Urban Multilingualism and Educational Achievement: Identifying and Implementing Evidence-Based Strategies for School Improvement

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In this paper, I analyze patterns of school achievement among students of immigrant background and suggest evidence-based directions for increasing students' educational success. Although each social context is unique, some generalizations regarding patterns of achievement and causes of underachievement can be made based on the research evidence. Identification of causal factors, in turn, enables us to highlight instructional interventions that respond to these causal factors.

Three potential sources of educational disadvantage characterize the social situation of many immigrant-background communities: (a) home-school language switch requiring students to learn academic content through a second language; (b) low socioeconomic status (SES) associated with low family income and/or low levels of parental education; (c) marginalized group status deriving from social discrimination and/or racism in the wider society. Some communities in different countries are characterized by all three risk factors (e.g., many Spanish-speaking students in the United States, many Turkish-speaking students in different European countries). In other cases, only one risk factor may be operating (e.g., middle-class African-American students in the United States, middle-class French-speaking students attending school in the United Kingdom). Although these three social conditions constitute risk factors for students' academic success, they become realized as educational disadvantage only when the school fails to respond appropriately or reinforces the negative impact of the broader social factors. For example, the social discrimination that Roma students experience throughout Europe has been educationally reinforced in some countries by educators who have labelled them as intellectually handicapped and placed them in segregated special education classes.

School Achievement among Immigrant-Background Students

The reading performance of 15-year-old first- and second-generation immigrant-background students from several countries on the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA) project is shown in Table 1. Students tend to perform better in countries such as Canada and Australia that have encouraged immigration during the past 40 years and that have a coherent infrastructure designed to integrate immigrants into the society (e.g. free adult language classes, language support services for students in schools, rapid qualification for full citizenship, etc.). Additionally, both Canada and Australia have explicitly endorsed multicultural philosophies at the national level aimed at promoting respect across communities and expediting the integration of newcomers into the broader society. In Canada (2003 assessment) and Australia (2006 assessment), second-generation students (born in the host country) performed slightly *better* academically than native speakers of the school language. Some of the positive results for Australia and Canada can be attributed to selective immigration that favors immigrants with strong educational qualifications. In both countries, the educational attainments of adult immigrants are as high, on average, as those of the general population. This is also true of other countries (e.g., Ireland and New Zealand) where immigrant-background students perform relatively well.

By contrast, second generation students tend to perform very poorly in countries that have been characterized by highly negative attitudes towards immigrants (e.g., Austria, Belgium, Germany). Christensen and Stegeritz (2008) highlight as particularly problematic the poor performance of second-generation students in many European countries: "Of particular concern, especially for policy-makers, should be the fact that second-generation immigrant students in many countries continue to lag significantly behind their native peers despite spending all of their schooling in the receiving country" (p. 18). In some cases (Denmark and Germany in 2003; Austria and Germany in 2006) second generation students who received all their schooling in the host country performed more poorly than first generation students who arrived as newcomers and would likely have had less time and opportunity to learn the host country language. These data clearly suggest that factors other than simply opportunity to learn the host country language are operating to limit achievement among second-generation students in these countries.

	PISA 2003 Gen 1	PISA 2003 Gen 2	PISA 2006 Gen 1	PISA 2006 Gen 2
Australia	-12	-4	+1	+7
Austria	-77	-73	-48	-79
Belgium	-117	-84	-102	-81
Canada	-19	+10	-19	0
Denmark	-42	-57	-79	-64

France	-79	-48	-45	-36
Germany	-86	-96	-70	-83
Netherlands	-61	-50	-65	-61
Norway	-68	-59	-63	-42
Sweden	-89	-20	-68	-29
Switzerland	-93	-53	-85	-48
United Kingdom			-44	-7
United States	-50	-22		

Table 1. PISA Reading scores 2003 and 2006 (based on data presented in Christensen and Segeritz, 2008); Gen 1 = first generation students, Gen 2 = second generation students; negative scores indicate performance below country mean, positive scores indicate performance above country mean); 100 points represents one standard deviation.

