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# Affirming plural belonging: Building on students' family-based cultural and linguistic capital through multiliteracies pedagogy

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**Abstract** This article reports on a qualitative case study involving pedagogical innovations grounded in culturally and linguistically inclusive approaches to curriculum. In this project, kindergarten children were supported in collaboratively authoring Dual Language Identity Texts. Our findings suggest that as family and teacher conceptions of literacy were extended beyond traditional monolingual print-based literacy, home literacies associated with complex transnational and transgenerational communities of practice were legitimated through their inclusion within the school curriculum. This process invited family members to take up roles as expert partners in children's biliteracy development. Further, conditions were fostered for parents to consider and articulate their beliefs and values vis-à-vis their children's multiliterate practice and participation within these multiple, transnational communities.

**Keywords** family literacies; linguistic minority education; multicultural education; multilingualism; multiliteracies; transnationalism

This article presents findings from a case study of pedagogical innovation, designed to develop multiliterate practice among ethno-racial and language minority students attending a highly diverse Toronto elementary school. Part of a national project, entitled 'From Literacy to Multiliteracies:

Designing Learning Environments for Knowledge Generation within the New Economy' (Early and Cummins, 2002), this study sought to support and document the expansion of traditional monolingual, print-based literacy pedagogy to incorporate pedagogies of multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000).

Luke and Grieshaber (2004: 6) remind us that '[p]edagogy involves the framing of selected text practices, genres and literacy events' in ways that differentially authorize and disqualify different literacy practices within the knowledge economies of schools. This research is spurred by the concern that, despite prevalent cultural pluralist discourses in Canadian schools and support for incorporating students' cultural capital within extra-curricular and even occasional curricular activities, students' diverse linguistic capital is rarely framed or tapped into as valuable forms of literacy.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, while children of minoritized cultural and linguistic backgrounds are often affirmed in their cultural identity, the school and teachers generally ignore their home languages and literacies, vital 'funds of knowledge'<sup>2</sup> that might contribute to academic learning (see Ada, 1988; Berk and Winsler, 1995; Bernhard et al., 2005; Bernhard and Cummins, 2004; Bernhard et al., 2006; Delpit, 2002; Dyson, 2003; Gee, 2004; González et al., 2005; Hull and Schultz, 2002; Manyak, 2006; Valdes, 1996; Volk and de Acosta, 2001).

There are also limited roles ethnolinguistic minority parents can play in children's learning since much of their expertise is marginal to the curriculum. Even when educators explicitly recognize parents as partners in their children's education, they often struggle to involve parents meaningfully and access their expertise (Becher, 1985; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Diaz Soto, 1997; Gregory and Williams, 2000; Schechter and Ippolito, 2008; Lareau, 1989; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2002; Schechter and Ippolito, 2006). Noteworthy exceptions to this trend have succeeded through carefully planned Freirian dialogue (Bernhard et al., 1998), ethnographic studies of home culture and language by educators,<sup>3</sup> and centring parental expertise as curricular resources (Cummins et al., 2005; Hannon, 1995; Lee and Seiderman, 1998; Schechter and Cummins, 2003; Schechter and Ippolito, 2008).

In the project under examination, linguistic minority students authored, with active family and teacher support, Dual Language, Multimodal, Identity Texts (Cummins, 2004). Dual Language Identity Texts, written in English and students' L1, have been proposed as an inclusive pedagogical and language learning strategy which is both cognitively challenging and a forum for student identity investment and recognition. They are multimodal, in this case combining visual, written and oral components in the form of illustrations and photographs created and chosen by the students and their families. The content of the text enabled the students to include

personally and culturally relevant dimensions of their identity as the books they authored were specifically about their own lives (Taylor and Bernhard, 2005; Taylor et al., 2005). The use of communication technology offers the possibility of expanding the forms of identity investment, the audiences and learning communities in relation to whom these texts are produced: as the books were scanned and provided to families in electronic form, they became available to be shared with extended family across the world.

We begin by situating this study within the challenges posed to current practices of language and literacy education by globalization and transnationalism, postmodern understandings of identity, New Literacy Studies (NLS), and pedagogies of bi- and multiliteracies.

## **Redefining immigrant families and learners, literacy, and identity**

The terrain of literacy education is undergoing profound shifts both in terms of *who* the students sitting in contemporary classrooms are and how contemporary social and educational theory are redefining literacy, expanding our appreciation of the social, intellectual and semiotic resources students bring from multiple fields of communicative practice.

Globalization, with its accelerated and inequitable flows of people, capital, information, discourse and culture, is increasingly disrupting modernist conceptions of educational monocultures (classrooms sharing a single language, culture, ethnicity and origin) (Luke and Grieshaber, 2004). Similarly, mono-national models of immigration as a unidirectional process of adaptation to the majority are losing explanatory purchase (Luke, 2003; Mitchell, 2000). Mitchell reminds us that a growing percentage of our students live a form of transnationalism: 'the simultaneous economic, social and political connections that bind immigrants to two or more nation states. Rather than movement "from" a society of origin "to" a country of settlement, the migrants operate in a social field of networks and obligations that extend across international borders' (Mitchell, 2000: 71 cited in Dagenais, 2003: 273).<sup>4</sup>

This demands a redefinition of family cultural and linguistic capital as global, national and personal resources.<sup>5</sup> It also implies that we reframe identity and literacy as transnational and transcultural trajectories rather than static inventories of traits and capacities: identity and literacy might be redefined as social practices and dynamic relationships that emerge through transnational forms of community, mobility, communication and cultural expression that articulate multiple global contexts (Taylor, 2008). Such a reconceptualization draws from postmodern understandings of

power/knowledge when examining questions of empowerment and identity investment in the education of culturally and linguistically minoritized children.

