Why Ecologies Matter:
Critical and Dialogic Perspectives on Instruction, Assessment, and Policies Impacting Multilingual Youth

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As educators, researchers, and policymakers, what are our goals for multilingual youth in secondary schools?

Equitable opportunities and outcomes – academically, linguistically, socially, economically

Realization of youth's immense potential – *across languages* and *across the multiple communities to which they belong*
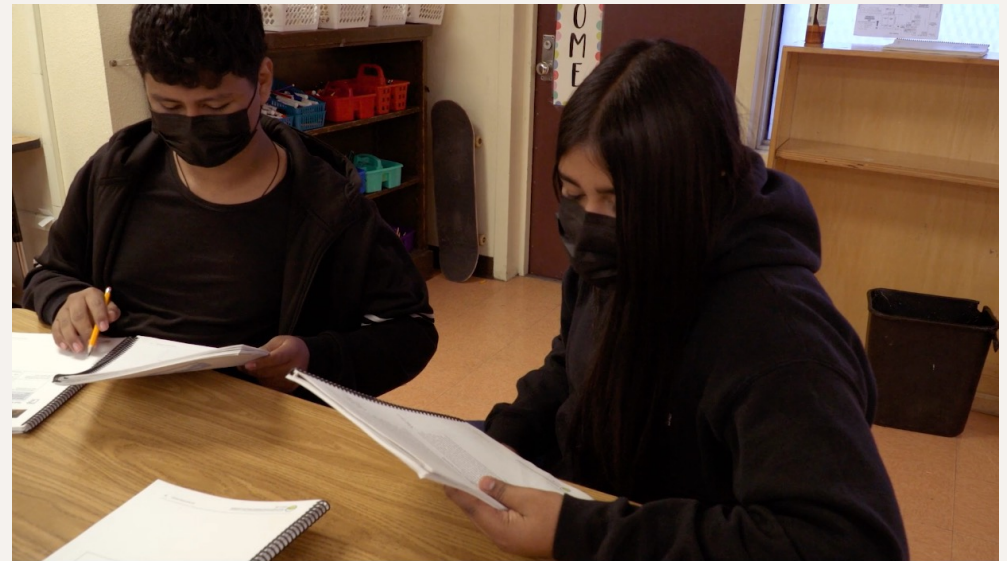
How do we meet these goals?

Through:

- Better Instruction

- Better Assessment

- Better Policies

But what does this require?

It requires a shift away from individuals…

to individuals in their ecologies:

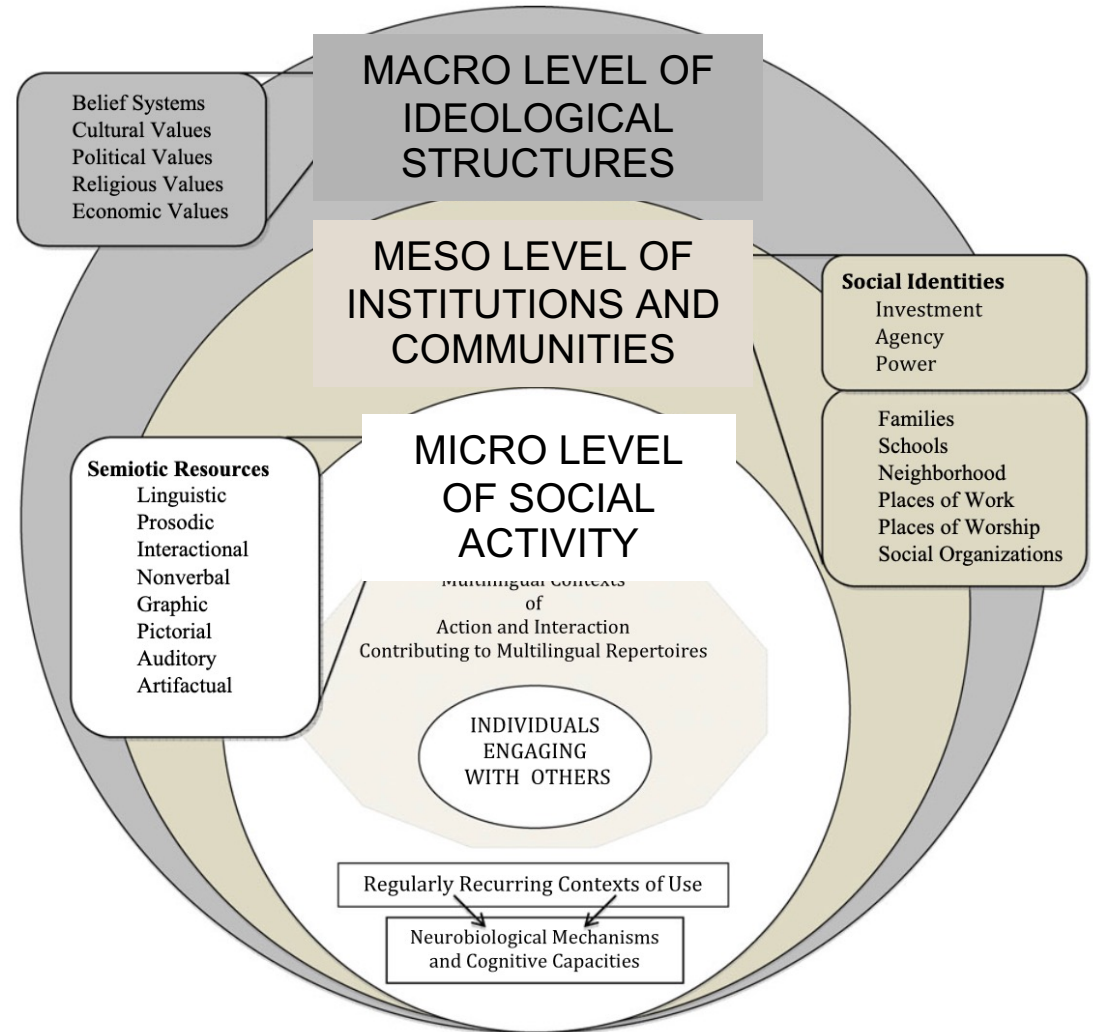https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-detention-child-migrants

