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**A Sociocultural and Critical Analysis of Educational Policies and Programs for
Minority Youth in British Columbia¹**

by

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Abstract: The education of immigrant and minority youth in Canada is a complex matter reflecting the social heterogeneity and policy framework of this nation. Canada's official federal policies of French and English bilingualism and multiculturalism are integral to Canada's definition of its national identity. While these policies are set federally (and provincially in Quebec), provincial ministries of education and local school districts have discretionary power to develop educational policies, programs and practices for immigrant and minority students at all elementary and secondary school levels from kindergarten to grade twelve. In British Columbia these discretionary powers are most notably the British Columbia Multiculturalism Act (1993) and the British Columbia Language Education Policy (1995).

This paper takes a socio-cultural and critical approach to examine the implications of these policies for educational programs available to immigrant and minority youth in British Columbia. In particular the focus is on the language education programs in which immigrant and minority students are involved. These include programs for English as a second language, the provincial Conseil Scolaire Francophone and second language programs such as core French classes, French immersion programs and heritage/international languages.

Understanding how equity might be achieved requires deconstructing the complex net of relationships among policies, programs and actors in order to discern approaches that may either prevent or facilitate the full educational participation of students of immigrant and minority ancestry. The critical theoretical perspective helps to make explicit issues of linguistic, cultural and racial equity and marginalization in the education of minority and immigrant youth.

Introduction

The education of immigrant and minority youth in Canada is a complex matter reflecting the social heterogeneity and policy framework of this nation. Canada's official federal policies of French/English bilingualism and multiculturalism² are integral to Canada's definition of its national identity (Moodley, 1995: 801). While these policies are set federally (and provincially in Quebec), provincial ministries of education and local school districts have discretionary power to develop educational policies, programs and practices for immigrant and minority students at all elementary and secondary school levels from kindergarten to grade twelve. In British Columbia these discretionary powers are most notably the British Columbia Multiculturalism Act (1993) and the British Columbia Language Education Policy (1996).

In this chapter, we take a sociocultural (Bahktin 1981) and critical (Bourdieu 1991) theoretical approach to examine policies that provide a framework for educational programs available to immigrant and minority youth in the province of British Columbia. In particular we consider the language education programs in which immigrant/minority students are involved, including programs for English as a second language, the provincial *Conseil scolaire francophone* and second language programs such as, Core French classes, French Immersion programs and heritage/international languages.

From a sociocultural perspective, we see that policies, educational programs, actors and their practices are inextricably related and embedded in sociocultural contexts. Understanding how equity might be achieved requires deconstructing the complex net of relationships among policy, program and actors in order to discern approaches (in policies as well as programs) that may either prevent or facilitate full educational participation of students of immigrant and minority ancestry. The critical theoretical perspective helps to make explicit issues of linguistic, cultural and racial equity and marginalization in the education of minority and immigrant youth.

Socio-cultural Theory

We employ socio-cultural theory in two ways. Firstly, we use the ideas of Bakhtin (1981) on authoritative versus internally persuasive discourse in looking at the policies specified above. Secondly, we will use these same ideas to look at educational programs (Toohey 2000). From a sociocultural perspective, federal and provincial government policies can be viewed as instances of

² The Official Languages Act of 1969, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism of 1971, Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1981) and the Multiculturalism Act (1988).

what Bakhtin (1981) refers to as “authoritative discourses.” Commonly, authoritative discourse is viewed as hegemonic and univocal; however, our analysis suggests that it is multivocal and sometimes dissonant. In Canada we often see contrasts between the discourses articulated in federal and provincial policies. Where these differences occur in language policies, especially in British Columbia, we will specify them in our analysis. As appropriate we will also make reference to language policies in selected Canadian provinces, e.g., Alberta and Ontario.

Where research is available we also consider selected programs and consider whether and in what ways the variety of federal and provincial policy discourses are implicated in these programs. In some cases the research available (e.g., Toohey 2000; Beynon, Ilieva, Toohey and LaRocque 2001) also analyzes normative, daily educational practices and discourses in classrooms enrolling immigrant and minority students.

Looking both at the ways in which authoritative policy discourses are articulated within provincial and school district social contexts and whether and if these discourses are then explicitly and implicitly taken up within selected school and classroom locations adds an important dimension to our understanding of the educational settings available to immigrant and minority learners in Canadian classrooms. Socio-cultural theory and research designed from this orientation suggest to us that effective education requires approaches that are inclusive of diversity. Such approaches construct minority learners as participants in a socio-cultural context to which they bring rich linguistic, cultural and social resources. Conversely, defining minority learners narrowly as individuals who lack English language proficiency, without recognizing their heritage knowledge and resources, works against establishing greater equity in schools. Thus in our examination of policy and available research we seek to discern the policy provisions that might lead to the construction of programs which are inclusive and value linguistic, cultural and social diversity. We also seek to identify how these program possibilities might be blocked.

Critical Theory

Bringing Bourdieu’s (1991) critical theoretical approaches regarding the inextricable relationships between power, language and ideology to an analysis of the “political narratives” and authoritative discourses of official policies, federal and provincial, leads us to question whether these policies serve to legitimate or to marginalize the languages and cultures of immigrant and minority youth within public education (Corson 1993; Carrington and Luke 1997). We consider the implications of a critical stance for understanding the operation of liberal pluralist social views in general. We then consider implications within the domain of education and specifically in language education.

Critical theorists and researchers from a variety of academic fields, including political science (Elliott and Fleras 1999; Tator *et al.* 1995), sociology (Burnet 1979; Kallen 1982), sociology of education (Moodley 1995; Ng 1995, Rezai-Rashti 1995), and educational policy (Manzer 1994), have critiqued the discourses articulated in federal and provincial policies concerning the pluralistic potential of Canadian society. They critique these policies for focusing on celebration of cultural diversity rather than attending to endemic and persistent power inequalities related to minority racial and linguistic status, and to gender. In particular the critiques focus on the guarantee of rights to individuals rather than groups. Discourses embedded in many federal and provincial policies are presumably designed to open up access to society for all. However, the liberal ideological context in which these policies were constructed emphasizes access for individuals rather than groups, and this creates barriers for some individuals. Liberal pluralism:

“endorse[s] the universal notion that what we have in common is more important than what separates us, that what we accomplish as individuals in an openly competitive environment is more important than who we are as members of a group” (Elliott and Fleras 1999: 122).

