CHALLENGES FOR LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND POLICY

Making Space for People

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Introduction

Schools as institutions are shaped by educational policies from the top, but also by the ideologies and enactments of individual educators (Menken & García, 2010). Most important among all individuals who exert authority in schools are the principals, leading a school’s educational efforts and managing its organization. This chapter focuses on schools serving emergent bilinguals; in the US, where our work takes place, such students are typically designated “English language learners” by the school districts in which they are enrolled. As Shohamy (2001, 2006) has noted, school principals wield enormous power in shaping language policies enacted within schools. For example, in New York City—the site for the project described in this chapter—school principals are called upon to determine if their school will provide bilingual education or monolingual English education, which greatly impacts the students’ educational experiences, opportunities, and language practices both within school and throughout their lives. In spite of the importance of such a decision, it is one that most principals are ill-prepared to make (Menken & Solorza, 2014). And yet the role of school leaders as language policymakers has been overlooked both in research and in educational practices. Hornberger (2010) thus makes a plea for “sociolinguistically informed educators . . . [who can] open up ideological and implementational space for multilingualism and social justice, from the bottom-up” (pp. 562–563).

The present chapter describes a project, in which García and Menken are involved as co–principal investigators, that develops the knowledge base of school principals, as well as other school staff, in order to transform the linguistic practices in schools enrolling large numbers of emergent bilingual students. The initiative, known as the City University of New York—New York State Initiative...
on the Education of Emergent Bilinguals (CUNY-NYSIEB), focuses on transforming ideologies about bilingualism held by individuals—specifically principals and other school leaders, teachers, parents, and students—while creating an ecological community of practice in which bilingualism is used as a resource and multilingualism is valued in schools. A large team of scholars makes up the leadership component of the CUNY-NYSIEB initiative.

This project has been deeply informed by both the work and scholarship of Elana Shohamy. With her contagious enthusiasm, Shohamy has described to us the course on bilingualism that she has offered for school principals in Israel in recent years, and her firm belief that such courses engender a powerful impact within schools. We start by briefly describing the situated context for the project in New York City, and then detail our shared work with individual school principals and staff. The purpose of this chapter is to share the work we have done, which is so closely aligned to Shohamy’s own beliefs and work, so that further efforts with school leaders can extend into contexts beyond the US and Israel.

The Context

The first cohort of schools selected to participate in our project were overwhelmingly located in New York City; thus, in this chapter, we limit our discussion to the 23 city schools (out of a total of 27 schools statewide) with which we worked during the first 1.5 years of the project (January 2012–June 2013). New York City is one of the most multilingual cities in the world (García & Fishman, 2002). Despite the linguistic richness of New York City, languages other than English (LOTEs) are hardly ever recognized as resources in schools. Rather, they are typically only considered—and problematized—when students are institutionally classified as “English language learners.”

Whereas linguistic diversity is the citywide norm, only a small proportion of emergent bilinguals benefit from the provision of bilingual education; thus, the vast majority of these students in New York City receive instruction in English as a second language (ESL) programs, where instruction is typically solely in English (New York City Department of Education, 2013). The number of bilingual education programs has dramatically decreased in city schools in recent years; whereas emergent bilinguals were equally divided between bilingual education and ESL programs in 2000, 76 percent are currently enrolled in ESL programs, with just 22 percent in bilingual education programs (Menken, 2013a; New York City Department of Education, 2013).

Project Participants

Schools selected for participation in the CUNY-NYSIEB project were all listed as failing schools due to the underperformance of their students designated as “English language learners” on state exams. The schools also served an above average number of these students. All 23 NYC schools that applied for the CUNY-NYSIEB project were selected for participation at the project’s inception in January 2012. Thus, participation in the project was voluntary for the principals who applied on behalf of their schools.

The participating schools reflected the diversity of New York City, and were as follows: seven elementary schools (Kindergarten–5th grade), two elementary/middle schools (Kindergarten–8th grade), 10 middle schools (6th–8th grade), and four high schools (9th–12th grade). In terms of location throughout the city, six of the schools were in Manhattan, nine were in the Bronx, seven in Queens, and one in Brooklyn. In some of the schools, the overwhelming majority of emergent bilinguals were Spanish-speaking, but there were also schools that were highly linguistically heterogeneous. At the start of the project, the majority of participating schools offered either ESL or transitional bilingual education programs in which the children were transferred to monolingual English-only programs once they had received a passing score on the English proficiency test given by New York State.

