

# BILINGUAL EDUCATION ASCERTAINS GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

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Writers in social work have highlighted the role of language in a range of social activities, such as identity formation, meaning making, representation, and knowledge construction (Gai, 2009, p. 1082). Dr. Sabine Ulibarri (1964, as cited in Smith & Rodriguez, 2011) stated the following:

In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was made flesh. It was so in the beginning and it is so today. The language, the Word, carries within it the history, culture, the traditions, the very life of a people, the flesh. Language is people. We cannot even conceive of a people without a language, or a language without a people. The two are one and the same. To know one is to know the other. To love one is to love the other. (p. 186)

Language is an identity that indicates our citizenship and a bridge that connects people together through communication. It carries love, and we can love each other because we love each other's language. For example, when I talk with my parents, we always speak in our hometown dialect, even though we all know how to speak the standard language, Mandarin. The dialect we speak is not only a language, but also a bond that shows the love we have for each other in our community.

This kind of love and bond is disappearing in our current school system. From a global and stereotypical perspective, English, as a symbol of power, brings people privileged opportunities. When you speak English with the perfect American or British accent in non-English speaking countries, people tend to be more friendly to you. Non-English speakers often want their children to grow up speaking English so that the next generation won't be discriminated against because of the language they speak. Some parents also believe speaking "real" English with an American accent or British accent can bring more opportunity for their children when they face interviews. That's why "VIPKid" is so popular in China. Chinese parents pay hundreds of RMB (*renminbi*, the official currency of China) per hour to have their children practice their oral English with a native speaker through VIPKid. All these stereotypes indicate that English is truly the most important language in the world if you want to be among the privileged.

In this article, I want to challenge "English as the dominant language" in school curricula by applying the method of *currere* to share my educational experience and reflect on how bilingual education can prepare students to become global citizens through a more inclusive curriculum. This paper is organized into four parts following the four parts in the method of *currere*: regressive, progressive, analytical, and syncretical (Pinar, 1994, p. 19). These parts provide a clear framework to conceptualize my past educational experience and envision my future research and teaching.

## REGRESSIVE

The first step of the method of *currere* is regressive, which means "return to the past" to "capture it as it was" (Pinar, 1994, p. 21). To prepare you to read my past educational experience, I want to share "complexity" in my conversations (Pinar, 1994, p. 21). Everyone's life is complicated, and the stories can be long. All the choices and

experiences are complex because there are so many factors from different perspectives that impact every move we make in life, including family members, teachers, friends, and even strangers. There are many related questions, but the predominant one is: “What has been and what is now the nature of my educational experience?” (Pinar, 1994, p. 20).

Here is the beginning of my story: when English became a mandatory subject for me in China, I was in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. The intention was to prepare us as global citizens for the future. I still remember the moment that a female English teacher walked into our classroom and started our class with interesting sounds. I had no idea what she was saying. All the letters “a, b, c, d...” that I had known as a part of the Chinese language since I was little were pronounced differently in English. It was interesting to get to know another language that is completely different from Chinese. A typical English class during my childhood consisted of reading the vocabulary list, learning the grammar rules, and readings the texts. It was the teacher’s job to teach and the students’ job to listen and follow. We had quizzes on vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension, which included writing short essays. My English grades were not that great. The truth is that it took me almost a whole week to learn how to spell “basketball.” The spelling, the grammar, and the sentence structure did not make sense to me. The Chinese language system is pictographic; each word is a character or group of characters that represent meaning, while English words are a combination of letters. My English teacher told us that there are two kinds of people when it comes to learning English: one who is good at English because of their talent and another one who is bad at it because English is not their thing. She put me into the group of “bad at English” students after the first test because the teacher only cared about scores. It was not her fault because that was how the whole Chinese educational system worked: only test scores mattered. I hated English from that time because I labeled myself just the way my first English teacher labeled me. I always failed my English tests in middle school and high school.

