



**PART I**  
Advancing the Conversation

## Toward an Expanded Understanding of Two-Way Bilingual Immersion Education: Constructing Identity through a Critical, Additive Bilingual/Bicultural Pedagogy

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*This literature review will take a focused look at the three currently accepted theoretical foundations upon which two-way bilingual immersion programs are based. Through an examination of research on identity construction in childhood and adolescence, particularly as seen through a critical pedagogical lens, it proposes that there exists a fourth and relatively unexamined component: identity construction. Further, it postulates that identity construction is of particular relevance to linguistic minority students.*

### Introduction

Despite a current political climate often hostile to bilingual education, two-way bilingual immersion programs (also known as TWI or dual language) continue to grow and to flourish. New two-way programs, often with innovative variations on program design, are evolving in spite of incredible odds (Garza, 2006; Gomez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005; Wiese, 2004; Linton, 2004). Their corresponding goals are threefold; that all children become bilingual and bi-literate, that

they achieve academically at or above grade level norms, and that they develop positive cross-cultural attitudes (Christian, Montone, Lindholm, & Carranza, 1997). Current research (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003; Christian, Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, & Howard, 2004) suggests that all three goals are being met. The primary instructional means used is context embedded content area instruction in a minority language. Because all children are expected to maintain their native language and culture while adding a second language, two-way bilingual immersion programs are by nature additive (Cummins, 2000).

Past and current research on two-way programs focuses on the linguistic and/or academic achievement of children in immersion programs rather than on what involvement in such programs means to the participants. Such studies ask if children are becoming bilingual and if they are achieving academically, but they do not ask what it means to children to become bilingual, bicultural, and bi-literate. Quantitative studies on academic achievement are important because they establish baseline data that children in two-way bilingual programs achieve at or above grade level norms. Yet, when unaccompanied by other types of information, such data are limited in vision because they narrow the view of what aspects of a two-way bilingual curriculum are worthwhile.

This literature review takes a focused look at the three currently accepted theoretical foundations upon

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which two-way bilingual immersion programs are based. Through an examination of research on identity construction in childhood and adolescence, particularly as seen through a critical pedagogical lens, it will be proposed that there exists a fourth and relatively unexamined component: identity construction. Further, it postulates that identity construction is of particular relevance to linguistic minority students.

### **Theoretical Framework of Two-Way Bilingual Immersion**

The inherent childhood capacity to acquire a second language without explicit instruction (Hakuta, 1986) provides the first pillar upon which two-way bilingual immersion programs have been constructed. It may also provide a springboard for exploration of the related issues of culture and identity. Key issues in child second-language acquisition include the relationship of cognitive development and proficiency in the first language to acquisition of the second language, the difference between simultaneous and sequential bilingualism, and the distinction between second-language acquisition and second-language learning. Theoretical constructs notwithstanding, all children are unique, and their roads to bilingualism are idiosyncratic. The important issue is that they are provided with an environment conducive to developing bilingualism. Data from the Center for Applied Linguistics (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003) indicates that two-way programs have been successful in this endeavor. Taken collectively, results of one large scale quantitative study and a number of smaller qualitative ones indicate that bilingualism and bi-literacy typically result for both native speakers of English and for English Language Learners within two-way programs.

The literature on academic, cognitive, and metalinguistic development in second-language acquisition provides the second foundational pillar upon which two-way programs are constructed. Peal and Lambert's landmark (1962) study challenged earlier claims of a negative correlation between bilingualism and intelligence and instead illustrated cognitive gains for bilingual children. Since that time research has indicated that there is no significant evidence of adverse effects on the speech and language development of bilingual children. Furthermore, advantages for bilinguals are said to include enhanced cognitive skills, superior developmental patterns, ability to employ necessary cognitive and social strategies, use of situational clues to understand what is happening, enhanced abilities in divergent thinking, ability to think flexibly and abstractly about language, the enjoyment of linguistic possibilities, the early emergence of the idea that there is more than one way of

saying the same thing, and the transfer of skills and knowledge from one language to the other (Van Groenou, 1993).