Analysis of Causes of Underachievement

The PISA data collected in successive OECD studies over the past 15 years provide extremely valuable data on broad patterns of achievement in different countries and among different social groups. The PISA studies have also identified the potentially causal role of several variables, as outlined in the following sections.

The Effects of Individual SES and the SES Levels of Schools

The OECD (2010a) reports that the SES of individual students exerted a highly significant effect on achievement in the PISA studies: "On average across OECD countries, 14% of the differences in student reading performance within each country is associated with differences in students' socio-economic background" (OECD 2010a, p. 14). However, this report noted that the effect of the school's economic, social and cultural status on students' performance is much stronger than the effects of the individual student's socio-economic background. In other words, when students from low-SES backgrounds attend schools with a socio-economically advantaged intake, they tend to perform significantly better than when they attend schools with a socio-economically disadvantaged intake. Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) similarly noted the correlation of .68 between reading achievement and the collective poverty level of students in a school, a correlation that is considerably greater than the correlation of approximately .45 between reading achievement and early literacy indicators such as knowledge of the letters of the alphabet or phonological awareness. This difference between the SES of individual students and the collective SES of students within particular schools highlights the effects of housing (and consequent educational) segregation on patterns of school achievement. The OECD (2012) makes this point as follows: "All things being equal, a more balanced social mix in schools would go a long way towards improving outcomes for both immigrant and non-immigrant students from disadvantaged backgrounds" (p. 14).

The Effects of Reading Engagement

The 2000 PISA study (OECD 2004) reported that the level of a student's reading engagement was a better predictor of reading performance than his or her SES. The report pointed out that "engagement in reading can be a consequence, as well as a cause, of higher reading skill, but the evidence suggests that these two factors are mutually reinforcing" (OECD 2004, p. 8).

More recent PISA findings (OECD 2010b) confirm these trends. Engagement in reading was assessed through measures of time spent reading various materials, enjoyment of reading, and use of learning strategies. Across OECD countries, approximately one-third of the association between reading performance and students' SES was mediated by reading engagement. The implication is that schools can potentially 'push back' about one-third of the negative effects of socioeconomic disadvantage by ensuring that students have access to a rich print environment and become actively engaged with literacy.

The credibility of this inference is supported by considerable data showing that many low-SES students have less opportunity to interact with print in their homes, neighborhoods and schools (Duke, 2000; Neuman & Celano 2001). In comparison to more affluent families, parents living in poverty don't have the money to buy books or other cultural resources (e.g., iPads, computers, etc.) for their children. In other words, there is an opportunity gap with respect to print access that schools have done very little to address. The strong relationship between print access/literacy engagement and reading attainment has been supported in numerous research studies (e.g., Elley & Mangubhai 1983; Lindsay 2010; Mol & Bus 2011; Sullivan & Brown 2013). For example, Mol and Bus summarize the findings of their meta-analysis as follows:

> For all measures in the outcome domains of reading comprehension and technical reading and spelling, moderate to strong correlations with print exposure were found. The outcomes support an upward spiral of causality: Children who are more proficient in comprehension and technical reading and spelling skills read more; because of more print exposure, their comprehension and technical reading and spelling skills improved more with each year of education. For example, in preschool and kindergarten print exposure explained 12% of the variance in oral language skills, in primary school 13%, in middle school 19%, in high school 30%, and in college and university 34%. Moderate associations of print exposure with academic achievement indicate that frequent readers are more successful students (p. 267).

Brozo, Shiel and Topping (2007) similarly articulated the implications of the PISA data for low-SES students as follows: "Keeping students engaged in reading and learning might make it possible for them to overcome what might otherwise be insuperable barriers to academic success" (pp. 307–308).

