



Multilingualism and Education

Researchers' Pathways and Perspectives

Edited by Gail Prasad, Nathalie Auger
and Emmanuelle Le Pichon-Vorstman

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi - 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781316517079

DOI: 10.1017/9781009037075

© Cambridge University Press 2022

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2022

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Prasad, Gail, editor. | Auger, Nathalie, 1973- editor. | Le Pichon-Vorstman, Emmanuelle, 1972- editor.

Title: Multilingualism and education : researchers' pathways and perspectives / edited by Gail Prasad, Nathalie Auger, Emmanuelle Le Pichon Vorstman.

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2022. | Contributions that were originally in French have been translated into English for publication. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021039262 (print) | LCCN 2021039263 (ebook) | ISBN 9781316517079 (hardback) | ISBN 9781009017053 (paperback) | ISBN 9781009037075 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Linguists--Biography. | Language teachers--Biography. | Language and education. | Multilingual education. | Multilingualism--Research. | Multiculturalism in education. | Language teachers--Training of. | BISAC: LANGUAGE ARTS & DISCIPLINES / Linguistics / General | LCGFT: Autobiographies. | Essays.

Classification: LCC P83 .M85 2022 (print) | LCC P83 (ebook) | DDC 404/.2072--dc23/eng/20211118

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021039262>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021039263>

ISBN 978-1-316-51707-9 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

List of F
List of C

- 1 Hum
Evol
GAIL
PICH
- 2 Beco
MEH
- 3 Betw
NAT
- 4 Lear
Lang
THE
- 5 A R
FRA
- 6 Mul
and
DAT
- 7 Rev
JEA
- 8 The
ove
ME
- 9 On
MA

Jeff MacSwan

Academics don't talk much about their personal stories. We're socialized, in fact, to keep those tightly under wraps, hidden from view as we dispassionately report rigorous scientific research and scholarship. That's because our personal stories should not affect the outcomes of good research. But they can, and typically do, affect our commitments and interests. Gail Prasad, Nathalie Auger, and Emmanuelle Le Pichon's project, *Multilingualism and Education*, catalogues the personal stories of scholars in multilingualism to understand how these have situated their work and the questions they ask. My own interest in multilingualism and schooling arose in large part from my personal experience in school: not as a multilingual speaker, but as a working class kid socialized into a particular role for economic production. As my academic interests took shape as an education researcher around language and linguistics, I was attracted to multilingualism and language education because I believed I could use insights from research to inform issues of fairness and social justice for underprivileged children and families. Because of my own experience and family history, I understood schooling not as a benign institution that sought to lift the socioeconomically disadvantaged up to a level playing field, but as a social and political tool which served to indoctrinate the poor into accepting meritocratic dogma, and to justify the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of "more deserving" social elites. For me, education research was about demonstrating the inherent talents and strengths of the underprivileged, with whom I identified, and showing how these strengths could be used as leverage for them to acquire new knowledge.

My father grew up in Paisley, Scotland, where his father worked as a shoe salesman in a local shop, and his mother managed the affairs of the home. His family of five lived in a cramped three-room apartment – not three bedrooms, but three rooms: A living room, kitchen, and bathroom. He often recounted the images of extreme wealth inequality growing up in Paisley, which was home to the Coats family, among the richest industrialists in the world, employing men, women, and children in thread and textile manufacturing. At the age of twelve, my father was offered an apprenticeship as an electrician; shortly after completing it, he was drafted to fight in World War II, then returned home to take care of his aging



Figure 26.1 Bell Gardens Elementary School, about 1972 (age 11)

parents. After they passed, he immigrated to the United States, eventually settling in California, where he became a US citizen in 1956.

My mother's father and brothers worked in the steel mills of Pennsylvania. She graduated from high school and briefly attended the University of Pennsylvania. She recounted how a classmate questioned her legitimacy as a student, telling her that her family could not afford for her to attend there. Convinced her classmate was right, she quietly dropped out, telling her parents she had changed her mind about going to college. She moved to California in search of a new adventure, where she met and married my father.

They settled in Bell Gardens, where my father got a job as an industrial electrician. We never bought a home but mostly lived in single-family rented houses that were roomy enough for our family of six. Bell Gardens was racially and linguistically diverse but economically homogenous; its families, mainly white and Latino, were predominantly poor and working class, and mostly lived in multifamily housing. Bell Gardens was multilingual in those days, mainly representing English and Spanish speakers. Latinos spoke Chicano English, and whites mostly spoke what dialectologists call working

class American English. Street fights were common, and the police were violent and abusive. Attending school in Bell Gardens in the 1970s, my three older brothers, who were challenging to teachers and school administrators, were each encouraged to drop out early, and did.