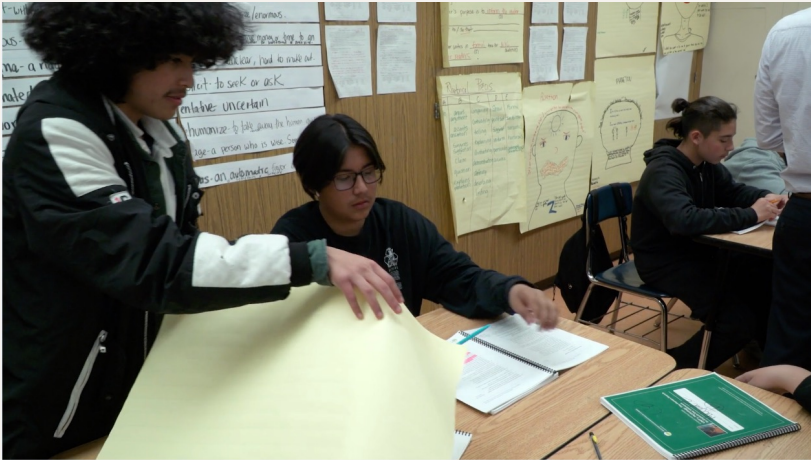# A foray in language learning & teaching theories…

From "in the head" vs. "in the world" to a transdisciplinary framework (Douglas Fir Group, 2016)

FIGURE 1
The Multifaceted Nature of Language Learning and Teaching

Belief Systems
Cultural Values
Political Values
Religious Values
Economic Values

MACRO LEVEL OF IDEOLOGICAL STRUCTURES

MESO LEVEL OF INSTITUTIONS AND COMMUNITIES

Social Identities
Investment
Agency
Power

Families
Schools
Neighborhood
Places of Work
Places of Worship
Social Organizations

Semiotic Resources
Linguistic
Prosodic
Interactional
Nonverbal
Graphic
Pictorial
Auditory
Artifactual

MICRO LEVEL OF SOCIAL ACTIVITY

Multilingual Contexts of Action and Interaction Contributing to Multilingual Repertoires

INDIVIDUALS ENGAGING WITH OTHERS

Regularly Recurring Contexts of Use

Neurobiological Mechanisms and Cognitive Capacities

A few foundations…

- We learn language by **using** it, not "studying" or "practicing" it for later use

- The development of language is **inextricably connected** to and **mutually supportive** of conceptual and analytic development in academic content areas

What's Unique About <u>Adolescent</u> Multilingual Youth?

