Innovative Multilinguocultural Practice:

Multicultural Education for Urban English Language Learners in New Times

Namsook Kim, Ph.D.

University at Buffalo, The State University of New York

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Abstract

The present qualitative case study grounded in critical, socio-constructivist perspectives towards transformative learning and identity development intends to identify and explore the in-depth nature of innovative multicultural educational practice in an urban adolescent ESL class in new times. Data, collected from an intensive year-long class observations, field-notes, interviews, and multi-genre, multimodal documents and analyzed in four-stage, spiral procedures, led to the multidimensions of Transformative Pedagogy of Multilinguoculture: (a) fostering second language literacies: activizing multilinguocultural literacies; (b) revitalizing Language One and Culture One for learning and development: pedagogizing multiculturalism; (c) framing a sociopedagogy of multilinguocultural literacies: realizing transformers' society. Detailed discussions of the core features of TPM and pedagogical and policy implications are suggested.

Keywords: English as second language, English language learner, multicultural education, transformative pedagogy

Any present society—whether in larger, global scale or smaller contexts such as a small English as a Second Language (ESL) class—becomes increasingly diverse, i.e., multilingual and multicultural (Edwards, 1994; Gollnick & Chinn, 2013; Graddol, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 2009). Increasing cultural diversity sounds and is, justly, supposed to be good news. As we celebrate cultural diversity as a societal condition, germane questions for responsible, reflective educational stakeholders will be: How effectively and equitably do we respond to societal, individual cultural diversity? Does our education as a social system of theory, research, practice, and policy play a 'good' role on fostering educational equity and social justice for 'all' including minority students? (Banks, 2009; Hakuta, 2011).

The present research intends to fill the gap in the literature that tends to focus on narrowly defining and understanding educational success in terms of the academic achievement evidenced in summative test scores, by identifying an exemplary case of innovative multicultural educational practice and exploring the in-depth nature of the multicultural learning community practice, theoretical significance of the findings of which may also lead to educational and public policy implications (Cummins, 2000; Nieto, 1999).

The research questions that guide this exploratory inquiry follow: What is the nature of innovative multicultural educational practice for diverse English Language Learners (ELLs) in urban secondary public education? In what ways, if any, does it help the high school students from diverse backgrounds to improve language learning and multicultural identity development?

Theoretical Framework

This study is epistemologically grounded in critical, socio-constructivism (Bakhtin, 1986; Bourdieu, 1991; Freire, 2003). Sociocultural differences in terms of multiple, interdependent identity categories—social class, race, ethnicity, language, gender, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, age, and religion—and following inequity in educational access and quality and, further, in societal participation due to the differences are the norm, rather than a myth or a defect (Ladson-Billings, 2004). Equity is a dynamic, dialogic, and collective system of condition-process-goal for the society to achieve as its crucial mission of education for all, not only for those empowered with unearned privilege (Banks, 2009; McIntosh, 1989).

Also, as relevant and useful theoretical and interpretive perspectives towards understanding innovative practice in new times featured by advancing technologies, which characterize adolescent digital natives' youth culture (Gollnick & Chinn, 2013; Prensky, 2005), the present research engages sociocultural notions towards transformative learning and identity development (Freedman & Ball, 2004) including 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1986), 'third space' (Bhaba, 1990), and 'New Literacies' (New London Group, 2000).

Methods

To effectively address the research questions—much needed exploration towards the nature of innovative multicultural educational practice for diverse ELLs in an urban setting, this study is designed to rigorously follow the tradition of qualitative single case study research (Creswell, 1998; Ely, 1991; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). The present research is bound in one-academic year and in an ESL class of an urban public high school.

The exemplary case, purposefully selected with expert consultation (Miles & Huberman, 1994 as cited in Creswell, 1998), is Ms. Kwon's (pseudonyms used for all proper names) freestanding ESL class with 40 students from diverse backgrounds, all of whom are eligible for free lunch, in an urban public high school, Vermeer High, in a northeastern city in the United States. Data were collected for the 2008-2009 academic year after a yearlong pilot study. Then, data were analyzed through four-stage, spiral procedures including an electronic analysis through NVivo9 software: Preliminary-Descriptive-Focused-Thematizing.

As a data triangulation strategy to strengthen trustworthiness of findings (Denzin, 1978 as cited in Mathison, 1988), data were collected from multiple sources: 110 videotaped class observations, 110 field-notes, 22 interviews and brief consultations with teacher and six focal students, and 45 multi-genre and multimodal documents. Documents were further categorized to identify relevance to school context, teacher knowledge and experience, ESL lessons, and students.

