



## Negotiating Intercultural Identities in the Multilingual Classroom

- Schools with large numbers of bilingual and multicultural students are sites where intercultural communication is the norm. This communication is never neutral with respect to societal power relations. In varying degrees, the interactions between educators and students either reinforce or challenge coercive relations of power in the wider society. These interactions involve a process of negotiating identities that are enmeshed in complex relations of power and status that reflect historical and current realities. In the wake of Proposition 227, a challenge for educators is to minimize the impact that is potentially disempowering and resulting from the “official” rejection of students’ languages and cultures. This is not only a technical issue of how to implement appropriate forms of literacy and content instruction when students have weaker language skills. It is equally or more a question of how to create within the classroom and school an interpersonal space that affirms students’ developing sense of self. The framework presented argues that student success or failure is determined largely in the process of identity negotiation between teacher and student. In order to promote academic success, it is necessary to establish school-based language policies that articulate the ways in which affirmation of identity will be achieved both in the classroom and school as a whole.

[T]he inescapable truth...is that teachers’ attitudes and behaviors *can* make an astonishing difference in student learning. (Nieto, 1999, p. 167)

### *Identity and Power in Human Interactions*

Issues related to language teaching and learning in culturally diverse contexts are inevitably sociopolitical as well as educational in nature. Language is not just a neutral abstract code that we use for thinking and communicating with others; it is also central to our personal and col-

lective identities—how we define ourselves in relation to others. The way we use language reflects our cultural origins and identity choices, our status in the social and economic hierarchy, and the educational opportunities we have experienced.

When we use language with others, we communicate not only information but also subtle aspects of our own identities as well as our feelings about the person with whom we are communicating. Take a parent communicating with a child—any one individual transaction may appear trivial and emotionally uneventful (e.g., “Don’t forget to make your bed.”). However, every interaction is embedded in the history of the relationship between that parent and child. Since the child’s birth, let us assume that the parent has communicated such messages as love, acceptance, concern, and clear expectations of behavior to the child. (Unfortunately some children experience the opposite set of messages.) The deeper meaning of any individual communication can only be understood in the context of the interpersonal space that has been established between parent and child (or between any individuals involved in a communicative relationship). This interpersonal space defines the parameters of the relationship. Within it are the “rules of the game” that reflect appropriate ways of relating one to the other, the emotional bond that exists between the participants (e.g., love, fear, respect), and the knowledge that each participant has of the other (e.g., “This child is my daughter. She has brown eyes and black hair.”).

Every communication with another is also a communication about self. We express to the other person aspects of our own identity (such as our status, authority, personality, intellectual ability, and interests). As a relationship develops, we usually build on and reinforce the ways we have “come across” in previous interactions, but sometimes we “act out of character” or we reveal aspects of our personality that were not previously apparent.

Our interactions not only reflect and reveal our own identities, they also communicate to those with whom we interact how we view them. For example, through language (oral, written, or body) we can show deference, respect, or affection. Alternatively, we can demonstrate an arrogance that communicates our view of others as inferior or subordinate.

In short, our interactions constantly shape an interpersonal space within which identities are negotiated. Many of the rules of the game of this interpersonal space are set by the cultures within which we are socialized. For example, most cultures expect younger people to show respect for and deference to elders. However, there is wide variation in the extent to which different cultures impose this expectation. Communication across cultures, therefore, entails learning about the cultural rules of the game that influence or determine the behavior of those with whom we are interacting. Serious misinterpretation of behavior can result if we are not sensitive to these rules of the game. For example, a teacher who interprets an Asian immigrant child’s reluctance to “look her in the eye” as insubordination rather than respect is seriously misreading the interpersonal message that is being communicated.

