

## **Multilingualism in Canadian schools: Myths, realities and possibilities**

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Bilingualism and multiculturalism have for four decades been official ideologies and policies in Canada but, as is often the case, the implementation and outcomes of such government policies nationally are less impressive than the rhetoric would suggest. This article reviews the political, theoretical and demographic contexts justifying support for the learning and use of additional languages in contemporary Canadian society and schools, and summarizes research demonstrating that bilingualism and multilingualism are indeed cognitively, socially, and linguistically advantageous for children (and adults), as well as for society. The five studies in this special issue are then previewed with respect to the following themes that run across them: (1) the potential for bilingual synergies and transformations in language awareness activities and crosslinguistic knowledge construction; (2) the role of multiliteracies and multimodality in mediated learning; and (3) the interplay of positioning, identity, and agency in language learning by immigrant youth. The article concludes that more Canadian schools and educators must, like the researchers in this volume, find ways to embrace and build upon students' prior knowledge, their creativity, their collaborative problem-solving skills, their potential for mastering and manipulating multiple, multilingual semiotic tools, and their desire for inclusion and integration in productive, engaging learning communities.

Le bilinguisme et le multiculturalisme sont, depuis quatre décennies maintenant, les idéologies et politiques officielles au Canada mais, comme c'est souvent le cas, la mise en œuvre et les résultats à l'échelle nationale de ces politiques gouvernementales sont moins impressionnants que ce que la rhétorique laisse croire. Le présent article passe en revue les contextes politiques, théoriques et démographiques justifiant l'apprentissage et l'usage de langues supplémentaires dans la société et les écoles canadiennes d'aujourd'hui, et résume les recherches qui démontrent que le bilinguisme et le multilinguisme sont, en fait, avantageux sur les plans cognitif, social et linguistique tant pour les enfants (et les adultes) que pour la société en général. Les cinq études présentées dans ce numéro spécial sont alors analysées à l'égard des thèmes suivants qui leur sont transversaux : (1) le potentiel pour

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des synergies et des transformations bilingues dans les activités de développement de la conscience métalinguistique et la construction de connaissances inter-langagières ; (2) le rôle des multilittératies et de la multimodalité dans l'apprentissage médiatisé ; et (3) l'action réciproque du positionnement, de l'identité et de la liberté d'action individuelle dans l'apprentissage des langues par de jeunes immigrants. L'article en arrive à la conclusion que plus d'écoles et d'éducateurs canadiens doivent, tout comme les chercheurs dont les travaux sont réunis ici, trouver des moyens de reconnaître les connaissances antérieures des élèves et de s'appuyer sur elles ainsi que sur leur créativité, leurs compétences en résolution coopérante de problèmes, leur potentiel de maîtrise et de manipulation de divers outils sémiotiques multilingues et leur désir d'inclusion et d'intégration à des collectivités d'apprentissage productives et stimulantes.

### **Introduction: Official discourses of “bilingualism” in Canada**

The headlining news on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) radio and television broadcasts on February 4, 2006 was “Plenty of [Canadian] Support for Bilingualism”.<sup>1</sup> The results of a poll conducted for Radio-Canada revealed, to the apparent satisfaction of CBC journalists, that, 40 years after the publication of the Royal Commission Report that laid the foundation for the Official Languages Act, “official bilingualism is finally a hit in Canada”. As evidence of this statement, they reported that most of those polled (81%) supported the notion that Canada is a bilingual country and even more (91%) felt that the prime minister of Canada should be bilingual in French and English.

Official discourses commonly encountered in news media, public policy documents and statements, and education—related to national bilingualism, diversity, multiculturalism, pluralism, inclusiveness, equity and opportunity—often present an optimistic and flattering image of what Canada has been able to achieve over recent decades through concerted efforts to honour the ethnic and linguistic differences and identities of citizens to build a strong united but heterogeneous nation and cohesive communities across the provinces. Some of these efforts have taken the form of innovative language programs (e.g. French immersion) and multicultural policies to showcase the richness of not just Anglophone and Francophone cultures, but of the many others that are constitutive of modern-day Canada.