The Effects of Home Use of a Language Other than the School Language

Successive PISA studies have reported a negative relationship between academic achievement and use of a language other than the school language at home (henceforth L1) (Christensen & Stanat 2007; Nusche 2009; OECD 2012; Stanat & Christensen 2006). The PISA research showed that in both mathematics and reading, first and second generation immigrant-background students who spoke their L1 at home were significantly behind their peers who spoke the school language at home. Christensen and Stanat (2007) concluded: "These large differences in performance suggest that students have insufficient opportunities to learn the language of instruction" (p. 3). German sociologist Hartmut Esser (2006) similarly concluded on the basis of PISA data that "the use of the native language in the family context has a (clearly) negative effect" (p. 64). He further argued that retention of the home language by immigrant children will reduce both motivation and success in learning the host country language (2006, p. 34). These researchers endorse policies that would immerse immigrant-background children in the societal language from age 3, thereby increasing opportunities to learn that language (and, by the same token, reducing exposure to L1 and its associated 'negative effects'). Consistent with this position, both Stanat and Christensen, and Esser, claim that there is little evidence that bilingual education is a credible option for increasing immigrant-background students' academic achievement.

In short, these researchers' promotion of immersion in the language of the host country as the most appropriate policy option derives from the following interpretation of the PISA data: *Inadequate proficiency in the school language and academic underachievement are partially caused by insufficient opportunity to learn the school language as a result of speaking a minority language at home.*

This interpretation is reinforced in a more recent OECD (2012) report entitled *Untapped Skills: Realising the Potential of Immigrant Students*:

> Not understanding the language of the country of residence upon arrival is a disadvantage; but so too is little exposure to that language outside school. PISA results suggest that students who mostly speak a different language at home from that which is used in school have significantly lower reading scores than those who tend to use the test language at home most of the time. This effect is very strong, accounting for a difference of about 30 points in reading scores, on average, between those who mostly speak the test language at home and those who do not, in both OECD countries and elsewhere. The performance gap is still apparent even when comparing students of similar socio-economic backgrounds. This amounts to almost a full year of schooling (OECD 2012, p. 12).

This report attributes the performance gap associated with home L1 use to the fact that use of the L1 in the home limits students' exposure to the dominant school language.

> Policy obviously cannot impose the use of the host-country language in the home environment, but it needs to ensure that the host-country language can better compete for the attention and

interest of immigrant children. Parents clearly have a role to play in this and should be encouraged to expose their children to national-language publications and media at home (OECD 2012, p. 12).

The language skills of parents, particularly of mothers, may not be sufficient to allow them to assist their children in their schoolwork. The objective needs to be more exposure to the host-country language, both in and out of school. This is especially the case in the Internet age when media in the language of the country of origin are more present in immigrant households than they ever used to be. Parents need to be sensitised to this so that the home environment contributes to improving outcomes (OECD 2012, p. 14).

There are some obvious problems with these interpretations including (a) the crudeness of the home language index; (b) the claim that home use of L1 automatically translates into 'insufficient exposure' to the school language; (c) the attribution of a causal role to insufficient L2 exposure; (d) failure to consider alternative directions of possible causal relations; (e) failure to account for findings that contradict the proposition that L1 use at home causes underachievement; (f) failure to acknowledge PISA findings that show no relationship between home L1 use and achievement in a majority of OECD countries when SES and other background variables were controlled; (g) the outcomes of bilingual education programs, which refute the 'time-on-task' or 'maximum exposure' hypothesis underlying the 'insufficient exposure' claim.

A. The home language index incorporates variability and uncertainty. This index was derived from a question to 15-year-old students asking whether or not the language they mostly speak at home was the same as the language in which they were assessed by PISA, which was always the language of instruction. In other words, PISA did not ask students about their initial language learned in the home but rather the language they mostly used at the present time (aged 15). Thus, some of the students who report mostly using the school language at home may be fully bilingual and continue to use their L1 for considerable periods or with certain interlocutors (e.g., one parent, grandparents, etc.). Others may be second generation students who grew up speaking a language different from the school language but who gradually shifted to greater use of the school language, perhaps losing much of the fluency in their L1. Similarly, students who reported mostly continuing to use their L1 in the home may do so because parents or grandparents do not speak the school language fluently or because parents have implemented a home language policy designed to maintain that language despite the fact that they are fluent speakers of the societal language. In short, there are many possible configurations of L1 and L2 language use in the home that are not clearly delineated by the somewhat crude index of home language use employed in the PISA research.