Importance of:
- **Engaging with peers** (Kibler et al., 2018; Molloy Elreda et al., 2022)
- Growing into adult identities and responsibilities
- Responding to institutional demands
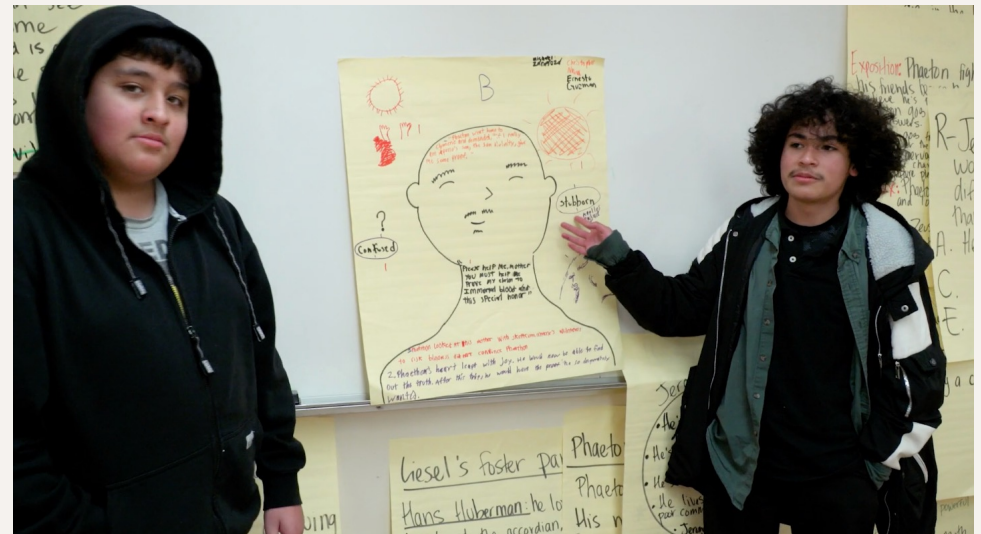
Our goals for multilingual youth require us to:

understand the inequitable ecologies in which multilingual students learn and

work to fundamentally change them

1. Rethink our language & metaphors (macro-level ideologies)

How is the English of multilingual youth often described?
"limited," "broken," "weak," having "gaps" and "holes," "lagging behind," serving as a "barrier" or a "problem," *not* academic," and when home language is considered: a "crutch"

How are their experiences with language in school often described?
a "struggle" to face a "challenge"

What do they need?
"help" and "support" to "catch up"
and to "be included"

Kibler et al., under review; Salerno et al., in preparation

1. Rethink our language & metaphors (macro-level ideologies)

What are the common metaphors embedded in this language?
- Separation
- Illness and weakness
- Loss and incompleteness

Kibler et al., under review; Salerno et al., in preparation

1. Rethink our language & metaphors (macro-level ideologies)

What do multilingual youth deserve from us?

- A "**rightful presence**" (Barton & Tan, 2020) in their schools and classrooms, rather than "inclusion" in them

- "**Educational dignity**" (Poza, 2021; Valdés, 2022) rather than "support"

- A "**most expansive**" (Thompson, forthcoming) learning environment rather than a "least restrictive" one

2. Question our institutions and communities (meso-level)

- How are we **"curricularizing" language** (Valdés, 2018) in schools:
  - Whose language is included and excluded?
  - How do these decisions shape instruction, assessments, and policies for multilingual youth?

- **Does the data we collect tell us what we really need to know?** What is our evidence for language learning in schools, and why?

- How is **educator expertise** developed and supported?

Kibler (2023)

3. Question classroom-level action and interaction (micro)

- **What genuine opportunities for learning and development** are present in classrooms, and why? What is happening in classrooms to create in/equitable outcomes for multilingual youth, and why?

- How do **meso- and macro-level ecologies influence** these micro-level processes?

- How can teachers and multilingual youth have **a voice inside and outside their classrooms?**

4. Move from Understanding to Action: Classroom-based practice & research

Attend to:

Action & interaction

and

Their Impacts

Critically, and as part of the larger ecologies in which they occur.

4. Move from Understanding to Action
Attention to Classroom Action & Interaction:

- **Enact dialogic classroom discourse practices in classrooms** that respond to and develop multilingual youth's communicative and interactional expertise

- **Embed these practices in critical perspectives** that help teachers and students challenge the linguistic and racialized norms and expectations that often limit multilingual youth's opportunities

Kibler, Valdés, & Walqui (2021)

Dialogic teaching and learning → Academic, linguistic, and intellectual development - embedded/secondary goal: equity

***Critical and* dialogic teaching and learning** → **Equity for marginalized populations *through* academic, linguistic, and intellectual development**

Kibler, A., Valdés, G., & Walqui, A. (Eds.) (2021). *Reconceptualizing the role of critical dialogue in American classrooms: Promoting equity through dialogic education*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429330667

