

## *Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage*

### **Linguistically Appropriate Practice: A Guide for Working with Young Immigrant Children**

by Roma Chumak-Horbatsch

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In light of the undeniable diversity in classrooms across Canada, Roma Chumak-Horbatsch concentrates her research on creating learning environments that welcome immigrant students as “emergent bilinguals” rather than labelling them in an English majority context as “English Language Learners.” She emphasizes the fact that these students bring their own constantly developing home languages and literacy practices to classroom discourse. Based on her research at the Ryerson University Early Learning Centre, Chumak-Horbatsch addresses the growing need to include practices that deepen the understanding of different heritages by engaging students and their families as part of the education community. For Chumak-Horbatsch, the goal is to create multilingual learning environments that ensure all students thrive in academic settings, and to shift away from previous models of instruction that enforce English-only practices. In addition to her own research in bilingual education, Chumak-Horbatsch includes references to Jim Cummins, who wrote the foreword, Lily Wong Fillmore, Ofelia García, and a multitude of other researchers. Chumak-Horbatsch mobilizes research to practice as she includes activities that target different written, visual, oral, and gestural modes that emphasize all the languages used by children.

*Linguistically Appropriate Practice* is divided into three major parts that include research in heritage and English-language learning, guidance for preparing the classroom, and practical activities. Part 1 is dedicated to previous and current research to update

readers, and addresses myths of language learning that have prevailed in pedagogical contexts. Many students are educated in monolingual classrooms where they risk losing their first language in favour of English, and consequently may be marginalized in the classroom. Chumak-Horbatsch presents three common approaches to classroom language instruction: assimilative (monolingual, monoliterate, and monocultural), supportive (monolingual, monoliterate, and intercultural), and inclusive (multilingual, multiliterate, and multicultural). She argues that assimilative and supportive practices do not adequately support cultural differences and that they still place emphasis on English as the dominant language. Subsequently, inclusive practices, based on more recent research, create a more comprehensive language-learning environment that accounts for academic and cultural diversity. Part 1 concludes by grounding linguistically appropriate practice (LAP) in dynamic bilingualism, which “focuses on languages that speakers *use* rather than on separate languages they *have*” and reiterates the social nature of language that cannot be dissected into “separate entities” (p. 53).

In parts 2 and 3, Chumak-Horbatsch focuses on preparing the classroom for LAP and offers practitioners detailed activity ideas reviewed by early childhood educators. She lists suggestions for observing and recording students’ progress, surveying families regarding their home languages and literacy practices, establishing a classroom language policy, and setting up classroom materials. The goal is to create an environment that commits to inclusion and sharing between students, educators, staff, and families. Her suggestions for activities range from multimodal representations of language, like creating dual-language books, to practising non-verbal communication, like American Sign Language. The objective of these activities is to broaden and expand on students’ various and multiple uses of language.

With growing concerns over language loss and the intense focus on monolingualism in schools, *Linguistically Appropriate Practice* continues the discussion of bilingual education researchers in North America and Europe. Education has long been situated in dominant-language schooling in an effort to standardize pedagogy, often overlooking and overpowering the rich cultural backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge that students bring to the classroom as educators attempt to “legitimize language.” Bilingualism has historically been viewed as less valuable and inferior to the dominant language of society and education (Bourdieu, 1991). While *Linguistically Appropriate Practice* is less politically situated and more practically oriented toward an audience of early childhood

practitioners, it nonetheless addresses the issue of cultural dominance in education toward young immigrant students, such as the loss of their home language through monolingual instruction and the difficulties of adapting to a new culture, as well as the importance of transforming pedagogy into culturally sensitive practices that include multimodal approaches.

Thoroughly researched and presented in an approachable manner for early childhood practitioners, *Linguistically Appropriate Practice* is an effective guide, but by no means is it a program that can be adopted into any curriculum in its entirety. In the foreword of this book, Jim Cummins argues that policy makers should review these practices to change their perspective on bilingual education and implement systemic changes (p. xii); however, this might be more difficult than suggested since educational policy is bound by much greater constraints. Unfortunately, educators are usually faced with uncertain circumstances and they will likely have to find a way to implement LAP into their instruction with limited materials and reduced autonomy in the classroom. Moreover, referring to students as “bilingual” seems somewhat limiting in the 21st century, when “plurilingualism” is fast becoming the norm and is a less restrictive label. In terms of practices to engage families, reaching out to parents of immigrant children can also be challenging if they do not share the same language as the practitioner. For instance, there are issues of cultural perceptions of surveys, which Chumak-Horbatsch addresses but does not elaborate on, as well as other questions, such as how to create documents that are accessible to parents and still yield information for practitioners. The examples of surveys in this book are text heavy and quite daunting to complete, and therefore, modifications by practitioners will be required. However, looking past particular limitations and constraints of classroom teachers and practitioners, there are many activities and suggestions that are welcoming to students and families that can be adopted in different settings with modifications.

For educators, practitioners, clinicians, and others who work with young immigrant children, *Linguistically Appropriate Practice* provides insight into bilingual education research thus far and seeks to provide a more concrete, hands-on, and inclusive approach fuelled by research. There are gently worded reminders of how policy makers and educators can inflict harm on the delicate nature of identity and literacy development outside of dominant languages like English and French, but it also reminds early childhood practitioners that they can take on a course of action toward change in practical ways.

## References

- Bourdieu, P. (1991). The production and reproduction of legitimate language. In J. B. Thompson (Ed.), *Language and symbolic power* (pp. 43–65). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.