The Center for Applied Linguistics (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003) provides a comprehensive summary of the latest data on the academic achievement of students in two-way programs. This report notes three longitudinal studies (Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002) and a host of smaller scale studies (Ajuria, 1994; Castillo, 2001; Coy & Litherland, 2000; Stipek, Ryan, & Alarcon, 2001; Sera, 2000; Lindholm & Aclan, 1991; Lucido & McEachern, 2000; Cazabon, Lambert, & Hall, 1993; Gilbert, 2001; Alanis, 2000; Kortz, 2002; Kirk & Senesac, 2002; Clayton, 1993; Cazabon, Nicoladis, & Lambert, 1998) that have attempted to document the academic outcomes of students in two-way programs. The report concludes that "On aggregate, the research summarized . . . indicates that both native Spanish speakers and native English speakers in TWI programs perform as well or better than their peers educated in other types of programs, both on English standardized achievement tests and Spanish standardized achievement tests" (p. 25). More recently, a review of research on academic achievement in English (reading and writing) and math, (Lindholm-Leary, 2005) notes that students in two-way programs consistently demonstrate high levels of achievement, oftentimes surpassing their peers in monolingual programs. The author cites studies by Howard, Christian, and Genesee, 2003; Serrano and Howard, 2003; Collier and Thomas, 2004; and Lindholm-Leary, 2001 to support this conclusion. Similarly, Perez (2004) presents data from elementary schools in San Antonio, Texas, documenting two-way immersion students' superior performances compared to non-immersion students in English reading and writing. Equally impressive are the results of the Center for Research on Excellence, Diversity, and Education (CREDE) study (Christian, Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, & Howard, 2004) "the first to present empirical evidence that students at risk of academic difficulty (including low income, ELLs, and/or racial/ethnic minorities) . . . can make substantial gains in TWI programs and function quite well" (p. 3). In addition, there is a growing body of evidence that parents of students in two-way programs have a high level of satisfaction with the academic environment in which their children are being schooled. The Dual Language Family Survey (2006) notes that "86% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their child is being sufficiently challenged academically" and "70.2% indicated that they were very satisfied with their child's dual language program overall" (p. 1).

The link to children's bilingual/bicultural attitudes and hence identity construction may well be found in the third theoretical pillar of two-way programs: cross-cultural attitude. This is because language is an integral aspect

of culture, and some studies suggest that by the age of six children have already begun to develop cultural identities (Hamers & Blanc, 1992). Although the home environment is the primary source of cultural identity in children, the school can play an important secondary role. Research indicates that there are positive long-term attitudinal effects from the two-way bilingual approach (Collier, 1989) and that the earlier children begin in such programs, the greater are their gains in attitudinal measures (Genesee, 1987). More recent research has replicated the findings that two-way students tend to have positive cross-cultural attitudes as well as positive attitudes towards bilingualism, biculturalism, and school. The Center for Applied Linguistics (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003) cites studies by Cazabon et al., 1998; Linholm-Leary, 2001; Linholm-Leary and Borsato, 2001; Van Dorp, 2000; Lambert and Cazabon, 1994; Cazabon, 2000; Alanis, 1998; Hausman-Kelly, 2001; and Rolstad, 1997 as evidence of this continuing trend. Recurring themes in the case study of a bicultural child (Reyes, 1998) also support the findings that two-way programs promote positive attitudes towards bilingualism, biculturalism, and school.

The linkages between bilingual linguistic development, academic achievement, and cross-cultural attitude are noted by Reyes (1998). She observes, "A case can be made for a positive relationship between academic, cognitive, linguistic, and metalinguistic abilities. The active use [as opposed to passive exposure] of two different language systems causes children to compare and contrast aspects of the two languages and to put cognitive effort into separating [them], thus strengthening cognitive as well as linguistic and metalinguistic ability. This, in turn, has a positive effect on academic achievement. . . ." (p. 32). Reyes further suggests the importance of "factors in the home environment that facilitate learner motivation and reinforcement of the bilingualism and bi-literacy being developed in school" (p. 40). When "students experience both social and academic success [within bilingual educational contexts], positive cross-cultural attitudes are fostered, and the stage is set for children to make [positive] meaning of their bilingual experiences" (p. 41).