Yet, as the papers in this volume collectively suggest, these official discourses are often more myth than reality as far as educational practice is concerned and when describing the linguistic competence of many who were born in Canada. Bilingualism and multilingualism seem to be thriving among immigrant Canadians, including those in the progressive public schools featured in this special issue, in ways that have by and large eluded the Canadian-born Anglophone population. A sobering finding from the survey referred to

earlier was that only 16% of Canadians outside of Quebec considered themselves bilingual (presumably in the official languages, although that was not specified, nor was a definition of “bilingual” provided), compared with 51% in Quebec; and, furthermore, that “seventy-six per cent of the former said there’s a lack of interest to learn the other language”.

Thus, the bilingual norm—never mind a multilingual one—is a much better reflection of Francophone Quebec and of new Canadians than of established Anglophone Canada, the exception perhaps being graduates of French immersion programs in recent decades. The degree of investment by immigrants in languages other than their own (as well as their own) stands in stark contrast with the investment by the Anglophone majority, for example, either in French or in other Indigenous, community, or international languages. Even in ostensibly bilingual programs (as Cummins reports, this volume), a monolingual norm of “two solitudes” may dominate—with French and English activities and knowledge, like their founding communities, kept separate in the curriculum, despite their obvious interconnectedness in the brain/mind as well as in the public’s or in policy-makers’ imagination.

### *Canada’s changing demographic and linguistic landscape*

To contextualize my comments in the remainder of this article and the studies to be discussed, it is important to relate the changing demographics of Canada and the effect of immigration patterns in recent decades to the linguistic ecology of the country (Duff, 2006). As in many other countries, Canada is a land rich in both immigrant and indigenous languages. In addition to English and French, the size and vitality of various non-official minority languages have changed considerably in recent years. According to Statistics Canada (2005a), the Canadian population in 2001 was just over 30 million, of whom nearly 58% claimed English as their first language (L1) and 23% French, followed by an assortment of other European and non-European languages. In 2001, the top five minority languages (non-official, non-aboriginal languages), in terms of number of native speakers, included various dialects of Chinese, Italian, German, Polish and Spanish, ranked from highest.

This national linguistic profile in 2001 contrasts sharply with earlier census data (e.g. Statistics Canada, 2002) and reflects several demographic trends over the past three decades. The first trend has been the immigration of large numbers of South and East Asians to Canada since the early 1980s, which has greatly increased the number of Chinese, Punjabi, Tagalog and Vietnamese speakers nationwide relative to earlier waves of immigrants from Western or Central European language backgrounds. Second, there has been a concurrent increase in the number of Arabic-speaking immigrants from the Middle East and Spanish speakers from various regions in Latin America, most of whom reside in Ontario and Quebec. Third, there has been a significant

generational shift from non-official-language use in the home to English or French among Dutch, Ukrainian, German, Greek, Italian and Yiddish speakers. Fourth, a growing proportion of Canadians speak *neither* official language as their mother tongue or home language. These are often referred to as *Allophones* in Canada and especially in Quebec. Nationally, Allophones accounted for 18% of the population in 2001. That year, approximately 40% of the population in Vancouver and Toronto were Allophone foreign-born landed immigrants. In contrast, only 20% of the population of Montreal was Allophone (see Statistics Canada, 2003, 2005b). However, a greater number of trilinguals reside in Montreal, proficient in both official languages and/or additional languages, such as Arabic (Lamarre, 2003; Lamarre and Dagenais, 2004). These speakers, like multilingual populations in so many other parts of the world, often have complex, multiple and hybrid linguistic and cultural identities, repertoires and social networks (see Dagenais *et al.*, and Allen, this volume).

### **Research on bilingualism and multilingualism in Canadian schools: Policy and practice**

Against the backdrop of Canadian demographic and immigration patterns such as these, it is clear that the five studies in this volume represent national trends very well. The studies are situated in greater Vancouver (Dagenais *et al.*), Toronto (Cummins, Lotherington, Mady) and Montreal (Allen, Dagenais *et al.*). The greatest linguistic diversity in the country is found in these three regions, each city with its own particular history of settlement and accommodation of immigrant populations from different regions. The schools featured in each of the studies also mirror the linguistic competencies and diversity of the newcomers in their programs, whether in reception/welcome classes, second-language or mainstream courses.

