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In this article, the author invokes Cummins' model for social empowerment of minority students to suggest an alternative way of thinking about the empowerment of school communities. This paper explains Cummins' theoretical framework and suggests implications that might help teachers better understand social language literacy development in terms of Cummins' (1986-1994) conceptual framework, which is based on the notion that students who are from a diverse background are in need of school literacy learning that attends to "the goals of instruction, the role of the home language, instructional materials, classroom management and interaction with students, relationships with the community, instructional methods and assessment" (Au, 1998, p. 298). This paper also attempts to explain how the relationships among students' literacy development, social practices, and their diverse background empower them and assess them in developing their learning literacy skills, taking into consideration the types of literacy that best work with diverse communities.

Introduction

Social context plays an important role in enhancing children's learning and literacy development. Social context is found in the children's school and communities where they learn, talk, read, and write. Within the last three decades, many educators, anthropologists, and linguists have explored and defined the importance of the social context for students' literacy development (Heath, 1989; Lewis, 2009). According to Heath (1989), children can be affected in their literacy development by their social context as well as their interaction with family members, parents, peers, and teachers. Thus, social context refers to "the societal setting in which events occur—in this case, the various surroundings at home, at school, and in the community in which children learn to talk, read and write" (Wells, 1982). Because of the significance of students' literacy development and the social diversity of students from different backgrounds, many educators now consider these diverse social perspectives and acknowledge the importance of those students' "ethnicity, primary language, and social class to literacy learning" (Au, 1998, p. 279). This means there is a tendency in education toward understanding and considering the relevance of the students' linguistic background and cultural diversity.

This paper suggests some implications that are useful for teachers to understand the social language literacy development in terms of Cummins' (1986-1994) conceptual framework, which is based on the notion that students who are from a diverse background are in need of school literacy learning that gives an adequate attention to "the goals of instruction, the role of the home language, instructional materials, classroom management and interaction with students, relationships with the community, instructional methods and assessment" (Au, 1998, p. 298). This paper is an attempt to explain how the relationships among students' literacy development, social practices, and their diverse background empower them and assess them in developing their learning literacy skills, taking into consideration the types of literacy that best work with diverse communities.

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Literature Review

Literacy Crisis

Educationalists in the United States have applied different kinds of educational and literacy reforms designed to foster literacy achievement and decrease failure among students from diverse contexts. Since 1983, many political debates have taken place concerning the *literacy crisis*. The National Commission on Educational Excellence sounded the alarm in its publication *Nation at Risk.* The report proclaimed that literacy and the educational measures had dropped, affecting both students and society (as cited in Cummins, 2007, p. iv). Cummins showed that low literacy rates and academic achievement were concentrated among students from poor families in groups such as African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans. Many public debates excused society from being responsible for the minority students' underachievement and attributed their school failure to the minority group's own insufficiencies, either in term of academic growth, drug use, or ineffective bilingual educational programs that were supposedly convened by Hispanic activists to limit their exposure to learn English (Ferdman, Weber, & Ramirez, 1994, p. 297). However, Cummins (1989) related this underachievement to the uselessness of the implemented educational reforms to foster the academic achievement among students from different cultural and linguistic background. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) proclaimed that there was a significant and increasing gap in the academic performance between the Euro-American students, the African American and Latino students. Cummins (2001) summarized the reasons for this gap:

> (a) empirical data relating to patterns of educational underachievement that challenge the current ideological mindset are systematically ignored or dismissed; (b) there is a deep antipathy to acknowledging that schools tend to reflect the power structure of the society and that these power relations are directly relevant to educational outcomes. (p. 650)

Cummins (2001) argued for the importance of including and not excluding human relationships for effective educational system. He claimed that those whose identities have

been underestimated in schools and societies are the ones who face the most unequal school failure. He also argued that most of the reform efforts shed the light on the relationship between the students' characteristics and learning achievement, ignoring an factor in the relationship between "achievement and social and educational inequities" (Cummins, 2001, p. 562).

Framework

Cummins (1986) believed that previous educational reforms set up by the government failed in making an effective change in the relation between teachers and students and between schools and communities because "they have not seriously challenged the social power structure" (p. 652). Cummins emphasized the significance of interaction among students, teachers, and communities. He believed that such an interaction is what challenges the coercive relation of power in societies. Thus, he established a model to face school failure and to improve the educational reform.

Empowerment

Cummins asserted that both educators and their students function under a sort of oppressiveness that is exemplified in structured curriculum and work conditions. However, they are not powerless. Educators have the opportunity to shape their classroom interaction by setting the social and educational goals that they would like to make with their students, as they are the ones in charge of building relation among diverse culture students and communities (Cummins, 1994, p. 653). Further, in his debate about empowerment, Cummins emphasized the idea of negotiating identity directly between teachers and their students. Each can identify the identity of the other through interaction and practice. Teachers reveal their identity through their interaction with their students, and students reveal their identity through their interaction with their peers, teachers, parents, and others. This creates a "context of empowerment… that challenges structures of inequity in small but significant ways" (Cummins, 1994, p. 653).