Relations of status and power are also played out by means of linguistic communication or “discourse.” For example, in most societies parents and teachers are assumed to have the right to discipline children who misbehave. The society may set limits on the extent to which this power can be exercised, drawing a line between discipline and assault. Power and status relations are played out not only between individuals but also between groups in society. Most societies, despite their egalitarian protestations, have a hierarchy of groups ordered according to various overlapping criteria: economic, “racial,” cultural, linguistic, gender, and sexual orientation, to name a few. These power and status relations have been formed historically and have often been legitimated on pseudo-scientific or religious grounds. For example, claims of “genetic inferiority” or “feeble-mindedness” legitimated the deportation of thousands of immigrants from the United States in the early part of this century (Hakuta, 1986). Religious beliefs continue to legitimate discrimination against gays and lesbians in many contexts around the world. Interactions between dominant and subordinated groups, and among subordinated groups, are played out against a backdrop of these current and historical status and power relationships.

How are these power relationships relevant to teaching in the multicultural, multilingual classroom that has become the norm in most urban centers across North America today? The relevance lies in the fact that student success or failure is determined largely in the process of identity negotiation between teacher and student. I have argued that human relationships are at the heart of schooling (Cummins, 1996). The interactions that take place between students and teachers are more central to student success than any method for teaching literacy, or science, or math. When powerful relationships are established between teachers and students, these relationships can frequently transcend the economic and social disadvantages that afflict communities and schools alike in inner city and rural areas.

The academic failure of many subordinated groups, historically and currently, can be interpreted as a consequence of the disempowering relationships established in school between educators and students. These relationships reflected rather than challenged the coercive power structure, involving economic and social discrimination, that groups such as African Americans, Latinos and Latinas, and Native Americans experienced in the wider society. The communication of negative messages about students’ identities can be overt or covert, intentional or, more frequently, unintentional. For example, prior to the 1970s, it was extremely common for educators to reprimand bilingual students for speaking their home language (L1) in the school. The message to be internalized was that students’ languages, cultures, and previous experiences had no place within this school or, by extension, within this society. To be accepted within the mainstream society, represented by the school, students were required to become invisible and inaudible; culture and language had to be left at home. California’s Proposition 227 (Unz, 1997), passed in June 1998, may communicate a very similar message to bilingual students and their parents.

The challenge for educators in the wake of Proposition 227 is to minimize the impact that is potentially disempowering resulting from the rejection of students' languages and cultures. This is not only a "technical" issue of how to implement appropriate forms of literacy and content instruction when students have weaker language skills. It is equally or more a question of how to create within the classroom and school an interpersonal space that affirms students' developing sense of self and provides them with intellectual and linguistic tools to contribute powerfully to their expanding social worlds. When students' identities are affirmed and extended through their interactions with teachers, they are more likely to apply themselves academically and participate actively in instruction. The consequent learning is the fuel that generates further academic effort. The more we learn, the more we want to learn, and the more effort we are prepared to put into that learning.

By contrast, when students' languages, cultures, and experiences are ignored or excluded in classroom interactions, these students are at a disadvantage. Everything they have previously learned about life and the world is dismissed as irrelevant to school learning. There are few points of connection between their life experiences and curriculum materials or instruction; students are expected to learn in an experiential vacuum. Students' silence and non-participation under these conditions are frequently interpreted as demonstrating a lack of academic ability or effort. In response, teachers' interactions with students reflect a pattern of low expectations, which become self-fulfilling.

In the remainder of this paper, I present a framework 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 lenses. The first lens is 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 to promote content knowledge and cognitive growth. The second lens is one 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.

After sketching this framework I discuss what it means for educators in a practical sense. What is the knowledge base with respect to bilingual students' learning that we can bring into the classroom and use to develop school-based language policies? Where should we position ourselves with respect to the intergroup and interpersonal power relationships that are being played out in the wider society, in the school, and in our own classrooms? What kinds of classroom interactions are implied when we integrate what we see through the lens of teaching-learning and the lens of identity negotiation?

In the last section, I describe a school context, the International High School in LaGuardia Community College in New York City. This school has brilliantly implemented an instructional program that simultaneously promotes students' learning and cognitive growth and affirms and extends their multicultural identities.

