



Positioning Teachers' Hearts and Minds for Educating Bi/Multilingual Students

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Abstract

Decades of research, reports, and political mobilization on rights to quality education for linguistically diverse students attest to our rumination on this problem and suggest that what has been studied, peer-reviewed, and published ought to result in real change. Nonetheless, challenges remain in converging robust strategies with critical consciousness in classrooms with bi/multilingual students. Drawing from two articles in this issue documenting efforts to support and grow language pedagogies by also attending to educators' hearts and minds, this article asks: How can in-service teachers of bi/multilingual students be positioned for success through more integrated approaches? To understand the critical role of educators, this article summons elements of Positioning Theory to understand how teachers can be located in this work to, in turn, position their students in more humanizing and pedagogically respectful ways for developing language.

Introduction

This spring 2022 issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* surfaces as the 2021-

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2022 school year nears its conclusion. With the return to in-person learning, educators contended with the consequences of the unmet needs of linguistically diverse students during pandemic schooling which accordingly triggered renewed attention to a longstanding problem. Despite aspirational discourse that leaned into pandemic-induced disruption and chaos to allow for reimagining and rethinking education, the sobering return of the testing season thwarted those musings. For millions of bi/multilingual students across the U.S. taking an English language proficiency assessment this spring, the stakes are particularly high and stand to impact their trajectory for academic survival and success through the educational pipeline. This signals a need for teachers to recognize the urgency and impact of their work by acknowledging and understanding that language teaching and learning are not neutral undertakings (Kayi-Aydar & Steadman, 2021).

To explore classroom power dynamics in bi/multilingual settings, Positioning Theory has been used to examine interactions by and across individuals within a given context. In making sense of how issues of identity, agency, and the distribution of rights and duties across various roles are negotiated, Positioning Theory focuses on ways in which individuals speak and act (Harré & Moghaddam, 2015) within a storyline as a reflection of their beliefs. In the context of students' diverse languaging practices, the consequent positive or negative manner in which teachers position themselves and their students (Morales & Hartman, 2019; Vetter et al., 2016; Yoon, 2008) reflects their perceived rights and duties rooted in practices and beliefs governed by moral reasoning (Smith, 2019). Positioning Theory is therefore useful for highlighting shifts in beliefs about how teachers position/reposition themselves and their students in ways that can help or hinder students' achievement and ability to develop a positive self-image as a learner. With a focus on developing teacher capacity in serving bi/multilingual students, the two articles in this issue on language address ways in which in-service teachers can be supported to better position/reposition themselves and their students more advantageously.

Positioning to Inspire

At the core of this work is the teacher's willingness to take a more humanizing stance in educating linguistically diverse students. This involves embracing new learning to better prepare for meeting the needs of bi/multilingual students and for situating themselves and their students in asset-based postures. In contrast to professional development efforts that more commonly occur in schools, the programmatic approach in Heineke, Vera, Hill, Israel, Goldberger, Anderson, Giatsou, and Hook's article in this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* highlights pathways for building deeper, more comprehensive, and sustained expertise. By imagining the attributes of a "well-prepared teacher" this study examines the longitudinal impact of a university graduate program designed for in-service general education teachers of bi/multilingual students spanning P-12. Designed to not only grow

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instructional expertise but also highlight the central roles of teachers as agentive and powerful disruptors of dominant discourses, the comprehensive six-course program offers teachers a three-pronged approach covering language and culture; classroom environment, assessment, and instruction; and advocacy beyond the classroom. In the context of understandings and practices serving bi/multilingual students, qualitative and quantitative study findings demonstrate teachers' increased confidence and capacity, heightened advocacy efforts, and interest in applying their knowledge toward leadership roles. Interview findings also revealed shifts in teachers' reflexive positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990), or intentional self-positioning/repositioning, as they discursively acknowledged students' backgrounds, families, and cultures as important assets in the classroom.