I was expelled from elementary school as incorrigible, and spent my years before and after that in the "opportunity room." There we quietly completed worksheets and demonstrated punctuality and compliance with authority. A few years later I found myself in Vail Continuation School in Montebello, California: a schoolwide opportunity room, as it were, where teachers were generally kind but did little or no actual teaching. If we arrived on time, kept our heads down and completed our "contract" work in a timely manner, we could keep coming back and eventually transition to the next grade.

As I began my junior year of high school, something remarkable happened. My family moved from Bell Gardens to the working class side of the neighboring town of Downey, called South Downey. We lived just close enough to the northern boundary to be in the geographical region assigned to Downey High School, which catered to the wealthy and middle class families of the North. Although my family's financial situation had not changed at all, school was now a radically different place. Here teachers treated students with respect, and helped them succeed when challenged. The overwhelming focus on control and compliance shifted to one focused on engagement, understanding, and respect. In the new setting, influenced by new peers and supportive teachers, I squeaked by to become the first and only of four boys in my family to graduate from high school. While most of my new Downey friends had big plans to attend major universities, I enrolled at nearby Cerritos Community College, and later transferred to California State University, Long Beach, assisted by the Equal Opportunity Program.

In later years in graduate school, I'd come to see my own school experiences in critical work on education such as Paulo Freire's (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Paul Willis' (1977) *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. As Linda McNeil (1986) noted, schools frequently focus on control and obedience to authority, with relatively little attention paid to actual academic learning. I came to see it as the responsibility of educational researchers concerned with issues of social justice to develop a knowledge base which would assist teachers, parents, and communities to create schools which foster greater respect for students and their communities, including their home language and cultural resources, and which build a foundation for the development of tools for intellectual self-defense.

Just as I was finishing my undergraduate degree, Los Angeles Unified School District began a massive recruitment effort to address its teacher shortage, offering to hire new graduates without traditional teaching credentials. I accepted an offer to teach ESL at Le Conte Junior High School in Los Angeles, and enrolled in a teacher education program at night while also pursuing a master's degree in linguistics. I later taught ESL at Los Angeles

High School for a few years, then returned to graduate school to get a PhD in Education. My interests by then had coalesced around multilingual education; I wanted to further develop my disciplinary expertise in linguistics to inform important questions about language education for multilingual students. I was an Education major, but spent substantial time in the Linguistics Department too – working as a graduate assistant in the Psycholinguistics Lab and taking essentially all the same courses as Linguistics PhD students were required to take, in addition to those required in Education.

As a student, I developed a strong interest in the mental representation of language; but because of my focus on education, I was more specifically focused on how our understanding of language as a cognitive system interacted with the social and political context of children and their communities. Chomsky's work was front and center for me as a linguistics student, as it grappled with important questions of how an organism, such as a human, could acquire so rich and complex a system as human language from such impoverished linguistic input as children encounter in daily life. Chomsky's solution was elegant: Much of what human beings know about language is given as part of their genetic makeup, with complex linguistic knowledge simply triggered by linguistic experience.¹ This basic idea, that human nature is rich and highly capable, underlies Chomsky's core political beliefs as well:

I believe that the study of human cognitive structures and human intellectual achievements reveals a high degree of genetically determined innate structure that lies at the basis of the creative aspect of human intellectual achievement, which is easily perceived in . . . the acquisition and free use of the systems of language, which permit the free expression of thought over an unbounded range. Similarly, I think . . . that related aspects of human nature lie at the core of the continuing human search for freedom from authoritarian rule, from external restriction, from repressive structures, what might be called an instinct for freedom. (Chomsky 1988, pp. 250–251)

In other words, *by their nature*, humans are rich, capable, and creative beings, and their innate capacity is evident in their acquisition of systems of knowledge, like language, and their impulse to freely create and express themselves without external restrictions. Chomsky sees schools, like other systems of propaganda, as serving in part to restrict intellectual independence and justify meritocratic distinctions, and thus a part of the external restrictions imposed on the human instinct for freedom.

My own scholarship is concerned with drawing out and affirming the linguistic talents and capabilities of students whose language is viewed or treated in a disparaging manner in school, and is primarily focused on multilingual students. These negative views of children's language, often termed "linguistic deficit theories" or simply "deficit thinking," take for granted ". . . that the student who fails in school does so because of his/her internal deficits . . . manifested in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings"

¹ For discussion of this work, see Berwick, Chomsky, and Piattelli-Palmarini (2012).

or other natural limitations (Valencia 2010, p. 14). In my view, by critiquing explicit or implicit linguistic deficit theories, we disrupt institutionalized propaganda guiding school policy, curriculum, and instruction, potentially improving conditions for politically oppressed communities.

