

# Foreword



Education and society have reached a point where it is no longer necessary to start every book and article on language and education by citing demographic information and changes, where nondominant students of color outnumber white, monolingual English users in school. That is the new reality for many, many U.S. schools. It does remain important, however, to point out that U.S. classrooms and schools are becoming increasingly hypersegregated, especially for nondominant students of color from immigrant families from Mexico, Central America, East Asia, and Africa, as well as for African Americans. Much of what we know about how to work in schools where the majority of students are new and generational immigrants comes from work that focuses on border crossers—immigrant children from Mexico and Central America—especially in the past 20 years (Faltis & Valdés, 2010).

This book, however, offers a fresh look at preparing teachers for emergent bilingual children who are not border crossers, Spanish-speakers, or refugee students; they are English learners (ELs) and users of English creoles, whose home languages (e.g., Hawaiian, Japanese, Marshallese, Chuukese, Cantonese, and Mandarin) are as varied as their cultural experiences (islanders, rural, and urban) and social classes. This book is for teacher educators and practicing teachers who want a panoramic view of teaching ELs through the promotion of intergroup relations, participatory language use, and bilingualism in the classroom.

## Setting the Stage

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What has not changed over the past 60 years—during which time there have been several spikes in immigration of children and youth of color and movement from place to place globally—is that elementary-to-secondary classroom teachers have been largely unprepared to meet the language and learning needs of students who enter with and participate in school through a language other than English, or language practices that are marked by their grammar and vocabulary as “nonstandard.” The overwhelming majority of classroom teachers remain white and middle-class. They are multi-dialectal English speakers, but are socialized to view “standard” English as the default language variety for use within academic contexts. Many believe in what has been called the *common knowledge theory of language and*

*language development* (Faltis, 2013), a popular view of language and language development that has been formally and informally used by English-speaking teachers who have little or no background in teaching ELs and emergent bilingual students. Within this view are the following four premises:

1. Language is a separate entity that originates inside the learners' heads and develops into an increasingly complex grammatical system of structures that become the basis for how learners communicate thoughts and ideas.
2. Language complexity, fluency, and accuracy develop in a linear process, from words and phrases to simple and complex sentences; from halted to native-like rapidity; and from error-laden to error-free speech.
3. Knowledge of the grammatical rules of a language enables learners to master the language being taught. Mastery means producing error-free, fluent language using complex language systems.
4. Mastering a language is facilitated when learners are explicitly taught the grammatical rules for using the language correctly.

All four premises stem from a long-standing cognitivist perspective of language and language development, in which the individual learner's capacity to develop language used in complex tasks, with fluent and error-free speech, ultimately depends on explicit instruction where learners take in language that is then used to generate the language needed for new tasks (Ellis, 1994). Moreover, when teachers hold these views of language, they are less likely to see the whole child or view language as local practice (Pennycook, 2010).

Rather than viewing language as an internal built-in syllabus that guides learners along a predictable path of development, contemporary scholars, like Ponte and Higgins, posit that language is a dynamic system of practices and uses that emerges from interpersonal and localized interactions (see also Faltis & Valdés, in press; García & Kleifgen, 2010). In contemporary scholarship on language and language development, cognition is necessarily tied to social activity and participation with others in communities of practice, a point Ponte and Higgins make throughout this book. In this manner, language practices emerge from, not prior to, social interaction around topics that matter to members of a community of practice. Likewise, from this perspective, ELs in school are better understood as new language (L2) users, whose language-use patterns emerge from and within a complex dynamic system, where elements of users' home language (L1), bilingual languaging practices (L1/L2) (García & Wei, 2014), and L2 co-adapt and develop over time (Cook, 2002; Valdés, 2005). The key to developing these interactive, participatory practices involves moving away from the common knowledge theory of language and language development and toward a

set of instructional strategies and practices that engages all students with spoken and written language, be that the home language, English, or some hybrid of both.

## English Learner Teaching Practices This Book Showcases

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Make no mistake about it: The audience for this book is teacher educators, graduate students, and new and practicing teachers. As Ponte and Higgins assert, all teachers need to be language teachers, not just the English language learner specialists in a particular school.