By casting a wider net targeting general education teachers across various disciplines, Heineke, Vera, Hill, Israel, Goldberger, Anderson, Giatsou, and Hook effectively disrupt the notion that bi/multilingual students are the exclusive responsibility of language teachers. This is a bold move toward effecting real change among teachers who position themselves as content teachers versus those who position themselves as teachers for all students (Yoon, 2008). University programs such as these can situate teachers as learners in meaning-making cohort spaces where new knowledge and discourse can reframe practices and beliefs.

Positioning to Support

Among the chief barriers to quality education for bi/multilingual students is a lack of teacher preparation and pedagogical knowledge of English language development and content instruction (Buenrostro & Maxwell-Jolly, 2021; Cruze et al., 2018; Lucas & Villegas, 2010). While preservice teachers benefit from expert facilitators, scholars, and current research-based practices as part of their university training, much of this gets clouded at the threshold of the self-contained classroom. Despite the best of intentions, teachers resort to the familiar, often based on their own schooling experiences centering dominant white monolingual traditions that further distance bi/multilingual students.

Because language education broaches the political (Kibler & Valdés, 2016; Macedo, 1991) and sociocultural (Norton, 2006), strategies offered to support teachers should align to positioning bi/multilingual students in humanizing ways while honoring their intersectional cultural and linguistic identities. In the context of biliteracy and writing, Zoeller and Briceño in this issue of *Teacher Education Quarterly* urge an integrated approach to frame language across system, practice, and identity to attend to the dangers of narrow approaches that overemphasize mechanical language structures, or that result in hard linguistic binaries that dismiss students' multiple languaging practices. The authors examine three cases of immigrant Latinx teachers in a graduate biliteracy development course. The three participants served in English-medium as well as two-way immersion dual-language

settings providing language support to bi/multilingual students, and all had been teachers in their Spanish-speaking countries of origin. The authors also demonstrate how despite sharing commonalities with students as learners of English as a second language, transnational teachers can still transmit beliefs about language that devalue bi/multilingual students' diverse languaging practices and position their ways of being and knowing as deficit.

Using a Transliteracy approach that explicitly coalesces language as practice, language as a system, and language as identity, Zoeller and Briceño usher teachers to position students at the center for observing their languaging strengths that can be leveraged for new learning. By infusing cross-linguistic pedagogies into their Transliteracy model for writing Zoeller and Briceño ground teachers in strength-based, language-focused pedagogies to allow for the full use of students' linguistic repertoires in writing. Like the comprehensive approach advanced by Heineke, Vera, Hill, Israel, Goldberger, Anderson, Giatsou, and Hook that accounts for the totality of this work, the Transliteracy approach to writing makes decisive pedagogical moves toward unifying students' observed use of language(s), the various language demands across writing tasks, and the construction of identity through various languaging practices. Taken together, these expansive measures of support equip teachers with an ethos and robust knowledge about bi/multilingual students for positioning/repositioning themselves and their students in asset-based postures.

Recommendations

The problems undergirding quality education for bi/multilingual students are deeply rooted in inequitable policies and language ideologies that undervalue their identities and languaging practices. Yet it is insufficient to bring awareness to the deficit framing of bi/multilingual students. Consciousness must also pair with action to confront the deficits with strategies that will be sustainable and transformative. The scholarship in this issue not only affirms ways in which in-service and experienced teachers can bolster their capacity in serving the needs of bi/multilingual students with robust strategies and pedagogies but more importantly, it attends to the totality of language education with moves that aim to recruit the hearts and minds of educators. Both articles demonstrate the power of comprehensive approaches in shifting how teachers positioned/repositioned themselves and their students in ways that honored students' identities and diverse languaging practices. These implications signal possibilities not only for sharpening practice in classrooms pedagogically, but also for calibrating the lens for equity that teachers employ to educate their students.

When teacher support efforts integrate all dimensions of educating bi/multilingual students, the subsequent redistribution of rights and duties can inspire new storylines where equitable and sustainable changes permeate the schooling experiences of bi/multilingual students at the classroom level. With these hopeful

approaches operating at the microlevel, we then direct attention toward larger contexts by examining mission statements, district initiatives, and accountability measures that prompt us to ask: How can we recruit the hearts and minds of decision-makers to take up policies and systemize efforts that will position bi/multilingual students and the teachers who serve them as a priority?

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