The studies all build on a rich tradition of Canadian research on the linguistic education, social integration and academic success of immigrant students within mainstream content courses at public schools (e.g. Duff, 2001, 2002, 2005; Gunderson, 2007; Mohan, Leung and Davison, 2001). Increasingly, the research on ESL students in Canadian schools examines students' heritage language maintenance and multilingualism, and their multiple literacies, identities, and artistic and intellectual talents as well, as a way of countering prevalent superficial "linguistic deficit" discourses, tapping into students' wonderful creativity and validating the linguistic and cultural knowledge they already possess and can build upon.<sup>2</sup> Allen, Lotherington, Dagenais *et al.*, Mady and Cummins (this volume) offer us original research and perspectives in this exciting, newly emerging area of both scholarship and educational intervention and reveal some of the challenges implementing innovation into the school curriculum.

The contexts in which their research is situated also vary in important ways. As Allen (this volume) points out, Quebec language policies and demographics are quite distinct from those of other provinces. Newcomers there sometimes find themselves in difficult or ambivalent positions vis-à-vis the learning of French vs. English: they must find ways of reconciling the languages of their prior schooling and success (e.g. Elena, a student from India who had previously completed high school in English but struggled with French for two years in Quebec high school before transferring to an English-medium college), the policies regulating the language of their schooling in Quebec (privileging French) and then their personal future aspirations for integration into wider (English-dominant) Canadian society as well as the international community.

What is also very evident in this volume is the impressive linguistic repertoire and vitality of the students. For example, the 18 youth from 15 countries in the *accueil* 'welcome' class who participated in Allen's research "spoke a total of 23 languages and half of the students spoke three or more languages other than French upon arrival in Quebec". However, despite this multilingual skill set, they are often positioned as linguistically deficient, on the basis of their nascent or developing knowledge of French. Interestingly, some learn languages other than French as well, such as Japanese, in the case of Mexican teenaged immigrant, Roger, who is unwilling to limit his future possibilities to life in the francophone world, although he is quite successful in French. Too often, however, assimilationist policies in Canadian schools lead to subtractive bi- or multilingualism, where French or English are privileged exclusively at the expense of students' other languages.

In Ontario, the research by Mady (this volume) reveals that the very language policies that are meant to foster official bilingualism also prevent it by denying ESL students the opportunity to study core French for course credit. However, as Mady argues quite persuasively, the ESL students in her study thrived in French, outperforming many of their classmates who had studied it for several previous years and more cumulative hours—625 hours vs. 100 hours—and it is therefore a subject in which ESL students can readily achieve academic success and receive validation, whereas they often initially lag behind peers in advanced content courses that require greater academic proficiency in English (e.g. social studies, English literature, biology). Again, official-language-assimilation, and especially Anglo-assimilation, rather than bilingualism or multilingualism and L1 loss or language shift, are common consequence of such policies. A puzzling finding in her study though, especially in light of the theme of crosslinguistic synergies and transfer discussed in the next section, is that the multilingual Canadian-born students in the study who spoke a home language other than English or French often performed in statistically indistinguishable ways from their English-L1 monolingual peers.

Unfortunately, this finding reveals the glaring inefficacy of core French education as offered in that context and also the low levels of motivation on the part of many Canadian-born students to learn and demonstrate their knowledge of French. This apathy toward official bilingualism was captured in the CBC survey described in the introduction where, in stark contrast to the jubilant claims that there was “plenty of support for bilingualism” and that “bilingualism is a hit”, sadly most Canadians in the survey (76%) admitted that “there’s a lack of interest to learn the other [official] language”.

### **Bidirectional synergies and transformations in language awareness and cross-linguistic knowledge construction**

In addition to these sometimes perplexing paradoxes of federal bilingualism-related policies and practices within schools that may inadvertently lead to monolingualism, a second theme running across the studies — which is not at all surprising to language education specialists but is still not well understood by many parents, some policy-makers, or the general public — is the following: the more proficient one is in first language (L1) and literacy skills, generally speaking (and notwithstanding Mady’s results), the greater the likelihood of success in learning additional languages, whether in French immersion schools for minority- and majority-language students, in English-medium schools for immigrants to English Canada, or in Francophone schools in Quebec. Thus, an investment of time and energy in maintaining and increasing students’ knowledge of home languages and literacy practices pays longer-term dividends with respect to additional language acquisition at school. Of course, there is no *guarantee* that English-proficient or multilingual Canadians for that matter will master French simply by virtue of their command of oral and written English. The curriculum, intensity and duration of exposure to high quality French instruction, educational experiences, plus motivation to learn the language all play a crucial role in determining actual learning outcomes. It is likely due to their knowledge of at least one other language and set of literacy skills plus their motivation to become more integrated Canadians with marketable skills for future employment that Mady’s ESL research participants did as well as they did in French, despite having studied it for a much shorter time than their Anglophone or Canadian-born multilingual counterparts. Or that in earlier research by Bild and Swain (1989), students from Italian and other L1 backgrounds learning French as a third language in Grade 8 French immersion programs who were literate in their L1 and were actively maintaining their L1 performed better than English-L1 students without proficiency in other languages on most of the French oral tests and on written tests given to them by the researchers.

