

Brooklin Trover

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Global Perspectives on Language Ideology and Policy

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Over 134 languages are spoken. “Minority” populations, Hispanics and African Americans, are rising to over twenty percent each. Yet there isn’t an international border, or port to be found. Landlocked by predominantly Anglo states like Nebraska and Wyoming there sits Colorado; a state with stunning natural landscape is experiencing changes in the landscape of its population.

In the 2005-2006 academic year the state identified 43,080 students who qualify within the English Language Proficiency Act Program (ELPA). Of those students 30,607 of them fall within the severely limited English proficiency category. What’s astounding is the amount of funds allocated per child within that category for language development; \$110.86 for the school year! That certainly isn’t enough to pay a teacher’s salary. What is the quality of public education these limited English students are receiving?

Within the policy of Article 23 of Convention 107 that was adopted by the General Conference of the International Labour Organization in 1959 words such as, “read and write in their mother tongue,” and “preserve the mother tongue,” sound like policy that Colorado should actively be concerned with. In the following document I will describe the ideology I believe informs the statement of Article 23. I will go on to support language policy and linguistic outcomes that result because of that ideology in Colorado. Then I will identify and support the type of educational intervention I believe would be successful in Colorado along with the structural and cultural support that would need to be in place to uphold the intervention.

Article 23 is worded in a way that allows for a variety of interpretations depending upon which words are given the most value. I believe openness in the wording is an intentional strategy for maintaining what authors Hall and Eggington

identify as a “tolerance-oriented” policy. Under this policy, minority language speakers have the right to cultivate their mother tongues in the private sector, but it is not promoted in public settings, like schools (Hall, p. 46). Because of the words, “where this is not practicable,” referring to the practicability of teaching children to read and write in their native language verses the language most commonly used by the group, article 23 authors have basically defined a tolerance ideology.

Another example of the tolerance informed ideology written in Article 23 is found in the third line, “appropriate measures shall, as far a possible, be taken to preserve the mother tongue...” Again, it is all too easy for policy makers to choose this ideology that allows them to wash their hands of finding ways to teach in native languages because of the “as far as possible,” line. It now becomes up to the speakers of the different languages to do whatever they can to preserve their language.

It is simple to see how Colorado has decided that it just isn’t “practicable” to teach children in their native language. Or how measures are just not “possible” to preserve students’ mother tongues. Due to the tolerance ideology the resulting language policy and linguistic outcomes have developed: Colorado strives for a monolingual language policy with limited bilingualism as the linguistic outcome.

I believe this policy comes from a very conservative political drive in the state government. Michael Apple articulates this well describing the tensions involved.

“Education is deeply implicated in the politics of culture. The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the text and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selective tradition, someone’s selection, some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge. It is produced out of the cultural, political, and economic tensions and compromises that organize and disorganize a people.” (Apple, 1996, p. 22)

In Colorado the public population is changing but the state government representation has not changed enough with it. It is still a state where the majority of English speaking, Anglo directed policy is paramount. That policy is monolingual.

The resulting linguistic outcome is limited bilingualism due to the fact that although the minority languages are not being promoted, they are neither being restricted in the state of Colorado. The growing populations have and will manage to hold on to some of their native languages, especially the rapidly growing Hispanic population that is geographically grouping together to form Spanish speaking communities.

Colorado's demographic landscape is beginning to resemble that found further in the southwestern parts of the United States. Yet a state wide priority on teaching students in the public schools in a way that preserves their native language is not anywhere close to a reality. I fear that Colorado is going to become home to some very "ill" people as Hall describes, "Soon some Americans may be the only ones in the world suffering from the curable illness of monolingual stupidity, and in a hundred years' time we multilinguals may be showing some of those who are still voluntarily monolingual, in pathological museums" (Hall, p. 39).

The timing is imperative for a language educational intervention to the status quo in the state of Colorado. As a graduate student examining this population and policy I argue for an intervention that is both "possible" and "practicable." I'm not proposing a specific bilingual program as an intervention to be used in Colorado's public schools. I believe I'm being more realistic by proposing a series of interventions that occur before a specific language program.

I argue for an intervention that is drastic, and time intensive. I argue for an intervention that is more than just a change in policy and ideology. I argue for a change that begins in teacher preparation, and follows throughout the continuing education required for professional educators. I argue for a change in hiring, evaluating, and school accountability. I argue for an intervention that Baker describes as a journey.

“To the highways and byways of bilingualism needs to be added the geography of the journey. The journey is affected by the psychology of the individual, the environment and conditions of language travel, the political and cultural weather surrounding acquisition, fellow travelers and map-makers. Becoming bilingual is a linguistic, social, and psychological event.” (Baker, p. 131).

This journey begins with a change in ideology at the government level. The state government needs to move from the tolerance ideology I identified earlier to one that is based on what Jim Cummins defines as a “Transformative/Intercultural” form of pedagogy. This pedagogy entails interactions between educators and students that foster the “collaborative creation of power, in other words, empowerment” (Cummins, p.46).

When the key component under this ideology is interaction between educators and students it is imperative for schools to have teachers that are ready and willing to teach by adopting a form of this ideology to build upon what they hold as a personal ideology.