Reyes' (1998) framework parallels the one proposed by Collier and Thomas (2000). In their bilingual model, sociocultural, linguistic, academic, and cognitive development are linked as interdependent processes. They assert that in "students who come from a bilingual community . . . nonstop cognitive, academic, and linguistic development . . . must occur in a supportive sociocultural environment through their first language (L1) and their second language (L2) to enhance student learning" (p. 1). They further suggest that "any one of the three academic, cognitive, and linguistic components depends critically on the simultaneous development of

the other two" and that "sociocultural processes strongly influence students' access to cognitive, academic, and language development in both positive and negative ways" (p. 2).

Although Collier and Thomas mention affective factors such as self-esteem as important components of sociocultural processes, and the literature on two-way bilingual immersion names cross-cultural attitude as both a goal and an outcome of effective two-way programs, identity construction is not explicitly named in either of these cases. We suggest that identity construction, particularly as it relates to children of linguistic minority heritage, merits closer examination. For linguistic majority children in two-way classrooms, learning a minority language may be foundational to promoting positive cross-cultural attitudes. We propose that for linguistic minority children, developing and/or maintaining a minority (heritage) language may be foundational to promoting positive identity construction.

### **Expanding the Theoretical Framework: Identity Construction**

While cross-cultural attitude refers to feelings about others, identity refers to feelings about self. We suggest that cross-cultural attitude may have the strongest impact on majority students, while identity construction may be more relevant to minority students. Yet a discussion of student identity construction within two-way bilingual immersion programs remains virtually invisible in scholarly literature.

One notable exception to this trend is the case study of a bicultural child in a two-way bilingual immersion program (Reyes, 1998). An extensive data collection reveals the following recurring themes in the life of the child: comfort in two worlds and contextually appropriate behavior; attempts to make sense of issues of race, language, and culture; positive self-identify; pride in bilingualism; heightened awareness of and interest in language and culture; opportunities for enhanced relationships with others; and desire to acquire literacy skills in the majority language. This study suggests that participation in a two-way bilingual immersion program can have a positive impact on identity construction in a bicultural child.

Although she did not set out to look at identity construction, Rubinstein-Avila (2002) uncovered some related information when she studied a Portuguese-English two-way bilingual immersion program. Parents of students in that program appeared to be more concerned with acquisition of bicultural identity than with bilingualism itself. This is not to negate the importance that they attached to bilingualism in the heritage language, but to accentuate the importance of

meaning that was attached to that bilingualism. Similarly, Aguirre-Baeza (2001) advocates for two-way programs in part because she “had to devote an entire college career to learning about a language that [she] should never have lost.” Aguirre-Baeza urges us “to realize how quickly our children can forget what their cultural background is and what kind of people their grandparents were” (p. 167).

Despite an absence of inquiry on identity construction within two-way programs, considerable information exists on the broader topics of identity and ethnic identity, and on the parallel topics of self-concept and self-esteem within childhood. Thus, to begin to build an argument for the inclusion of a fourth pillar in the theoretical foundation of two-way programs, we turn to these related areas.

According to Diller and Moule (2005) “identity refers to the stable inner sense of who a person is, which is formed by the successful integration of various experiences of the self into a coherent self-image. *Ethnic identity* refers to that part of personal identity that contributes to the person’s self-image as an ethnic-group member” (p. 120). Many theorists believe that issues of children’s identity are directly related to the development of ethnic attitudes, which are usually set by the fourth grade (Katz, 1982). Recent studies have found positive associations between ethnic identity and self-esteem in minority youth. In addition, some suggest that social and psychological well-being are predicated on ethnic identity and that ethnic identity formation takes time and increases with age. Self-confidence and self-esteem are expected to increase as one moves from an unexamined identity to searching for identity achievement (Dinkha, 2000).

Herrera, Murry, and Morales Cabral (2007) provide a succinct review of current research on the relationship between cultural identity and student wellness and note the following findings (p. 88):

- Ethnic identity is the strongest predictor of overall wellness for CLD [culturally and linguistically diverse] students (Dixon, Rayle, & Myers, 2004).
- Higher levels of positive socioemotional development are consistent with a student’s positive identification with both his or her own and the majority group’s culture (Shrake & Rhee, 2004).
- Low levels of ethnic identity, characterized by negative attitudes toward one’s own group, can result in psychological distress, including feelings of marginality, low self-esteem, and depression (Phinney, 1993).