Findings

In this section, I present detailed accounts of the case of innovative multicultural educational practice for urban high school ELLs in new times. The four-stage analytical procedures led to developing the core features of 'Transformative Pedagogy of Multilinguoculture' (TPM). TPM represents the core principle, process, and goal of Ms. Kwon's ESL class as a learning community; her ESL class does not merely consist of students from diverse cultural backgrounds; rather, the student 'members' under the teacher's leadership jointly construct their knowledge-creating community with their unique microculture (Banks, 2009) by actively creating, maintaining, and utilizing their

multiple languages and cultures as their collective, 'powerful discourse' (Gee, 1989) for 'higher learning' (Vygotsky, 1986) and as their ideological goal, procedural guide, and part of societal movement for equity and empowerment (Banks, 2009) and cosmopolitan transnationalism (Rizvi, 2009). Thus, in this learning community, the students, often positioned as the vulnerable in the societal, educational system of oppression, are no longer 'the oppressed' (Freire, 2003) but liberated by transcending means of their primary-language cultures, which are often hidden, missing, distorted, or marginalized in the mainstream. Three signature features of innovative multicultural educational practice include: (a) fostering second language literacies: activizing multilinguocultural literacies; (b) revitalizing Language One and Culture One for learning and development: pedagogizing multiculturalism; (c) framing a sociopedagogy of multilinguocultural literacies: realizing transformers' society. I discuss the first feature as the focus of this paper in detail below.
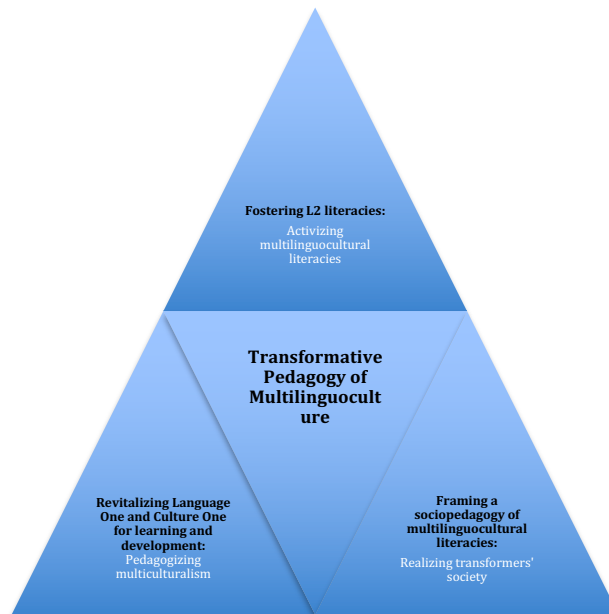

Figure 1. Transformative Pedagogy of Multilinguoculture

Fostering Second Language Literacies: Activizing Multilinguocultural Literacies

The distinctiveness of this ESL class lies in how it addresses ever-increasing pressure to teach-to-the-test macroculture and produce test scores and a satisfactory passing rate as an objective proof of teacher's instructional effectiveness and students' academic success. The members of the class do not yield to passivity as 'the oppressed' by doing what the learners were prescribed or 'supposed by powerful others' to do; the class as a collective community does what they need or are rightly supposed to do to participate and succeed in the society as legitimate members. They learned beyond four language skills as traditionally defined, and fostered their second language (L2) literacies through innovative classroom teaching and learning practices. As the result, two thirds (67%) of the students passed the 2008-2009 New York State ESL Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) for Grades 9-12 administered in June 2009. As the result of this test, combined with district-wide assessments, majority (52%) moved up to a higher proficiency level of the ESL program in the next year; 43% stayed at the same level; 5% were placed to a lower level. Twenty-one class members of this ESL cohort proved to be higher achievers than average.

Worth noting here is L2 development, from the 'Pedagogy of Multiliteracies' standpoint (New London Group, 2000), of the students as 'multi-competent' L2 'users' (Cook, 1992) rather than limited-English-proficient (LEP) minority learners who seem to be systematically expected to struggle in their new linguistic and cultural environment as the deterministic LEP label sounds to predict or pre-condition unjust outcomes. Due focus is what the students can do in real context by appropriating available 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez et al., 2005) including their integrated-language-competence set in

its developmental continuum (Hornberger, 2003), rather than what they can do at a test that dissects and questions individual test-takers' performance of a discrete language skill—listening, speaking, reading, or writing as if the authentic situation would demand such skills individually.