### *A Framework for Reversing School Failure*

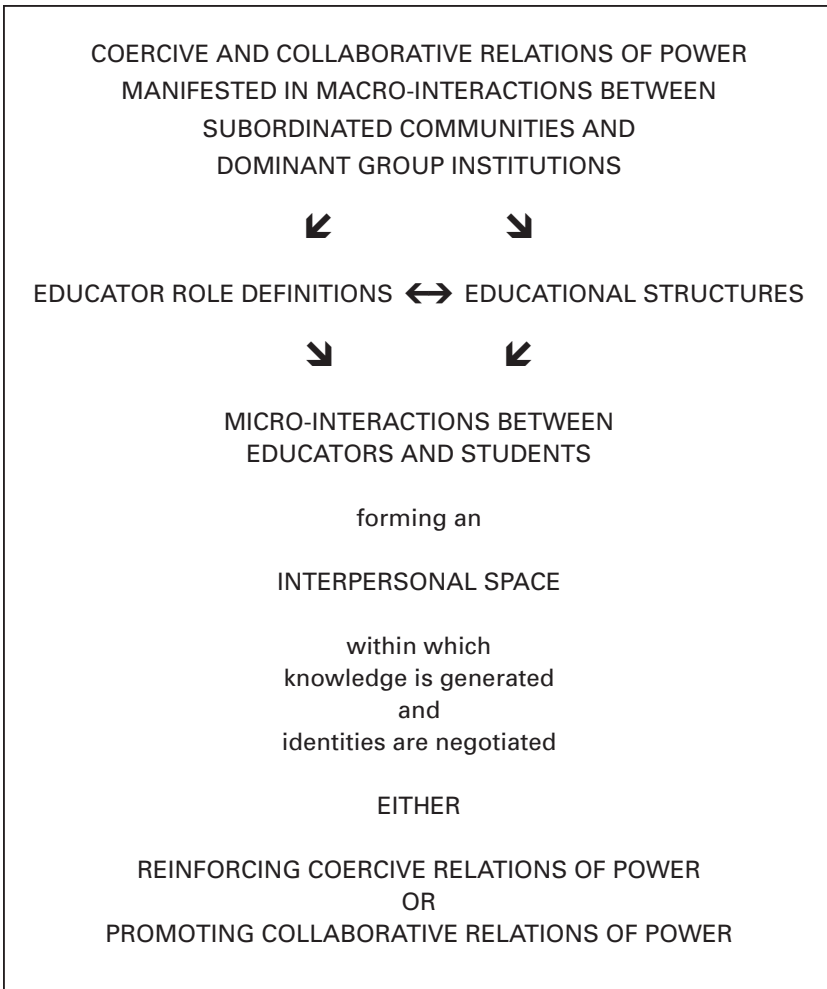
The framework (Figure 1) proposes that relations of power in the wider society (macro-interactions), ranging from coercive to collaborative in varying degrees, influence both the ways in which educators define their roles and the types of structures that are established in the educational system. Role definitions refer to the mindset of expectations, assumptions, and goals that educators bring to the task of educating culturally diverse students.

Coercive relations of power refer to the exercise of power by a dominant individual, group, or country to the detriment of a subordinated individual, group, or country. For example, in the past, dominant group institutions (e.g., schools) have required that subordinated groups deny their cultural identity and give up their languages as a necessary condition for success in the “mainstream” society. For educators to become partners in the transmission of knowledge, culturally diverse students were required to acquiesce in the subordination of their identities and to celebrate as “truth” the perspectives of the dominant group (e.g., the “truth” that Columbus “discovered” America and brought “civilization” to its indigenous peoples).

Collaborative relations of power, by contrast, reflect the sense of the term *power* that refers to being enabled, or empowered to achieve more. Within collaborative relations of power, *power* is not a fixed quantity but is generated through interaction with others. The more empowered one individual or group becomes, the more is generated for others to share, as is the case when two people love each other or when we really connect with children we are teaching. Within this context, the term *empowerment* can be defined as the collaborative creation of power. Students whose schooling experiences reflect collaborative relations of power participate confidently in instruction because their sense of identity is affirmed and extended in their interactions with educators. They also know that their voices will be heard and respected within the classroom. Schooling amplifies rather than silences their power of *self-expression*.

Educational structures refer to the organization of schooling in a broad sense that includes policies, programs, curriculum, and assessment. While these structures will generally reflect the values and priorities of dominant groups in society, they are not fixed or static. As with most other aspects of the way societies are organized and resources distributed, educational structures are contested by individuals and groups.