B. L1 use at home does not imply 'insufficient exposure' to L2. The claim that L1 use in the home automatically represents a lack of exposure to L2 is immediately suspect by virtue of the fact that in a highly mobile world this home-school language switch configuration is increasingly common. Certainly exposure to the school language *is* an important variable in academic success. As noted in the OECD (2012) report, a recently arrived 15-year-old immigrant student

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who does not speak the school language will not perform well on a test administered in that language. It takes time (and exposure to the school language) to catch up academically. However, for most students, the catch-up trajectory is not a linear incremental process between ages 5 (the start of school) and 15. Many research studies have demonstrated that a period of 4-7 years, on average, is typically sufficient for immigrant students whose home language is different from the language of the school to catch up academically with native speakers of the school language (e.g., Collier 1987; Cummins 1981; Hakuta, Butler & Witt 2000; Jang et al. 2014; Klesmer, 2004). Thus, the time period of about 10 years during which second generation students in the PISA studies have been exclusively exposed to L2 in school should be more than sufficient to enable them to catch up academically unless other factors (e.g., poverty, inadequate school support, discriminatory school policies, etc.) are operating to limit their academic engagement and success.

C. The relationship between achievement and L1 use at home is a relationship of association, not causation. The PISA authors (OECD 2012; Stanat & Christensen 2006) consistently interpret the relationships observed between home use of L1 and school achievement in causal terms despite the fact that the relationships observed are correlational rather than causal. In order to (cautiously) infer causality, contradictory data would have to be accounted for and the unique variance associated with language spoken at home would have to be identified and isolated from other mediating variables. As documented below neither of these conditions has been met.

The PISA authors show little awareness of the broader research on bilingual students' academic achievement. They posit linguistic mismatch between home and school as an independent source of immigrant students' underachievement, ignoring the large body of research that refutes this hypothesis (Cummins 1979, 2001). Many groups of immigrant students, from all socioeconomic backgrounds, succeed academically despite a home-school language switch (e.g., Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

D. Possible causal relationships can operate in two ways: Success in L2 learning at school can promote L2 use at home. Even if there were a causal relationship between language use at home and achievement, the direction of this causal relationship is not clear. It may be that students who are more successful in acquiring the school language are more likely to use that language in the home. In other words, it is just as plausible to argue that the positive relationship between school achievement and L2 use at home derives from more successful learners switching to L2 at home rather than L1 use in the home resulting in poor school achievement.

E. If L1 use at home results in insufficient exposure to L2 and subsequent underachievement, why are these relationships not observed in all countries? No relationship was found between home language use and achievement in several of the countries where immigrant students were most successful (e.g., Australia, Canada, Israel, New Zealand). A theoretical proposition such as that proposed by the PISA authors must account for all of the data or suggest plausible reasons why the proposed effects are not observed in certain contexts. For example, the authors might try

to account for the discrepancy in the proposed effects of L1 use at home by suggesting that the educational level of the immigrant population mediates its impact. However, they have not attempted to construct any such explanation, preferring instead to posit a unidirectional and universal causal relationship that fails to account for the data.

F. The relationship between home language use and achievement disappears for most OECD countries when background variables are controlled. Stanat and Christensen (2006, Table 3.5, pp. 200-202) present data for mathematics achievement that shows the relationship between achievement and 'foreign language spoken at home' disappeared for a large majority (10 out of 14) of OECD-member countries when variables such as immigrant status (first or second generation), parental education and occupational status, and age on arrival were controlled. The disappearance of the relationship in a large majority of countries suggests that language spoken at home does not exert any independent effect on achievement but is rather a proxy for variables such as SES and length of residence in the host country. This interpretation is supported by analyses of 2003, 2006, and 2009 PISA data for Spain showing that immigrant students who came from non-Spanish-speaking countries made faster progress in catching up than students from Latin America whose L1 is Spanish (Zinovyeva, Felgueroso & Vazquez, 2013). Clearly, these data are inconsistent with the proposition that underachievement is caused by lack of home exposure to the school language.