We wanted to ensure that every school transformed their practices surrounding the education of bilingual students according to their resources, the needs of their student population, and their school community. At the same time, we wanted to communicate a coherent shared vision of dynamic bilingualism as a resource, something that all schools, regardless of program type or school population, would be able to follow.

CUNY-NYSIEB Vision and Non-Negotiable Principles

The CUNY-NYSIEB team is comprised of faculty members and doctoral students who, from the start of our work together, were knowledgeable about bilingualism and the education of emergent bilinguals, including the range of school programmatic structures and pedagogies, but who approached the work from differing angles. School principals were well informed about the many regulations that have been put in place by New York State in order to shape the teaching and learning of these students, but few had received any preparation to work with this population of students. What was therefore needed was a way to build a dialogue across our individual differences and experiences as scholars, researchers, and educational practitioners. To build this dialogue, we relied on time together in a series of institute sessions, meetings, and on-site supports that enabled all of us to better understand each other’s positionalities and to construct a program of individual action that met the needs of the students and teachers within each school (described below). To guide our efforts to come together, we developed a coherent vision that moves beyond some of the common assumptions about bilingualism.
Vision

Bilingualism in U.S. schools is often seen as a problem, and English-only programs have grown, especially in the last decade as bilingual programs have come under attack (García, 2009a; García & Kleifgen, 2010; Menken, 2008, 2013a). Instructional programs therefore typically encourage subtractive bilingualism, as exemplified in the reality that the vast majority of emergent bilinguals in U.S. schools are enrolled in English as a second language, with instruction and materials typically only provided in English. The small proportion of emergent bilinguals who receive bilingual education usually do so through transitional bilingual education, in which a student’s home language is to be used for a short period of time that decreases as the student learns English. When bilingualism in U.S. schools is encouraged and developed, it has most often been through what are called dual language bilingual programs. Some of these programs are two-way bilingual programs, initially bringing together equal numbers of students who are developing English with those who are developing the language other than English. Other dual language programs are one-way and can be better described as developmental bilingual education programs. Regardless of the student composition, these dual language bilingual programs in the U.S. separate languages strictly and adhere to a philosophy of additive bilingualism, in which one language is separately added to a “first” language (for a critical perspective, see García, 2014).

Our philosophy of bilingualism, however, differs from the subtractive or additive approaches of these program structures (García, 2009a), in an effort to break away from their rigidity and carve out spaces within schools to build on the complex and fluid ways that emergent bilinguals actually use language. As we describe below, our vision for CUNY-NYSIEB adheres to the following three tenets:

1. the creative emergence of individual language practices;
2. the dynamics of bilingualism; and
3. the dynamic processes of teaching and learning of emergent bilinguals (for a complete statement of our vision, visit www.cuny-nysieb.org).

The naming of the CUNY-NYSIEB initiative in referring to students as “emergent bilinguals” instead of “English language learners” expresses our view that bilingualism is the desired norm for all American students, and rather than a “problem,” it is an asset that all students in New York State should possess to meet the demands of the twenty-first century (see García, 2009b; García & Kleifgen, 2010). What is more, the use of students’ home languages in school is essential for their academic success in all of the areas that currently “count” in the current high-stakes testing environment defining U.S. schooling today, especially their development of English literacy (for instance, see August & Shanahan, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008; Hornberger & Link, 2012). In focusing on the emergence of the students’ bilingualism, we hold that bilingual development is not linear, static, or able to reach an ultimate endpoint of completion; rather, it is always emergent, continuous, never-ending, and shaped by relationships with people, texts, and situations.

Bilingualism is dynamic, and not simply additive (García, 2009a). Contesting traditional views of bilinguals normed on the language practices of monolinguals and misperceived as possessing a rigid separation between their languages, and like Shohamy (2006), among others (see, for instance, Cenoz & Gorter, 2011; García, 2009a, 2014; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007), our work is grounded in the view that bilinguals language fluidly, using language differently from monolinguals. Thus, educators need to continuously provide affordances for the actual language practices of emergent bilinguals and for new understandings to emerge. Bilingual students, we argue, need to language bilingually, or translanguaging, using their entire linguistic repertoire to make meaning and to meet their communicative and academic needs.