A related apparent paradox, at least from the standpoint of nonspecialists, is that the greater metalinguistic awareness one has of others' languages, the greater the metalinguistic awareness they are likely to have in their own language, in turn. In other words, investing in the study of other languages improves one's own language knowledge and helps students with the analysis of additional languages as well. Thus, as Cummins, Dagenais *et al.*, Mady and Lotherington reveal in their studies (in this volume, as well as in previous work), strategic metalinguistic knowledge transfer across languages can work well in both directions (L1 to L2 or L2 to L1) under the right conditions. And the metalinguistic knowledge transfer from L2 to L1 or from L3 to L2 may be completely implicit.

Furthermore, Dagenais *et al.* (this volume) demonstrate just how exciting, validating and useful this process of metalinguistic discovery can be when elementary students (Grades 5–6) in French-L2 contexts in Vancouver and Montreal are asked to collaborate on roughly 20 thematically contextualized language awareness/analysis activities (at each site) during one academic year. Examples include French-language-mediated tasks engaged in by small groups of students to guess the word “anorak” from the root word *anore* ‘wind’ in Inuktitut to refer to a piece of warm, waterproof clothing used in winter sports (in their Montreal study); a newspaper piece about tourism in Japanese and a Spanish recipe text, both of whose sources and languages they were asked to discern (in their Vancouver study). In the Spanish example, students use their collective knowledge of French to deduce that the text is Spanish because of cognates (*patatas, salada*), which are comprehensible not only because of the linguistic relationship between French and Spanish (and English to some extent) but also because of the accessible alphabetic writing system, unlike the Japanese text, which they think might be Chinese. Through written, print-based activities such as these as well as aural ones (e.g. weather reports in four languages), they co-construct knowledge about language, about genetic or typological relationships between languages and also about oral/written genres and modes of discourse (recipes, telephone weather reports), with their respective components (e.g. openings such as *Allo* vs. *Hola* in the French and Spanish telephone greetings). Such activities, combined with tasks where students interview one another about their own linguistic repertoires or researched different orthographic systems, help students also become more aware of *le paysage linguistique* ‘the linguistic landscape’ of their classrooms and communities from which the texts were derived and of the vast combined linguistic resources and identities of their classmates as well. This language-awareness building, in turn, allows students to reflect on their own languages as well as others' more deeply, the features shared or distinctive among them, as well as the reasons for linguistic diversity (e.g. economic trade, tourism, migration). Choosing not to limit language awareness to just French-English comparisons

which might otherwise be the case in French-medium education for English speakers makes all the more sense in a country in which the third most widely spoken language is a variety of Chinese and whose neighbouring country, the United States, has a Spanish-speaking population approaching 30 million — nearly the size of Canada's entire population (Duff, 2006). Learning more about these languages and about Inuktitut in Quebec and Japanese or other Eastern and South Asian languages in British Columbia is justifiable for a variety of academic, social and economic reasons.

Cummins (this volume), well known and respected for his research on the potential for knowledge and skill transfer across languages (the interdependence principle; Cummins, 1981, 1991), believes that cross-linguistic awareness activities, translation between languages, a focus on shared cognates, creation of bilingual texts and other recourse to students' L1 knowledge are under-utilized or even banned in many early French immersion classrooms, in English-only courses for immigrant students and in modern-language courses for English speakers, in the name of "monolingual instructional approaches" such as the Direct Method.