G. The proposition that L2 achievement is directly related to L2 exposure is refuted by the consistent outcomes of bilingual education programs showing no long-term relationship between achievement and L2 exposure. Several comprehensive research reviews on bilingual education for underachieving minority language students suggest that in contexts where bilingual education is feasible (e.g., concentration of particular groups), it represents a superior option to immersion in the language of the host country. Francis, Lesaux and August (2006), for example, report: "The meta-analytic results clearly suggest a positive effect for bilingual instruction that is moderate in size" (p. 397). Similarly, Lindholm-Leary and Borsato (2006) conclude that minority student achievement "is positively related to sustained instruction through the student's first language" (p. 201). Thus, in contrast to claims made by researchers such as Christensen and Stanat (2007) and Esser (2006), bilingual education represents a legitimate and, in many cases, feasible option for educating immigrant and minority language students. The fact that less L2 instruction in bilingual programs (in comparison to L2-only programs) results in no adverse consequences for L2 achievement refutes the theoretical proposition that immigrant-background students' L2 achievement will benefit from maximum exposure to L2.

Conclusion

The PISA data clearly demonstrate the negative impact on achievement of variables associated with SES and they also suggest that promoting print access and literacy engagement can address some of these negative impacts. However, despite the claims of OECD researchers, the PISA data provide no evidence that home use of L1 results in 'insufficient exposure' to L2, which in turn, negatively affects L2 achievement. In order to make a case that L1 use at home exerts an independent (negative) causal impact on school achievement, researchers would have to explain why no such causal effect appears in immigrant-welcoming countries such as Australia, Canada, Israel and New Zealand and why the relationship disappears in most countries when other background variables are taken into account. The argument that L1 use at home will exert a negative effect on achievement in L2 is also refuted by the academic success of vast numbers of bilingual and multilingual students in countries around the world. Thus, parents who interact consistently with their children in L1 as a means of promoting bilingualism and biliteracy can do so with no concern that this will impede their children's acquisition of the school language.

This perspective is consistent with the perspectives advanced in another OECD report (OECD, 2010c) which advocates affirmative school policies towards students' home language:

> Valuing the mother tongue of immigrant students is an essential part of developing a positive and appreciative approach to diversity and identity. It means seeing students' language capacities as part of their personal, social and cultural identity and welcoming it as a tool for learning and understanding (2010c, p. 49).

Also supportive of this perspective are the increasing number of studies highlighting bilingualism as a positive force in children's academic development. Reviews by Barac and Bialystok (2011) and Adesope, Lavin, Thompson and Ungerleider (2010) concluded that "the experience of speaking two languages yields cognitive benefits in the areas of attentional control, working memory, abstract and symbolic representation skills, and metalinguistic awareness" (Barac & Bialystok 2011, p. 54). The problematic interpretation of the correlational relationship between home language use and achievement proposed in some OECD reports would effectively deny immigrant-background children the opportunity to develop a cognitively and academically enriching form of bilingualism and biliteracy.

Implementing Instruction that Responds to Causes of Underachievement

Table 2 elaborates on the three sources of potential educational disadvantage outlined above and also specifies the evidence-based educational responses that are likely to have the highest impact in addressing these sources of potential disadvantage.