Only First Nations, French and English minorities in Canada are accorded group rights. Manzer (1994: 226) refers to these exceptions as examples of “ethical liberalism.” In ethical liberalism, membership in cultural communities is recognized and linguistic choice is endorsed.

Critical theorists argue that avoiding the issue of minority-group rights (other than for English and French minorities) implicitly asserts the ascendancy of the white Anglo-Celtic majority, and that the practical results of these policy narratives is assimilation (or Anglo-conformity). This assimilation is attended by loss of diverse linguistic and cultural repertoires; it also reinforces a hierarchical political and economic structuring of society, with entitlement and power still vested in the mainstream.

The liberal pluralist emphasis on individual achievement has important consequences for the positioning of minority students in mainstream educational institutions. Looking at the achievements of individuals diverts our attention from the differential power in schools (and society) of mainstream and minority groups. The valorized goal of the education system conceptualized within the liberal pluralist framework is then to assimilate individual minority and immigrant students into this mainstream.

As McCarthy reminds us, if schools are “not conceptualized as sites of power and contestation [with] differential interests, resources and capacities determin[ing] the maneuverability

of competing racial groups” (1990: 56), then the established power of English-speaking groups implicit in mainstream institutions is seen as a natural phenomena not open to question.

Finally we will consider language policies and programs from this critical theoretical stance. As we have seen, the critical theoretical position suggests that mainstream school practices construct schools as spaces devoid of racial, lingual or cultural group dynamics. We argue that language programs which define learning in terms of linguistic proficiency alone, unconnected to learners’ experiences, knowledge and identities as members of diverse socio-cultural linguistic communities, are a manifestation of this liberal pluralist ideology. Hence we see the critical importance of multicultural and anti-racist educational approaches as an integral part of the shared educational experiences of mainstream and minority students.

Practices constructed solely from concerns about English language proficiency can act to relegate minority students to peripheral positions in the social life of the school. In bringing students into the centre of the school it is important not only to critically assess the individualism implicit in policy discourses, but also to understand the kinds of discourses within the schools themselves which might support or preclude equitable participation. It is in this regard that socio-cultural theory and research formulated from a socio-cultural perspective are valuable. These socio-cultural approaches provide insight into the types of educational approaches which would likely work to create inclusion and equity for learners by building on, rather than negating, their connections to their families and communities.

We see that the socio-cultural and critical theoretical perspectives are complementary. The power differences and inequalities revealed by critical analysis must be acknowledged and addressed if non-dominant groups are to be able to influence the authoritative discourses and educational practices attended to by socio-cultural theory.

The Canadian Federal Policy Context

The Official Languages Act of 1969 (revised in 1998) officially sanctioned bilingualism (increasing government support for second language instruction in French and in English, including French immersion programs)³ and incorporated into authoritative discourse a recognition of group rights.⁴ Thus there is equal institutional presence for French and English in official communications under federal jurisdiction and “where *significant public demand* exists all *individuals* are entitled to federal

³ An outcome of this policy was increased governmental support for second language instruction in French and in English, including French Immersion programs.

⁴ Federal support for French-English bilingualism was reaffirmed in the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1971) and Section 23 of the 1981 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

services in either language”⁵ (Elliott and Fleras 1999: 215, italics added). These fundamental premises are central and enduring features in the Canadian language education landscape: French and English are required, while other languages are optional and “individuals” in the minority need to make their presence known and argue their cases. The discourse is, however, ambiguous in spelling out how many individuals add up to “significant public demand,” setting the policy stage for putting the responsibility on the shoulders of minorities to establish the sufficiency of their presence.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Section 16) and the Official Languages Act also recognized the rights of Canadian citizens to have their children receive primary and secondary school instruction in the language of the English or French linguistic minority population of a province. Where numbers warrant, these services would be provided out of public funds. This means, for example, that Anglophones living in Quebec and Francophones living in other provinces who have received their primary education in English and French, respectively, have a right to have their children receive primary and secondary school instruction in that language. This is the only set of circumstances in which educational matters are dealt with in the Charter.

This right also extends to immigrants to Canada who were educated in either official language outside the country. Under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, they can claim the right to have their children receive instruction in the same official language they were educated in themselves. For example, children of immigrant families living in British Columbia whose parents were educated in French have the right to enrol in the Francophone School Authority and be educated in French. They also qualify if they have siblings who were educated in French.

With the enactment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Francophone parent groups across the country claimed their right to have their own school authority. In 1990 the Supreme Court of Canada handed down a decision concerning the Mahé case in Alberta that confirmed the right of Francophones to their own educational system. This had an impact on the provision of educational services to Francophones in British Columbia, as will be described in a later section.

For language groups other than French and English, Section 15 of the Charter is relevant. It states:

Every *individual* is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability (italics added).

⁵ Thus there is equal institutional presence for French and English in official communication that is under federal jurisdiction: “Where *significant public demand* exists all *individuals* are entitled to federal services in either language” (Fleras & Elliot 1999, p. 215; italics added).

In this oft-cited and fundamentally important section, reference to individuals rather than groups is apparent and no mention is made of languages. Hence only where French and English are specified do we see that the Charter is protective of language rights.

A consistent authoritative discourse with regard to English and French, and a contrasting discourse regarding languages other than English and French, is then articulated in the Multiculturalism Act (1988). This is the second instance (after the Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism) in federal documents where languages other than English and French are acknowledged in a substantial way. Here the government is portrayed as having an active role to play. For example, it states that it is the policy of the government of Canada to “preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French, while strengthening the status and use of official languages of Canada,” and that all federal institutions “make use, as appropriate, of the language skills and cultural understanding of individuals of all origins.” This seems different to us than the previous approach of leaving all responsibility in the hands of the individual/minority group to lobby for appropriate services.

