

Chapter 74

Critical Bilingual Leadership for Emergent Bilingual Students

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ABSTRACT

The overarching goal of this chapter is to examine and understand the role that school leadership plays in fostering the educational space where language and literacy development are central to the vision of a school community for emergent bilingual students. With this in mind, traditional school leadership theory and practice are insufficient to truly foster the culturally and linguistically responsive schools that are needed for emergent bilingual students. Therefore, this chapter presents critical bilingual leadership theory as an innovative conceptual framework aimed at answering this challenge. Drawing from transformative leadership and Latin@ critical race theory, this framework situates the role of equity-oriented leadership in the context of fostering language and literacy development for emergent bilingual students.

INTRODUCTION

The increase in transnationalism and global migration of students calls for changes in educational policy and school leadership to match the cultural and linguistic identities of students in schools. Educators across the globe must analyze the ways in which they serve students who transcend national boundaries. Unfortunately, it is all too common for countries to avoid responding in affirmative and transformative ways. Across the United States (US) many schools have been, and continue to be, used as vehicles for assimilation (Irizarry, 2011). In this role, such institutions often enforce traditional White, middle class, and monolingual norms and values through color-blind individualism (Leonardo, 2004; Welton, in press), racist nativism (Pérez Huber, Benavides Lopez, Malagon, Velez, Solorzano, 2008) and other sociopolitical factors (Nieto & Bode, 2008) that impact culturally and linguistically diverse students. Due to these subtractive forms of school policy and practices (Valenzuela, 1999), emergent bilinguals¹ are forced to shed their multidimensional identities for a chance at school success (Irizarry, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). As 21st century transnationalism and globalization lead to an increase in emergent bilingual students and families across the world, the demographic shift requires educators, scholars, and policymakers

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to be responsive to, and conscious of, linguistic diversity in their approaches to language and literacy programs and instruction.

Schools, school leaders, and educators hold the promise and potential for making the changes needed to be more responsive to and conscious of their culturally and linguistically diverse students and families. To achieve this goal, language and literacy practices are essential for the successful development of emergent bilingual students. This chapter begins with an examination of the larger forces at play in the dynamics of schooling as relates to school leadership. By extension, the chapter will examine the sociopolitical factors that influence how school leaders operate with due attention to the goals of social justice and multicultural education. In doing so, I fulfill two objectives. The first is to problematize and challenge traditional leadership theories and practices that lead to subtractive schooling and limited equitable educational opportunities for the implementation of cross-cultural practices for emergent bilingual students. The second objective is to further theoretical understandings of how equity-oriented school leadership can, and should, foster the types of school communities where emergent bilingual students can prosper. Through exploring these objectives, this chapter will reveal possible situations in which a proposed theoretical framework can be contextualized for emergent bilingual students and schools. This chapter will reflect how leadership can foster the spaces to promote positive change for language and literacy development of multilingual youth. As a result of this discussion, insight will be gained into the ways in which critical bilingual leadership practices deployed in subtractive times might support school leaders' and policy makers' efforts to enact equity-oriented approaches with bi/multilingual learners in schools.

BACKGROUND

The US landscape of education for emergent bilinguals has rapidly shifted to one of silence in the face of intentional and unintentional attacks on bilingual education (Garcia, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008). Policymakers often design policies with a race-neutral and dysconscious approach; an "uncritical habit of mind" that accepts the existing inequities of racial and social order (King, 1991). This dysconscious approach ignores the historical and contemporarily educational inequities and when applied, leads to the implementation of policies that only broadly meets the needs of all students (Gillborn, 2005). Dysconscious policies are counter to the politics of race and language, given that both racism and linguicism are deeply entrenched in U.S. society, functioning in ways that sustain the interests of white monolinguals and limit opportunities for persons of color and emergent bilingual youth (Gillborn, 2005; Tate, 1997). Rather than acknowledging these historical and contemporary issues and attempting to reexamine them, ideological beliefs play a major role in reinforcing English-only programs, high stakes English testing, the tracking of students of color and the underfunding of linguistically minoritized students in schools (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). These beliefs ultimately reflect systemic and interpersonal forms of linguicism and racism, presupposing that emergent bilinguals are problems to be fixed rather than cultural and linguistic assets to the school community. Ideological beliefs allow society to ignore the historical and contemporary ways in which educational structures have systemically stripped emergent bilinguals of the linguistic and cultural funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) accompanying them into the classroom and instead, place the responsibility for their educational failure on the shoulders of emergent bilinguals, their families, and the schools that serve them. U.S. legislation and policies reflect these deficit-oriented ideological beliefs in explicit ways. For instance, once referred

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