Postmodern theory reframes power, not as a commodity, but as flowing through closed, self-referential systems of 'knowledge' that powerfully define the terms of reference through which individuals come to be recognized, to understand themselves and their experience (Foucault, 1982). In Canadian contexts, for example, Eurocentric discourses of national identity and hegemonic multiculturalism position racialized communities as eternal newcomers and 'minorities',<sup>6</sup> graciously hosted by white British and French 'founding nations', whose bodies and forms of knowledge are indelibly inscribed as *from elsewhere* (Sleeter, 1995; Taylor, 2006a; Walcott, 2003). Similarly, in the Eurocentric and Anglocentric discourses dominating even culturally tolerant or celebratory schools, knowledge of languages other than English and non-western, racialized cultural forms are positioned beyond the curricular pale, marked as occasional imports from out-of-school spaces but irrelevant to core learning. Educational empowerment, then, involves a process of shifting the Eurocentric, monolingual epistemological economies anchoring the current literacy curriculum in order to centre increasingly salient global flows of discursive, textual and semiotic systems (Taylor, 2008). This may also open up alternative identificatory discourses in which English Language Learners (ELLs) are positioned and recognized as members of a global majority (see Kachru, 1990; Pennycook, 2007; Taylor, 2006b), opening up a creative tension with their national minoritized status.<sup>7</sup>

In the current study, rethinking power/knowledge in this way suggests that curriculum which centres dual language texts drawing from minoritized cultural and linguistic capital to pursue students' cognitive and literacy development might be expected to 'empower' students in different ways. It might be expected not only to encourage their identity investment in this learning,<sup>8</sup> but also to shift the balance of authority and expertise among teachers, students and family.

Such an understanding is supported by NLS (Street, 2000, 2005) research into the literacy practices of multilingual families. By reframing literacy as a social practice and communal resource rather than a set of individual attributes or skills, NLS allows us to reposition family and other out-of-school literacies as valid, pedagogical and dynamic practices situated within different domains of learners' lives and shaped by different social institutions and power relationships (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). The research of Syncretic Literacies scholars (Gregory and Williams, 2000; Gregory et al., 2004) challenges cultural and linguistic deficit models

which presume the ‘psychological poverty’ and subtractive linguistic ‘mismatch’ of family literacies vis-à-vis school literacies by documenting the ‘complex heterogeneity of traditions, whereby reading practices from different domains are blended resulting in a form of reinterpretation which is both new and dynamic’ (Gregory and Williams, 2003: 13). Drawing from Duranti and Ochs’ (1996) concept of *syncretic literacies*, which ‘merges not simply linguistic codes or texts, but different activities’, they argue for an understanding of these rich family literacy practices as *contrastive literacies* which complement rather than detract from academic literacy development (Gregory and Williams, 2000: 13). Significantly for our study, their research suggests that a range of family members can play important roles as ‘cultural mediators’, ‘brokers’ and ‘guiding lights’ (Padmore, 1994; Williams, 1997), socializing young learners into different cultural literacy practices through ‘guided participation’ (Rogoff and Gauvain, 1986) or ‘scaffolding’ (Bruner, 1986).

The NLS concept of literacy practices links family literacy practices to identity in important ways: as it encompasses an ethnographic and ecological understanding of the cultural values, norms, beliefs and relationships expressed through the ways different discourse communities interact with, organize access to and understand written texts, the concept of family literacy practices allows us to consider the shared epistemologies and affiliations expressed in the different cultural and linguistic literacy practices into which families initiate their children (Barton et al., 2000: 7–11). Moving our focus from *literacy events* to *literacy practices* allows us to ask how different identities – different positions within and affiliations to different communities – are constructed through the literacy practices of different communities within specific arenas or domains of public life (Street, 2000: 22–3). In this study, then, we consider the significance of migrant family multilingual literacies for transnational identity trajectories (or dynamic, multiple belonging) and pathways to literacy.

## From literacy to multiliteracies pedagogy

In the context of what Cummins (2004) has termed the default option in North American classrooms, these complex family literacies are divorced from the curriculum, pathologized and penalized by the cultural and linguistic deficit models underpinning pedagogies focused overwhelmingly on monolingual English academic print literacy.

Several pedagogical frameworks aim to redress this exclusion: the growing body of family literacies programmes (González et al., 2005; Pitt, 2000; Schechter and Ippolito, 2006) in particular ask how family literacies might more productively be linked to academic/school literacies. This

particular study involved workshops with participating teachers that drew from Cummins' (2001) Academic Expertise Framework, bilingual authorship (Ada and Campoy, 2003), and the Multiliteracies Framework (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000).

Multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) is used to capture the increasingly complex range of multimodal practices required to comprehend, manage, create and communicate knowledge in our technologically sophisticated, multilingual, culturally diverse globalized societies. These include both new, multimodal forms of literacy associated with information, communication, and multimedia technologies and, equally important, the variety of culturally specific forms of literacy associated with complex pluralistic societies and a globalized economy. In North American and European urban settings, multilingual youth are already engaged in sophisticated multiliteracies (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Gregory and Williams, 2000; Gutierrez et al., 1999; Rampton, 1995; Schechter and Cummins, 2003). Teachers in schools tend to ignore these rich forms of students' cultural and linguistic capital, focusing rather on a narrow range of monolingual, monocultural text-based literacies. Multiliteracies pedagogy aims to design innovative learning environments that engage all students in an expanded range of literacy practices, including imaginative and cognitively demanding integration of text-based and multimedia practices. Pedagogical design creates opportunities for students to engage in meaningful experience and practice within a learning community (*Situated Practice*), supported in their developing understanding and conceptual repertoires by explicit instruction at teachable moments (*Overt Instruction*). After students critically examine their new literacies in terms of social, cultural relevance and power relations (*Critical Reframing*), teachers design opportunities for them to apply their new knowledge and forms of expression in ways that impact upon their own lived realities (*Transformed Practice*).

