

FROM THE FIELD

Bringing in Missing Curriculum through Engaging Students' Multilingual and Multicultural Identities



Fenglan Nancy Yi-

Cline 易凤兰博士 is an ELL program specialist in Federal Way and an adjunct ELL Instructor at Seattle University. She is also a co-founder of PanGeo Education, an organization that disrupts educational inequities and promotes social and environmental sustainability. She holds a Doctor of Education degree in Language, Literacy, & Culture from the University of Washington. Fenglan has worked with EFL/ELL students of all ages and proficiency levels in the U.S. and abroad. She also has years of experience as a teacher educator and coach in teacher education and ELL endorsement programs. Fenglan is an advocate for culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy and works to promote equitable education for all students.

nanmike78@gmail.com

Classrooms where emergent bilinguals can show up authentically and engage in critical conversations about race and language require real world application of learning. Antiracist, inclusive educators create “third spaces” in which students’ multifaceted identities and their linguistic, academic, and cultural funds of knowledge are welcomed, explored, and affirmed (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

According to Eisner (1994) and Richard Milner IV (2017), there are three types of curriculum: implicit, explicit, and null curriculum. Explicit curriculum indicates what is official, what is on the shelf, what is in standards and guides, and what is overtly taught and tested. Implicit or hidden curriculum, though not explicit, is there, present in interactions, in stories, in answers, in unsaid expectations, and in invisible yet tangible values. Null curriculum, on the other hand, has no presence: it is not there, silenced, and omitted. Historically marginalized and minoritized students, including emergent bilingual students, previously known as English learners, often are not able to see curriculum that mirror who they are, what they have experienced, what contributions their communities have made, and what heroes and role models they can follow; instead, they are often peeking through windows into other peoples’ stories and lives.

Milner (2017) states, “When we teach through the null, we are complicit in maintaining the status quo, including the continuation of racial injustice.” We as educators have the responsibilities to make implicit curriculum explicit and bring null curriculum into the classroom space through engaging students’ multilingual multicultural identities.

When we think about the schooling of emergent bilinguals, some implicit curriculum can include classroom norms and expectations. What does classroom participation look like in the U.S.? How should

Mike Cline is an experienced educator, passionate about social and environmental justice and sustainability. He is co-founder and co-director of PanGeo Education, where he works to ensure all students have access to quality outdoor and environmental learning. Mike has taught social studies across all grade levels both here in America and overseas. As an equity-minded educator, Mike seeks to elevate the voices of underrepresented communities and empower them through critical pedagogy. contact@pangeoeducation.com

one follow a class schedule? How do teachers define “good” students? How do students engage in academic talk? What is deemed proper interaction when socializing with peers? What behaviors are considered acceptable according to the discipline plan? These are only some questions for us to ponder as we fully consider emergent bilinguals’ prior schooling experiences, or the lack of any formal schooling, and what being a good student means in their home culture. It is also important to think about what parental involvement means, as we simply cannot assume their ways of participation in their children’s schooling is the same as the US system’s traditional PTA model.

In terms of null curriculum, we educators need to take on the lens of educational equity in order to see what is missing and omitted. When we are aware of inequities, be they racial or linguistic, social justice issues come to the forefront. We need more counternarratives such as immigrant stories, untold contributions, and unshared successes of minoritized communities. Those counternarratives embrace the full and wholesome cultural and linguistic beings where positive lights are shone. When we educators value students’ and communities’ funds of knowledge and open up the classroom curricular and pedagogical space to all ways of being and knowing, we are more likely to have investment from students, as they are able to fully be themselves, embracing their own multilingual, multicultural identities.

Below are some links that educators can easily bring into their classrooms:

- [National museums](#) that showcase the contributions and struggles of groups of people in American history are important symbols and invaluable resources. There are national museums for Native Americans, African Americans, and other groups, but no national Asian-American and Pacific Islander museum yet. US Representative Grace Meng is working hard to change that. In a press release she said, “We need to weave the narrative of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities into the greater American story,” reflecting an often overlooked “null” part of our history and culture. How can such a museum help reveal and celebrate more American identities?
- [Vietnamese author and illustrator Thi Bui](#) has created a graphic novel, “The Best We Could Do,” which tells her family’s immigrant story, a journey from Vietnam to the US. Although the Vietnam War may be familiar to many Americans, are the stories of Vietnamese-Americans as well known? What missing part of our collective history can be filled by understanding the

path from a war-zone to a new life in California?

- [Do you know who the first woman of color](#) in the US Congress was? Or when was she elected? Patsy Takemoto Mink was elected in 1964, and was a key lawmaker in Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society initiative, working to end poverty, abolish inequality, and protect the natural environment. She served into the 70s and was re-elected to Congress later in the 90s. She had a major impact on the national stage, as well as back in Hawaii. How many people know about this important figure in American politics?
- [What does a Mississippi accent look like?](#) We all have stereotypical images of Americans of different kinds in our heads. Although stereotypes are natural, being unable to envision anything other than that stereotype limits who we think Americans are. The stories of Americans who don’t fit those stereotypes are usually the least told. Listen to Sally Chow and see if your stereotypical image of a Southerner changes a bit.

Cummins (2009) proposes a literacy framework that prioritizes the role of identity investment in literacy engagement through transformative literacies pedagogy. This framework demonstrates how students’ multilingual and multicultural identities and their communities’ funds of knowledge can be entry points of null curriculum to counter the dominant White pedagogy. Through engaging and empowering students and partnering with communities on critical issues that matter to them, we are more likely to disrupt assimilationist asset-based pedagogies and move towards critical pluralistic pedagogies. We can use the real-life events that students care about—and are confused about—as curriculum. We need to call out the perpetuation of racist, sexist, homophobic, and xenophobic mindsets and discourses. We have a social responsibility to teach students to embrace their multifaceted identities, build transferable skills, examine the world, be more socially conscious, and make justice-oriented decisions.

Emergent bilinguals should be afforded opportunities to bring their authentic linguistic selves into the classroom space. Theories of language pedagogy should acknowledge the significance of the first language not only in linguistic terms of “interference” or “transfer” but also in terms of students’ multilingual social identities (Belz, 2003), which often powerfully influence the ways in which they interact in the classroom. Multilinguals engage in fluid translanguaging practices; teachers need to build bridges from these language practices and the language practices desired in formal school settings and intentionally create

translanguaging opportunities in the pedagogical space.

Identity texts are great tools for engaging students' multilingual and multicultural identities. Cummins (2009) defines identity texts as the products of students' creative work or performances carried out within the pedagogical space orchestrated by the classroom teacher. They can be written, spoken, visual, musical, dramatic, or combinations in multimodal form. Titles such as "I am," "where I come from," and "where I will be" become powerful

conduits between families and schools. Students'—and their families'—multilingualism is used as a resource to encourage both first and second language development. When their first languages and cultures are brought into the classroom space, who they have been, are, and can become humanized.

All educators should make implicit curriculum explicit and bring null curriculum into the curricular and pedagogical space. We can all work together to promote equitable schooling for all.

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