It is also noteworthy that research has not borne out the idea that parents are their children’s primary socializers; the role of peers and school are also significant in areas such as the formation of racial attitudes (Katz,

1982). Ocampo, Knight and Bernal (1997) suggest that ethnic self-identification may be impacted by the way young children are socialized both within and outside of families. They postulate that the development of ethnic identity could be better understood if increased attention was given to socialization theory. All of this points to the importance of early school experiences in the formation of cultural attitudes in children, especially in preschool through the end of third grade. For the bicultural child, who may one day face conflicting messages regarding culture and ethnicity, an early and firm foundation in biculturalism may be one prerequisite for positive identity in adult life.

When issues of language and culture intersect, a solid foundation in both the minority and majority languages may positively affect self-identity. Cavallaro (2005) discusses the connections between language and ethnic group affiliation at length. Based upon an extensive review of salient research he notes that language is central to maintenance of ethnic/cultural heritage and identity at both the individual and group levels. Language is the carrier of culture; thus, losing one’s language is equivalent to living outside of one’s culture. This holds true not only for members of linguistic minority groups who speak English as a second language, but for members of linguistic minority groups for whom English is a first language or who are at various stages of bilingual proficiency. Ethnic identity and heritage language facility are strongly related (Baker, 2001; Cho, 2000); heritage language development often has a positive impact on identity formation (Cho, Cho, & Tse, 1997; Feuerverger, 1991; Tse, 1997). Anzaldúa (2004) captures this concept poetically when she writes, “. . . if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language” (p. 271). Two-way bilingual immersion programs strive to not only prevent heritage language loss, but to give back that which has already been lost. Thus, whether by conscious choice or not, such programs are intimately involved in ethnic identity construction and the corresponding development of self-esteem in children from linguistic minority backgrounds.

As children learn to value and “selectively maintain and use both cultural systems including the use of two languages in a contextually appropriate manner” (McLaughlin, 1985, p. 193), they become bicultural. Similarly, Clement, Dornyei, and Noels (1994) propose that as contexts change, people may shift from one group membership to another. The ability to develop and maintain relationships in both cultures may thus be the key to psychological well-being. Furthermore, the extent to which a person actively alternates between cultures determines the ease by which maintaining competency in both cultures will be. People who have flexible identity should experience less stress, whereas people

who have rigid identity should experience more stress. This phenomenon would be intensified in multicultural environments (Berry, 1990).

Group membership becomes increasingly important in adolescence. Much of the research on identity construction in schools has focused on adolescents and adults (Hawkins, 2005), yet the majority of two-way bilingual immersion programs are on the elementary level. The literature on such programs suggests that students start as young as possible. Many vibrant two-way programs begin at the preschool level, yet Fernandez (2006) notes that research on bilingualism and personality development on the preschool level is virtually nonexistent. In an extensive review of the related literature that is available, she concludes that bilingual preschoolers perform best when they are able to maintain and develop upon the skills already in place in their first language and when their first language is valued and their culture is promoted. Yet there is much we do not know. Fernandez suggests that more research is needed to determine the impact of discontinuing the use of preschoolers' native language in school. She implies that it has potentially negative consequences on identity construction. Fortunately, two-way bilingual immersion preschool classroom models mandate a high ratio of classroom activities in the minority language, usually 80% to 100%. We offer a parallel suggestion to that of Fernandez: more research is needed to determine the impact of two-way bilingual immersion classrooms on identity construction in preschool children.

Up until this point we have focused our discussion on the development of ethnic identity within two-way bilingual immersion programs. Such programs have as their goals the academic and cognitive as well as linguistic and cultural development of students. Yet there is more to identity construction than the development of ethnic identity. Hawkins (2005) notes the value to children of acquiring identities as learners within schools. We suggest that the development of ethnic identity and academic identity may be linked in two-way bilingual immersion programs because they maximize the possibility for bilingual children to construct identities as learners that parallel their ethnic identities. When academic achievement, cognitive skill, and linguistic and metalinguistic ability connect within the context of an overall school environment supportive of bilingualism and biculturalism, not only positive cross-cultural attitudes, but also positive self-esteem and consequently positive identity can result. Cross-cultural respect, as well as a motivating and stimulating learning climate, can lead to positive student interpretations of a bilingual/bicultural environment and thus positive attitudes toward bilingualism/biculturalism (Reyes, 1998). Herein lies the previously noted possible connection between academic and cognitive gains and personal development. When stu-

dents experience both social and academic success within a bilingual/bicultural environment, positive attitudes towards bilingualism/biculturalism have a firm foundation in which to grow. We suggest that this foundation can be provided within two-way bilingual immersion programs. We further suggest that such a foundation may provide the basis for healthy identity construction in children and youth from linguistic and cultural minority backgrounds. We advocate further exploration of this supposition.

The Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Education provides data (Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2001) that supports our hypothesis. Students surveyed from linguistic minority backgrounds

“achieved high levels of academic competence and motivation; developed ambitions to go to college and knowledge about how to pursue college; were proud to be bilingual and continued to use Spanish after they finished the programs; and were very satisfied with the education they received in the two-way program.”(p. 21)

Further, results pointed

“to the development of a sense of ‘resiliency’ among the Hispanics, particularly ELL and low income students. . . . These include certain internal traits, such as high self-esteem, a motivation to study hard, and a belief in one’s academic competence; (and) the perception of a positive school environment. . . .” (p. 21)

Although McKay and Wong’s (1996) study of four Chinese-American secondary school students did not take place in a two-way program, it offers further insight into the interplay between identity construction and academic achievement. Identity construction is suggested to be the mediating factor in the students’ differing levels of academic achievement and second language (English) learning.

As demographics in the United States continue to change, issues of ethnic identity continue to surface (Tomlinson-Clarke, 2001). School is one of the primary socialization vehicles of childhood and as such may well be one of the sites where issues of identity closely linked to ethnicity are most salient. Although two-way programs may offer support to school-supported identity construction, critical two-way classrooms may be even more powerful in this endeavor.

### **Bilingualism, Identity, and Power**

A glimpse into the research on critical literacy provides further insight into the possible linkage between two-way bilingual immersion and identity construction. This literature places the student search for identity within the context of a society fraught with issues of race, class,

gender, and culture, and it identifies critical classrooms as powerful and potent places where identity construction can be supported and negotiated.

Both Freire (1970) and Wink (2000) describe critical pedagogy as a way of knowing in which students not only read the word but also the world. The process through which this *reading* occurs is rooted in dialogue. We suggest that in this process students negotiate and renegotiate their identities as they consider their place in what may be considered an unequal power structure. Critical pedagogy is ultimately transformational (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1998; Knoblauch, 1990; McLaren, 2003; Finn, 1999; Wink, 2000) and thus encourages students to expose and to challenge such inequities. Further research in which identity formation is studied in critical classrooms is needed.

In two-way bilingual immersion programs, linguistic and cultural systems are continuously being contrasted. Students are asked, in essence, to read a multilingual and multicultural world. However, students are also invited to *become* bilingual and bicultural. Thus, such programs may also be considered transformational. However, whether or not power relations are ever formally explored is up to the pedagogical stance of the particular teacher and the particular school. Yet, the possibility is omnipresent; giving linguistic minority students access to their native language and culture allows them to “read the world” through a multicultural lens. Gay (1995) proposes that multiculturalism is the mirror image of critical pedagogy. Giving students access to their native language and culture may also promote viewing the world through a critical lens, a lens common to both bilingual and multicultural frameworks.

Based on field research in a two-way bilingual immersion classroom, Reyes and Vallone (2007) postulate that students in (additive) two-way bilingual immersion programs may develop a “metacultural awareness,” a heightened awareness of one’s own culture in relation to the culture of others. In subtractive models of education for ELLs, students may sense that their own language and culture are not valued. Hruska (2000), in her research of Spanish-dominant English language learners in both ESL and transitional bilingual settings, found that English speakers placed limited value on the Spanish speakers’ bilingualism. In a year-long ethnographic study that encompassed several hundred hours of field observations, she concluded that Spanish dominant speakers in an English dominant kindergarten class “. . . may have already become sensitive to the meanings and low status attached to Spanish in the local community” (p. 16). Hruska’s study can generate other questions: Do subtractive programs for ELLs promote not only subtractive bilingualism but also subtractive biculturalism and a corresponding internalization of negative attitudes toward ethnic identity? What happens

to children from bicultural backgrounds who are trapped between two cultures and, due to lack of supports, achieve proficiency in neither? Can a form of lasting “semi-culturalism” evolve in which the child does not fit comfortably into either cultural context? These questions merit investigation.