This case study was conducted as part of a nationwide project in partnership with four school boards and 24 elementary and secondary schools, aimed at documenting teaching practices and learning environments that expand traditional conceptions of literacy and that build on and extend students' multimodal, multilingual critical literacies. From an analysis of over 70 critical case studies and a review of relevant frameworks for multiliteracies pedagogy, the national project moved from praxis to proposing core principles to guide instruction and policy and curriculum development (The Multiliteracy Project).

In this Dual Language authoring activity,<sup>9</sup> in which teaching staff and family members helped transcribe children's oral composition, this composition is situated within the learning communities of the participants'

classrooms and family conversations, especially as these often incorporated reviewing and selecting accompanying family photos. Classroom observation and parent interviews suggest that in the process of transcribing these compositions in English and in home languages, school staff and family members engaged in various strategies of overt literacy instruction and language talk (see Findings). The relationship between school and home literacies was also critically reframed by explicit encouragement and modelling by their teacher (see Methodology).

### Cummins' academic expertise model

Sharing with the multiliteracies framework a focus on cognitive development and effective learning through active, critical inquiry and knowledge construction, Cummins' framework insists that this be balanced with an attention to processes of and opportunities for *identity negotiation and investment*, fostered within the interpersonal pedagogical space created within a learning community through teacher–student and student–student interactions in literacy activities (Cummins, 2001). As these interactions are organized around a *Focus on Meaning*, a *Focus on Language*, and a *Focus on Use*, they promote the development of critical language awareness through which students can understand and apprentice in the powerful ways language is used in different contexts.

In the activity described here, children's emergent L1 and English literacy were embedded within a linguistically rich, personally meaningful social

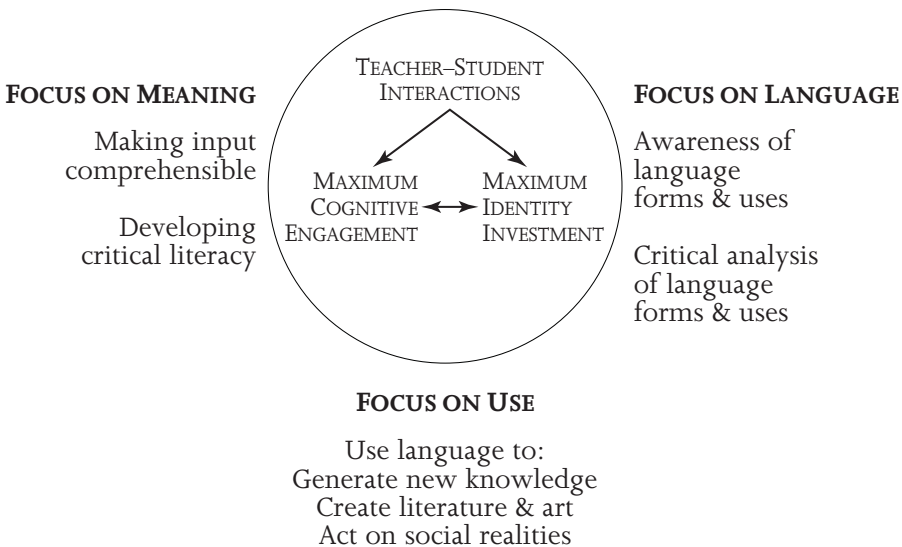


Figure 1 The development of academic expertise



context (*Focus on Meaning*), in which adults might highlight relevant language forms and uses (*Focus on Language*) as part of children's creative practice of storytelling (*Focus on Use*).

Cummins has recently expanded the Academic Expertise framework to theorize the ways that children's investment (or 'affective bonding') and meaningful learning are intensified through the production and reception of these texts, in which they see their linguistic and cultural identities positively showcased, affirmed and reflected back to them by socially significant audiences such as school and home communities or extended transnational family networks (Cummins, 2004).

Grounded in these frameworks, the current study sought to document the shifts in student identity redefinition and investment and in the balance of power/knowledge among teachers, students and parents, which might be opened up by an inclusive multiliteracies pedagogy.

## **The study: Introduction and context**

Maple Leaf Public School is located in a northern suburb of Toronto in a relatively new and rapidly growing neighbourhood.<sup>10</sup> The majority of the households are composed of multigenerational immigrant families or extended families of South Asian descent. Well over half of the student population of the school (about 800) are racialized minorities. In most families where English is an added language, preservation of first languages is valued and first languages are spoken at home. Most of the teachers at the school are white; however, there are teachers of Sri Lankan, Indian, Caribbean, Iranian and Chinese descent.

The school administration has developed with the teaching staff an explicitly inclusive collective vision that draws from recent research and proactive school board policies that support cultural and linguistic diversity. The value placed by administration and staff on students' cultural capital is reflected not only in policy, but also the institutional practices within the school: diverse cultural values, practices, forms of knowledge and memory of students' families and communities figure centrally in the school culture, daily routines, physical environment and extra-curricular activities. Each morning children have five minutes of physical activity time where they dance to music from various regions of the world. The entrance lobby and hallways showcase student work honoring events including Chinese New Year, Black History Month, Asian History Month and, in 2005, student poetry in English and Tamil responding to the Asian tsunami as part of the community relief organizing. This display is an important space, hosting innovative cultural production and commemorations that explore

and re-narrate significant calendar events from diverse community perspectives. For example, the Remembrance Day display commemorated the sacrifices of ethno-racial minority as well as majority veterans and the victims of wars around the world, past and contemporary. In organizing the display and school assembly, students critically reframed a conventionally nostalgic narration of white Canadian memories of the First and Second World Wars within a contemporary transnational dialogue exploring peace and resisting the glorification of war.