Educational structures, together with educator role definitions, determine the micro-interactions between educators, students, and communities. These micro-interactions form an interpersonal space within which the acquisition of knowledge and formation of identity is negotiated. Power is created and shared within this interpersonal space where minds and identities meet. As such, these micro-interactions constitute the most immediate determinant of student academic success or failure.



**Figure 1.** *Coercive and collaborative relations of power manifested in macro- and micro-interactions.*

**Note.** From *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society* (p. 19), by J. Cummins, 1996, Los Angeles, California Association for Bilingual Education. Copyright 1996 by J. Cummins and California Association for Bilingual Education. Reprinted with permission.

Micro-interactions between educators, students, and communities are never neutral; in varying degrees, they either reinforce coercive relations of power or promote collaborative relations of power. In the former case, they contribute to the disempowerment of culturally diverse students and communities; in the latter case, the micro-interactions constitute a process of empowerment that enables educators, students, and communities to challenge the operation of coercive power structures.

In summary, a central principle of the present framework is that the negotiation of identity in the interactions between educators and students is central to students' academic success or failure. Our interactions with students are constantly sketching a triangular set of images: (a) an image of our own identities as educators; (b) an image of the identity options we highlight for our students (consider, for example, the contrasting messages conveyed to students in classrooms focused on collaborative critical inquiry compared to classrooms focused on passive internalization of information); and (c) an image of the society we hope our students will help form. In other words, an image of the society that students will graduate into and of the kind of contributions they can make to that society is embedded implicitly in the interactions between educators and students. These interactions reflect the way educators have defined their role with respect to the purposes of education in general and to the nature of their relationships with culturally diverse students and communities in particular. Are we preparing students to accept the societal status quo (and, in many cases, their own inferior status therein)? Or are we preparing them to participate actively and critically in the democratic process in pursuit of the ideals of social justice and equity that are enshrined in the constitutions of most democratic countries?

This perspective clearly implies that in situations where coercive relations of power between dominant and subordinated groups predominate, the creation of interpersonal spaces where students' identities are validated will require educators (and students) to directly challenge the societal power structure. For example, to acknowledge that culturally diverse students' religion, culture, and language are valid forms of *self-expression*, and to encourage their development, is to challenge the prevailing attitudes in the wider society and the coercive structures that reflect these attitudes.

### ***Implications of Research Findings and Educator Identity Choices for Classroom Instruction and School-Based Language Planning***

The ways in which we orchestrate interactions with our students in the classroom should be informed by what is known about bilingual students' acquisition of academic English. Our interactions with students will also reflect our own identities as educators—specifically how we have defined our role with respect to culturally and linguistically diverse students and their communities. It is beyond the scope of this article to sketch in any detail the knowledge base that exists relating to the language development of bilingual or English learners (ELs) (see Cummins, 1996, 2000), but in the context of Proposition 227 and its aftermath, one set of findings is immediately relevant. These findings are outlined below followed by a description of the educator identity choices implied by a commitment to create contexts of empowerment for EL students.

***Academic language development.*** Research has consistently shown EL students typically require at least five years to catch up academically in English (e.g., Collier, 1987; Cummins, 1981; Gándara, 1999; Hakuta, Butler,



& Witt, 2000; Klesmer, 1994). Students may be conversationally fluent in English in everyday contexts within about two years of starting to acquire English, but this does not imply that in all-English classrooms they are capable of surviving academically without additional support. Hakuta et al.'s (2000) analysis of data from two California school districts in the San Francisco Bay Area showed that "even in two California districts that are considered the most successful in teaching English to LEP [limited English proficient] students, oral proficiency [measured by formal tests] takes 3 to 5 years to develop, and academic English proficiency can take 4 to 7 years" (2000, p. iii). They label the one-year time period of "sheltered English immersion" that Proposition 227 gives EL students to acquire English "wildly unrealistic" (2000, p. 13).

Outside of North America, Shohamy (1999) reports ongoing research being conducted in Israel that shows a time period of seven to nine years for immigrant students to arrive at similar achievements as native speakers in Hebrew literacy and slightly less than seven to nine years to arrive at native speaker levels in mathematics.