He draws on Bransford, Brown and Cocking (2000) and Donovan and Bransford (2005) and many others to bolster his argument that we must draw on students' prior knowledge and understandings — including their L1 or other metalinguistic, conceptual or pragmatic knowledge — to a greater extent, rather than view it as an impediment. In other words, capitalizing on their prior linguistic knowledge creates a more efficient cognitive and sociocultural context or scaffold for learning and also transforms the students' overall, integrated linguistic repertoire which becomes part of a dynamic, multilingual system. This integration is more than just the "sum of two parts", of two co-existing linguistic solitudes. The synergies across languages become part of a qualitatively different knowledge base.

Citing Manyak's (2004) research with primary school students in California and his own collaborative research in Ontario (Cummins *et al.*, 2005), Cummins especially encourages the use of translation and biliteracy in language classes as well as in multilingual classrooms with immigrant students. In Manyak's study, a bilingual teacher might ask Latino students for items of personal news in Spanish, which the class would then help her translate into English, and they would see the written version of each. Therefore, it becomes a biliteracy activity and not just a way of drawing on the experiences of all students in class, including newcomers not yet fully proficient in English. Such practices, and others he describes based on his work with Urdu speakers in a Grade 7/8 social studies classroom, Cummins notes, "established bilingualism as a highly esteemed ability in the class" and promoted "identities of [bilingual or multilingual] competence" or what Cook (2007) calls "multicompetence". Furthermore, the practices allow students to produce



what Cummins calls multimodal, multilingual “identity texts” that reflect such multicompetence.

In peer-learning contexts, if allowed, students may already do a great deal of cross-linguistic negotiation of texts (Duff, Li and Nakamura, 2005). Based on Nakamura’s (2005) data, Duff *et al.* (2005) analyzed an activity in which a pair of Mandarin speakers in a university Japanese-language classroom used English, Mandarin and Japanese to reconstruct an interview they had conducted and created intersubjective understandings of the content of their interview about the lives and interests of the Japanese exchange students (their interviewees). Similarly, we noted how in another case with a Japanese heritage-language student in a Japanese course, Chinese students used their extensive knowledge of Chinese characters (shared to some extent by Japanese *kanji*) as well as their knowledge of English and, to a lesser extent, Japanese to provide an understanding for the heritage-language learner, who was more orally proficient than literate in Japanese, about the meaning of particular vocabulary items, such as *ringyou* ‘forestry’, written in Japanese.

Cummins cites a number of studies when discussing approaches that seem to favour a monolingual (L2) as opposed to bilingual or multilingual classroom environment (e.g. Duff and Polio, 1990; Turnbull, 2001). The topic of how to achieve an optimal balance of L1 and L2 (or L3) in language education is an important one, which certainly requires further empirical research. Pedagogical implications or prescriptions also need to be carefully contextualized, keeping in mind the purpose of the programs, the backgrounds and goals of the students, their exposure to the L2 outside of class and other such factors. Duff and Polio (1990) reported in their study that the target language was used by teachers in some of the 13 foreign-language university courses they observed sometimes less than half of the time that the teachers spoke and in some cases as little as 10% of the time. Increased use of the target language in such foreign language classes seems to be warranted, especially if students are expected to develop not just knowledge *about* language (declarative metalinguistic knowledge) but overall proficiency and automaticity in *using* language (procedural knowledge; see also Polio and Duff, 1994; Gatbonton and Segalowitz, 2005). Unfortunately, in too many such foreign-language courses, English (the students’ L1) dominates. As a result, students have little exposure or opportunity to engage in the development of fluency in listening and speaking, or writing for that matter; discrete-point metalinguistic (grammatical) knowledge is often privileged instead, perhaps because it is easier to assess at the end of each unit as compared with more integrative knowledge or language production. Whether such instruction provides a “threshold” experience in the target language for building receptive and productive L2 fluency is still open for discussion, even if some metalinguistic transfer or skill transfer occurs across languages.

Another interesting challenge arises in multilingual “foreign language” course contexts in which grammatical explanations may be given by teachers in English and they may also assign students translations from the target language (e.g. Japanese) into English (the language of the institution and the L1 of some but not all students). This instructional and assessment strategy may be only partially effective or fair when students’ command of English does not permit error-free translations or an understanding of grammatical explanations in English, another L2 for them. This concern was reported by several teachers of Japanese in Nakamura’s (2005) study in which large numbers of Chinese students were taking Japanese courses. The teachers in most cases did not speak Chinese and some of the students had comprehension difficulties in English.