From a critical theoretical perspective we see that the Multiculturalism Act moves beyond the royal commission (1971) recommendation that heritage language be an option, to a more forceful discourse of “preserving and enhancing” heritage languages. We see potentially, in this modulation of liberal pluralist philosophy, an instance of ethical pluralism, but it is not clear how this preservation and enhancement might be taken up within provincial education. Against this federal policy background which initially omits and subsequently expresses an intention to preserve and enhance languages other than English and French, we now examine relevant policies in British Columbia.

The Policy and Program Context of British Columbia

Educational programs for immigrant and minority youth in British Columbia have developed and been implemented in the context of the federal policies outlined above, and in the context of the B.C. provincial policies regarding language, multiculturalism and language education outlined below. The British Columbia Multiculturalism Act (1993)⁶ does not address issues regarding Canada’s official languages, and in this respect it differs from the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is

⁶ There are several authoritative policy and program documents related to the B.C. Multiculturalism Act. For example, the Ministry of Education has a set of Multicultural principles derived from it that address "weaving multiculturalism into the daily program, assessing materials, taking action against racism"--again no specific references to language are made. Both Multiculturalism B.C. and the B.C. Human Rights Commission have educational programs as part of their policy mandate. As well, Heritage Canada funds some educational programs.

similar to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, however, in that it fails to explicitly and specifically address issues relating to languages other than English and French. Rather, it states:

It is the policy of the government to foster the ability of each British Columbian, *regardless* of race, cultural heritage, religion, ethnicity, ancestry or place of origin, to share in the economic, social, cultural and political life of British Columbia in a manner that is consistent with the rights and responsibilities of that *individual* as a member of the society of British Columbia (italics added).

The above statement of intent seems to us to fully embrace a liberal pluralist perspective where the individual is constructed as having rights and responsibilities and these accrue to the individual in spite of, rather than because of, his or her sources of identification. Whether language is understood to be a part of cultural heritage is ambiguous.

Greater clarity regarding language is apparent in the British Columbia “Language Education Policy” (1995), which has four objectives, one of which ensures the supremacy of English:

“The Government of British Columbia will ensure that all students have the opportunity to achieve proficiency in the English Language.”

In Bourdieu’s (1991) terms, this objective legitimizes knowledge of English as the linguistic capital to be valued in the field of schooling. Another objective guarantees the collective rights of Francophones:

“The Government of British Columbia will ensure children whose parents qualify under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms have the opportunity to be educated in French.”

The particular interests of students of Aboriginal ancestry are “recognized,” and it is noted that they should have opportunities for learning Aboriginal languages. However, this recognition falls short of the government commitment accorded Francophones. The policy states:

“The Government of British Columbia recognizes that all students, in particular those of First Nations ancestry, should have the opportunity to learn a First Nations language with the support of the Aboriginal community (italics added).”

The fourth objective concerns languages other than English, French and Aboriginal. The policy opens up possibilities for, but does not commit to, the availability of instruction in these languages:

“The Government of British Columbia will ensure all students will have the opportunity to learn languages that are significant within our communities.”

In this section we shall discuss school programs which have developed within the context of these two provincial policies, under three headings: English as a second language (ESL) education;

Conseil Scolaire Francophone; and second language education, including French immersion programs, core French programs and heritage/international language programs. Other related provincial documents are introduced and discussed as appropriate

English as a Second Language Education

The B.C. “Language Education Policy” (1995) addresses English as a second language education by asserting:

The Ministry of Education will ensure that all students, whether born in British Columbia or immigrated to the Province, who require assistance with learning English will have opportunities to establish their English language skills. English as a Second Language will be offered as a transitional program to facilitate the integration of these students into regular classes as quickly as possible.

Integration, then, appears to be defined as focusing on the development of English language skills, with no particular attention to the maintenance of, or instruction in, first languages. Rather, the two areas are constructed as separate domains in the curriculum and the school.

The B.C. “English as a Second Language Policy Framework” (1999) is a prominent authoritative discourse which specifies concerns regarding the government’s continuous commitment to language education and equal access to services in the B.C. school system (B.C. 1981 and 1984). The focus here shall be an analysis of the ideals framed by this authoritative discourse. To the extent that other provinces have officially expressed similar objectives, the present analysis of the B.C. situation indicates key areas educators and policy-makers in other settings could usefully examine.

In B.C., ESL students are defined as “those whose primary language(s), or language(s) of the home, is/are other than English, and who may therefore require additional services in order to develop their individual potential” (B.C. 1999: 6). ESL student’s needs are viewed as related language proficiency, intellectual development and citizenship, which should be fulfilled “in a school environment which values diversity, bridges cultures and works to eliminate racism” (B.C. 1999: 7). The need for ESL services to distinguish between social and academic communicative competencies (academic competence is viewed as taking longer time to achieve) is also noted. Thus the current authoritative policy discourse reflects a concern for equity (Ashworth 1988; Cummins 1984 and 1996; Gunderson 2000; Toohey 1992 and 2000). It remains to be seen to what extent this policy discourse is reflected in programs currently in place in the province.

Illustrative of earlier policies guiding ESL program development are the statements that the needs of English as a second language/dialect ESL/d students must be met in such a way that their

native “language and culture are supplemented and not supplanted,” “integration is preferable to assimilation,” “mutual respect between different cultures must be encouraged” and the “success of the ESL/d program [is tied to] interaction and understanding between the student, the school and the student’s home” (B.C. 1981: 4). These statements point to the existence of authoritative discourses in the policy area of ESL services provision that take into account the importance of respecting students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds in ESL program delivery. However, as will be illustrated by research presented here, in many cases such authoritative discourse does not appear to have translated into an internally persuasive discourse for the deliverers of such programs.