My mother learned a lesson from my schooling experience and started my sister in English classes when she was in early elementary school. My sister, unlike me, loves English and has been good at it because it was so easy for her to learn the language. I wish I had learned English earlier than the 7<sup>th</sup> grade like her. Maybe I would have been a member of the group that is good at English if I started early. One thing I am sure about now is that I have strong feelings about language education because my middle school and high school language education failed me. I did not escape from the failures of my early English language education. Rather, I “totalized my situation” (Pinar, 1994, p. 21) and conceptualized a different view on language education. I started to think that bilingual education could make the process of learning another language easier and better prepare students to be global citizens.

I studied hard enough to get accepted to an excellent teacher college in China. I have wanted to become a teacher since I was a little. However, I had to major in English if I wanted to attend the university. Making the decision to major in English education was difficult. The first two years of college were even harder because I was so far behind everyone in my classes in terms of the English language, no matter how hard I tried. Then I realized that the traditional way of learning English did not work for me. My English did not improve through memorizing spellings and practicing grammar rules. In fact, I suffered from the traditional way of learning a foreign language. I suffered from practicing listening, reading, writing, and speaking by myself at 5am every morning. I suffered from all the English-related course work, and I hated my major. There had to be a better way to learn a foreign language.

In the summer of 2014, I met John, an American professor from a U.S. university. He encouraged me to talk with him and write my ideas down on my paper instead of worrying about word choices, sentence structure, and grammar. He was the first person who said my English was great. I was so happy and decided to continue being happy in college by enjoying the language instead of only paying attention to the English tests and exams. John taught me that learning a language is a way to express yourself and communicate with others, not to get a higher score on final exams. I made friends with American Fulbright students at our university. We explored delicious food and historical sites in the city together. It was a wonderful time, and I fell in love with the English language and the culture. Language became a bond to connect our love and friendship.

Sam, one of my friends from the Fulbright program, recommended that I visit the United States before I began to teach English. He always questioned our curriculum because he didn't think we could teach English without seeing and knowing how it is used in authentic contexts. Language, as a part of culture and a way of living, is more than a communication tool in social life. Therefore, I decided to apply to an exchange program to visit a U.S. university for my senior year.

I was an exchange student at Wright State University in Ohio in the TESOL (Teaching English as a Second Language) department. It was an amazing learning experience. I had a lot of opportunities to practice my English and learn more about western culture. I also built friendships with U.S. students who were learning Chinese at Wright State. In our conversations, we talked about how learning a language can be life-changing and hard at the same time. We mentioned how wonderful it would be if we had been raised with bilingual education. We could have communicated with each other in both languages and known more about each other's cultural background. Growing up using both languages, English and Chinese, could have helped us become more open-minded with the possibilities and opportunities in life.

By the end of the program, one of my favorite professors at Wright State suggested the graduate program in TESOL to me. I did not think I was ready to teach English because I had not learned enough about the language. With the support of my family, I continued my education at Wright State University and graduated with a TESOL M.A. degree and a SAHE (Student Affairs in Higher Education) M.Ed. degree.

During my first year of graduate study, my research interest was about improving English speaking skills. I learned so much about student services in college and gradually formed a more holistic view of education. I realized that if I wanted to make learning a language easier for students, I needed to think bigger and share my failures to possibly find a better form of language education. Instead of thinking about how to teach English effectively, I started to reflect on the educational system, the teaching pedagogy, and the assessment design. I started to question what has been missing from the current curriculum. I then joined the Educational Leadership doctoral program at Miami. I started to research bilingual education as a possible reform for the language curriculum.

### PROGRESSIVE

The second step is progressive, which suggests "we look the other way...at what is not yet the case, what is not yet present" (Pinar, 1994, p. 24). We relax, then we think about the future in a reasonable way because "it is important in the progressive as well as the regressive moment to free associate" (Pinar, 1994, p. 25). Therefore, I pictured the education I want for my future children.

I want my children to be happy and enjoy their educational experience. I want them to enjoy the learning process with their friends collaboratively. I want them to have kind and beautiful hearts that welcome all the others no matter their economic status or color of skin. I want them to be critical global citizens who ask questions and pursue their own unique way of living. I want them to love and bond with each other because that connection will provide the support and courage they need when they face challenges.

