

Editorial Introduction

Yan Guo
Guest Editor

yanguo@ucalgary.ca

This special issue is devoted to exploring language, culture, and pedagogy from Canadian and international perspectives. The special issue provides decolonizing approaches that privilege immigrant parents' and children's language and culture in Canadian education, recognizing the importance of using students' first language as the medium of instruction in China, and honouring indigenous knowledge embedded in Caribbean history and literature in the Creole language in Jamaica.

For many decades, bilingualism in Canada referred to French and English, yet today languages such as Chinese and Spanish are also offered in schools. The current curricula and teaching practices in K-12 education in Canada are characterized by Eurocentric perspectives, standards and values, and do not reflect on the knowledge and experiences of our culturally and linguistically diverse student population. Despite Canada's multicultural policy, immigrant students are still expected to assimilate into the norms of the dominant culture. The basic assimilative model insists on having the children and parents drop their mother tongue(s) as soon as possible (Hébert, Guo, & Pellerin, 2008). Education is provided only in the dominant language of the receiving country, with considerable pressure from school authorities as well as peers to change as rapidly as possible. This model assumes the inferiority of children and their parents, with their linguistic and cultural knowledge disregarded and discounted as possible resources for schooling. Assimilative policies and programs in education discourage students from maintaining their mother tongue. As Cummins (2000, p. 2) suggests,

While students may not be physically punished for speaking their mother tongue in the school, a strong message is communicated to children and youth of immigration, that if they want to be accepted by the teacher and society, they have to renounce any allegiance to their home language and culture.

In China, the increasing emphasis has been placed on English language teaching. English language learning has been adopted as a strategy to produce *Fuhexing Rencai* (复合型人才, all-rounded talents) in order to promote the nation's economic competitiveness in a global economy. This means people who possess both strong competence in a foreign language, particularly in English and knowledge in specialized areas such as business, medicine, and information technology. Recently China has issued a policy calling for the use of English as the medium of instruction in many universities for certain subjects such as information technology,

biotechnology, new material technology, finance, economics, and law (Feng, 2011). The use of English as the medium of instruction is problematic as this policy fails to recognize the negative impact of the dominance of English language on Chinese learners.

The spread of English language is by no means a new phenomenon. The history may be traced back to hundreds of years ago when Europeans started to colonize local peoples by imposing their language, culture, and religion upon them. The Jamaican Creole language, for example, has evolved over several hundred years since the introduction of enslaved Africans to sugar plantations in the last seventeenth century. The Jamaican Creole language is often seen as a marker of being uneducated and unsophisticated. Authors of this special issue challenge the neo-colonialism and racism by reclaiming local languages and knowledge (Canagarajah, 2005).

In the first article, *Exploring Linguistic, Cultural, and Religious Diversity in Canadian Schools: Pre-service Teachers' Learning from Immigrant Parents*, Guo demonstrates what immigrant parent epistemology can contribute to teacher education. Individual interviews with immigrant parents from 15 countries generated three types of parent knowledge: First language, cultural, and religious knowledge. Then parent knowledge was shared with a group of pre-service teachers. Results reveal some pre-service teachers encouraged the use of students' first language in their practicum whereas others internalized their monolingual ideology despite multilingual realities. They recognized cultural misunderstanding between immigrant parents and Canadian teachers, and questioned the feasibility of accommodating everyone's religious needs. The author calls for the reconstruction of difference and the inclusion of epistemological pluralism, particularly immigrant parent knowledge, within teacher education. Practical implications are also discussed.

In the second article, *A Critical Review of Immigrant Children's Literacies and Identities from a Deleuzian Perspective*, Zhang examines the intersection of immigrant children's literacy and identity from sociocultural and poststructural perspectives, particularly using the concept of rhizome developed by Deleuze and Guattari, French poststructuralists. Rhizome is what Deleuze calls an "image of thought," based on the botanical rhizome such as ginger, that describes an open system of multiple interactions and unpredictable connections on various disparate planes. Zhang argues that the concept of rhizome advances a new way of research about literacy and identity of immigrant children, who are often marginalized in schools. This new way of research emphasizes literacy as a process of becoming, highlighting immigrant children's multilinguality, creativity, and intersections of multiple literacies across school, home and community and across global and local contexts and the fluidity of their identities. Zhang concludes with a call for an awareness of the complications, connections and multiplicities that literacy research and practices confront concerning immigrant children.

In the next article, *Content-based English Education in China: Students' Experiences and Perspectives*, Beckett and Li explore the experiences and perspectives of university students who studied in a Chinese-English bilingual program, a content-based approach, in China. This

approach promotes both English language development and subject-matter content such as science. It has been implemented in many universities since 2001. Through a three-part open-ended questionnaire administered with university students, the study reveals overwhelming support for content-based English education. At the same time, 99 percent of the students reported that content taught in English by their Chinese professors is shallow. Students did not feel the courses they took were successful in teaching adequate content knowledge in English because of their own and their professors' low English language proficiency. They requested that subject matter content be taught in Chinese. Their study shows that developing countries cannot simply transplant a Western model, but need to consider local language, cultural contexts, and needs (Guo & Beckett, 2007).

In the final article, '*Freedom Songs*' in *Selected Caribbean-Canadian Contexts: Retrospective Fragments*, DePass examines variations in concepts of freedom and resistance from postcolonial perspectives. By deliberately adopting a poetic voice, and including several sources from Caribbean history, literature, rich songs, and folktales in the Jamaican Creole, DePass argues for the need for people to free themselves from mental slavery and oppression of colonization. The article first provides historical contexts to show how Africans and their descendants collectively resisted to slavery in former colonies such as Jamaica and fought for their freedom. In doing so, DePass demonstrates the importance of depicting the local history, erased by colonizers. She then illustrates how some Caribbean writers deliberately published in the Creole language to challenge the dominant voices of the colonizers and the elite in the colonial centers. In the third part, DePass continues to argue for the importance of understanding local knowledge and using an insider's perspective to challenge Eurocentric perspectives in education.

References

- Canagarajah, A. S. (2005). Introduction. In A. S. Canagarajah (Ed.), *Reclaiming the local in the language policy and practice* (pp. xiii-xxx). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power, and pedagogy. Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Feng, A. (2011). Introduction: The apex of 'the third wave' - English language across greater China. In A. Feng (Ed.), *English language education across greater China* (pp. 1-20). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Guo, Y., & Beckett, G. H. (2007). The hegemony of English as a global language: Reclaiming local knowledge and culture in China. *Convergence*, 40(1-2), 117-132.
- Hébert, Y., Guo, Y., & Pellerin, M. (2008). New horizons for research on bilingualism and plurilingualism: A focus on languages of immigration in Canada. *Encounters on Education*, 9, 57-74.