Student background	Linguistically Diverse	Low-SES	Marginalized Status
Sources of potential disadvantage	-Failure to understand instruction due to home-school language differences;	-Inadequate healthcare and/or nutrition; -Housing segregation; -Lack of cultural and material resources in the home due to poverty; -Inadequate access to print in home and school;	-Societal discrimination; -Low teacher expectations; -Stereotype threat; -Identity devaluation;
Evidence-based instructional response	-Scaffold comprehension and production of language across the curriculum; -Engage students' multilingual repertoires; -Reinforce academic language across the curriculum;	-Maximize print access and literacy engagement; -Reinforce academic language across the curriculum;	-Connect instruction to students' lives; -Affirm student identities in association with literacy engagement;

Table 2. High-impact instructional responses to sources of potential educational advantage

Linguistically Diverse Students

With respect to immigrant-background students who are learning the language of instruction, there is consensus among researchers and most policy-makers that schools need to support students in gaining access to instruction and catching up academically. Ideally, students' grasp of academic language will be reinforced across the curriculum and not only in language-related classes. Bilingual programs represent one empirically supported way of providing support for students to comprehend instruction and participate academically (Francis et al. 2006; Gögolin 2005; Lindholm-Leary & Borsato 2006). In cases where bilingual education cannot be implemented, either for reasons of feasibility or ideology, then it is important that *all* teachers (not just language specialists) know how to support students in acquiring academic skills in the school language. The term *scaffolding* is commonly used to describe the temporary supports that teachers provide to enable learners to carry out academic tasks. These supports can be reduced gradually as the learner gains more expertise. They include strategies such as use of visuals and concrete experiences and demonstrations to increase comprehension.

Obviously, both within countries and across countries, there is variation in the extent to which schools do provide adequate scaffolding of instruction. Failure by schools to provide adequate scaffolding and to reinforce academic language across the curriculum is likely a contributor to immigrant students' underachievement in some countries. One reason that a home-school language switch emerges as a disadvantage in many European countries is that many schools have traditionally done very little to help students learn the school language. By contrast, in countries such as Australia and Canada, a coherent infrastructure for supporting English language learners has been in place since the 1970s. This may partially explain why home use of a language other than the school language is unrelated to achievement (i.e. not a disadvantage) in these countries.

Students from Low-SES Backgrounds

Christensen and Segeritz (2008) note that the impact of SES on achievement varies widely among countries. For example, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom exhibit high levels of student achievement in Science and a lower-than-average association between SES and Science performance. Norway also showed a low level of association between SES and Science (<10% variance explained), but overall performance was below average. These results show that despite the strong overall relationship between SES and academic performance, some countries do succeed in promoting both equity (low-SES students perform relatively well) and excellence (overall performance is strong). In fact, according to the OECD (2010a), the "best performing school systems manage to provide high-quality education to all students…regardless of their own background or the school they attend" (p. 13).

Some of the sources of potential educational disadvantage associated with SES are beyond the capacity of individual schools to address (e.g., housing segregation) but the potential negative effects of other factors *can* be ameliorated by school policies and instructional practices. In this regard, the two sources of potential disadvantage that are most significant are the limited access to print that many low-SES students experience in their homes, neighborhoods and schools (Duke 2000; Neuman & Celano 2001) and the more limited range of language interaction that has been documented in the United States in many low-SES families as compared to more affluent families (e.g., Hart & Risley 1995). The logical inference that derives from these differences is that schools serving low-SES students should (a) immerse them in a print-rich environment in order to promote literacy engagement across the curriculum and (b) focus in a sustained way on how academic language works and enable students to take ownership of academic language by using it for powerful (i.e., identity-affirming) purposes. Examples of powerful and identity-affirming uses of language are provided in the discussion of identity texts later in this chapter.

Students from Marginalized Communities

There is extensive research documenting the chronic underachievement of groups that have experienced systematic long-term discrimination in the wider society. The link between societal power relations and school experiences of some minority group students has been succinctly expressed by Ladson-Billings (1995, p. 485) with respect to African-American students: "The problem that African-American students face is the constant devaluation of their culture both in school and in the larger society." This constant devaluation of culture is illustrated in the well-documented phenomenon of *stereotype threat* (Steele 1997). Stereotype threat refers to the deterioration of individuals' task performance in contexts where negative stereotypes about their social group are communicated to them. Thus, there is a clear link between societal power relations, identity negotiation, and task performance.