The book was developed from a longitudinal study of professional development (PD) involving elementary teachers in two schools in Honolulu, Hawai'i. Teachers using local practices in local schools engaged in a year-long PD project that was led by the teachers and facilitated by the authors, Ponte and Higgins. What is special about this PD project is that it emerged out of deep conversations with teachers about the need for changing the status quo, to transform teaching so that the children who were learning English and English language practices would not only experience an enriched curriculum, but also one that supports students' diverse learning needs through flexible grouping; increased opportunities for interaction, interpretation, and performance; scaffolded instruction, including home language use, in core academic subjects; and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and assessment.

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TAKES COMMITMENT**

In Chapter 1, Ponte and Higgins make a strong case for prolonged PD. They correctly aver that “quick and dirty” PD workshops have no impact on changing teachers' investments or past behaviors. Teachers need to believe in and commit to PD, meaning they need to have a voice, provide continuous feedback on what they are learning, and stay with the PD program for a long period of time. As Ponte and Higgins state, “top-down PD workshops are quickly forgotten and often despised as wasting teachers' time.” In Chapter 2, Ponte and Higgins provide a host of ways for teachers to provide input for quality, long-term PD. Doing so raises the potential for participants to transform their pedagogy, because when teachers have a say in the direction of long-term PD they become recognized as members of a community of practice.

### **GET TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS**

Some of the first questions in the PD workshop went something like this: Who are the ELs in your class? How many ELs do you have in your class? What are their speaking and writing abilities? What are your ELs' home

languages and how do they use them? Lamentably, teachers had little idea who their students were, what their home languages were, or how they used their languages in local practices and for learning. One of the first suggestions that all teachers followed was to get to know their students and their home language practices. In acquiring this information, they found that there was much more to learn about their students, their home communities, and their cultural experiences. Several of the chapters in this book discuss the importance of knowing your students for transforming pedagogy. For me, this is one of most important learning experiences teachers can engage in—getting out of their cultural systems and understanding that there are multiple ways of doing and being.

## DEVELOP AND PLAN FOR TRANSFORMING PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

Learning about the ELs in their classrooms was eye opening for the teachers in this PD project. As teachers began to “see” children as learners, as belonging to rich cultural contexts with varied experiences, they also began to understand that they had to change their established teaching practices. This realization was when they truly embarked on a pedagogical journey to learn ways of teaching that are beneficial to ELs, ways that socially and physically integrate ELs with English speakers in all aspects of classroom learning. This change allowed them to move from a teacher-centered curriculum to a learner-centered one that was based on interaction and participation in small- and whole-group discussions.

This is where the expertise of Ponte and Higgins proved invaluable to teachers. Chapter 4 provides a panoply of proven instructional strategies and adaptations for teaching ELs. Arguing for praxis, the interweaving of theory and practice, Ponte and Higgins show teachers how and why certain practices for developing interaction, promoting multiple interpretations, and fostering a range of language performance abilities are effective with ELs and users.

One of the points made throughout this book is that students’ L1 and L1/L2 abilities are essential for learning in and through an L2, as students’ bilingual practices emerge. Early on in the PD workshops, several teachers mentioned their belief that “students should not speak their L1 in school,” meaning they need to use only English in the classroom and on the playground. Ponte and Higgins contest this view, and, over time, as the teachers become more familiar with their students and their language practices (and the role of the L1 and L1/L2 in learning), their beliefs and practices changed. Instead of prohibiting L1 use in classrooms and school yards, they encouraged it, a powerful transformation. Readers who go through the experiences of these teachers will, I believe, also come to this understanding, and see how L1 and L1/L2 play a critical role in developing English, and in accessing the full range of activities in any classroom.

## SUSTAINABILITY IS KEY

The PD described in this book was successful because teachers invested in it and because there was a built-in sustainability component. That component was a set of field experiences to support teacher learning and feedback. New pedagogical practices become part of a teacher's tool kit when there are support systems, such as the following:

- Peer mentoring
- Videotaping coupled with stimulated recall
- Assistance of a senior support teacher to provide critical, guided reflection and praxis regarding how teachers are gaining agency in developing new instructional strategies and understanding about teaching ELs and emergent bilingual students

Chapter 5 is filled with strategies, tips, and practices that foster sustained, guided learning and constant critical reflection on the part of the teacher participants.

This book will compel teachers to make transformations in their pedagogical language knowledge (Bunch, 2013; Galguera, 2011), while at the same time, supporting them as they gain new understanding of the children they teach. Teachers will come away from this book with the foundational premise that language is involved in all teaching and learning.

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