I don't want my children to discriminate or be discriminated against. I don't want test scores to limit their abilities. I don't want judgments and stereotypes to narrow their possibilities. I don't want them to follow the mainstream and have no thoughts of their own. I don't want them to speak only one language and make friends with only others like them. I don't want them to resist changes and differences. I don't want them to think only from their own perspectives and not analyze things holistically.

I hope my children will have the kind of education that embraces diversity and prepares them to be global citizens. I hope they can grow up speaking different languages and understanding that all languages are equally important. I hope educators will be ready for bilingual education and more diverse students' needs.

### ANALYTICAL

The third step is analytical, which "describe[s] the biographic present, exclusive of the past and future, but inclusive of responses to them" (Pinar, 1994, p. 25). Possibilities and opportunities in life bring changes and aspirations to people. I understand education as the process and product of learning through social interactions, books, observations, and many other ways. *Currere* can critically reflect the flaws we have in the current curriculum by encountering the failures and re-imagining a better way forward.

When I look back at every step of my journey, I realize how important language education can be because my life has been truly changed through learning a different language, even though the beginning of the learning was not pleasant. Language education not only brought me more opportunities and perspectives in life, but has also taught me to look at education in a holistic and critical view. I never even imagined going to another part of the world until I fell in love with English. I never even thought about getting into graduate school until I had the study abroad opportunity. I never even connected education with politics and economy until I taught language classes in a local high school. English serves as a symbol of dominant power, and marginalized groups need bilingual education to disrupt the mainstream.

All these lived experiences taught me how important language education is and how challenging it could be to design a better language curriculum that would prepare students to be global citizens. San Miguel (2004) stated, "Scholars found that bilingualism was an asset to learning in the schools and that it played a positive role in intelligence" (p. 6). When students know two or more languages, their cognitive skills, academic skills, and social skills will be improved (Haft, 1983, p. 253). Schools can also transform systemic oppressions by acknowledging and supporting the cultural assets and wealth of other minority groups in the United States (Yosso, 2005, p. 81). "As with other social positions, such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender in explicating the unjust and stratified reproduction of knowledge, language is a key component in the production of inequality" (Kubota & Lin, 2009; Luke, 2009; Ruecker, 2011, as cited in Cho, 2017, p. 667).

However, it is not easy to reform school curricula. It is challenging to design a curriculum that uses two languages in teaching school subjects, such as math and social

science. Moreover, San Miguel (2004) stated, “Bilingual education is one of the most contentious and misunderstood educational programs in the United States because it raises significant questions about national identity, federalism, power, ethnicity, and pedagogy” (p. 1). Bilingual curricula could encounter a lot of obstacles without support of the dominant power. Delgado Bernal (1998, 2002, as cited in Yosso, 2005) asked: “whose knowledge counts and whose knowledge is discounted?” (p. 69). Bilingual education could be difficult to achieve, but it is going to be a revolutionary change in education that could disrupt the mainstream. English is a language, but not the language for education.

### SYNTHETICAL

The last step is synthetical, which is to “look at oneself concretely, as if in a mirror ... Who is that? In your own voice, what is the meaning of the present” (Pinar, 1994, p. 26). My lived experience formed my research interest on bilingual education as a doctoral student. My past guides me on my present and enlightens me on my future. Klapwijk and Van der Walt (2016) stated, “The scenario is a familiar one for a multilingual (usually postcolonial) country: a society in which multiple languages enjoy equal status by law, and where the national curriculum acknowledges and supports multilingualism” (p. 67). Language is an asset for education, and educators need to face the challenges in the bilingual curriculum design. San Miguel (2004) stated, “The changes in bilingual education, in general, were the result of several forces, including litigation, legislation, a changing political context, and activism on the part of contending groups with competing notions of ethnicity, assimilation, empowerment, and pedagogy” (p. 1). My present and my scholarly work about bilingual education will disrupt “English as the dominant language” in the school curriculum and contribute to future students’ global citizen identities.

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