While Hruska makes a significant contribution in terms of language learning, perhaps her consideration of power structures within transitional bilingual programs is most salient. “This study demonstrates that the meanings that are constructed for bilingualism, and the affiliated identities available to bilingual students are shaped by dominant discourses and their underlying power dynamics. While multiple language proficiency might be celebrated and encouraged in one context for a specific population, it can be cast as a disadvantage and hindrance in others” (p. 38). Hruska indicates that language learning alone does not best meet the needs of bilingual students, but rather she suggests “race, ethnicity, socioeconomics, historical circumstances . . . cannot easily be separated from it [second language learning]” (p. 38). Citing Cummins (1996) and Crawford (1989) Hruska (2003) conceptualizes the debate in bilingual education as a sociopolitical one. “It is about power relations. These power relations, their underlying ideologies, and related educational practices shape the meaning of bilingualism in a specific context” (p. 11).

In this sense, one can see a direct connection between bilingual education paradigms and student identity construction; notably, identity construction as it relates to power relationships based on language use in the classroom. In additive bilingual paradigms (which include bilingual maintenance programs) minority language and culture are respected. In two-way programs this is taken a step further; minority language and culture are seen as gifts to not only be maintained, but to be imparted to others. Conversely, in subtractive bilingual paradigms, minority language and culture are not maintained but replaced with the dominant language and culture. Thus, the difference in value placed upon the non-dominant language and culture clearly varies with program model. The question becomes how the perception of value associated with these variables may shape identity construction in students of linguistic and cultural minority background. As Hruska (2000) points out “. . . identities are socially produced. People implicate their relationships and identities to each other and position each other through language. Positioning can affect not only the construction of identities but also who has access to which discourses. . . .” (p. 2).

The social context for learning is a crucial factor in two-way bilingual immersion classrooms and may provide the context in which issues of identity and access can be safely explored. In two-way classrooms, both languages and cultures represented need to be viewed

with equal value, and children from all backgrounds need to be respected and well treated as well as integrated in the same classrooms (Lindholm, 1992) within the context of an overall school climate that respects and places value on bilingualism and biculturalism. In programs where children from the target language group are not represented or are represented poorly, respect and value for the target language and culture are equally crucial. Within the context of mutual respect, as well as mutual access to language discourse, identity becomes a natural part of the classroom curriculum and is subject to continual rethinking and reshaping.

O'Brien (2001), citing Weedon suggests that, "Rather than considering social situations like classrooms as places where teachers and students have relatively fixed identities and power identities, we can think of them as places where both subjectivities and power relationships are constructed and reconstructed through local discourses" (p. 40). In two-way classrooms, where discourse is bilingual, where students and teachers alike are both teachers and learners, and where students and teachers are encouraged to move between cultures with fluidity, this can take on added significance. Further, O'Brien posits that, "Viewing our identity as open to creation and recreation rather than a fixed property that we were born with, shows us as constantly changing creatures engaged in dealing with the contradictions of everyday life, including those we meet as students and teachers" (p. 40).

This point of view is foundational to the two-way classroom, where all participants are continually negotiating issues of bilingualism and biculturalism. This process of linguistic and cultural negotiation, however, is not limited to the classroom. For many participants in two-way programs, including teachers and administrators, this process moves back and forth between the worlds of home and school as well as moving outside of both locations. Indeed, "Identity is no longer found tied to stable environments like home or work but through actions carried out in places like malls, train stations, etc. Identity is now a matter of self-construction amidst unstable times, mores, and global consumerism" (Bean & Thomas, 2003, p. 640). Yet the classroom can provide a stable environment in which to *explore* identity. Reyes and Vallone (2007) note that a safe environment is needed to facilitate identity formation as students view the ideas of others in contrast to their own. The two-way classroom encourages such exploration through comparing and contrasting not only languages but also cultures and associated societal mores. It thus provides the safety net that children and youth need to probe both socially and individually constructed notions of race, class, culture, ethnicity, language, and gender. Bean and Thomas (2003) note, "Young people are social actors struggling with social relationships to construct positive identities in fluid

times" (p. 631). Two-way students are often grappling with ways of constructing fluid identities in fluid times.