In his framework, Cummins classified the educators' interaction with their students in three images: an image of the identities of the teachers as educators; an image of the identity

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options educators highlight for their students; and an image of the society educators hope their students will help form. These images can be established in classroom interaction and they are a part of the educators' vision of power structure of communities (Cummins, 1994, p. 654). The images can work as an effective guidance for policy makers to consider the children's culture, linguistic, and identity.

Social Power Relations

In order to talk about Cummins's framework, an overview of his opinion on coercive and collaborative power relations is required. *Coercive relations* of power signify the kinds of power that are exercised by the dominant group over the subordinate ones where "the more power one group has, the less is left or other groups" (Ferdman et al., 1994, p. 299). Coercive relations of power happen when the dominant groups is seen as superior, whereas the subordinate groups are seen as inferior, and is a commonly occurring a power structure throughout human history either within national or international relations (Ferdman et al., 1994, p. 299).

In contrast to coercive power relations, collaborative relations of power indicate a shared power among all participants. Through implementing this concept, Cummins claimed that power will not be "a fixed predetermined quantity but rather can be *generated* in interpersonal and intergroup relations, thereby becoming 'additive' rather than 'subtractive'" (as cited in Ferdman et al., 1994, p. 299). In this case, all participants are involved in an empowered relationship through collaboration, where participants can confirm their identity and gain self-efficacy.

Cummins (1994) applied the values of collaborative relations of power in the educational context. Cummins believed that the insistence on keeping the coercive relations of power resulted in disempowering the dominant and the subordinate groups; the shift in paradigm from the coercive to the collaborative relations of power empowered all groups. Further, the coercive relations of power are the reason behind "educational failure, functional literacy, and impoverishment among subordinate groups," which results in an increase in costs and the disempowerment of the dominant group (as cited in Ferdman et al., 1994, p. 300).

Cummins' Theoretical Framework

Cummins (1986) proposed a broad theoretical framework for empowering minority students of diverse contextual backgrounds through developing educators' attitudes toward minority students (see Figure 1.)

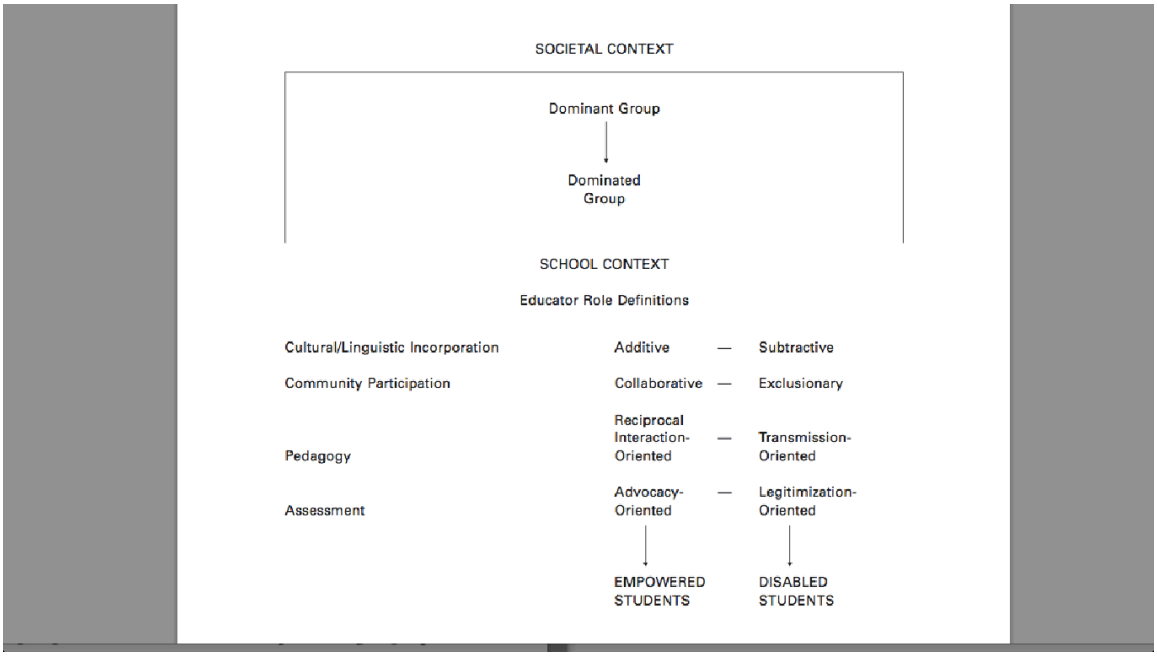

Figure 1. Cummins created a theoretical framework for the empowerment of minority students. Adapted from (*Harvard Educational Review*, *56, p. 663*).