Multi-competent L2 users in this ESL class show language uses of both multiligualism and multiculturalism—communicative practices of using and promoting more than one language and culture, i.e., transformative language use beyond the most powerful, single language and culture of the hegemonic society. Here, multilingualism and multiculturalism are not considered as two separate entities or ideologies such that they can only occasionally be found to overlap in individuals' language use. Rather, multi-competent L2 users interlock the dialectical nature of language and culture (Edwards, 1994) as an organic whole, not two different parts or two different wholes. Thus, I term other-language users' developing multi-competence in more than one language-and-culture as '*Multilinguocultural Literacies*'. To situatedly elaborate, '*multilinguoculturally literate*' L2 users, in good standing in their developmental continuum, showed that they were able to:

- Listen actively to others in order to understand others' intended message inclusive of ideas, subjective or objective, and feelings (Multilinguocultural Literacies Competence I: *Active Listening*);
- Speak fluently in order to express the intended message (Multilinguocultural Literacies Competence II: *Intentional Speaking*);
- Read strategically in order to connect the text and the context to read the voices of self and others of the real world (Multilinguocultural Literacies

Competence III: *Strategic Reading*);

- Compose multimodally in different genres in order to share with and publish the production to the real audience (Multilinguocultural Literacies Competence IV: *Multimodal Composing*); and

- Use diverse knowledge and experience of self and others to engage and promote interculturality (Multilinguocultural Literacies Competence V: *Intercultural Engaging*).

As the multilinguocultural literacies competence indicators—active listening, intentional speaking, strategic reading, multimodal composing, and intercultural engaging--suggest, multilinguocultural users do not just listen, speak, read, or write. They engage in a language activity as active agents with a clear communicative purpose to do conscious, communicative actions—to understand, express, connect, share, and promote—and, importantly, combine these purposeful, communicative actions. Each is not a separate, discrete part of the whole competence; rather, each represents a component of light, i.e., the multi-competent user's competence spectrum. What multi-competent users develop to be able to do with their multilinguocultural literacies adds an important meaning to their socially constructed identity kit that includes other sociocultural categories—language, race, ethnicity, social class, age, (dis)ability, sexual orientation and religion. The key in developing multi-competent users' multilinguocultural literacies lies in (a) agency, (b) hybridizing, and (c) collaborating in the L2 users' communicative actions.

An exemplar of agentive, hybridizing, collaborative culmination in teaching and learning in this ESL class is the digital video project. The multimodal activity, not as a

one-time instructional task but as a developmental, pedagogic activity, makes an iconic signature of what the class members have done in the history of the class in their shared, intensive learning space. Follows a further discussion of the 'activity' through which the L2 users 'activize' their multilinguocultural literacies (See Appendix for details of what is seen and heard in the film, 'Letter from the President', a multimodal narrative embedded in a one-minute-and-thirty-second-long film.)

The edited film is terse in length—one minute and thirty seconds; it is rich with insights to help understand what is taking place in and beyond this class in terms of fostering Multilinguocultural Literacies. The microgenetic history of the students' film production also glimpses the development of the student producers until the moment they shine. The in-class film premiere, followed by a group evaluation session, takes place on May 19, 2009; later it is screened to a bigger audience at a mainstream theater on June 5, 2009. As the narrative in Appendix suggests, the production transcends the concept of conventional time and spans much longer than a single-class period. It traces back to the time when the current President was a promising college student. As active listeners, intentional speakers, strategic readers, multimodal composers, and intercultural engagers, the film producers communicate with Presidential voices and participate in this dialogic activity, rather than to learn four discrete language skills. This multilinguoculturally literate group uses their funds of knowledge—their growing competence in multilinguoculturla literacies—to represent and communicate who they are and where they come from, and further, what they virtue ("Different is good").

Clearly evidenced are the producer group's actions of (a) agency, (b) hybridizing, and (c) collaborating in practicing Multilinguocultural Literacies. Agency that the

students show is beyond that of good language learners of four skills; their agency is more of that of active participants in society. Their agency is participatory power based on linguistic and cultural 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez et al., 2005) or 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1991) empowered by innovative teaching leadership. Student agents, Ms. Kwon's apprentices, use available resources (newspapers, photographs, etc.) and hybridize different genres (e.g., a print-based letter and a digital video) and multiple modes inclusive of linguistic, visual, audio, spatial, human, emogestural, temporal, and ideocultural elements (Kim, 2011) to fulfill their communicative intention. Three leading producers—a narrator, a cameraman, and an editor—collaborate with the teacher, the principal, and 26 other peer students who are not members of this class community; they "work together" to pass on "hope" and "unity of purpose". The collectively virtued, common message of the nation and the ESL class seems to be effectively communicated: the genuine dialogue between self and others (Bakhtin, 1981; Holquist, 2002) surpasses the four closet-walls and becomes alive in its full swing. The creative producers of 'Letter from the President' are no longer mere language 'learners'; they have become 'users' (Cook, 1992) of multilinguocultural literacies and, further, 'sign makers' (Kress, 2003).