Translanguaging as the discursive norm of all bilinguals, as well as a pedagogical scaffolding for emergent bilinguals, is the centerpiece of our vision (García, 2009a). The term translanguaging was coined in Welsh (Trawseithu) by Cen Williams (1994). In its original use, it referred to a pedagogical practice where students are asked to alternate languages for the purposes of reading and writing, or for receptive or productive use; for example, students might be asked to read in English and write in Welsh, and vice-versa, and it is that meaning that still is prevalent in the Welsh bilingual education literature (for a review, see Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012a, 2012b). García (2009a) has extended the term to refer to the flexible use of linguistic resources by bilinguals in order to make sense of their worlds, and has applied it mostly to classrooms because of its potential in liberating the voices of language-minoritized students. Translanguaging is related to other fluid language practices that scholars have called by different terms, such as polylinguism (Jorgensen, 2008), transidiomatic practices (Jacquemet, 2005), metrolinguism (Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010), and codemeshing (Canagarajah, 2011).

Aligned to others promoting translanguaging pedagogies (e.g. Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Canagarajah, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2010), we assert that emergent bilinguals need to be encouraged to perform fluid and dynamic language practices that go beyond separate conceptualizations of “first” and “second” languages. Instead of focusing on the addition of English as a second language, educators must engage bilingual students’ entire range of language practices, including features and practices associated with languages other than English, as well as those associated with English, as their very own.

Non-Negotiable Principles for Principals (and All School Staff)

To carry out these principles of emergence, dynamic bilingualism, and dynamic bilingual teaching and learning, we established two non-negotiable principles for all CUNY-NYSIEB schools:
1. Bilingualism as a Resource in Education

Regardless of program structure (i.e. whether the program is called ESL or bilingual), the home language practices of emergent bilingual students are not only recognized, but also leveraged as a crucial instructional tool and, to the greatest extent possible, nurtured and developed. The entire linguistic repertoire of bilingual children is used flexibly and strategically in instruction.

2. Support of a Multilingual Ecology for the Whole School

The entire range of language practices of all children and families are evident in the school's textual landscape (e.g. in signs throughout the school, in texts in the library and classrooms), as well as in the interactions of all members of the school community.

Many professional development programs may hold a similar vision about bilingualism and using bilingualism in education, but it has been our collaborative structure, with its many contact hours, that has enabled this coherent vision to shape the ideologies and practices of the participants in the project. Before we identify some of the changes that have taken place in participating schools to date, we describe the collaborative structures that we put into place.

CUNY-NYSIEB Structures

To implement our project, CUNY-NYSIEB involved the following structures over 1.5 years, from January 2012 to June 2013: teamwork (CUNY-NYSIEB Teams and School Emergent Bilingual Leadership Teams), seminars, and on-site support. All three structures aim to foster individual voices, through shared collaboration over an extended period of time in different formats. Our work with schools took place over two phases: a foundational stage from January to June 2012, and an implementational stage from July 2012 to June 2013. Schools were required to develop a school improvement plan during the foundational stage, focused on the education of emergent bilinguals and aligned to our non-negotiable principles, which was then implemented with CUNY-NYSIEB support during the implementational stage, over the course of the 2012–2013 school year.

CUNY-NYSIEB Team

The CUNY-NYSIEB team was comprised of six faculty members from various City University of New York (CUNY) campuses who specialize in different aspects of the education of emergent bilinguals, and six doctoral students specializing in Language and Education in the Urban Education program at the Graduate Center of CUNY (see note 1 for identification of persons in the teams). One faculty member was paired with a doctoral student and assigned to four schools for on-site visits. Each pair provided support to their schools through monthly site visits, and was in regular contact throughout the project period. The team also met with the Co-Principal Investigators of the project and the Project Director every two weeks to share experiences, review protocols and processes, and generate ideas and resources.