The main idea of this framework is that students from dominant groups are empowered or disabled as a consequence of their interactions with educators in public institutions. His framework is based on four roles or characteristics of interactions, which can determine the failure or the success of the learning activity. These characteristics are

> the extent to which 1) minority students' language and culture are incorporated into the school program; 2) minority community participation is encouraged as an integral component of children's education; 3) the pedagogy promotes intrinsic motivation on the part of students to use language actively in order to generate their own knowledge; and 4) professionals involved in assessment become advocates for minority students

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> rather than legitimizing the location of the "problem" in the students. (Cummins, 1986, p. 659)

Cummins (1986) structured his framework in terms of "majority/minority societal group relations, school/minority community relations, educator/minority student relations" (p. 660). The minority students' failure and the failure of previous educational attempts were due to the failure in addressing the relationships "between educators and minority students and schools and minority communities" (Cummins, 1989, p. 656). Status and power relations between subordinate groups (minority students) and dominant groups (majority students) have a significant effect on the minority students' school performances (Cummins, 1986, p. 660). For instance, Troike (1978) stated that Finnish students, who were a low status group, failed academically in Sweden while they succeeded in Australia because they were considered as a high status group. Similarly, Dominant groups consider themselves inherently superior and as a result they should be the ones to control institutions in societies (Mullard, 1985).

Cummins (1986) based his frame on four fundamental elements that are mentioned above and will be explained later. These elements control whether the minority students are going to be empowered or disabled. As it is shown in Figure 1, these elements incorporate the culture and the language of minority students, the minority students' communities, the pedagogical assumptions, and classroom activities. The elements emphasize an advocacy-oriented assessment of the diverse minority students.

Cummins (1986) connected the educational failure of minorities to the "lack of cultural identification" (p. 660). Moreover, Cohen and Swan believed that minority student's failure in learning the English language was a result of cognitive difficulties or lack of sufficient knowledge about their cultural identity values (1976, as cited in Cummins, 1989, p. 662). Cummins (1989) emphasized the importance of developing students' cognitive skills through providing them with an intensive first language instruction and an emphasis on their cultural identity. Likewise, many researchers like Campos and Keatinge (1984), Cummins (1983), and Rosier and Holm (1980), associated minority students' academic success with the integration of their first language and culture in the schools study

programs.

Further, Cummins (1986) argued that disempowerment was not limited to minority students in schools only, but also occurred their communities that have been excluded and disabled in their interactions within social institutions. Similarly, Skutnabb-Kangas (1984) believed that equality is an issue in itself and can make a difference. They asserted that through equality of opportunities, individuals are more responsible for their own failure or for feeling inferior. Such assertions emphasize the critical nature of schools' and communities' interactions to help minority students gain an educational success.

Cultural/linguistic incorporation

Under this section of the framework, Cummins (1986) considered two important aspects of orientations: the additive aspect, which seeks teaching in the minorities' first language and considers their culture, and the subtractive orientation, which subtracts the culture and the first language of the minority students. An additive orientation does not require the actual teaching of the minority language. Cummins associated these two aspects with the educators' roles. Educators whose roles are to add a second language and cultural connection to their minority students would empower these students, unlike, the other educators who see their roles to replace the students' culture and first language (Cummins, 1986).

Cummins (1986) stated, "an additive orientation does not require the actual teaching of the minority language" (664); however, providing minorities with some classes of their primary language would enhance the learning process of those with low concentration. This would increase these minorities' self-efficacy when they feel that their language and culture are valued. Very often, improved metalinguistic elaboration can be established within the additive bilingualism orientation (Cummins, 1989; Hakuta & Diaz, 1985; McLaughlin, 1984).

Community Participation

If educators succeeded in involving the parents of the minority students as partners in their children's educational process, this would develop a sense of efficacy within these minority

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communities and students would be empowered, which in turn would enhance their academic growth (Cummins, 1989, 664). Further, parental non-involvement in school activities can be related to parental illiteracy. Illiterate parents are a cause of children's school failure, as they may not be able to help their children academically (Cummins, 1984). Therefore, educators should include the parents of the minority students through collaboration in school activities. As evidence, Cummins cited The Haringey project in Britain, which took place in a multiethnic areas. This project involved the parents of minority students of three different schools in educational activities listening to what their children read. The teachers reported that the collaboration between them and the parents effectively improved the students' performance. More importantly, the teachers stated that the students became more interested in coming to school and learning. Thus, the teachers' success in adopting a collaborative orientation assisted them in engaging the parents to participate in fostering their children's learning development at home and school (Tizard, Schofield, & Hewison, 1982 as cited in Cummins, 1986).