This calls for a huge change in hiring new teachers; looking deeply at teacher preparation programs, and quality dispositions that have been identified in effective teachers. It calls for training current teachers; providing inservice that includes strategies that will help shift educators to a transformative/intercultural ideology. It calls for a change in evaluation procedures and accountability factors; a shift is needed from a focus

currently on teachers' students standardized test scores to teachers' interaction with students and the teachers' performance in the classroom.

When schools have teachers in place that are better prepared to teach under the transformative/intercultural ideology, schools then need to adopt some form of additive immersion bilingual education model. I believe this will naturally fall into place because additive immersion follows along with the changes under the transformative/intercultural ideology. Additive immersion is not a far fetched idea, and will actually fit into article 23's word choice of instruction that is "practicable," and measures that are "possible."

Due to the large scope of the population concerned, an entire state, a specific form of additive immersion is not being prescribed. I believe it is important to see through the lens that Cummins uses when he says, "What matters is not whether a program is called 'bilingual', 'ESL', 'structured immersion' or 'mainstream,' much more significant is what is being transacted in the interactions between educators and students" (Cummins, p.49). Thus, we are back to the importance of having educators that value the interactions with students to a point of empowerment.

To define additive immersion Colin Baker uses the work of Lambert to describe additive immersion as a program "where the addition of a second language and culture is unlikely to replace or displace the first language and culture (Lambert, 1980)." (Baker, p. 58). Empowering teachers will want this to happen and will be thrilled with the positive research correlations that Cummins identifies in surrounding individuals with multiple languages, "There are close to 150 empirical studies carried out during the past 30 or so years that have reported a positive association between additive bilingualism and students' linguistic, cognitive, or academic growth" (Cummins, p. 37).

Crawford adds to the positive light by saying, “Pedagogically speaking, these research findings are excellent news. They confirm that developing fluent bilingualism and cultivating academic excellence are complementary, rather than contradictory, goals” (Crawford, p. 85).

The journey of an intervention I propose in the monolingual language policy of the state of Colorado will move the state to a language policy that is multilingual. The resulting linguistic outcome would be a state striving for a multilingual population. These indicators will come from transitions in public schools that embrace additive immersion programs.

Besides the simple truth of time necessary to make this kind of intervention a reality a range of support is necessary. Structural support begins with the understanding of power. From the state government down to the classroom teacher power needs to be understood through the focus of meaningful interactions. Cummins identifies a healthy understanding by writing, “Within collaborative relations of power, ‘power’ is not a fixed quantity but is generated through interaction with others” (Cummins, p.44). These interactions would range from the teachers and students, to schools and communities, to government and public.

Another piece of structural support necessary will lie in the hands of administrators and teachers. They need to make sure they are not reinventing the wheel, or creating more confusion than organization. Baker articulates this, “Coordination, integration and synchronization are needed to ensure learning is cumulative and not repetitive” (Baker, p. 352).

The cultural support needed for this type of intervention to be successful is a culture of informed, confident participants. In Crawford's text he forcefully states,

“The nation's thirty-year experiment with bilingual education, despite its success in many schools and its benefits to many children, is branded a failure in the public mind. A generation of experience and research is discarded, as the pedagogy is relegated to marginal status. The question for bilingual educators and advocates is whether they can regain the confidence, understanding, and allegiance of their core constituency – language-minority communities – in time to rewire this grim scenario” (Crawford, p. 102).

Informed parents need to know that it is beneficial for their children to keep their native language in addition to learning the dominant English language. Teachers and administrators need to be informed of research that has proved critical academic success within additive immersion programs. Research like that which Cummins highlights; “Educators who encourage students to develop their L1 literacy skills are not only promoting learning in the narrow sense, they are also challenging the coercive discourse in the wider society which proclaims that ‘bilingualism shuts doors’ and ‘monolingual education opens doors to the larger world’” (Cummins, p. 50).

Additionally students need to be informed as well that they have voice, they have assets to bring, even if those assets are in a different language than the teacher natively speaks. Eloquently put, “Only through communication can human life hold meaning. The teacher's thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students thinking.” (Freire, 1993, p.58).

Colorado is on the brink of something big. I strongly believe it could be a big loss of an opportunity or a big step in the right direction. As a graduate student examining this population and policy I agree wholeheartedly with Hall; “We know what we should do, pedagogically and in terms of linguistic human rights. But it is not done. Clearly, the

education offered by the human-rights loving U.S. to most of the minority children is ‘not in line with international standards’” (Hall, p. 35).

Colorado, it’s time to do what we know we should do. There is no room for quick bandaid solutions to this size of a language issue. I have illustrated a change in ideology that would require large changes in the manner of staffing and running multilingual schools. I also showed that these changes need the support of the state government, the public, and most importantly the teachers and students.

Crawford pointedly tells us what we know well about politics and education on page three of his 2000 text; “Increasingly it is politics, not pedagogy, that determines how children are taught. Attention must be paid to the debates now raging over language, or the voices of equity and diversity could one day be silenced.” I believe Colorado has an opportunity to rise up and change their politics so they do not silence the beautiful growing diversity their naturally stunning state.

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