Seminars and Collaborative Descriptive Inquiry

The principals were required to participate in five monthly all-day seminars during the foundational stage that were held from January through June 2012, and two half-day seminars during the implementational stage from September through December 2012. During the foundational stage, the morning session consisted of a formal lecture on topics relevant to our vision, including dynamic bilingualism and translanguaging, programmatic structures, and pedagogical practices.

For the afternoon, the schools were divided by level (e.g. elementary, middle, and high schools) and were engaged in a process that we call collaborative descriptive inquiry (CDI). Collaborative descriptive inquiry is a disciplined, democratic process for collective teaching and learning, derived from the work of Patricia Carini in the 1970s and continued to this day by many educators (see, for example, Garcia & Traugh, 2002; García & Velasco, 2011; Himley & Carini, 2000). The development of an individual voice and trust in the group contributed to our increased understandings.

During the implementational stage, seminars mainly involved CDI, with brief lectures at the start of the day. The CUNY-NYSIEB Guide for Professional Development details and expands the curriculum used for the seminar meetings during the foundational stage, January–June 2012 (Witt & Mohr, 2012).

Emergent Bilingual Leadership Teams in Schools

After the second seminar during the foundational stage, principals were asked to form Emergent Bilingual Leadership Teams, a group within their school made up of school leaders and teachers who would collectively focus on improving the education of the emergent bilinguals in the building. The principals and two or more members of the school’s Emergent Bilingual Leadership Teams attended remaining seminars and developed their school improvement plans with support from CUNY-NYSIEB. This group was responsible for the school-wide implementation of the improvement plans during the 2012–2013 school year.

On-Site Support

Each CUNY-NYSIEB team made monthly visits to the schools during the foundational stage, first obtaining information about the school by interviewing school leaders and educators and by observing classes. The CUNY-NYSIEB teams
also worked with the Emergent Bilingual Leadership Teams on developing their school improvement plans, focusing on goals for implementation in the following academic year.

The CUNY-NYSIEB teams made monthly or bimonthly school visits during the implementation stage. In addition, they provided teachers with professional development in translanguaging strategies and offered support specific to each school’s efforts to improve the education of emergent bilinguals.

Changing Ideologies and Enactments
To engender changes within participating schools, where many administrators and teachers possessed limited knowledge about emergent bilinguals and saw these students solely through a deficit lens at the start of our work together, we used a quote from Martin Luther King that we found in one of the schools: “You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.” The bulk of the changes thus far have taken place, step by step, in the following three areas: (1) school ecology and community/family engagement; (2) programmatic structures; and (3) translanguaging pedagogical practices.

School Ecology and Community/Family Engagement
One of the first changes that schools enacted involved identifying, acknowledging, and then displaying the multilingual ecology of their school. At the start of the project, we found that many principals and teachers were simply unaware of the languages spoken by their students; now, educators routinely ask children and parents about the languages they speak at home and have learned about the languages. To do so, many use the CUNY-NYSIEB Guide, The Languages of New York (Funk, 2012). For example, one principal told us during his initial interview that his students speak “African.” Today, this principal can talk with pride about the multilingualism of those very children, marveling over one student’s abilities in Pulaar, French, Mandinka, Wolof, and English.

All of the schools in the project now have multilingual welcome signs prominently displaying the languages of all their students. Some schools have labeled key locations in the building with multilingual signage, and/or used the children’s languages in morning announcements, poems, and songs for the whole school. One school created a welcome packet in the school’s most commonly spoken language—Spanish, Polish and Chinese—to be given to all newcomers.

Despite the fact that many schools still offer ESL programs, teachers have found ways of identifying, acknowledging, valuing, and incorporating their students’ home language practices in instruction, to support their academic skills as well as English literacy ability. For instance, the schools have purchased texts in the children’s many languages and, where texts were unavailable, some have involved bilingual parents and community members to make audio recordings of classroom literature in the students’ languages for all of the children to enjoy.

Many of the schools have engaged the parents not only in putting on international and multilingual activities, but in teaching their languages, their cultures, their dances, their songs, their ways of making meaning and life.