A similar authoritative discourse is evident in the policy provisions of the other provinces in Canada (Ontario, Alberta and Manitoba) (Ashworth 1988; Flaherty and Woods 1992; James 2001). Ashworth (1988: 104–105) summarizes these discourses as follows:

The philosophy [of the education of immigrant children] today... in most provinces tends to cover the three areas of language, academics, and culture.... Most provinces add a rider that in achieving these goals, it is important to ensure that students maintain a pride in their first language and culture.

She specifies, however, that “ESL/d programs do not take responsibility for maintaining students’ first languages and cultures except indirectly by encouragement.”

The variety of documentary, survey and socio-cultural research on questions of supporting immigrant and minority students in learning English in British Columbia suggest that areas of dissonance between policy and programs are apparent with respect to equity in providing services. Areas of concern are the adequacy of ESL support in the school system, the overall atmosphere and climate of the school, especially in regard to issues of race and marginalization, and the place of first languages in the educational system. Whereas documentary/survey research gives an overview of what is actually happening compared to authoritative discourses set out in policy, socio-cultural research provides a more in-depth look at the dynamics of how ESL is transacted, and vividly describes how the intentions of policy get lost in daily practice.

Adequacy of Resources

The B.C. Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) research (Naylor 1994) surveyed the views of ESL teachers, staff and parents on the adequacy of support. With a few exceptions, respondents felt the needs of ESL/d students were not being met by current provisions. Insufficient ESL instructional time, and the complexity of the ESL teachers’ role, including high ESL enrolments and substantial non-teaching duties, are implicated. Parents would like to see improved communication between the

schools and the local communities, greater cultural awareness among teachers, improved ESL curriculum and the promotion of self-esteem and pride in cultural identity.

Gunderson's (2000) B.C. studies of 35,000 immigrant students from a variety of national origins and socio-economic levels also point to some inadequacies of ESL service provision. Eighty-five percent of the respondents viewed Canadian pedagogical approaches negatively compared to approaches in their countries of origin. Lower socio-economic status (SES) students viewed ESL classes positively. Higher SES students were concerned that ESL classes were "places for second-class students, those who had little chance to go on to university," and they felt that "ESL classes were best when they taught academic stuff" (Gunderson 2000: 699). These student views confirm current pedagogical approaches which embed English language instruction in the curriculum content areas (Early, Mohan and Hooper 1989; Swain 1996).

Of particular importance is the indication that in the year the ministry of education published its ESL policy framework (1999), it also imposed a five-year cap on funding that has eliminated ESL service for about 19,000 students. McCarthy and Foxx (2001: 6) view this cap as "the most recent example of a systemic, structural barrier to equitable treatment." A structural barrier to equitable treatment of ESL students seems to be evident as well in the Alberta provincial educational policy which has created a mandatory age for students to leave high school. The research of Derwing *et al.* (1999) suggests that at least 10 percent of the ESL students in one Alberta school board district were pushed out of school by the provincially mandated age limits and overall only 54 percent of high school ESL students graduated, compared to 70 percent of all students in Alberta.

Overall Climate of the School

Concerns over marginalization and racism are evident in many of the studies already referred to. For example, relevant to critical theoretical issues of power, and the inclusion or marginalization of ESL, teacher respondents in the BCTF's survey indicated that, while ESL students and teachers are included in school events, there is also evidence that:

ESL is the subject of systematic discrimination in schools. Such discrimination is epitomized by practices such as room allocation (when ESL takes what is left after other needs are met) and by district and government in terms of funding. Such discrimination essentially means that, in view of the respondents, ESL/ESD provision has a lower status than most other teaching areas in schools, among district administrators and as reflected in government priorities. (Naylor 1994: 2)

Parents in BCTF's focus group interviews also expressed a concern with regard to issues of segregation and racism. In Gunderson's (2000) study about half of the respondents reported instances

of racism. In a project that provided an in-depth analysis of an ESL career education program (Beynon, Ilieva, Toohey and LaRocque 2001), both staff and students pointed to significant difficulties related to their invisibility, stigmatization and isolation in the school context. These were evident, for example, in the modification of the program's original model due to exigencies of class scheduling at the administrative level and the expectations for ESL co-op students integrated into "regular classes" to meet curricular obligations in the same way other students do. Some students sensed and articulated feelings of prejudice against them by other students and some teachers as well.

Roles of First Languages

Some studies also indicate that ESL students' first languages and cultures are inadequately accounted for in the school system. Toohey (1992: 93) observes:

In very few cases have we recognized students' minority languages as resources upon which to base further instruction. We continue to define our students in terms of what they do not know and we continue to ignore their strengths.

Gunderson's (2000) study found that teachers discouraged the use of students' first languages, while students felt their learning of academic content in English would have been greatly improved if they had been allowed to consult bilingual dictionaries or bilingual classmates. In addition, whereas students did not feel bilingual classes would have been more helpful, about 30 percent suggested that bilingual teachers would have been helpful in providing explanations in the first language of difficult material. Telling stories of lost sense of identity among the immigrant youth he studied, Gunderson concludes that, "in many ways, the degree of a student's success in school in Canada is a direct measure of the degree of first cultural loss. As teachers, we must begin to value the languages our students speak" (2000: 703). Some positive aspects of first language use by teachers of minority ancestry in accommodating the language, cultural identity and curriculum content needs of minority and immigrant students in B.C. schools as well as in school and community communications have already been documented (Hirji and Beynon 2000; Beynon, Ilieva and Dichupa 2001). Parents and teachers in BCTF's research also stress the importance of having more bilingual and bicultural personnel available.

The Francophone School Authority

The creation in 1992 of the B.C. Francophone School Authority builds on the provincial Programme Cadre de Français, available since 1978 to minority Francophone students. Programme Cadre de Français was delivered through the English language school districts of the province. Citing the Mahé case in neighbouring Alberta, which set the precedent for the group rights of minority Francophones,

in 1992 the French language community successfully pressured the British Columbia government to allow Francophones to provide educational services in French to the Francophone community of the province (Vinet 1993; Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique 1999).

