Reimagining Ontario Classroom-Based Learning Assessments for Newcomers from Refugee Backgrounds to Include Translanguaging.

In Ontario, newcomers from refugee backgrounds with interrupted schooling and emerging print literacy in their mother tongues learn in English Literacy Development (ELD) classrooms. Despite decades of research showing the benefits of using mother tongues (Canagarajah, 2014; Janks, 2004; Lau & Van Viegen, 2020) and students' entire communicative repertoires in schools (García & Kley, 2016), it is outside the Ministry of Education's policies to encourage this much, beyond using first languages to scaffold learning English or French (Van Viegen & Jang, 2021). Research shows that plurilingual approaches such as translanguaging lead to better connection and more positive identity for plurilingual learners from refugee backgrounds (Bigelow et al., 2017; DeCapua, 2016; Dryden-Peterson & Reddick, 2021). Some educators already resist monolingual policy and use translanguaging approaches in Ontario (Brubacher, 2019). However, many are not engaging in plurilingual pedagogies despite having positive views toward these learners and their translanguaging practices outside the classroom. Research shows that the monolingual and deficit nature of the STEP forms as classroom-based language assessments may contribute to educators' monolingual bias (Bale et al., 2023). In this thesis project, I will explore whether 'translanguaging' should be included in formal educational policies such as the STEP forms. In most Ontario school boards, classroom teachers and specialist 'ESL' educators complete a classroom-based language assessment called STEP forms for each of their ESL/Multilingual students twice a year, which are meant to guide instruction of the multilingual students' learning English and determine their English language proficiency level (six levels) across three domains: reading, writing, and oral communication. I will interview Ontario educators teaching in ELD classrooms about their engagement with STEP and ask whether they can envision using the STEP forms to remove barriers to the flow of students' plurilingual repertoires in the classroom. I will also examine how education policies in Ontario affect newcomers with emerging print literacy and consider overlapping contexts, including history, politics, economics (Bale & Gagné, 2023; Cassels Johnson, 2013), and oppressive and intersecting structures (Flores & Bale, 2020).

SPEAKER

KAREN ANDREWS

Karen Andrews is a master’s student in the Education and Society program at the Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE) at McGill University. Karen has worked as a teacher in Ontario Public Schools for 20 years as an ‘ESL’ teacher, a Special Education teacher, and a teacher for newcomers with emerging print literacy in their mother tongues in an English Literacy Development (ELD) classroom. She is interested in imagining how policies in language education in Ontario can support educators in engaging in removing barriers to the flow of languages for students in ELD programs. Karen is currently a research assistant with the iMPACTS project at McGill, and with a participatory action research/community publishing project.

DATE
March 27, 2024

TIME
4-5pm

PLACE
Online
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