Assemblies play a vital role in centring families' diverse cultural practices, linguistic capital, and community affiliations at the heart of the school's extra-curricular life. The December holiday assembly celebrated a range of traditions including Diwali, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and Christmas. These cultural practices were reflected in the dress not only of audience members, but staff as well led by the principal who appeared in a gold *salwar kameez*, a traditional South Asian pant suit. Students participated prominently in the planning and performance as their cultural capital was sought out as vital expertise.

The focus of this study was a morning kindergarten classroom of 27 children aged 4–5 years. All are visual minorities, the majority being native speakers of Tamil, as well as Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarati, Hindi, and Cantonese. The Iranian-Canadian teacher/school-based researcher and two Urdu-speaking parent volunteers model and normalize linguistic diversity, creating an enriched, safe and inviting environment in which children are positioned as experts in their cultural and linguistic funds of knowledge. In September, the teacher and students located their family histories of migration and transnational ties on a display map of the world. The children were also supported in writing their names in English and their home language and posting these names outside the classroom door for teachers, children, parents and visitors to see. Students would often stop and comment on the names and the languages in which they were written, creating an initial interest in the linguistic diversity of the classroom. The teacher also encouraged all the children to share their spoken languages: 'Some of you, you speak Chinese, some of you, you speak Urdu, some of you, you speak Indian, some of you speak just English. So I speak Farsi. Do you know what they say in Farsi, [for] "Good morning"? (says "Good morning" in Farsi). *Sobh beh'khayr*. What do you say in your language Leyla?'. On occasion, first language is also accessed as an academic scaffold for student understanding by the parent volunteers.

Once the books were actually completed the teacher set up carpet time where the children were encouraged to share their books with one another. Throughout this sharing time the students displayed their excitement in not

only listening to their peers share their books but also with the prospect of being able to share their own books. They volunteered to share their books with enthusiasm and once they were given the stage showed confidence and pride in the books they had created. Children interviewed each other about what they had written in their books and then took turns reading both the English and home language sections of their books to the entire class. Such observations suggest students' increased comfort and confidence in accessing home language and multilingualism in the context of classroom learning, an important foundation upon which the dual language book project was able to flourish.

## Methodology

This project emerged as a university-school collaboration directed by Judith Bernhard and under the principal investigator Jim Cummins. An important element of the methodology included an initial meeting between the research team,<sup>11</sup> teachers and administrators, in which examples of linguistically inclusive pedagogy were introduced (including discussion of Ada and Campoy, 2003). This initial meeting was key in the school administration defining the research goal: that is, that the research team might document aspects of the particular teaching and learning context of kindergarten classes that might be playing a significant role in supporting the academic success of linguistic minority students entering grade 1 (with an eye to expanding these strategies in other classes).

Family members and home literacies were positioned centrally within the project. In a parent meeting/workshop (led by Judith Bernhard) exploring the value of multiple and home literacies, kindergarten parents and family members produced dual language stories to be shared with children. A Home Literacies Survey highlighted the ethnolinguistic wealth of diverse family and community social contexts, and multilingual language and literacy materials and practices in the home (please contact the authors for copies of the questionnaire). Survey findings were vital to expanding the research team's understanding of home contexts and positive familial attitudes towards L1 retention, and to identifying and affirming the value of home literacies resources available to families (see Findings).

In terms of pedagogical process, the children were introduced to the dual language authoring project through questions about themselves, their family, friends, favorite foods, favorite activities at home and school, and aspirations when they grow up. They drew pictures and dictated their answers in English to be transcribed by teachers, researcher and teacher assistants working in the classroom. The books were sent home with

requests for parent collaboration in finding photos and transcribing children's translation of their answers into their first language. Finally, each child's book was bound in order to be shared as a classroom multiliteracy resource with peers, and then scanned as electronic books to be shared with their family in Canada and abroad.

The research team documented this process during six months of twice-weekly visits for the purposes of classroom support, observation and data collection during the production and in-class use of the books as biliteracy resources. Data collection combined video ethnography of teacher and parent meetings as well as classroom interactions, samples of student electronic books, focus group interviews with children, individual interviews with parents and teachers. Observation charts focused on: teaching strategies (including grouping strategies of same- and cross-language buddying), linguistic scaffolding, language talk and language use between adults, kindergarten students and older reading buddies during production and reading of the books.

The research team conducted a child-by-child analysis, triangulating written and videotaped classroom observations with analysis of individual books, surveys and parent interviews (when available) in order to develop themes and patterns for each child. A cross-child analysis was then carried out, which included the identification of common patterns across all children. A set of common themes was identified. The transcribed videotaped classroom interactions and interviews with the school-based researcher and parents were coded to arrive at a set of preliminary findings, which were tested through further triangulation.

## Findings and discussion

The initial Home Literacies Survey indicated a rich range of multilingual and multimodal family literacies and explicit values of L1 maintenance already prevalent in the participating students' homes. All of the parents indicated that they told stories to their children with the majority of parents reporting that they read stories to their children every night of the week. Storytelling emerged as prominent practice of multilingual literacy and oracy. Of the parents who indicated speaking a language other than English in the home, the large majority told stories to their children in both English and home languages, including Tamil, Cantonese, and Urdu. Parents accessed a range of resources to support their children's home language development through heritage language classes, reading materials purchased locally, packages from abroad, libraries and religious institutions. Most parents used newspapers and books as their source for home language

literacy materials. Significantly, one parent identified the survey itself as providing the impetus for her to seek out home language print and multi-media materials.

Based on home literacy surveys, classroom observation and parental interviews, we have selected and elaborate below detailed portraits of two participants in order to illustrate relevant findings that stand out across the study. These portraits document changing family literacy practices and the emergent relationships and values made possible by the project's expanded curricular conceptions of literacy.