Throughout the authoritative discourses in federal and provincial policy documents the Francophone language group is referred to as a collectivity. References which acknowledge the diversity of national and linguistic origins within this group and educational provisions for this diversity are less apparent. For example, the Francophone School Authority makes a commitment “to participate actively in the development of the Francophone collectivity of British Columbia”... and to “offer[ing] programs and educational services that value the full blossoming and cultural identity of Francophone learners” (Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique 1999: 4, *ad hoc* translation).

This mission statement does not acknowledge that this collectivity is composed of French speakers living in various regions of the province who have a diversity of cultural, national and social origins. Heterogeneous views of culture and identity relating to diverse origins and personal experiences within the B.C. Francophone School Authority were addressed in Arcand’s (2000) interview-based study with teachers, principals, administrators and school trustees. Arcand skillfully argues that a dialectic of enculturation and acculturation is aimed at developing Francophone group culture and identity. This attempt to create a collectivity stands in contrast to participants’ multi-voiced and contradictory internally persuasive discourses on the school’s cultural mission as it applies to children of diverse origins. Debates over individual versus collective rights and the heterogeneous, multi-dimensional nature of culture and identity are unresolved and laden with issues of power.

Neither does the discourse of the ministry of education’s official program and resource document for Francophone schools acknowledge cultural diversity within the Francophone collectivity. This document unequivocally gives primacy to the French language as constitutive of students’ identity and culture, and the likelihood that students will be involved with other languages is not addressed. The document specifies that students will “explore their own cultural identity, live in French and assume their responsibilities as Francophones as well as creating their own cultural space” (B.C. 1994: 5, *ad hoc* translation).

The above-outlined official discourses thus affirm the importance of the French language as a symbolic means of resisting the hegemonic presence of English in the province. Positioned within a historical French-English duality, this discourse eclipses the diverse languages of the student population in the Francophone schools, as has occurred elsewhere in Canada (Laferrière 1985; Burgess and Henchey 1987).

In contrast to the discourse of linguistic and cultural uniformity, some potential for acknowledging diversity is articulated in an authoritative discourse on individual rights specified in the commitment to “offer quality programs of study adapted to the individual needs of students and fostering their development in terms of linguistic, cultural and community vitality” (CSFCB 1999: 7, *ad hoc* translation). While the individual is the focus in this discourse, it remains unclear whether students are understood to internalize singular linguistic, cultural and community identities or a plurality of identities.

Second Language Education

As an outcome of the Official Languages Act, French immersion programs have been well established in B.C. for some time. The B.C. language education policy statement curiously makes no reference to French immersion but does require that districts offer a second language in grades five through eight to all students (students with special needs are exempted).⁷ While French is commonly offered to meet the second language requirement, especially through core French programs, the B.C. language education policy opens up opportunities for other languages — referred to as “heritage” or “international” languages — to be introduced.

French Immersion Programs

Federal financial support for French immersion was involved in an experimental second language program in a suburb of Montreal in 1971, and in the rapid spread of immersion to all Canadian provinces. In British Columbia, the first immersion program opened in Coquitlam in 1973 (Day and Shapson 1996).

Heller (1990) suggests that generous funding in this area was seen as a means of protecting the rights of French and English language groups and reducing tensions between them. Observing that French immersion education began to interest Anglophones at the same time that Francophones acquired greater economic and political status in Quebec, Heller argues that French immersion education and French-English bilingualism were pursued by Anglophones in order to maintain economic and political power.

French immersion programs were thus typically described as serving a middle-class English-speaking population, and thirty years of research repeatedly demonstrated that immersion pedagogy promotes learning and bilingualism for majority language speakers (Genesee 1987; Lapkin, Swain and Shapson 1990). However, not all children enrolled in the program are from English-speaking

⁷ Students with special needs are exempted from studying a second language.

families, as a number of researchers have indicated (Dagenais and Berron 2001; Dagenais and Jacquet 2001; Hurd 1993; Lamarre 1997; Swain and Lapkin 1991; Taylor 1992), and recently educators have reported an increase in children of diverse language backgrounds in urban French immersion classrooms. Because little is known about the social, academic and linguistic development of students from diverse backgrounds in immersion classrooms (Taylor 1992), the French Lower Mainland Consortium of British Columbia and the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers have called for research on these French immersion students.

Dagenais and Day (1998 and 1999) have documented the positive learning experiences of children of diverse backgrounds in Canadian French immersion programs. Interviews with immigrant parents who have chosen to enrol their children in French immersion programs reveal the complexity of their educational choices and the broad perspective they adopt in opting for this particular program alternative (Dagenais 2003). The discourse of immigrant parents indicates that they have internalized official discourse on the importance of French-English bilingualism in the national context and opt for French immersion as a means of ensuring their children's national integration and access to powerful official language communities. At the same time, they adopt a transnational perspective, referring to international markets and their ties to their language communities in Canada and abroad, to attribute both economic and symbolic value to languages in their children's repertoires.

The diversity of the French immersion student population has begun to be addressed in the discourse of some curriculum materials produced for the program. For example, a teacher's handbook of intercultural activities produced by the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers (1995: 7) acknowledges this explicitly:

For many of our students, French is their third or fourth language. This is even more evident now that we consider ethnic diversification in our society as a richness: More children are encouraged to maintain their heritage languages and have access to means of doing so. Each child thus arrives in class rich in his/her own cultural experience (*ad hoc* translation).

Citing Paulo Freire's definition of culture as "all human creation," including language, objects, art, behaviours, customs, habits and ideas, the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers (1995) recommends activities that explore diverse cultural practices, develop communication and foster cooperation. In valuing diversity and interculturalism, this document legitimates minority learners, recognizes their resources and validates their experiences.