My first effort pertained to the study of language mixing, or codeswitching, which is often viewed as a crutch or a sign of linguistic confusion. As Rampton (2007) noted, codeswitching research "... has waged a war on deficit models of bilingualism and on pejorative views of syncretic language use by insisting on the integrity of language mixing and by examining it for its grammatical systematicity and pragmatic coherence" (p. 306). My interest was to reconceptualize the underlying grammatical theory of language mixing using the tools of recent research on linguistic structure, positing no codeswitching-specific rules. The work showed that bilinguals who codeswitch are exquisitely sensitive to the underlying grammatical requirements of both their languages, just as monolinguals are, dispelling conceptions of language mixing as evidence of semilingualism (e.g. MacSwan 1999, 2000a).

I extended this same critical perspective to accepted dichotomies of bilingual proficiency in language education such as the BICS/CALP distinction and the notion of "limited bilingualism" embedded in the Threshold Hypothesis (e.g. MacSwan 2000b) and common language tests which identify children as "non-nons," that is, nonproficient in both English and Spanish (e.g. MacSwan and Rolstad 2006).

I have supported children's right to access their home language in educational settings in the United States. The attack on bilingual education is an attack on diversity, an effort to ban children's most critical and useful resources when and where they need them most. I conducted a number of studies in Arizona, where language education policy is perhaps more regressive than anywhere else in the United States, which found that the state-mandated English-only instructional policy was ineffective. Working with graduate students and colleagues, I organized research to show that conservative and media claims about the effectiveness of language restrictive policies in California were false (Thompson et al. 2002); that bilingual education programs were effective at teaching children English reasonably quickly, countering the rhetoric of English-only proponents in Arizona (MacSwan and Pray 2005); and that Arizona's claims of effectiveness for its language education policy were almost exactly wrong, with fewer than 11 percent of children achieving English language proficiency in one year's time (Mahoney, MacSwan, and Thompson 2005). We publicized these research results through press releases, press conferences, letters to editors, and editorial contributions to local newspapers.

My experience in school in the "opportunity room" and continuation high school left me with a deep personal connection with children whom school is designed to sort for exclusion. Although I am a full professor at a major research university, my identity is still that of an incorrigible working class kid, now fighting from within to reduce the negative impact of schooling as a

mechanism of social control and socioeconomic reproduction. Good schools, for me, are those which fit, affirm, and respect children and their communities, drawing out their talents and capabilities and building on them as resources to advance knowledge and understanding. I hope to continue to contribute to this important effort for as long as I am able.

REFERENCES

- Berwick, R. C., Chomsky, N., and Piattelli-Palmarini, M. (2012). Poverty of the stimulus stands: Why recent challenges fail. In M. Piattelli-Palmarini and R. C. Berwick, eds., *Rich Languages from Poor Inputs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 19–42.
- Chomsky, N. (1988). *Language and Politics*. Edited by C. P. Otero. 2nd ed. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.
- MacSwan, J. (1999). *A Minimalist Approach to Intrasentential Code Switching*. New York: Garland.
- (2000a). The architecture of the bilingual language faculty: Evidence from codeswitching. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 3(1), 37–54.
- (2000b). The threshold hypothesis, semilingualism, and other contributions to a deficit view of linguistic minorities. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 20 (1), 3–45.
- MacSwan, J. and Pray, L. (2005). Learning English bilingually: Age of onset of exposure and rate of acquisition of English among children in a bilingual education program. *Bilingual Research Journal* 29(3), 687–712.
- MacSwan, J. and Rolstad, K. (2006). How language tests mislead us about children's abilities: Implications for special education placements. *Teachers College Record* 108(11), 2304–2328.
- MacSwan, J., Thompson, M., Rolstad, K., McAlister, K., and Lobo, G. (2017). Three theories of the effects of language education programs: An empirical evaluation of bilingual and English-only policies. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 37, 218–240. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190517000137>
- Mahoney, K., MacSwan, J. and Thompson, M. (2005). The condition of English Language Learners in Arizona. In D. Garcia and A. Molnar, eds., *The Condition of PreK-12 Education in Arizona*. Tempe, AZ: Education Policy Research Laboratory, Arizona State University, pp. 1–24.
- McNeil, L. M. (1986). *Contradictions of Control: School Structure and School Knowledge*. New York: Routledge.
- Rampton, B. (2007). Language crossing and redefining reality. In P. Auer, ed., *Code-Switching in Conversation: Language, Interaction and Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Thompson, M. S., DiCerbo, K., Mahoney, K. S. and MacSwan, J. (2002). ¿Éxito en California? A validity critique of language program evaluations and analysis of English learner test scores. *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 10(7). <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v10n7.2002>
- Valencia, R. (2010). *Dismantling Contemporary Deficit Thinking in Educational Thought and Practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Willis, P. (1977). *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. Farnborough: Saxon House.