### Portrait of Sarah

Sarah is a bright student fluent in Cantonese and English. Her parents are both bilingual, though English-dominant, her mother being Canada-born and her father having immigrated to Canada from Hong Kong at age nine. This means that her parents primarily speak in English with their children and 'as much Chinese as we can' (parent interview, 3 March 2005): during monthly visits with her maternal grandparents, her parents try to speak only Chinese. Her paternal grandmother, who lives with the family, speaks only Cantonese, and though Sarah understands her, she tends to respond to her in English.

Sarah's family's experience with the Dual Language book project illustrates quite dramatically the ways the incorporation of multiliteracies and specifically L1 into the mainstream curriculum can enrich home biliteracy practices and, consequently, personal relationships within the home learning community. Before the project, a particular configuration of circumstances prevented Sarah's grandmother from contributing to her literacy development, despite the deep bond between them. Her mother describes how, '[t]hey can do no wrong in each other's eyes . . . it is a very special relationship that we really want to protect and help it develop as much as it can and the language would really help that'. Many factors combine, however, to position this relationship as marginal and irrelevant to Sarah's social identity and language development. Sarah's mother describes her mother-in-law's resistance and concern:

that we not do too much Chinese 'cause she didn't want [Sarah] to be behind on her English . . . Which I found interesting since I know that that is not a problem and this is the stage for them to be exposed to a language since they are like sponges. And I was confused about that I guess because of her own experience with her own son coming to Canada when he was nine, was fluent and it's all gone. When we explained that to her she said, 'No, just have her know the very minimal just so she can understand me and that's all that's needed'.

Not only does Sarah's grandmother disqualify herself as a potential resource and instructor in Sarah's literacy development, but also her fear of being a burden on the family renders her a retiring and marginal member:

There's not much interaction with my mother in law. It's part personality. She's more introverted . . . [b]ecause of our busy lifestyle right now and because of my mother in law's nature, she doesn't like to be intrusive, so she stays out of the picture as much as possible . . . She's 83. She's at a stage now where older people feel that they don't want to be that.

Several changes were made possible through the initiation of the research project and the process of authoring the dual language books. Since the focus was on L1 as the project was introduced to parents through written communication and the kindergarten parent meeting, a space was created within which Sarah's parents articulated their beliefs and values regarding L1 maintenance:

I was really excited about it because we're actually – we really want our children to speak as much Chinese and understand as much Chinese as possible. Because we realize, more in hindsight I think, that any additional language is enriching and puts people in touch with their heritage. And the reason we say 'in hindsight': I was so-called 'forced' to go to Chinese school and I went. I know my basic numbers and my name and that sort of thing. In terms of writing and my language is not as great as I would like, but I didn't realize till I was older how enriching that would be. So we recognize that for our children and we would like to do that. [There are] Heritage Language [classes], so we wanted to sign her up for that, but it was a school night so we thought that would be too much for her.

Although Sarah's mother is a teacher herself, neither she nor her husband had ever thought of themselves as potentially playing the role of teacher in Sarah's biliteracy development: rather, the quote above illustrates how they positioned themselves as deficient bilinguals, illiterate in Chinese. After reading questions in the home literacies survey listing various potential resources (e.g. bilingual and L1 books or videos from the library), they sought out such resources from the library, eventually finding ones in Cantonese – particularly 'WiggleWorks' – that became the basis of their conversations about the Chinese written script with Sarah.

When Sarah brought home her initial draft of her book with drawings and English captions to be translated into Chinese, the challenge inspired an unprecedented three-generational collaboration:

The biggest advantage that I really enjoyed about this whole project was the sense of interaction between Sarah and my mother in law and myself. I'll never forget sitting around the dinner table with the book and relating the picture to

my mother in law and Sarah telling us what the picture was all about in English and then I would have to translate in my Chinese to my mother in law. She would have to write it out. And then I would sit down with Sarah and teach her the Chinese . . . That will be always my highlight from this project and I'll carry that picture around.

With the human, media and text resources already accessible to her, then, Sarah's mother was able to take on the role of teacher and facilitator in Sarah's developing biliteracy. Even more dramatically, Sarah's grandmother found herself not a burden, but a 'guiding light' and broker of valued knowledge (Williams, 1997): 'That was great for her as well. I think the advantages for Sarah are obvious but for her it was kinda nice to get involved with us as well'.

In the case of Sarah's family, the proces of authoring the dual language books not only allows for the recognition and enrichment of home multi-literacy practices, but also the emergence of new relationships. Parents and grandparents are invited to become full partners in their children's multi-literacies development, not through empty rhetoric, but through a redefinition of core epistemological assumptions underpinning the curriculum. That is, as minority vernacular cultural and linguistic content (see Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester, 2000) are repositioned more centrally in the curricular landscape defining what counts as valuable knowledge, and as they are positioned not only as supplemental knowledge but an integrated means of achieving curricular learning objectives, family members proficient in these forms of capital are repositioned and re-qualified as resources and educators. This shift in power/knowledge reconfigures power-saturated relations of legitimacy and authority, while home literacy practices and the relationships they mediate take a valued place within the larger project of the child's formal education. As we see in this case, this redefinition can also dramatically shift and enrich inter-generational family relationships of authority, confidence, collaborative knowledge construction and appreciation.

### **Portrait of Zohreh**

The potential of dual language initiatives to powerfully reposition family members in relation to children's learning is also illustrated in the experiences of Zohreh, another senior kindergarten student. Even though she regularly volunteers as a classroom assistant in her daughter's class, Zohreh's mother emphasizes that the project invited her into an unprecedented meaningful role in the *process* and not simply the *product* of her daughter's learning:

Because in school we get just the homework like usual matter but this was something that was different. So we were quite excited: . . . this included me in the process. Like in the school she does and the outcome just I see at the home and the homework and all just it comes once a week on Fridays and she completes it, gives it back on Monday, that's it. But this was the thing that I was involved too. Like I was excited 'Oh where is the pictures and I have to write it in Hindi'. After a long time I have not been writing in Hindi.