This deeper understanding of their school’s multilingualism is not limited to classrooms in which there are emergent bilinguals; rather, the resources of all bilingual children are recognized. Taken together, smaller and larger changes serve to mainstream the multilingual ecology of the schools, turning the schools’ multilingualism into a source of pride. These examples of the schools’ appropriations of multilingualism are significant, as instead of schools standing as an unwelcoming border where English monolingualism is imposed on multilingual communities and only one part of the children’s linguistic and cognitive repertoire is acknowledged, such efforts move schools into borderland spaces that embody the complexity of the communities they serve.

Programmatic Structures
In sharp contrast to the rapid closure of numerous bilingual education programs over the past decade (Menken, 2011, 2013a), our schools are transforming their programmatic structures to support the students’ bilingualism. In some of the schools, the ESL programs have been transformed through the use of translanguaging strategies (described below); thus, ESL programs are no longer English only, but are significantly building on the students’ home language practices. In other schools, transitional bilingual education programs have become focused on the sustained use of home languages to develop the students’ bilingualism. Yet, in others, transitional bilingual education programs are giving way to dual language bilingual education programs, the only possible type of program within New York City that allows for sustaining and developing the bilingualism of children over time. But unlike other dual language bilingual education programs in the city where languages are compartmentalized, within these programs translanguaging is used as a pedagogical tool to make meaning and ensure the students’ cognitive engagement and self-regulation of learning.

The following is an example of one team’s summary about a middle school they have worked with:

The school has embraced the CUNY-NYSIEB principle of using students’ bilingualism as a resource and has opened two dual languages classes (Spanish and English) to serve students in the upper grades. The teachers in this new bilingual structure make up the Emergent Bilingual Leadership Team and meet regularly . . . teachers have begun to recognize and value bilingualism and bilinguality as the goal for their emergent bilinguals. They have eagerly embraced translanguaging as a transformative pedagogy.

(Herrera & Ebe, summary, December 2012)

Translanguaging as a pedagogy is the subject of the next section.
Translanguaging

What makes translanguaging different from these other fluid languaging practices is that it is transformative, attempting to wipe out the hierarchy of languaging practices that deem some more valuable than others. Thus, translanguaging is a mechanism for social justice, especially when incorporated in teaching language minoritized students (García, forthcoming).

Because little has been written about translanguaging as pedagogy in the past (García & Li Wei, 2014, forthcoming; Menken, 2013b), the CUNY-NYSIEB project has issued a Translanguaging Guide (Celic & Seltzer, 2012) in an effort to support educators and educational leaders in their efforts to negotiate and extend translanguaging practices in the classroom. With a theoretical introduction by García, the guide helps teachers construct translanguaging classrooms, as well as use translanguaging strategies for content, language, and literacy development. Because CUNY-NYSIEB work is deeply rooted in the individual school’s ecology, the guide also describes the process of collaborative descriptive inquiry (García & Ascenzi-Moreno, 2012). That is, the use of the guide, like translanguaging and dynamic bilingualism, is not meant to be linear, but to respond to the desires, aspirations, wishes, and needs of individual educators in a particular space as they work with unique emergent bilinguals. As this chapter goes to press, the project is in the implementation phase; as such, schools are currently at differing stages in their uses of translanguaging strategies in the classroom.

One CUNY-NYSIEB team noted the following examples of further translanguaging strategies they observed at a high school serving Spanish-speaking emergent bilinguals:

In a beginner ESL class the teacher—who speaks five languages—used his knowledge of Spanish to highlight cognates and similarities in structures. A bilingual computer teacher preparing students for A+ certification maneuvered between English test questions and discussion about the concepts in Spanish. A monolingual English-speaking science teacher asked students to identify Spanish cognates and then attempted to build a sentence summarizing a concept in Spanish (which was met by applause by the students). Therefore, translanguaging is a pedagogical approach used by all teachers across the school as a means to support content learning, side-by-side language comparison and as a way to become bilingual.

(Guzmán Valerio & Kleyn, CUNY-NYSIEB summary, December 2012)

While still in the early phases, these examples show teachers are now offering their emergent bilingual students space to use their linguistic resources more flexibly than ever before in participating schools, and how the students’ home language practices are being leveraged strategically in the students’ development of content and language for academic purposes.