There are two main reasons why it takes longer for EL students to catch up in academic skills as compared to conversational skills:

1. Academic language—the language of subject matter (e.g., science, math), literature, and magazines, for example—is fundamentally different from conversational language. As students progress through the grades, they encounter far more low-frequency words (primarily from Greek and Latin sources), complex syntax (e.g., passives), and abstract expressions that are virtually never heard in everyday conversation.

2. Academic language is what we try to develop among native English-speaking children who come to school fluent in conversational English. Therefore EL students must catch up to a moving target. Native speakers of English continue to develop their academic language abilities throughout their schooling.

These findings allow several obvious implications. First, educating bilingual and EL students is the responsibility of the entire school staff and not just the responsibility of English as a second language or bilingual teachers. The numbers of EL students in many districts, together with the time periods typically required for students to catch up, means that "mainstream" classroom teachers must develop the expertise to teach all the students in their classrooms.

A related implication is that school language policies should be developed in every school to address the needs of *all* students in the school and, in particular, the needs of those students who require support in English academic language learning (Corson, 1998). This also implies that administrators in schools will provide competent leadership to address issues of underachievement in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts.

A third set of implications concerns assessment issues. District-, state-, or nation-wide assessment programs for EL students who are still in the process of catching up academically in English are likely to present a very



misleading impression of both the students' academic potential and of the effectiveness of instruction. Students who have been learning English for about three years in a school context perform about one standard deviation (the equivalent of 15 IQ points) below grade norms in academic English skills (Cummins, 1981). If the interpretation of test results fails to take account of these data, effective schools with large numbers of EL students will appear ineffective to parents and policy-makers. This perception is likely to reduce student and teacher morale. Similarly, bilingual students who are referred for special education assessment are likely to receive distorted results if the assessment is conducted only in the students' second language.

***Educator identity choices.*** To what extent is there any empirical evidence for the emphasis that I have placed in Figure 1 on the centrality of *identity negotiation* in determining students' academic development? Several major studies and literature reviews provide ample evidence. August and Hakuta (1997), for example, identified 13 factors that distinguished more effective from less effective schools. I have suggested that for EL students, these factors are best expressed as three overlapping dimensions (Cummins, 2000): (a) coherent school organization and leadership; (b) affirmation of student and community identity; (c) balance between meaning-focused, oral and written language input and use designed to promote problem-solving and higher-order thinking, and explicit formal instruction designed to develop linguistic and metacognitive awareness. In other words, affirmation of student and community identity is one of the central components of an effective school.

An example of how issues related to identity negotiation emerge in individual research studies comes from Lucas, Henze, and Donato's (1990) study of effective high schools for Latino and Latina students. The affirmation of student and community identity was highlighted in five of the eight dimensions they identified. These were:

1. Value is placed on the students' languages and cultures.
2. High academic expectations are communicated to language-minority students.
3. School leaders make the education of language-minority students a priority.
4. Parents of language-minority students are encouraged to become involved in their children's education.
5. School staff members share a strong commitment to empower language-minority students through education.

These data suggest that educators, both as individuals and collectively within schools, are never powerless or without choices, even though they frequently work in conditions that are oppressive both for them and their students. While they rarely have complete freedom, educators do have choices in how they structure classroom interactions. They have some degree of freedom in determining the social and educational goals they want to achieve with their students. They are responsible for the role definitions they adopt in relation to culturally diverse students and communities. In the context of English-only instruction, educators have options reflected in how they choose

to respond to the students' language and culture, how they encourage parent and community participation, and how they implement pedagogy and assessment (e.g., Lucas & Katz, 1994).