Moreover, the experience of Zohreh and her family powerfully illustrates the potential for dual language initiatives to allow both for students' home multiliteracies and cultural practices to be reconfigured in complex ways, and for the many complex affiliations of their lives to be integrated and showcased in an affirming identity text (Cummins, 2004).

At home, Zohreh and her parents speak Urdu and English. Born in Pakistan, her parents are fluent and literate in Urdu, Hindi, English and literate in Arabic, and have taken steps to create a rich multilingual home environment. At home the family speaks Urdu and English, and Zohreh's mother tells her stories in Urdu and English. Her early English literacy is fostered as her mother reads aloud to her western children's storybooks, as well as books in English borrowed from the neighbourhood Muslim Centre that tell familiar stories from the Koran. She is developing early Arabic literacy through a private tutor as well as Arabic literacy primers her mother reads with her. Zohreh's mother emphasizes the importance they place on nurturing her sense of faith- and culturally-based identity:

Because our holy book is in Arabic and like we teach it from right this age so that they get good at reading Arabic . . . [S]o that's the main thing, right? . . . [T]hat's very important because we want her to be . . . Westernized as well as religious, all the things together.

As in Sarah's case, the research project and Dual Language authoring process explicitly created and supported spaces for Zohreh's parents to explore, articulate and clarify their goals for her language development. Her mother decided to translate the English transcriptions of Zohreh's book into Hindi in order to facilitate her orally translating the English into Urdu (similar to spoken Hindi):

Actually I don't think she will be able to read or write Hindi because you know it's not possible for me to make her learn Hindi from the beginning, so many languages. So she can write English but when I speak Hindi, she can understand so that's the thing and like [when] she can read in English, I can . . . read it out in Hindi: even though she won't be able to read it but still she'll be able to understand so . . . So she can have still lots of languages. Now Urdu, Arabic, English, Hindi – so many languages.



This is a particularly poignant experience for Zohreh's mother as it brings her own personal history of language learning and loss in dialogue with the hope-filled experience of supporting her daughter's multiliteracy development:

I wrote Hindi at school . . . [from] grade one 'til grade ten and . . . I mastered in it . . . but after that, in college . . . I had . . . Arabic so I lost touch with Hindi but still I used to read some things [and] . . . sometimes I used to write my name, just my name and [I] like to be in touch with the language. But [now] after a long time I have been writing in Hindi in her book, so it was like exciting. I did it my – in my school days and now I am doing in her school days.

Her mother's experience highlights the ways literacies are lived as active social relationships in which individuals invest emotion, memory and meaning: no longer participating in social, academic or professional communities of practice in written Hindi, it faded from her life. This is relevant to the language-learning goals Zohreh's parents articulated through their participation in this project. It emerges in her mother's interviews that they hope that 'she can have still lots of languages': that she develop English oracy and literacy, Arabic literacy and perhaps even oracy (at least reading comprehension of Arabic in order to read the Koran), Urdu oracy and literacy (as it is written in Arabic), Hindi oracy and perhaps a reading comprehension of Hindi. Her parents see these capacities as resources for her professional and also her personal life, allowing access to and active participation in the many family, faith-based and cultural communities to which she belongs, and affirming her complex cosmopolitan identity. Through their experience in the project they also come to appreciate the importance of continuing to provide opportunities for meaningful development and use of her different literacies:

Yesterday . . . she began to write Arabic, the alphabets and it was like she did it by herself and I was like stunned: 'Oh, I never did it and she is doing at this age!' So that was great. So I'll continue my efforts like [writing Arabic on] the computer myself and she too, of course, to continue with [learning Arabic].

Her mother's reflection on her own language loss also underlines the emotionally powerful ways the process of authoring this Dual Language book about her family, her home and school life initiated an excavation, appreciation and reconfiguration of the many dimensions of her identity. As they rummaged through family photo albums and talked about the occasion of each photo, when and where it was taken and whether to include it, Zohreh was able to assemble with her mother many disparate memories into a trajectory of transnational belonging:

Actually she had learned many things [through this project]. Like she learned that we came from India . . . [that] we came the last year when she was just four years, and . . . [that] she was born in Houston . . . we always used to tell [her] that 'you were born in US'. So . . . we went back to India and then from there we came here. And now she [says] . . . 'Yeah, I know I was born in Houston but I stayed . . . for three years in India.' So I told her 'Yeah, that's our home too'. So . . . that there are certain things she came to know about that . . . she is picking up now . . . [T]hat's nice that she remembers India that belongs to our country, yeah . . . [S]he has faint memories (laughs) back at home so these are the things [she learned]. So because she stayed in Houston just for six months and . . . she was a baby and . . . she doesn't remember anything but . . . on India she remembers everything.