Implications

Pedagogical implications from the findings of this study—the core features of Transformative Pedagogy of Multilinguoculture—include the key principles toward successful multicultural education for urban ELLs in new times. Key considerations toward innovative multilinguocutural practice include (a) valuing, capitalizing, and using, as pedagogical means and content, the languages and cultures of the students and the

teacher as active agents of the educational practice, (b) designing and producing meaning-making activities that demand and foster enhanced second language literacies and 21st century digital literacy as a semiotic means to represent and celebrate the cultural identities of the class members and further to communicate with the authentic audience beyond the classroom, and (c) creating and co-constructing the learning community space where students are guided to reform their identities from the oppressed learners to the active agents and owners of their languages and cultures that they bring to class and also users of multi-competence and creators of new knowledge and culture who develop and engage in multilinguocultural literacies and participate in cultivating and practicing global-societal multilingualism at the individual and class-community levels.

Pursuing and realizing the Transformative Pedagogy of Multilinguoculture and its core features in the educational contexts for ELLs should not be considered to be or remain to be an ideal or a merely good thought. It is a tall order that needs actions from and among critically thinking educational stakeholders, at all levels, who are responsible for pre-service teacher and administrator education, in-service professional development, community and family connection and education, curriculum development, instruction, assessment, and policy decisions. Innovative Multilinguocultural Practice as conscious actions toward the critical sociopedagogy as an ideological movement leads to the needed educational reform to serve the goal of 'education for all', not only the ELLs who are socially, not inherently, positioned as the oppressed in the macro- and micro-level system of oppression and are burdened with assimilating into the values and practices of the dominant linguoculture.

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Appendix

Multimodal Narrative, "Letter from the President"

(Guitar music foregrounds the title that shows the following.)

Vermeer High School, Lakeville, New York

English as a Second Language classes

(A student, named Hanna, enunciates, in a firmer than usual voice, the

following. Background guitar music synchronizes with this ninth-grade,

African American, female narrator's voice.)

A while back, our ESL classes wrote a letter to President Obama.

Surprisingly, he wrote back to us.

(Hanna's narration pauses; but music continues seamlessly until the end of

film; next in the movie screen is shown a handwritten letter, mailed to the

President, which shows following content.)

축하! [which means 'Congratulations' in Korean]

Dear Mr. Obama,

You have shown us the meaning of "the land of equal opportunities." My

students want to express how proud of you being the president. Different

is good, finally!

Ms. Kwon, teacher

Congratulations!

('Congratulations' are handwritten in seven different language varieties

including English: "Congratulations", "축하", "MAUHAY KA!",

"¡Felicitación!", "Tahniyad!", "поздравление", and "تهنئة" . Continue

names of 27 students and school principal one by one. Each of the

participants writes her or his full name in English and also adds where she

or he comes from in parentheses. This diverse ESL group of 28

participating members shows their 12 different country-backgrounds other

than the U.S.: Yemen, Ghana, Vietnam, Russia, Moldova, Palestine,

Philippines, Cuba, Somalia, Iraq, Puerto Rico, Korea, and Kenya. Then,

Hanna's emphatic, enunciating narration resumes.)

This is what he said.

(As Hanna continues to read the President's reply, is shown the envelope

from the White House addressed to 'Ms. Kwon's Class' and the main text

of the printed letter signed by the President. Hanna synchronizes the

Presidential voice in his writing and the guitar music. She pauses twice

where each of two paragraphs begins. Continuous music seams the vocal

void between paragraphs.)

Thank you for your recent note, and for sharing your thoughts with me.

Your kind words echo the message of millions of Americans who have

welcomed me and my family to the White House with an outpouring of

goodwill.

(first pause)

On January 20th, Americans spoke with one voice, choosing hope over

fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord. Our Nation faces serious

challenges, but we will overcome them if our imagination is joined to common purpose.

(second pause)

Now is our time to work together, reaffirm our enduring spirit, and choose our better history. With your help, we will renew our Nation's promise to carry forth the great gift of freedom to future generations, as our forebearers have delivered it to us.

(Music continues with eight different photographic clips of the President in his living history from youth until the day of his inauguration featured in various newspaper articles. Then, with music, film ends by showing who creates the film.)

Narration: Hanna

Camera man: Gambi

Editing: Assad