Sonia Nieto (1999) has expressed well the potential impact of the identity choices that educators adopt:

In the end, if teachers believe that students cannot achieve at high levels, that their backgrounds are riddled with deficiencies, and that multicultural education is a frill that cannot help them to learn, the result will be school reform strategies that have little hope for success. On the other hand, if teachers begin by challenging social inequities that inevitably place some students at a disadvantage over others; if they struggle against institutional policies and practices that are unjust; if they begin with the strengths and talents of students and their families; if they undergo a process of personal transformation based on their own identities and experiences; and finally, if they engage with colleagues in a collaborative and imaginative encounter to transform their own practices and their schools to achieve equal and high-quality education for all students, then the outcome is certain to be a more positive one than is currently the case. (1999, pp. 175-176)

To illustrate how closely interrelated are the affirmation of identity and effective instruction, think about the importance of activating students' prior knowledge as a means of making input more comprehensible. One of the few principles that reading theorists seem to agree on (see Carrell, 1988; Dochy, Segers, & Buehl, 1999) is that we interpret new information by relating it to what we already know (our prior knowledge or *cognitive schemata*). Thus, it is commonly recommended that we systematically activate students' prior knowledge through brainstorming and other activities in order to make the learning process more efficient (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). In a multilingual classroom, this strategy also communicates to students that their cultural knowledge, experiences, and interests are relevant within the classroom. The teacher demonstrates interest in what students know and who they are. Learning is realized to be a process of building on what students already know in their native or first language (L1) rather than a process that views the L1 and students' prior experiences as either irrelevant or as an impediment to learning (as Proposition 227 implies).

The final section illustrates how these principles reflecting affirmation of student identity and equitable intercultural communication have been put into practice in one high school in New York City.

***Creating Contexts of Empowerment:  
Language Policy in the International High School***

International High School in La Guardia Community College, New

York City, was founded in 1985 and offers learners of English a four-year comprehensive program where they can satisfy state-mandated subject matter requirements while learning English (DeFazio, 1997; DevTech Systems, 1996). The students are from over 60 countries and speak more than 50 different languages. According to DeFazio, entering students score in the lowest quartile on tests of English proficiency, yet more than 90 percent of them graduate within four years and move on to post-secondary education. As a result of the success of the original program, the philosophy and vision have been extended to two other international high schools in different boroughs of New York City.

The philosophy underlying instruction and school organization at the International High School includes the following beliefs:

1. Language is key to learning and increasing proficiency in academic language emerges most naturally in experiential, language rich, interdisciplinary study.

2. Fluency in two languages represents a resource for the student, the school, and the society.

3. Students learn best from each other in heterogeneous, collaborative groupings, and learning is facilitated when collaboration exists between the school and the larger community.

4. Assessment must support individual growth and offer a variety of opportunities for students and faculty to demonstrate what they know and what they can do.

Among the innovations of the school is an emphasis on career education throughout the curriculum; students are encouraged to explore career options and are, as a result, self-motivated to continue to expand their language sophistication. In addition, the teachers recruit new teachers to work within the school and have developed procedures for collaborating, providing each other with support and evaluation.

Rather than being organized according to traditional subject matter, the curriculum has an interdisciplinary structure. The teaching staff has organized itself into six interdisciplinary teams, each responsible for developing at least two interdisciplinary programs. The programs run for 13 weeks with the team of teachers responsible for overseeing a group of approximately 75 students. An example of the type of interdisciplinary focus is a program labeled Origins, Growth, and Structure that involves chemistry, mathematics, linguistics, and art.

Rethinking the assessment of students has been a fundamental component of the restructuring process. Portfolios and exhibitions incorporating self, peer, and instructor evaluations play a major role. DeFazio notes the following:

Students at the International High School undergo portfolio assessment where they demonstrate their academic, linguistic and social proficiencies. Traditional testing is eschewed because it is often unfair and counterproductive to linguistically diverse populations who often know much more than they may be able to articulate in

English. Portfolio assessment encourages retention, higher-level cognitive skills, development of internal standards, creativity and variety in solving problems.... Students undergo these assessments informally during the course of a semester and more formally at the end. Students also present a master portfolio as they prepare to graduate. (1997, p. 102)

Although English is the usual language of instruction, the school is very much a bilingual and multilingual learning environment. Students' first languages are integrated into all phases of learning and assessment. In developing their portfolios in the various interdisciplinary programs, students write in both their first language and English, according to their choice. Teachers will often ask other students or members of the wider community for assistance in translating material that has been written in a language they themselves do not know.