Core French Programs

With the expansion of French immersion programs in the 1970s, the viability of traditional core French as a second language course was re-examined by a commission on French as a second language. This examination led to the development of the “National Core French Study” (CASALT 1994), which proposed the implementation of a revised national syllabus. The discourse on culture adopted in this syllabus explicitly grounds itself in a national authoritative discourse on Canada as a multicultural society. As specified in the following aims, the syllabus legitimizes the cultural resources of learners of diverse origins:

- cultural focus to prepare students to live in Canadian society by building on the multicultural background of Core French learners in ways that validate their own culture and increase their awareness of others’ cultures;
- general language education that employs awareness strategies regarding how languages are learned and fosters comparisons between diverse languages and cultures.

To facilitate the transition from policy to practice, the British Columbia Ministry of Education, Skills and Training has published "Integrated Resource Packages" (IRP) for Core French grades five to twelve. These IRP’s draw on curricular orientations outlined in the National Core French Study and specify how various aspects of the curriculum should be addressed at each grade level.

It is noteworthy that in addition to expecting students to make explicit elements of their own and their classmates' cultural backgrounds, this curriculum document refers to Francophone cultures in the plural, recognizing not only the cultural backgrounds of students but also the plurality of Francophone cultural groups as well. This echoes the discourse of the curriculum document on French Immersion and interculturalism and stands in contrast to the discourse on culture present in documents for the French School Authority.

Heritage/International Language Programs

In this section we take up the same four themes that informed our analysis of ESL programming, namely, the roles of first languages in the development of second or additional language proficiency; communication with parents; the overall atmosphere and climate of the school, especially in regard to issues of race and marginalization; and the adequacy of fiscal and other support. We consider these themes both in regard to the B.C. language policy (1996) and in our analysis of the handbook for parents and communities, which complements the policy itself. We also review available documentation on British Columbia programs and the discourses of the curriculum

documents, and compare these analyses with documented programs in other locations in Canada, primarily Alberta and Ontario (Canadian Education Association 1991; Tavares 2000).

The “Language Education Policy” for British Columbia requires that school districts offer a second language in grades five through eight to all students. As well, “the language taught will be chosen by the school district. If an alternative is not selected by the school district, French will be the language taught” (B.C. 1996: 4.2). Item 4.2 of this policy creates the opportunity for choice. However, it is the school district that has this power. The policy specifies that “school districts will base their selection of alternate second languages on community demand, student enrolment, availability of quality curriculum and teaching resources.” It is not clear, however, at how these decisions are to be properly arrived.

Intermediary between official B.C. policy and specific program development and implementation, the ministry of education issued A Handbook for Parents and Communities (B.C. 1997) which presents a somewhat different authoritative discourse than does the policy. This discourse appears to us, more than the policy itself, to lean away from ethical pluralism which acknowledges group rights, in the direction of liberal pluralist ideology which places considerable responsibility on minority individuals for realizing policy objectives. For example, the policy states that the government will “ensure” opportunities for all students to learn languages significant in the community, but the handbook talks of “encouraging” opportunities. We are also concerned about what appears to be an effort to exclude from heritage language classes in public schools those students for whom these are family languages. These points relate, respectively, to issues of parent involvement and funding.

For example, “recognizing that some children speak their first language very well and speak English as their second language,” the handbook defines heritage languages as “languages that students study outside of school.” It then reclassifies these as “international,” rather than “heritage,” languages. It recommends that students who take heritage language classes or who are fluent in that language study a different language in primary school, arguing that “the second language curriculum is developed for students who are just beginning to learn the second language” (1997: 8). In other words, students who take classes outside school in a language such as Punjabi or are fluent in that language are urged to study another “second” language in school. From a critical theory perspective we see that this has the potential of de-privileging minority students, as well as excluding from in-school “international” language classes those minority students who would benefit socially and educationally from participation. Rather than being defined as capable in their family languages, they are defined as incapable in English. Hence they are constructed as needing to invest school time in

learning English rather than developing their knowledge of family languages. Excluding these students also limits opportunities for building on the cultural resources that they could bring and integrating these into the educational experiences of other students.

Roles of First Languages

Authoritative research discourse on the compatibility of first and second language instruction has, it seems to us, been selectively applied or ignored across Canada in relation to the varying political climates. On the provincial political/educational scene, Alberta was, in 1971, the first province to pass legislation permitting languages other than English and French to be taught in elementary schools. This led to full-time bilingual heritage language programs within the public school system at the elementary school level.

Starting in 1971 with a Ukrainian English bilingual program, Edmonton then developed, in order, bilingual schools with German, Hebrew, Arabic and Mandarin components. Edmonton programming exemplifies the close connection between policy and program (and possibly research). The Ukrainian population was one of the main political forces lobbying for acknowledgement in federal policy of languages other than French. Political and historical analyses of the 1971 Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism commonly attribute the document “Contributions of the Other Ethnic Groups” to this lobbying (Elliott and Fleras 1999).

Critical analysis of the interplay of policy and programs in Ontario suggests that research on the compatibility of first and second language learning seems to be overridden by political concerns, and points to the hegemony of the mainstream (Author unknown 2001; James and Burnaby 2003; Cummins 2000; Cummins and Danesi 1990; Lind 1974; Masemann 1978–79). In 1977 the Ontario Ministry of Education assumed responsibility for a heritage languages policy in a way consistent with the liberal pluralist approach. Parent groups are responsible for approaching local school boards with requests that heritage language classes for elementary school children be provided. Such programming must be done as an extension of the regular five-hour school day and there are no official requirements regarding either curriculum or teacher certification. In these ways the full potential of heritage language programs for valorizing minority students and creating possibilities for engagement with mainstream students are minimized.

In B.C public schools, we note that virtually all programming (which takes the form of specific courses in additional languages, as opposed to integration of language into a variety of subjects) is at the secondary level. As well, explicit attempts to exclude from participation minority students who could benefit socially and educationally from such participation are evident. The B.C.

Ministry of Education (2001) reports that in the year 2000 there were 1,637 students who took the grade twelve provincial exam in Mandarin, 775 in Spanish, 589 in Japanese⁸ and 74 in Punjabi. The fact that these languages are “examinable” establishes them as bona fide for university entry, an important dimension in legitimating them as valued cultural capital within mainstream institutions (Bourdieu 1991). Further research is required to see if minority language speakers are in fact able to take advantage of these programs.