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on how we have applied what we learned from Shohamy to our work with schools that have large numbers of emergent bilinguals. The going back and forth between the individual voices of principals and a shared collective vision of emergence of language practices, dynamic bilingualism, and dynamic development of teaching and learning have enabled us to build a generous collaborative space where, over time, schools and the lives of emergent bilingual children have been transformed. This is the story of the structures we have put into place and the people we have called upon in order to accomplish this.

Our story is not of total success. After a year and a half, some of the schools are still failing, according to children’s scores on standardized tests, and others are struggling in more qualitative ways to overcome the challenges they face in their efforts to implement the changes they had planned. But overall we have found that the ethos of the schools has been transformed to one of potential—potential to succeed, to learn from the community and the children, to view bilingualism as a resource. These schools have become, in other words, not just places that teach disadvantaged children, but sites to learn about the advantages of being multilingual. The enthusiasm for multilingualism is contagious, and teachers are constructing teaching and learning from the individuality of the children, as well as a shared vision of the strength of having a multilingual school ecology.

Our story is also of the efforts it takes to work collaboratively to act on a coherent vision across our differences and individualities—individualities as scholars, teachers, and students. The road taken is not always one of certainty. Our scholarship and theoretical frameworks have often come up against everyday practices in schools. For us, as scholars, this work has taken us to a different place—one of questioning “expert” knowledge and of the humbling realization that we are all learners when it comes to the enterprise of schooling emergent bilinguals. This work has put us in the position of learners, as we—academics and school personnel—collectively learn from each other the complexities of language education policies and the languaging practices of emergent bilingual students.

To improve the education of emergent bilinguals, we must work collaboratively as learners and listen to individual voices, as we nourish a vision of pride and hope in a bilingual future for all American children.

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Notes
1. CUNY-NYSIEB is funded by New York State. The Principal Investigator is Prof. Ricardo Otheguy. At its inception, Nelson Flores served as Acting Project Coordinator, a position now held by Dr. María Teresa Sánchez. The team of the Leadership component is composed of the following CUNY faculty: Professors Laura Ascencio-Moreno, Brian Collins, Ann Ebe, Tatiana Kleyn, and Vanessa Pérez; a Field Supervisor, Christina Celli; and Research Assistants: Kathryn Carpenter, Luis Guzmán, Luz Herrera, Sarah Hesson, Liza Pappas, and Heather Woodley. There are two other components of the project that are not examined in this chapter; more can be learned about the entire project at www.cuny-nysieb.org.
2. It is worth noting that the CUNY-NYSIEB project is ongoing, and has recently received funding to continue.
3. For our use of the term resource in this chapter, we credit Ruiz (1984) for long ago offering the field differing orientations to language that drive policy and programming decisions. Two of these orientations are, in our view, opposing: a language-as-resource orientation, in which linguistic diversity is regarded as a resource that should be developed and conserved. It is this latter perspective that we promote in schools.

References
This study examined the incongruous situation associated with English in Ethiopia. On the one hand, discourses of globalization contribute to the widespread recognition of its importance for the country, and Ethiopia’s current language policy accords it a prominent place in education. On the other hand, there is a recognized general low degree of proficiency in the language among its users, to such an extent that these users are, in many cases, unable to fulfill the anticipated needs for the use of English as decreed by the national language policy. The educational language policy mandates English to be used as a medium of instruction (hereafter, MOI) after primary education. Nonetheless, due to the generally low degree of proficiency of English, students and teachers alike actually use Amharic and other local languages for the purpose of classroom interaction in order to bridge the skill gap and focus on content instruction, a practice not in line with the country’s educational language policy. Hence, English remains a commonly used language of textbooks while the actual MOI appears to be determined by the linguistic background of teachers and students. This study addresses the role of English in Ethiopia, highlighting the prestige accorded to the language in Ethiopian society at large, and the attitudes of teachers and students toward English and proficiency in the language. We point to individually based approaches, or linguistic practices, taken to surmount the challenges associated with the low degree of proficiency in English. Hence, in this chapter, we focus on the need to make space for the individual in language policy.

Our study is based on a range of data collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations from different regions, as well as data on the linguistic landscape, the use of signs in the public sphere (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Shohamy, Ben-Rafael, & Barni, 2010; Shohamy & Gorter, 2008). In the following, we first present an overview of the languages,