For example, in the American Reality program, students formally explore their native language, human development, and career education, spending at least half their school day reading and writing in their native language. The first language resources that enable students to do this "include abundant native language materials that teachers, students, and parents purchased for the school" (DeFazio, 1997, p. 104).

Parents have become significantly involved in the school. Teachers have asked students to write letters home in their native languages to describe the interdisciplinary programs, to explain what they are learning, and to explain the portfolio and grading process. Parents are encouraged to respond to the letters in either the native language or English. When parents' letters are returned in the native language, the student is requested to translate the letters for the teacher into English. According to DeFazio:

The letter writing campaign helped instantiate several aspects of the school's language philosophy: the importance of the native language; the need for the parent/guardian and school to work together regardless of language; the development and importance of bi- and multilingualism; language respect. (1997, p. 103)

In the other interdisciplinary programs, students produce both native language and English language magazines and articles. Their writing is read by teachers and students proficient in the native language. If no one on the school staff is proficient in the students' language, "teachers go into the community to find volunteers willing to spend time reading and commenting on the students' work" (DeFazio, 1997, p. 104). DeFazio notes that students often comment on how much of their native language they had forgotten.

Other projects that students carry out in the Origins, Growth, and Structures program include writing an autobiography or a biography of another student (again in English, their first language [L1], or both) and investigations into comparative linguistics. For example, students work with

the International Phonetic Alphabet to practice the sounds in each others' languages, to write cartoon strips in phonetics, and to attempt tongue twisters and riddles in the various languages represented in the class. Their linguistics projects culminate with a community research project focusing on some issue or question related to language in the wider community. For example, students have interviewed members of their communities about bilingual education, dialect, and language prejudice and presented their findings as the last chapter of their linguistics book. Another project involved students writing multilingual children's books on some aspect of language or linguistics (e.g., *How the Chinese Got Language* and *The Monster that Ate Polish Words*).

What is most relevant to highlight in this example is the language planning process (Corson, 1998) that educators in the International High School implemented. This planning was designed to resolve problems they identified with respect to the match between the organization of the high school and EL students' language and academic learning needs. Students entering the high school system with limited knowledge of English were severely handicapped by the inflexibility of the original curricular and assessment requirements. They did not know enough English to gain access to and learn a challenging curriculum at the same pace as native English-speaking students; nevertheless, they were being assessed with the same tests as native English-speaking students. Consequently, many were failing courses or receiving grades that would preclude them from going on to university or college.

The planning process involved changing the curriculum and assessment procedures to enable students to use their prior knowledge (much of it in their L1) to facilitate their learning and demonstrate what they had learned. Use of students' L1 was encouraged, as was a cooperative and supportive inquiry process. Language itself became a major focus of study within the program.

The performance assessment implemented in the school was a vital component in the entire restructuring process. There is no way that traditional forms of assessment could have evaluated the learning and project work that students undertook. There is no doubt that traditional forms of assessment would have resulted in a high failure and drop-out rate because most students entering the school with minimal English would not have been capable of passing the tests at each grade level. This is illustrated by the numbers reported for New York City as a whole, where the drop-out rate among limited English proficient students is close to 30 percent compared to only 3.9 percent at the International High School (DevTech Systems, 1996).

### ***Conclusion***

I have suggested that schools with large numbers of bilingual and multicultural students are sites where intercultural communication is the norm. This communication, whether in the classroom or outside the classroom, is never neutral with respect to societal power relations. In varying degrees, the interactions between educators and culturally diverse students either reinforce

or challenge coercive relations of power in the wider society. These interactions involve a process of negotiating identities that are enmeshed in complex relations of power and status that reflect historical and current realities. Empowerment, understood as the collaborative creation of power, is generated in contexts where the affirmation of student identity has become a priority among educators. In these contexts, as illustrated by the International High School, educators are willing to challenge aspects of the societal power structure, thus creating opportunities for students to extend the horizons of their intellect, culture, and identities.

An implication of the analysis outlined above is that school language policies should emphasize equally, and in an integrated way, the implementation of effective instructional strategies for promoting EL students' learning and the creation of organizational structures and patterns of intercultural interaction that clearly affirm the value of the intellectual, cultural, and linguistic resources that students bring to school.

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