The only exceptions to the “second language” approach to heritage languages in B.C. are the bilingual programs in Russian-English in Castlegar and in Mandarin-English in an elementary and secondary school in Vancouver. The prominent difference between the two programs is that there are very few children in Castlegar who are fluent in Russian, so that children of a diverse range of family backgrounds are enrolled in the school. In contrast, in Vancouver, children who are Mandarin speakers could be excluded from the program because of their knowledge of the language (Mackay 2001). This construction negates the potential advantages demonstrated in research for both students of minority language ancestry and their monolingual Anglophone peers.

There are, to our knowledge, no public districts taking advantage of the policy that makes it possible to teach languages other than French as one segment in the grade five to eight curriculum, except for schools teaching First Nations languages.⁹ We note with interest that in the district of Surrey, B.C., the Punjabi Language Association of B.C. in July 2001 brought a request to the district to run a pilot program in Punjabi starting in grade five, in lieu of French. The availability of a fully developed ministry of education curriculum template (1996) for in-school instruction of Punjabi from grades five to twelve clears the way for this development.

Communication with Parents

In the Russian-English bilingual program in Castlegar, the involvement of Doukhobor and non-Doukhobor ancestry families was carefully considered. The B.C. ministry of education Heritages Language Advisory Committee, which did the groundwork for B.C. policy, carefully considered the work in Castlegar and strongly recommended that the ministry allocate resources for field development personnel to consult with parent groups across the province. This recommendation was never taken up (Beynon and Toohey 1991). There is presently no narrative documentation, which we

⁸ Secondary school Japanese classes predate the B.C. Languages policy and were introduced primarily in response to growing economic connections between B.C. and Japan in the late 1980s.

⁹ Several First nations languages which are taught in public schools in the districts of Kamloops, Prince Rupert, Nisga, and in band run schools in Mt. Currie and Anahim Lake, among others.

were able to identify, on the history of any of the other second language classes in B.C. public schools.¹⁰

Overall Climate of the School

Heritage/international languages are posited in research (Cummins and Danesi 1990) as an opportunity to create an inclusive curriculum. Our review of the comprehensive curriculum templates developed with ministry of education support indicates that considerable attention is given to approaching language education as inclusive of the rich cultural and social lives of the respective communities and connecting it to cross-curricular goals of anti-racism. While the discourse in these instructional resource packages is detailed in regard to cultural and social referents, this same discourse is ambiguous in reference to who constitutes the student audience. For example, students are asked to interview their own family members and to compare their experiences to those of the Punjabi or Chinese community. Whether the IRPs assume no students of these minority ancestries are enrolled in the classes is not made clear. We are curious to determine the actual composition of the secondary school classes in these languages and the cultural and linguistic histories of the students enrolled in them.

Adequacy of Resources

Introduction of heritage languages as second (core) languages rather than as languages of instruction in bilingual programs is related at least in part to financial considerations. Instructors teaching a few hours a week require less training than teachers in bilingual programs. Training costs rise in relation to proficiency expectations. In the case of heritage languages, teachers already credentialed with these proficiencies would be a definite asset. However, as demonstrated by Beynon, Ilieva and Dichupa (2001), there are complexities in tapping into this scarce resource. These complexities are associated with the history of school-based marginalization and discrimination experienced by the small cadre of minority teachers in B.C. public schools and teacher education programs.

The B.C. languages policy made explicit that costs of any new programming options other than curriculum development would be the responsibility of districts, not the provincial ministry of education (Beynon and Toohey 1991). Districts need then to figure out ways to fund these programs that make maximum use of already existing resources — and teachers are a major budget item. We note that the preparation of all elementary school teachers to teach French as a second language in

¹⁰ This area is the subject of a research project in its preliminary stages (LaRocque, Beynon, Ilieva)

grades five to eight has created financial demands at all levels. Most prominent are financial pressures in teacher education. There is little evidence of political will and attendant funding to increase both program development in these areas and access to these programs. Rather than emphasizing and supporting languages other than English and French it appears that the emphasis in programming is on ESL instruction.

Interpretation

The history of Canadian federal legislation and policy regarding language is complex. Adding to this complexity are the diverse provincial policies. Centrally important in federal policy is the status of (minority) French language. The status of Francophone minorities sets a precedent and a reference point for the educational aspirations, concerns and plans of diverse minority language groups.

A socio-cultural perspective on federal and provincial policies and programs helps us to see if and how the authoritative discourses (Bakhtin 1981) of federal policies are taken up in provincial policies and in the discourses of educational programming. From this perspective we can see that federal authoritative discourses give more recognition to the status of minority languages than do the parallel discourses of provincial policy. Within the social context of local district educational programming there is even less evidence that programs identified as possibilities from a provincial policy perspective might be translated into practice. For example, the B.C. ESL policy documents and the B.C. languages policy (1996) identify programming possibilities well informed by research. However, a range of factors, including financial constraints, construct barriers to possible programs. We see that different groups have had differential success in “inserting their own intentions” (Bakhtin 1981) into these discourses. Notwithstanding the fact that they had to take their case to court to have their rights recognized, Francophones have had the right to speak and win an audience more easily than other minorities in Canada generally and in B.C. particularly. First Nations and other diverse minority language groups have to expend more energy to be heard (Bourdieu 1991). Moreover, these diverse minority groups have to be able to voice their concerns and assert their contentions in English or French.

From a critical theory perspective (Manzer 1994; Bourdieu 1991; Elliott and Fleras 1999) we can see that Canada’s federal “ethical” liberal ideology has opened up possibilities for pluralism. However, except in the cases of Francophones and First Nations, the responsibility (with no guarantees of success in provincial contexts) for making pluralism a reality rests with individuals who must lobby in one of the two official languages in order to be heard. Historically Alberta has played a prominent role in setting the policy stage and implementing programs. Lobbying from Alberta put

minority languages on the federal agenda thirty years ago, albeit in a position unequal in status to French. Shortly thereafter, Alberta established classes within public school curricula in a number of heritage languages. British Columbia only began addressing these issues ten years ago.