However, as Cummins rightly claims, allowing students to draw upon their L1 knowledge in learning or to use their L1 to communicate clearly with each other and the teacher in certain situations can be very important and even necessary for various cognitive, linguistic and affective reasons. Encouraging or allowing the use of L1 by immigrant minority-language *second-language* students and their teachers especially, to help scaffold student learning, has therefore been widely supported by the literature and by a number of other authors in this special issue.

### **Multiliteracies and multimodality in mediated learning**

In much the same vein as Dagenais *et al.* and Cummins, and also drawing on the aforementioned interdependence principle, Lotherington (this volume) demonstrates how children’s knowledge of different languages and cultures and their creative talents can be harnessed in multilingual, multimodal social practices that mediate learning in meaningful ways for them. Complementary research examining the significance and potential of multilingualism and multimodality in language/literacy learning and socialization is taking place in immigrant communities in urban areas of England as well as other countries (Pahl, in press). In Lotherington’s Toronto inner-city elementary school context, children are encouraged to use innovative digital technologies drawing on their prior learning, their many linguistic and literacy resources and their fertile imagination to produce, with teachers’ and others’ assistance, new narrative texts and multimedia artifacts (i-Movies with voice-overs, music, PowerPoint presentations, plasticine story boards, a video game format) that transform traditional folk tales such as *Goldilocks*, *The Three Little Pigs* and *The Little Red Hen* into highly personal, contemporary semiotic and cultural forms. Like Cummins, Lotherington also embraces translation as an effective tool for having students share understandings, for example in the use of multilingual greetings in class and translation software for short texts. However, she

encountered logistical problems trying to implement the latter productively and accurately, especially in the languages needed (e.g. Tamil, Vietnamese), and faced obstacles transferring Chinese texts across platforms. Lotherington concluded that the process was nevertheless valuable, as students became proficient in new digital technologies, multimodal representations of narratives and were authors, artists and translators for one another. Finally, solutions to technical inadequacies in translation, she hopes, will be overcome by soliciting broader multilingual community participation in translation activities.

### **Positioning, identity and agency in language learning by immigrant youth**

What emerges in the papers in this volume and in much related research is that twenty-first-century education in multilingual Canadian schools must engage students to a greater extent so as to validate their prior learning, their languages, cultures, talents and their capacity for representing meaning through multiple semiotic systems and modalities. Yet after one generation in Canada, many second-generation immigrant English-speaking students not enrolled in French immersion programs seem to have become more complacent about L2 learning (as revealed in Mady's study), just like their peers and the general population.

Many exemplary practices are illustrated by teachers and students whose classes were researched by the volume's contributors as ways of counteracting this complacency about languages and bootstrapping the construction of knowledge in new languages by drawing on existing ones. Cummins describes the value of "identity texts" created by students to reflect their multilingual and multiliterate identities and Dagenais *et al.* have students discover one another's rich linguistic identities and metalinguistic skills through particular analytic tasks which also contribute to students' content knowledge.

However, a challenge that many students and teachers in today's multicultural classrooms face concerns precisely how to make connections with students in order to validate their social, cultural, or linguistic identities without inadvertently positioning them in ways they do not want to be positioned — for example, as "model minority" students, as "Chinese" or "new immigrants" or "Urdu-speakers" as somehow deficient or "other" (e.g. Harklau, 2000; Duff, 2002). While issues and examples of identity affirmation and extension run through the volume, more troubling or insidious aspects of positioning with respect to students' identities are addressed forcefully by Allen (this volume). In her article, she uses the terms *name-calling* and *name-claiming*, an adaptation of Hall's (1996) notions of *hailing* and *investing* in identities, respectively. By "name-calling," Allen means positioning or identifying people in potentially (but not always) disadvantageous ways. This positioning is done not so much by means of literal naming practices such as taunting or bullying

