Exploring ideological becoming in professional development for teachers of multilingual learners: Perspectives on translanguaging in the classroom

Jennifer Holdway [a, b, *], Caryl H. Hitchcock [b]

[a] Study Abroad Canada Language Institute, 223 Queen Street, PO Box 3231, Charlottetown, PE, C1A 7N9, Canada
[b] Center on Disability Studies, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 1410 Lower Campus Road #171F, Honolulu, HI, 96822, USA

HIGHLIGHTS

- Teachers experienced increased ideological awareness related to English monolingualism.
- Teachers' perceptions and attitudes changed regarding translanguaging as a classroom resource.
- Teachers gained self-confidence in realizing what they are doing is beneficial for students.

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This paper explores teachers' perspectives on the pedagogical resource of using students' first languages in the classroom. The authors implemented this action research case study within the context of a larger 15-week online, asynchronous, professional development course, where K-12 in-service public school teacher-participants were introduced to translanguaging and engaged in study and reflection on current practices and the benefits of including students' first languages in learning. This paper reports on the responses of seven representative teacher-participants from Hawai'i, USA, on their learning, with findings showing varied acceptance and resistance to encouraging and supporting their students' first language in the classroom.

© 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

This study explores ideological becoming through the pedagogical resource of using students' first language in the classroom. It is set within the context of a larger 15-week online, asynchronous, professional development course for K-12 in-service public school teacher-participants in the content area of math. The authors designed and implemented the course to address a need identified by classroom teachers for resources and teaching strategies to support learning for their multilingual learners (MLLs).[1] Teachers engaged in study and reflection, discussion with their peers, and an applied 8-week case study with 2—4 MLL students in their classrooms. Teachers were introduced to the concept of translanguaging as well as the benefits of including students' first language in their learning. In addition, teachers had the opportunity to discuss multiple topics of concern—related to both pedagogy and ideology—that are relevant to the current education system in the United States and Hawai'i in particular; this provided the teacher-participants the space to challenge their current pedagogies, ideologies, and subsequent practices.

More specifically, this study explores the following questions as a means to learn more about K-12 in-service teachers' learning regarding MLL math-specific pedagogy and ideological becoming. It

* Corresponding author. Center on Disability Studies, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 1410 Lower Campus Road #171F, Honolulu, HI, 96822, USA.
E-mail addresses: jholdway@hawaii.edu (J. Holdway), chh@hawaii.edu (C.H. Hitchcock).

[1] 'Multilingual learners' is used in this study rather than 'limited English proficient' or 'English language learner'. This is done intentionally to address the fact that the latter two describe students in deficit terms. Instead, "when students see themselves (and know that their teachers see them) as emergent bilinguals, they are much more likely to take pride in their linguistic abilities and talents than if they are defined in deficit terms" (Cummins, in García & Kleifgen, 2010, p. x). In taking this meaning a step further, we choose to use the term *multilingual learners* instead of emergent bilinguals to further recognize the diversity of students' linguistic abilities.

presents excerpts from written reflections by the teacher-participants documenting their new teaching practices and ideologies as they work daily with MLLs. These questions include:

- What are in-service teachers' beliefs about language in content learning (i.e., first language use as an equitable and effective classroom practice), and what role do they see themselves playing in supporting the teaching and learning process?
- How do in-service teachers' beliefs—including ideologies and practices—change during participation in a long-term professional development course focused on strategies for teaching mathematics to MLLs?

Through working with K-12 in-service teachers in learning MLL pedagogy with a specific focus on math, the teachers could explore and critically reflect on their current teaching practices and how what they learned could impact their teaching and learning in a positive way. Teacher-participants additionally had opportunities to become aware of and potentially change their previously unrecognized ideologies, referred to as 'ideological awareness' or 'ideological becoming' (e.g., Bakhtin, 1981; Ball, 2012). These pedagogies and ideologies directly relate to teaching MLLs and working within classrooms and an education system that also has its own covert and overt, conscious and subconscious ideologies.

By providing teachers with MLL pedagogy change and engaging in written reflections as part of a professional development course, this study addresses equitable education to meet local needs while providing teachers with a platform to critically explore relevant classroom practices and ideological beliefs; through the experience of ideological awareness and transformative learning, it contributes to creating broader transformative practices and more effective culturally and linguistically equitable instruction. It also helps to build teacher confidence in recognizing what they are doing as legitimate and providing positive change, and helping those teachers who are not yet aware see that what they are doing is transformative.