Although two-way programs are most popular at the elementary school level, they are slowly making inroads into the lives of adolescents. Nationwide in 2001, 26 middle schools and 8 high schools had two-way bilingual immersion programs (Montone & Loeb, 2000). As the difficulties encountered in establishing two-way programs at the secondary level are documented and addressed, and as increasing numbers of students graduate from two-way bilingual immersion elementary schools, this number will surely increase. Adolescence is universally noted as a critical time to explore identity issues; what may be explored subconsciously in childhood may later be the focus of explicit examination. It would be natural to explore the contributions that two-way bilingual immersion classrooms can make to this important task which youth face on the way to becoming young adults. In critical classrooms "Teen social actors use action and experience to forge identities in this shifting, unstable landscape" (Bean & Thomas, 2003, p. 640). It is crucial that teens are provided with the opportunity to think through their identity and that the critical classroom provides a safe place in which to do so (Reyes & Vallone, 2007). Again, issues of race, class, culture, ethnicity, and gender are central to critical classrooms just as they are embedded in two-way bilingual immersion curriculum. Although not all two-way immersion classrooms may be up to the challenge of addressing such issues, the possibility certainly exists. Exploring the possibilities for providing supports to adolescents in their attempts at identity construction within two-way classrooms through a systematic research agenda could encourage more two-way educators to strive to meet this challenge.

Also meriting exploration is the role of critical literacy in supporting identity construction in the two-way classroom. According to Bean and Thomas (2003), the critical classroom uses literacy as a way for youth to negotiate their identities by working through characters and situations. Literacy, after all, "is not neutral . . . every literacy event involves social and cultural values . . ." (Woodridge, 2001, p. 263). In two-way classrooms, literacy events are expected to involve more than one set of social and cultural values, thus providing a rich opportunity for identity construction.

## Conclusion

Bilingual education has become a controversial and politically charged issue, subject to fierce debate in the public arena. What this debate has largely neglected to consider, however, is that our schools do more than teach

academics. As socializing agents of students, schools have the opportunity to profoundly influence identity construction through their pedagogical and curricular stance and their ability to provide services and to forge alliances with parents, families, and communities. Conversely, lack of sensitivity in these areas can create additional stressors for children and adolescents as they seek to develop constructs about self and society that inform diversity. Furthermore, identifying meaningful constructs of ethnic/cultural identity could lay the groundwork for future qualitative and quantitative studies that examine whether academic achievement is mediated by such identity.

It is important to remember that two-way bilingual programs are also multicultural programs, made up of not only middle class white and low-income Latino students, but of children of diverse cultural, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds, in many different combinations. African-American children, for example, may not be linguistic minorities, but they certainly do not represent “mainstream” America. Furthermore, not all children are members of only one linguistic, racial, or cultural group. Not all middle-class children are of European-American background, and many English dominant children are of Latino background. Two-way bilingual immersion programs meet the criteria proposed by Nieto (2004) in her definition of multicultural education when she writes that such schooling “challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect.” The multicultural sites provided by two-way bilingual immersion programs offer countless opportunities for students to forge identities in supportive contexts.

Our world is complex. Children face many challenges as they forge identity. We need to look to new ways of educating and socializing children to meet the challenges of an increasingly culturally complicated world. Two-way bilingual classrooms and schools are a logical site to begin to address the research questions outlined in this article because they allow for the possibility of multicultural and multifaceted identity construction.

Future research in bilingual immersion education could be informed by studies that take a focused look at the impact of identity construction on not only linguistic and academic achievement but also on the psychosocial health of linguistic minority children and children of linguistic minority heritage. After all, educational research holds importance because of its potential to impact the quality of human life. Likewise, countless conversations with parents and teachers of students in two-way immersion programs attest that participation in such programs can and do make deep and profound

contributions not only to the educational growth but also to the emotional health of children. As the themes generated by their stories unfold and connect with those stories already written and those stories yet to be written, so do the future possibilities for our children.

The search for identity is universal. The challenge for educators and for parents is to provide support systems that respect diversity and are available to all children and adolescents yet are responsive to individual circumstance. We must seek to illuminate the support systems available for identity construction in two-way bilingual immersion programs and by so doing expand the theoretical foundations of such educational programs.

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