The activity opens a space in which Zohreh may come to understand that she has many homes: her multi-homedness (Bhabha, 1996) is a product of her family's participation in a larger transnational movement of post-colonial professional classes seeking their fortunes within a globalized marketplace, in which not only World Englishes (Kachru, 1990; Pennycook, 2007) but, increasingly, multilingual literacies are potentially convertible to economic and symbolic capital (Dagenais, 2003). Multiple homes are also mediated through multiple oral and written communication practices with loved ones strewn across several continents. It is important to note that schools are generally not aware of the importance of students' multiple homes and identities. While Zohreh's parents correspond with her grandparents in India (soon to move to Toronto) in English on email, the digitized nature of Zohreh's scanned book means it can be shared with the expanded audience of her grandparents, as her mother notes: '[I]t will be exciting because [all her] grandparents are there and they are more concerned what's going on here'.<sup>12</sup> The inclusion of vernacular minority content means that the sharing of her book will be carried out in written English and Hindi and spoken English and Urdu at home and at school:<sup>13</sup> this project, then, reflects, affirms and supports the development of the complex language practices that comprise her complex cultural identity, a goal dear to her parents' hearts:

It's very important because it recognizes her identity: that she is an Indian and she will be an Indian . . . [O]f course she has been brought up here, she is a Canadian too but still she will always – our heritage like her forefathers and all they belong to India so . . . she should continue to speak Urdu, her language, because that culture is really . . . [very] good. But still we want to keep with our culture, we want to keep her going with that . . . to speak Urdu and to tie the scarf, so we will continue that, I think.

Zohreh's mother emphasizes the centrality of language to a complex sense of identity as the lived practice of communication, imagination and memory across space and time, across continents and generations, across personal futures and ancestral heritage. Through the dual language exploration of her personal and family history, Zohreh is able to integrate disparate memories into a complex integral identity embodied in ongoing cultural and linguistic practices (speaking Urdu and observing the *hijab*). This stands in sharp contrast to the kinds of identities imagined for Zohreh within the discursive universe of the 'default option' of most classrooms. In these, the majority of school classrooms, there is minimal acknowledgment or promotion of students' cultural/linguistic capital; and 'literacy' is understood narrowly as English, print-based literacy. The curriculum focuses on the dominant culture of English-language, white Eurocentric Canadian-born communities, addressing and reflecting the experience of students of this heritage while ignoring others. Within this English-only, Eurocentric Canadian curriculum, the place Zohreh might be able to carve out for herself would be defined in relation to *who she is not* or *what she can not do*. This deficient or belated fractured identity is the familiar identity of 'the kid who can't speak English', 'the immigrant kid', the 'New Canadian' or 'the ESL kid' (Taylor, 2006b). On the other hand, this project allowed for a shift in the constellation of power/knowledge/authority/identity in the curriculum: the composite identity defined by Zohreh's mother as she helps her daughter author her multi-layered autobiographical book is powerfully positioned in relation to a global vision of all she is, all she *can do*, all the communities of her active memory, *belonging and participation*.

## Discussion

In this study, the questionnaire and Dual Language books initiated opportunities for families to reconceptualize these family literacy practices within children's biliteracy (or multiliteracy, in Zohreh's case) and identity development. As Sarah's parents sought out Cantonese 'WiggleWorks' and other literacy resources available through global flows of media, digital communication and commercial distribution, as they enlisted her grandparents' tutorial support, they articulated their desire for Sarah to construct a cosmopolitan identity actively engaged in multilingual communities across generations and national borders. This desire was particularly informed by her parents' personal experiences of loss within an assimilationist (unidirectional) model of immigration. The salience of this opportunity is underlined by Li (2006): he traces widespread Chinese language loss to a range of school, mass media and linguistic factors, but

notes the central role of the home context, arguing that biliteracy development depends upon children's experience of the vitality and social embeddedness of Chinese through diverse home literacy practices. He signals the key role school language policy and pedagogy can play in shifting the ideological context within which parents gauge the pragmatic and symbolic value of multilingualism, creating opportunities for 'parents to examine their own beliefs and practices at home and become aware of the importance of their role in supporting biliteracy development' (Li, 2006: 378). Within the dual language identity text activity's catalytic articulation of multilingual intergenerational communities of practice with the symbolic capital of school literacies, different family members were repositioned to play a range of complementary pedagogical roles situating biliteracy within socially meaningful relationships (Gregory and Williams, 2000).

The diverse multilingual family literacies recognized within the Dual Language book index Zohreh's active membership in transnational ethnic and faith communities. In relation to the family's values and worldview, Zohreh's mother articulated her goal that her daughter incorporate 'all the things together' in her sense of identity informed by her personal and family trajectories across time and geography. Authoring her electronic book in English and Hindi, Zohreh was invited to address these diverse interlocutors, constructing her dynamic identity within these intersecting social matrices of belonging.

This project was not without minor challenges and a discussion of these challenges aims to inform future research in the areas of curriculum, language, culture and identity. Concern regarding the time required to implement the dual language books initially overshadowed the potential positive contribution they could have for the students. The workload coupled with the time constraints that teachers face within the classroom became the main challenge of the project. In the beginning the perceived time required to implement the dual language books overshadowed the potential positive contribution they could have for the students. This challenge was addressed early in the project through incorporating the dual language book project into broader curricular objectives. In her post-project interview the teacher reiterated this concern about time constraints; she also went on to elaborate at length on the educational and familial benefits she had observed generated by the dual language book project.

This case study adds to a growing body of research documenting the ways communication and collaboration amongst teachers, parents and students increase during a Dual Language literacy project. Parent interviews suggest that, in the case of both Sarah and Zohreh, family members were not simply involved in the process of authorship, but that their expertise

was repositioned as a form of academic capital. Likewise, as holders of such knowledge they were themselves repositioned as instructors rather than mere observers of their children's education.

The study builds on the model of Identity Texts (Cummins, 2004) in important ways: to the extent that the model posits a particular process of textual production and reception that intensifies students' identity investment, the portraits presented here suggest the potential complexity of these identificatory dynamics and the communities of memory and belonging indexed and activated as the Dual Language authorship project articulated intergenerational literacies with the prestige and authority of academic literacies.

This is not to make sweeping claims: based on documentation of one learning project over a five-month period, this case study can only speculate as to the forms of identity investment, familial role redefinition and legitimation of intergenerational literacies and transnational communities of practice set in motion. Clearly, the directions we discern here are exactly that: movements, vectors and potentialities suggested by triangulated data collection and part of a lengthy, complex process.