What is needed to make dialogic teaching *critical?*

Common Dialogic Talk Features

Co-constructed → **active, agentive roles for students** in talking about **authentic** and **relevant questions**

Intellectually Purposeful → **elicits multiple voices** and perspectives through **critical stances toward knowledge**

Respectful → **equitable and reciprocal community norms**

Critical Dialogic Transformations

Kibler, Valdés, & Walqui (2021)

What is needed to make dialogic teaching *critical?*

Common Dialogic Talk Features

Adaptive

grounded in **teachers' knowledge of power dynamics** and a **firm belief that all students can participate**

Contextually Responsive

recognizes **no contexts are neutral**

Learnable

learning **does not automatically lead to empowerment**

Critical Dialogic Transformations

Implications

- **Curricular Materials:** re-envision rather than adapt
- **Language Pedagogies**: use scaffolding in ways that prioritize fluency, exploration, and complexity over accuracy, repetition, and simplicity
- **Student Roles:** as knowers and researchers with expertise
- **Teacher Roles:** as facilitator with critical stance and mindset

4. Move from Understanding to Action: Attention to <u>Impacts</u> of Action & Interactions

- We need to systematically **explore the "process" of learning and language development** to understand how ecologies shape "products" and "outcomes"

- **Observational frameworks** can help us attend to settings ecologically and critically

- **Researchers and practitioners (i.e., teachers)** can undertake this kind of research
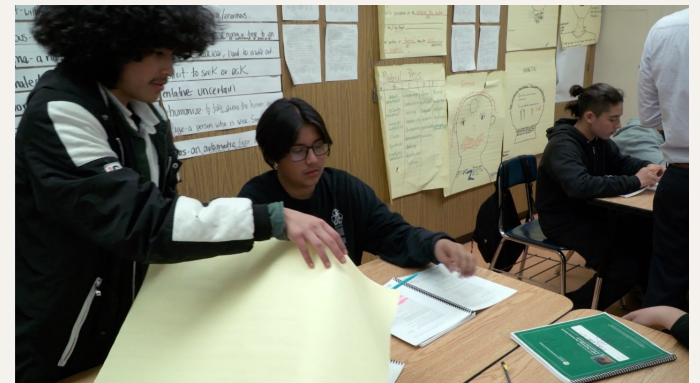
How Can We Trace Impacts of Action & Interaction?

- Use **classroom observations** to document how multilingual youth
  - notice,
  - use, and
  - appropriate new ideas, practices, and language resources

- Analyze **observations over time** to understand impacts

- **Talk to students** (and their teachers)!

Kibler, (2019)

The Case of Diego

Kibler et al. (2013; 2019)

Mr. Smith:
"So with Diego I felt that I was almost writing his essay at one point."

Diego:
"*Ahorita todo esto lo 'toy sacando de los maestros, me 'tan dando todas las respuestas* / Now all this I'm getting it from the teachers, they're giving me all the answers."

Tracing Impacts of Action & Interaction

Interactions:
- Ideologies/Institutions: "Hardworking student/immigrant" discourse
- Institutions (School): "College Prep" school where we read "thick books"
- Classroom Action/Interaction:
  - limited reading of the text
  - teacher two-page summary
  - in-class writing, with 26 informal teacher-student conferences,

Impacts:
- All content from the summary or teacher/peer suggestions
- Written sentences were usually nearly identical to Mr. Smith's oral suggestions

Changes over time?

April 19, 1950

Ruku
Village
India

Owners
Tannery of India Company
Rukmani's Village
India

To Whom It May Concern,
     Is your daughter a prostitute? My name is Ruku and i have a daughter that is a prostitute. This has affected my family because people in the village criticize us saying that we don't educate our children well. I'm riding this letter to convince the owners of this tannery that Industrialization has caused major problems for my family and village.
     When your factory came to our land you created problems not just for my family but also my village. When the factory came to our village prices became higher so people didn't have enough money to pay their rent or buy food…

Can Teachers Do This? YES!

- They notice:
  - the assets students bring & how they understand the task
  - the impacts of peers, teachers & instructional approaches on texts students write
- They need continued support to:
  - take a longitudinal perspective
  - negotiate larger ecological systems

Kibler et al. (2022; in preparation)

Achieving our goals requires us to:

<u>understand</u> the inequitable ecologies
in which multilingual students learn
and
<u>work</u> to fundamentally change them

Where Do We Go From Here? Looking Critically Beyond Individuals to Ecologies

1. Rethink our language and metaphors
2. Questions our institutions & communities
3. Question classroom-level action & interaction
4. Move from understanding to action: Attend to action/interaction and their impacts

Thank you!

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