and what their hopes for the future might be. Many students struggle to escape from this externally imposed identity cocoon. Their inability to fully express their intelligence and feelings over a prolonged period of time is frustrating and diminishing. A very different identity negotiation process takes place when instruction enables students' linguistic and intellectual talents to find expression in the classroom. Under these circumstances, students develop *identities of competence* (Manyak, 2004) and come to see themselves as:

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

It is significant that the articulation of these emerging policy directions has been led by classroom teachers in collaboration with university researchers. Hopefully, policy-makers at higher levels of the educational hierarchy (school board administrators, initial teacher education faculty, Ministry of Education officials and politicians) will join forces with teachers to pursue these directions which have truly transformative implications for Canadian schools and society.

Endnotes

1. Some faculties of education have recently instituted required courses focused on EAL issues as part of their initial teacher education program (e.g., University of Prince Edward Island, University of British Colombia). Also, the new two-year teacher education program in Ontario will require a mandatory course on "diversity issues" to be included. However, unless the guidelines explicitly designate EAL/multilingual issues as part of "diversity" it is likely that some initial teacher education programs in the province will focus only minimally on these issues.

2. The school website (http://www.esl-almadina.com/) provides the following description of the Almadina Language Charter Academy (ALCA), which is a publically funded charter school: "The uniqueness in this school comes through the programs we offer that focus on English language learning acquisition for students whose second or third language at home is English. Therefore, we serve not only newcomers to Canada, but also Canadian born individuals who have a need to increase their English language proficiency level. … The Almadina Language Charter Academy (ALCA) emphasis is on English language acquisition. Other international languages, depending on interest, may be offered to help those students make a connection between their prior knowledge in another language to increase their conceptual understandings in the English language. Currently, our students are offered French, Urdu, English Language Learner Enhancement or Arabic Language and Culture as an International Language option."

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