The notion of ideological becoming (Bakhtin, 1981) plays a role in challenging and negotiating teachers' ideologies and attitudes. It is necessary for mainstream teachers of MLLs to recognize their personal and professional "ideological points of view, approaches, …and values" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 346) and how these influence their current teaching practice; and, once knowing, to continue on to bring about change. As Ball (2012) explains, 'to know is not enough,' and there is thus a need to connect new knowledge with practice. In a similar vein, Bartolomé (2004) uses the term 'ideological clarity' to describe the process of struggle and change: "the juxtaposing of ideologies should help teachers to better understand if, when, and how their belief systems uncritically reflect those of the dominant society and thus maintain unequal and what should be unacceptable conditions that so many students experience on a daily basis" (p. 98). In the context of mainstream teachers of MLLs, ideologies and attitudes can affect teacher practice on a daily basis, having a detrimental impact on the education of linguistically diverse students.

This study has both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of language education. A review of the literature revealed a dearth of studies focused on both ideological becoming and teacher

beliefs on the use of first languages with students who are MLLs (Ball, 2000, 2009; Freedman & Ball, 2004).[2] Ideological becoming is "how we develop our way of viewing the world, our system of ideas" (Freedman & Ball, 2004, p. 5), referred to by Bakhtin (1981) as an ideological self and represents the whole person as a set of complex ideas. Ideological becoming additionally includes the social process that influence peoples' perceptions and understandings about the world and which occur in an ideological environment (Freedman & Ball, 2004), such as a classroom. Within this social process are two forms of discourse: authoritative and internally persuasive (Bakhtin, 1981); authoritative discourse is a prior discourse that is afforded more power because of its authority or pervasiveness, while internally persuasive discourse is "what each person thinks for himself or herself, what ultimately is persuasive to the individual" (Freedman & Ball, 2004, p. 12). As an example of ideological becoming in a teacher education course, Ball (2000) reports on a program offered in South Africa to help teachers become better prepared to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students. This study explores the changing perspectives of 100 pre- and in-service teachers while exposed to readings and activities that were chosen for a specific purpose; namely, to help positively affect the teachers' perspectives through the internally persuasive discourse of diverse writers about literacy (Freedman & Ball, 2004). Teachers came to the course with their own assumptions and beliefs (internal ideologies) that had been influenced by the authoritative discourses they had experienced before beginning the course; however, teachers were "exposed … to a range of theoretical readings representing the internally persuasive discourses of others, which she [Ball] hoped would be added to the multiplicity of voices that would shape and guide the developing ideologies of the next generation of teachers" (Freedman & Ball, 2004, p. 20). In sum, "readings about pedagogy and best practices … would enlighten them about working with diverse student populations and cause them to give serious consideration to ways that diversity could be viewed as a resource in their classrooms" (Freedman & Ball, 2004, pp. 20—21). Opportunities which support ideological becoming are paramount in teacher education programs and cite the need and potential to bring about lasting change.

Translanguaging is the action of engaging in multilingual practices, including all modes of communication, and centers not on the languages spoken but instead on the observable practices of language in use (García, 2009; Hornberger & Link, 2012). It is well-noted by language scholars that this newly defined concept of how language is used diverges from the standard understanding of language practice, such as code-switching (García, 2009, 2014; Hornberger & Link, 2012). In contrast to code-switching—which focuses primarily on transferring or borrowing from one language to another and considering language use to be dichotomous (García, 2009)—translanguaging centers on how speakers of multiple languages use their linguistic abilities in flexible and dynamic ways (García, 2009; Hornberger & Link, 2012). As such, translanguaging serves as an important pedagogical resource, where MLLs can use their language abilities and "practices *flexibly* in order to develop new understandings and new language practices, including academic language practices" (original italics, García, 2014, p. 112).

There is a common myth that mainstream monolingual teachers of MLLs need to speak the languages of their students in order for the students' first languages to be effectively used in the classroom. Monolingual teachers may additionally believe that, should students be allowed to use their first language in the classroom, the students will easily get off-task or their behavior may become disruptive to learning (García & Li, 2014). However, scholars and advocates for multilingual education and first language use in the

---

[2] Examples of studies combining ideological becoming and the education field in general include an MLL parent's perspective on becoming school literate (Chen & Harris, 2009), pre-service elementary school teachers' experiences through community-based learning (Farnsworth, 2010), participants in a short-term, outside-of-country teacher training program (Gutierrez, 2015), and among MLLs themselves (Blackledge & Creese, 2009; Skerrett, 2015).