At the same time, the conclusions we draw from this study are supported by analysis across case studies within the national multiliteracies project: that is, 'ELL students' cultural knowledge and language abilities are important resources in enabling academic engagement; ELL students will engage academically to the extent that instruction affirms their identities and enables them to invest their identities in learning' (Cummins et al., 2005). As part of a larger project, this case study supports a unique model for conceptualizing and planning multiliteracies development. This model would expand students' access to multiple texts in the home, community and school; promote learners' socialization into and identification with diverse learning communities; scaffold and maximize children's opportunities for cognitive processing, language awareness and identity awareness; and build collaborative home-community-school relations through a school environment which challenges inequality and promotes collaborative relations of power (Cummins et. al., 2005).

## Conclusion

Street (2005: 4) reminds us: 'if we want learners to develop and enhance the richness and complexity of actual literacy practices evident in society at large [and in the various communities of practice in which they participate], then we need curriculum and assessment that are themselves rich and complex and based upon research into actual literacy practices'. This

case study suggests that even in English-dominant classrooms, an expanded and culturally situated conception of literacy on the part of teachers can ground pedagogical innovations that in turn pursue academic literacy development in dialogue with family literacies in ways that explicitly validate and are enriched by the latter.

Multiliteracies and New Literacy Studies argue that “in order to build upon the richness and complexity of learners’ prior knowledge, we need to treat ‘home background’ not as a deficit but as affecting deep levels of identity and epistemology, and thereby the stance learners take with respect to the ‘new’ literacy practices of the educational setting” (Street, 2005: 4). The portraits of Sarah and Zohreh attest to the complex relations of belonging and authority negotiated through the multiple literacies that learners bring into our globally embedded classrooms. These complex family literacy practices initiate multilingual students into transnational and transgenerational webs of kinship, and cultural and faith-based communities of practice. Through these literacy practices learners are initiated into shared ways of knowing, remembering and imagining vital to the multiple affiliations and semiotic economies through which their identities are constituted.

This case study also points to the transfigured, unique roles family members can play as partners in children’s multiliteracies development, within a curriculum and school environment centred in the dynamic cultural flows and multiple communities of practice intersecting in students’ life pathways.

Finally, this article argues for the need to rethink power and knowledge in transcultural and transnational contexts. Current conceptions of literacy as monolingual, monomodal, textual and divorced from the increasingly complex, globally wired and connected communities of practice and multiple affiliations in which our students learn, communicate and make meaning are no longer tenable. They reflect Eurocentric, insular discourses of national culture as monolithic, and outdated conceptions of migration as unidirectional and assimilatory: these powerful narratives reinforce processes of minoritization and marginalization of polyglot migrant families and reinforce the inequity of institutionally sanctioned forms of academic knowledge. Empowering linguistic minority students implies changing our conceptions and practices of what it means to know, teach, learn, communicate and belong in our world.

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## Notes

1. In his theory of language and power, Pierre Bourdieu postulated that forms of knowledge, know-how and relationships functioned as resources or *symbolic capital* differentially valued in different social fields.
2. The concept of 'funds of knowledge' was developed by Luis Moll to identify bodies of knowledge and know-how which are 'historically accumulated' and circulated within marginalized communities and come to act as resources that are 'essential for household or individual functioning and well-being' (Moll et al., 1992: 133). Gregory et al. (2004: 11) remind us that, for Moll, these collective forms of capital and practice are inseparable from the social relations and context in which they circulate: they 'are transmitted within a social matrix, a community of social networks based on reciprocity and *confianza* or mutual trust'.
3. Many examples emerge from Luis Moll's 'Funds of Knowledge' Project, conducted jointly by university researchers, teachers, and local schools in Tucson (Moll et al., 1992; see various authors in González et al., 2005).
4. The particular dynamics and pressures in transnational families often are not considered by schools (Bernhard et al., 2005).
5. Trueba (2002: 7) argues: 'The mastery of different languages, the ability to cross racial and ethnic boundaries, and a general resiliency associated with the ability to endure hardships and overcome obstacles will clearly be recognized as a new cultural capital that will be crucial for success in a modern diversified society, not a handicap'.
6. Postcolonial and critical multicultural theorists have critiqued hegemonic, state or multiculturalism *from above* (Bannerji, 2000; Walcott, 2003) as a culturally relativist discourse which reduces racialized cultures to 'sambas, samosas and steel bands' while silently condoning and reinforcing the authority of Euro-Canadian institutional predominance (see May, 1999; Taylor, 2006a,b).
7. This does not necessarily imply a class-blind celebration of elite cosmopolitanism: several theorists and authors of African, South Asian and Chinese diaspora (Malkani cited in Yelaja, 2006; Ong, 1999; Walcott, 2003) explore the resistant identificatory potential of diasporic formations 'from below'.
8. Following Norton Peirce (1995), we use 'investment' rather than 'motivation' in order to situate language choice within the broader sociopolitical context of uneven power relations amongst ethnolinguistic communities.
9. The activity was explicitly framed by teachers and researchers as one of not

simply literacy development but *authoring*: this was based on teachers' reading and discussion of *Authors in the Classroom* (Ada and Campoy, 2003).

10. All institutional and personal names are pseudonyms.
11. The team consisted of Judith Bernhard and Suchi Garg, with Lisa Taylor joining during the final two months of data collection.
12. The sharing of books electronically with family abroad could not be included in data collection for this project and thus we can only speculate on all it might make possible.
13. While not reported in this article, the case study also documented an all-school assembly in which kindergarten children read aloud their books (projected on the auditorium screen), then shared them with reading buddies from an older grade, as well as with attending parents.

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