as by assigning people to institutional categories, such as “child refugee” vs. “adult refugee”; or as “French-language-deficient” (requiring segregated *accueil* classes) vs. “French proficient” (and thus provided no additional language support in the mainstream); as “Best Welcome Class Student”, and so on. On the other hand, name-claiming, according to Allen, involves a more active role of investment in a particular identity, based on choices afforded by their human agency and also by institutional circumstances and constraints. Whereas in name-*calling* students are positioned by others, *claiming* a name or an institutional identity allows them to position themselves according to their own purposes, needs and subjectivities, generally in ways that are more advantageous for them. Allen illustrates these practices and tensions with four case study participants: (a) an Angolan refugee nearing adulthood (age 18–19), who received only a modest child-refugee stipend as long as he was registered at secondary school as opposed to an adult school; (b) a high-achieving teenaged Mexican immigrant who excelled in his francophone school and embraced his newfound identities as both a French and an English speaker and the opportunities that they provided; (c) a Peruvian young man who, because of his age, needed to be mainstreamed into French prematurely and rather unsuccessfully; and (d) a young English-speaking Indian woman labeled as French-deficient and who, even in her second year of *accueil*-class French, was floundering and miserable until she reclaimed her English-speaking identity; she did so by obtaining necessary paperwork from India allowing her to capitalize upon her Anglophone status by enrolling in an English-medium college in Montreal and was only then able to feel more integrated in mainstream education and society. In some of these cases, Allen believes the individuals were constrained by the labels and identities and institutional learning options at their disposal, based on the Quebec language education laws, instructional program options and eligibility based on age, government financial allowances and stipulations, and the new immigrants’ own ambivalence or dissatisfaction with their progress in French. Their positioning — by themselves, their histories and by others — and their own performance then leaves them either feeling integrated or excluded from the learning communities they aspire to be full participants in. Although it is often said that students such as these have *agency*, Allen queries this assumption, observing that agency only comes with power and control over situations, whereas not all of her participants in fact had power and control over their options or were enabled and felt included to the same degree by the same learning opportunities or programs.

Therefore, her study reminds us that people’s sense of agency, power and control often come bundled together and may not be taken for granted. Furthermore, Wortham (2005) suggests that they be examined in light of students’ “trajectories of socialization”. The choices they can act upon, moreover, are also strongly related to their real or perceived (e.g. L2) aptitude — success at

quickly mastering French in *accueil* classes, for example — and how the students are perceived by others, as bright and capable, or as dull and recalcitrant, and how the discourse in which they participate reifies these identities and includes or excludes them. The broader issue of subjectivity and positionality in education — how these are assigned and taken up or, rather, resisted, and with what consequences — and how researchers in turn represent, categorize, or interpret students' identities and experiences, requires more attention in our increasingly diverse and complex learning ecologies (Harré and Van Langenhove, 1999; Duff, 2002; Wortham, 2006).

### **Conclusion: Beyond linguistic solitudes and monolingualism in Canadian schools and society**

The five studies in this volume offer wonderful examples of sustained, situated, collaborative, bilingual and multilingual research in schools across Canada. Responsive to their local contexts, to the curriculum and to the interests, needs, desires and subjectivities of students, they stress the inadequacies of reproductive transmission models of learning and provide an alternative: to imagine new epistemological possibilities and to recognize learners' multifaceted identities, their rich resources of linguistic and other symbolic/cultural capital, and their transformative potential. More Canadian schools and educators must, like the researchers in this volume, find ways to embrace students' prior knowledge, their creativity, their collaborative problem-solving skills, and their normal desire for inclusion and integration in productive, engaging learning communities. What is more, by incorporating innovative, pedagogically sound, multilingual and multimodal activities (e.g. narrative or language-awareness tasks) in classes and appropriate digital tools, majority-language as well as minority-language students' connections with each other and with educational content, and their functionality across languages will be enhanced and hopefully sustained. Perhaps in doing so we will be able to counteract societal inertia regarding language learning among the monolingual Canadian-born majority as well. In this way, we might truly implement official discourses of bilingualism or multilingualism in our knowledge economy and effect greater intercultural and crosslinguistic understanding in our highly globalized and interdependent twenty-first-century world.

### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> As downloaded from the CBC home page on the World Wide Web on Feb. 4, 2007 ([www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2007/02/04/bilingualism-poll.html](http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2007/02/04/bilingualism-poll.html)). The poll was done of 2000 Canadians in October and November, 2006.

- <sup>2</sup> See, for example, [www.multiliteracies.ca/](http://www.multiliteracies.ca/), a collaborative national multi-year project spearheaded by Margaret Early, Jim Cummins and their graduate students and colleagues in the greater Vancouver and Toronto school districts.

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