In British Columbia, possibilities for minority languages education have been whittled away. We have seen that even when the authoritative discourse of official policy (e.g., the ministry of education “Languages Education Policy”) seems to open doors, the very same agency can begin to close these doors (with, for example, the Handbook for Parents and Communities). ESL is the pervasive programming that immigrant parents and their children will encounter in their neighbourhood schools. Even within the context of ESL, we see that professional associations like the teacher’s federation (Naylor 1994) and comprehensive research (Gunderson 2000) can supply ample evidence that exclusive focus on English language proficiency is a narrow approach to what ought to be understood as a complex educational experience. Current research and policy relating to ESL strongly advocate recognition of and attention to children’s family languages and cultures. Curriculum theory also underscores the importance of multicultural and anti-racist education in creating the inclusive social environment that is a prerequisite to engagement and learning (Dei 1996; Ghosh 1996; Lee 1985; McCarthy 1990; Rezai-Rashti 1995; see also chapter 5). Nevertheless current documentation of programming and outcomes in B.C (Gunderson 2000; Naylor 1994) demonstrates the variety of ways in which individual children and families are put “up against” the apparently monolithic system of English unilingualism. There are indications that these issues are also present in French language programs (Arcand 2000).

In spite of authoritative provincial policy discourses (B.C. multiculturalism policy, ministry of education multicultural principles) which valorize diversity, anti-racism and instructional approaches that build on rather than obliterate family languages, the realities are vastly different. Funding is one impediment to full implementation of policy. Parent involvement falls by the wayside as local districts face budget cuts. For example, Burnaby, a lower mainland school district with ESL enrolments of over 40 percent, recently cut its twenty-year-old program of multicultural home school liaison workers because of budget shortfalls (Weir 2001: 1). Teacher training is also problematic. Many enrolling classroom teachers still have no preparation to respond to minority learners in ways that acknowledge their potential for being multilingual rather than treating them as lacking English.

In-school heritage language programs could potentially help students to become bilingual or multilingual, but we have seen that apparent shortages of qualified teachers (Hirji and Beynon 2000; Beynon, Ilieva and Dichupa 2001) and policy discourses that valorize English and leave organizational work to immigrant parents make it difficult to establish these. Moreover, particularly

in British Columbia it seems that the policy is being interpreted to favour teaching heritage languages only to those individuals who have no facility in them (Mackay 2001; B.C. 1997). We understand that (unofficially) local schools are inserting their own intentions into these policy discourses in order to include minority language students. Nevertheless we see that the provincial policy (re)definition of heritage languages as international languages appropriates these from the potential educational biographies of minority language students and interpolates them into the educational biographies of mainstream students. From a socio-cultural perspective we see this as a missed opportunity for constructing potentially inclusive settings where minority and mainstream peers of many backgrounds might have opportunities for positive interactions with one another.

On a positive note, the B.C. curriculum for these heritage/international languages appears to be state of the art and inclusive. The instructional resource packages for teaching minority languages incorporate rich cultural resources and opportunities for anti-racist and multicultural education. Noting that these curricula were modeled after authoritative nationally developed templates for French language instruction elucidates one way in which the official status of French has been beneficial to educational programming in other minority languages.

Recommendations

Bakhtin (1981: 342) wrote about authoritative discourse that “it is privileged language that approaches us from without... it is connected with a past that is hierarchically higher [than our internal thoughts and feelings].... It is a prior discourse... given in lofty spheres.” It is the ways in which we insert our intentions and make these discourses our own that leads these authoritative discourses to become internally persuasive, meaningful and influential in guiding our actions and practices. Put pragmatically, policy is a necessary but insufficient condition for the realization of programs. Research, task force reports and theory are also authoritative discourses which need to be internalized before they can become meaningful. What interrupts the process whereby these authoritative discourses become internally persuasive? The answers are many. For example, critical theory alerts us to the fact that systems set up to encode the privilege of those in power tend to stay firmly rooted in place. When institutional structures have historically privileged the mainstream, it takes considerable effort and energy to change this course, and most of the effort needs to come from minorities willing to challenge the system. Many immigrant minorities are focused on establishing themselves in a new country where employment and domestic needs are understandably paramount. Challenging the systems in place is not easily undertaken. In combination with the fact that

mainstream institutions don't automatically provide the kinds of alternative programs recommended in research, it is easy to see how historical norms continue to prevail.

Change will require engaging district administrators and trustees, and ministry officials, in dialogues with minority language advocates. These, mainly mainstream, education professionals will need to internalize discourses which articulate that the educational interests of all students (mainstream and minority) will best be served by bringing minorities more centrally into the life of the school. We have seen how ESL programming tends to define learners as deficient and to push them to the periphery of school activity. Issues regarding space allocation, racism and funding construct systemic barriers to integration and put the responsibility for change on the shoulders of the individual students and their parents. At the same time, minority language programs, which could draw on the resources of these children and families, instead define these children out of the classroom ("they need to learn English first") and push them to the periphery.

Public education professionals are positioned to initiate change. But first they need to internalize the idea that the resources brought to school by minority students and their parents would be a contribution to the learning of all students. Often those in positions to make changes say they must respond to the will of the majority. Our work with teachers of minority ancestry indicates that they are advocates within the system and they are forming alliances with a range of colleagues to develop their own internally persuasive discourses about inclusivity serving the best interests of all students. Work undertaken by the BCTF indicates that just as there are many who want to maintain the status quo, there are also mainstream teachers who see that challenging this status quo is essential in order to meet their students' educational interests. We think it is necessary for more and more teachers, administrators, trustees and officials to see the importance of inclusive approaches that respond to the needs of all. There is ample authoritative discourse to back them up as they take steps to initiate engagement among diverse students and parents, both minority and mainstream.

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