Among linguistically diverse students, the home language represents a very obvious marker of difference from dominant groups. Despite increasing evidence of the benefits of bilingualism for students' cognitive and academic growth, schools in many contexts continue to prohibit students from using their L1 within the school, thereby communicating to students the inferior status of their home languages and devaluing the identities of speakers of these languages. This pattern is illustrated in a study of Turkish-background students in Flemish secondary schools carried out by Agirdag (2010). He concludes:

> [O]ur data show that Dutch monolingualism is strongly imposed in three different ways: teachers and school staff strongly encourage the exclusive use of Dutch, bilingual students are formally punished for speaking their mother tongue, and their home languages are excluded from the cultural repertoire of the school. At the same time, prestigious languages such as English and French are highly valued (p. 317).

How can schools counteract the negative effects of societal power relations that devalue minority group identities? Ladson-Billings (1994), once again, has expressed the essence of an effective instructional response: "When students are treated as competent they are likely to demonstrate competence" (1994, p. 123). In other words, educators, both individually and collectively, must challenge the devaluation of students' language, culture, and identity in the wider society by implementing instructional strategies that enable students to develop "identities of competence" (Manyak 2004) in the school context. These instructional strategies will communicate high expectations to students regarding their ability to succeed academically and support them in meeting these academic demands by affirming their identities and connecting curriculum to their lives (see Cummins & Early 2011; Hélot, Sneddon & Daly 2014).

Among the overlapping instructional strategies reviewed by Cummins and Early (2015) that have been successfully implemented for affirming students' identities are (a) encouraging immigrant-background and socially marginalized students to use their L1 as a cognitive tool for carrying out academic tasks; (b) promoting opportunities for students to develop literacy skills in their home

languages; (c) enabling students to write and web-publish literary and multimodal creative work (e.g., stories, poems, videos, music); this work can be in the school language or (ideally) in multiple languages depending on the context and language skills of the students; and (d) implementing projects focused on inquiry and knowledge generation that encourage students to use both their L1 and L2, perhaps in partnership with a collaborating class in another location. These forms of pedagogy are aimed at enabling students to use language for powerful purposes that are identity-affirming and motivate students to engage academically. We have used the term *identity texts* to refer to the products of these pedagogical collaborations between teachers and students as well as the processes in which they engage to produce these texts (Cummins 2004; Cummins & Early 2011; Ntelioglou et al. 2014).

Identity Texts

Collaborative research that we have carried out with teachers over the past 15 years has established the principle that students from diverse backgrounds will engage actively with literacy only to the extent that such engagement is identity-affirming. In this regard, creative writing and other forms of cultural production (e.g., art, drama, video creation, etc.) assume particular importance as an *expression* of identity, a *projection* of identity into new social spheres, and a *re-creation* of identity as a result of feedback from and dialogue with multiple audiences. This re-creation of identity through the production of what we have termed *identity texts* assumes particular importance in the case of students from marginalized social groups whose languages, cultures, religions, and institutions have been devalued, often for generations, in the wider society. Students invest their identities in the creation of these texts which can be written, spoken, signed, visual, musical, dramatic, or combinations in multimodal form. The identity text then holds a mirror up to students in which their identities are reflected back in a positive light. When students share identity texts with multiple audiences (peers, teachers, parents, grandparents, sister classes, the media, etc.) they are likely to receive positive feedback and affirmation of self in interaction with these audiences.

The process of creating identity texts can be illustrated in projects carried out by elementary school teachers working with English language learners in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) over the past five years (see https://digitalstorybooks.wikispaces.com/). Some of these projects are sketched below based on symposium presentations made at the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) conference in Toronto, March 2015. More detailed descriptions can be found in Cummins, Hu, Markus and Montero (2015). The teachers who presented each project at the TESOL conference are named but many others also participated in these projects. The rationale for the projects was expressed in the symposium brochure as follows: "By including the personal narratives of students and their families, the use of identity texts provides a springboard not only for language learning, but also for students to increase their feelings of worth and pride in themselves and their cultural and linguistic communities."

Creating a class mural as an identity text (Anne Kong). Inspired by murals depicting local history in their community, newcomer students created a collaborative class mural that shared significant experiences in their lives.