Pedagogy

Cummins (1986) distinguished between two major models for pedagogy: The transmission model and the reciprocal model of teaching. The transmission model is the common model adopted by North American school system (Barnes, 1976; Wells, 1982). Cummins stated that the transmission model idea is much similar to Freire's (1970/1973) "banking" model of education:

> Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely in the world, not with the world or with others; the individual is a spectator, not re-creator. In this view the person is not a conscious being (corpo consciente); he or she is rather the possessor of a consciousness: an empty "mind" passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside. (p. 247)

Simply, the banking approach hinders the intellectual growth of students, turning them into "receptors" and "collectors" of education that lacks the association with their real lives (1973). Cummins related Freire's banking concept to the transmission pedagogical

approach of teaching. The fundamental principle of the transmission model is that "the teacher's task is to impart knowledge or skills that she or he possesses to students who do not yet have these skills" (Cummins, 1986, p.667). This entails the teacher being the one in control of the interaction. Educators like Cummins (1984) and Wells (1982) advocated that this model disregards the actual principles of literacy and language acquisition. Accordingly, all students can only create the meaningful use of language via actual interaction, conversation, and participation in the same environment; therefore, the reciprocal model is a better alternative.

Bullock (1975) claimed that the essence of the reciprocal model is that "talking and writing are means to learning" (p. 50). Cummins (1986) extended that this model to "empower students, encourage them to assume greater control over setting their own learning goals and to collaborate actively with one another in achieving these goals" (p. 667). Cummins emphasized the importance of developing the minority students' self-efficacy in schools through the use of this model in teaching. The model encourages students' oral and written dialogues within their peers and teachers in a collaborative atmosphere, thus, fostering the students' cognitive skills instead of merely recalling information.

Further, this pedagogical approach integrates language use with the curriculum instead of teaching the language in isolation. This is in addition to the class activities that promotes the minority students' academic growth and arouses the intrinsic motivation in them (Cummins, 1986, p. 667). Fillmore (1983) claimed that Hispanic students who were taught using the reciprocal approach based on engagement and interaction became better English learners.

Assessment

Assessment is used as a tool to determine problems that affect school performance for minority students. An assessment process usually has a psycho-educational concept. If the only available tools for a psychologist to locate the minority students' difficulties are psychological tests, then most of the students' difficulties will be assigned as "psychological dysfunction" (Cummins, 1986, p. 668). Mehan, Hertweck, and Meihls (1986) claimed that psychologists would keep testing students until they found difficulties or disabilities that

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would reveal some factual information regarding their learning difficulties.

Cummins (1986) stated that diagnosis and tests were more affected by bureaucratic procedures and financial issues and less a process for caring about the students' learning performances (p. 668). Further, Rueda and Mercer (1985) stated that classifying minority students as having a learning disability or language disability was determined by who is diagnosing them, "a psychologist or a speech pathologist" (Cummins, 1986, p. 668). Moreover, an "analysis of four hundred psychological assessments of minority students" showed that most of these assessments were illogical, yet the psychologists were unwilling to admit this fact to either the parents or teachers (Cummins, 1986, p. 668).

Advocacy and delegitimization are alternative calls for the psychologists. So their role will be limited in delegitimizing "the traditional function of psychological assessment in the educational disabling of minority students by becoming advocates for the child in scrutinizing critically the societal and educational context within which the child has developed" (Cazden, 1985 as cited in Cummins, 1989, p. 668). Cummins (1986) stated that well-intentioned individuals emphasized the discriminatory assessment and neglected the socioeducational system that disempowered the minority students and that minority students are in need of "a comprehensive diagnostic/prescriptive assessment" to set up the appropriate remedial intervention for them (p. 672).

Criticism

Cummins' framework has gone under many criticisms. Au (1998) claimed that the weakness of Cummins' framework was first revealed by the critical theorists, who stated that his framework concentrated more on the educators' role rather than power issues within societies that controls students and educators. Konzol (1991) also criticized Cummins' framework for being neglecting "the material circumstances with which teachers and students must contend" (as cited in Au, 1998, p. 305). Still, Au argued that that "the greater challenge is not in proposing frameworks but in bringing about changes in schools that will close the literacy achievement gap" (p. 316).

Conclusion

The focus of this paper has been to emphasize the need to pay more attention to minority students' academic achievement and to locate the achievement gap between students from dominant communities and their counterparts from the subordinate groups. This work suggests that Cummins' framework for empowering minority students' academic achievement can provide solutions. Further, it suggests how educational programs and school systems may prevent the failure of minority students and help empower them through the reinforcement of minority students' cultural identity, involvement and collaboration within their communities, and the integration of the meaningful usage of language in everyday activities (Cummins, 1989).

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