Coming to Canada (Angela Sioumpas). English language learners attending 5 different schools and taught by the same 'itinerant' English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teacher tell their immigration stories using their own words, photos, art and voices using iMovie software.

Self-Identity Collage Project (Artemis Kapakos). English language learners explored self-identity through mixed media, collage and text. Using four simple sentence frames for scaffolding writing: *I am…, I like…, I remember…, I believe,* students explored their individuality and distinct backgrounds in a multitude of short sentences. This written identity component of the piece was then shaped into a picture frame for the student's collaged self-portrait.

The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse (Yasmin Hasan). Students re-created the fable of the town mouse and the country mouse by creating physical models of the two environments using drama and role-play to explore issues related to environment, home, lifestyle choices, excitement, doubt, and changes.

Math Identity Texts in Inner City Schools (Jennifer Fannin). Students from grades 2 to 5 used ages of family members to create timelines and math problems involving addition and subtraction. The math identity texts created (e.g., *Our Ages: A Book about Subtraction*) incorporated and validated students' lived experiences, home lives, and families.

The Four Seasons (Shiry Keltz). This collaborative project involving a grade 1 class and a group of English language learners used mixed media to create beautiful images of their favorite season guided by the expectations of the Grade 1 Science and Technology curriculum.

In X-ray Style (Shamira Mohamed). Grades 4 and 5 students in the Literacy Enrichment Academic Program (LEAP), designed for students who have not had the opportunity to attend school regularly before arriving in Canada, created paintings in the style of Norval Morrisseau, a First Nations artist whose 'x-ray style' showed the inside and outside qualities of a figure. Students created paintings that reflected their own culture, traditions and beliefs, internalizing the message that it was important to keep their own traditions alive and vibrant and to contribute to the diverse cultures that make Canada unique.

Flying Home: A Migration Story (Shirley Hu, Lisa McDonald, Shamira Mohamed, Grace Wong). This collaboratively written book is a parallel text created by Grades 4 and 5 newcomer English language learners designed to give students the opportunity to tell their story of migration to Canada. The text above the drawing created by students describes the migration patterns of Canada Geese while the text below the picture describes students' experiences of

migration. The description of the project included in the TESOL conference brochure is summarized below:

> Every line of the story was taken from the experiences of these students facing the challenges of acculturation. The students studied the migration patterns of Canadian Geese. As we learned more about the birds, we discovered many truths about ourselves, our reasons for migration, our growing love for our new home, and our attachment to the place where we were born. The creation of a digital narrative and hardcover book allowed us to integrate subject matter using knowledge and skills from across the curriculum. The digital narrative was recorded in a variety of languages to honour the linguistic and cultural background of the classroom. (see https://digitalstorybooks.wikispaces.com/space/content). Recordings in Romani and Czech are available on the website in addition to English.

Conclusion

Underachievement among immigrant-background students is *not* caused by home use of a language other than the school language. L1 use at home represents the foundation for students' emerging bilingualism and biliteracy. Home use of a language other than the school language becomes a potential source of educational disadvantage only when the school fails to provide appropriate support to enable students to develop academic skills in the school language. Underachievement is observed predominantly among linguistically diverse students who are also experiencing the effects of low-SES and/or marginalized group status in the host country. Thus, instruction must also address the sources of potential disadvantage that characterize low-SES and marginalized group students. Evidence-based instructional strategies include maximizing students' engagement with literacy (ideally in both L1 and L2) and enabling them to use language powerfully in ways that enhance their academic and personal self-concept. In a social context where the identities of marginalized group communities have been devalued, effective identity-affirming instruction requires that schools challenge the societal power structures that position students as socially inferior and less capable academically. A first step in this process is for schools to acknowledge the academic, cognitive, and social value of students' home languages and encourage them to develop literacy in these languages. The TDSB identity text projects very briefly described above illustrate how newcomer English language learners and those who have missed out on schooling can engage cognitively and academically when instruction connects with their lives, affirms their identities, and engages them in powerful uses of language and literacy.

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