Introduction

The main problem addressed in this book is the mismatch between the instruction and assessment that millions of multilingual students* need in order to thrive and the instruction and assessment that they experience. While this mismatch exists for most students, it is even more harmful for multilingual students (Cunningham, 2019).

The current model of learning, which is grounded in the accumulation of a set of facts and skills, ignores and devalues the many assets that multilingual students bring with them to the learning table. These assets include a rich array of languages, cultural backgrounds, knowledge, talents, interests, and stories. Accumulation-focused learning tends to overload multilingual students with linguistically complex tasks in English, disconnected information to memorize, and semi- to nonengaging content (Darling-Hammond, 2007). As a result, many multilingual students lack feelings of agency, belonging in school, respect, and freedom to voice their ideas and opinions (Beyer, 2017).

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*I use the term "multilingual students" in this book. Most multilingual students grew up speaking a language other than English. Many speak two or more non-English languages. Multilingual students have a wide range of diverse backgrounds. Many come from other countries, many migrate, many are refugees, and many have had gaps in their schooling. The suggestions in this book will also benefit students who speak variations of English that differ from the language of texts and tasks commonly used in school.

For decades, testing companies, curriculum companies, and policy-makers have perpetuated the narrative that large multiple-choice tests in English are all that we need to scientifically show learning progress—and that schools must do all they can to help all students to improve their scores in the same way. Yet as Chapter 1 describes, this narrative heavily favors monolingual, middle-class, English-speaking students. Multilingual students, in contrast, are more likely to struggle, disengage, and drop out of school than their monolingual peers (Christle et al., 2007).

When a system supports the success and well-being of one group more than others, that system is unjust and requires change. This book focuses on changing school-based learning at the classroom level and at the system level in order to achieve *pedagogical justice*. Pedagogical justice means giving all students the appropriate support, resources, instruction, time, encouragement, relationships, opportunities, and choices to become the individuals they were meant to be. For multilingual students, in particular, it means providing learning experiences that value their backgrounds and languages—not in order to memorize facts and skills for tests, but to learn and grow and thrive.

Most teachers have a mix of monolingual and multilingual students in their classrooms. And most teachers do not have time or energy to differentiate their lessons among their students. Even in the cases where such lessons and activities are differentiated, multilingual students are often asked less interesting and less cognitively challenging questions. I therefore recommend reading the following chapters with an eye on overhauling instruction for *all* of your students. Along the way, you will find that your monolingual students will also benefit from these changes.

Also, read this book with an eye on the long term. This is not a one-month or even a one-year process. In most cases, it starts in a handful of classrooms and grows over time. Chapter 6 describes different starting points (e.g., unit, course, assessments, grade level, policy, etc.) where a district or school might begin.

Overhauling takes time, but the stakes are too high to keep spending precious time on minor reforms and short-lived initiatives aimed at bumping up test scores a few percentage points. This book instead argues for an approach that addresses a multitude of issues:

- Giving students high levels of voice and choice as they learn

- Changing how we assess student learning and growth

- Focusing more on communication, products, and performances than on percentiles and points

- Valuing the building of relationships, fostering student agency, and encouraging student creativity

Chapter 1 starts with six dimensions of pedagogical justice: student agency, engaging challenges, idea-building, meaningful interactions, critical and creative thinking, and assessment for learning. Chapter 2 digs into what students should be learning and how they should be growing. Chapter 3 then looks at ways to assess these things more effectively and more engagingly than points-focused tasks and tests. Chapter 4 presents an alternative model for instruction and assessment, which I call the Idea-Building Approach. Chapter 5 describes how to overhaul classroom instruction for idea-building, with an emphasis on unit and lesson design.

The bulk of this book (Chapters 2 through 5) focuses on changing instruction and assessment in ways that are especially beneficial for multilingual students. Hopefully, many teachers will apply the suggestions in their classrooms. But to achieve pedagogical justice, the entire school needs to be on board, which requires administrative and systemwide support. This is the focus of Chapter 6. Each chapter also offers short activities to encourage you to stop, reflect, apply, and build up your own ideas as you read.

This book builds upon the work in my last book, *The Communication Effect*, which focuses on enhancing instructional activities to increase the quantity and quality of language use in every lesson. This book focuses on the bigger picture of (a) seeing how learning is currently defined, measured, and realized in our schools and (b) outlining an alternative approach to learning in school, which focuses on building up ideas to foster pedagogical justice for multilingual students.

The audiences for this book are the teachers, instructional coaches, administrators, curriculum writers, and professional development providers who are willing and able to make major changes over the long haul and to help all students grow into the amazing individuals they were meant to be.

I have been teaching and working in K–12 classrooms for over three decades. I have worked closely with teachers to design instruction that fosters student engagement and rich interaction

across grade levels and disciplines. Along the way, I have seen *many* different efforts to raise "achievement" (yearly test scores), especially the scores of multilingual students. Computer programs, special language courses, and reading interventions came in to save the day. Some even raised test scores, but they have failed and still fail to adequately serve multilingual students in meaningful ways. And many such interventions caused even more harm.

Every single student has the right to resources, opportunities, support, and the pedagogy that they need to learn and grow as much as possible in order to reach their full and varied potentials (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Yet the current model was never designed—or even adapted—to meet the needs of multilingual students. Unfortunately, it has been a "sink or swim" model from the beginning—and without a major overhaul, many multilingual students will continue to "sink."

As you read the following pages, remember that everything we do in school—each activity and assessment, each conversation and assignment—either moves our students (and us) toward pedagogical justice or away from it. This overhaul is long overdue and cannot wait. Students in our classrooms need it right now.

References

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ACTIVITY I.1
Building up Ideas

The purpose of this book is to help you build up your key ideas for improving the education of multilingual students. Throughout the chapters, you can start new ideas and add to them as you read and engage in the activities. Here is a sample big idea that you can build up in the next three chapters. I include several sample building blocks that you can use or replace. Building blocks tend to consist of examples from the book or from your own life, along with definitions and clarifications. This is just one of several ideas you can build up. I provide one sample idea per chapter for your convenience.

IDEA STATEMENT: The current system fosters pedagogical injustices for multilingual students and needs a major overhaul.		
We need to overhaul what we teach students and what we expect them to learn.		We need to overhaul how we assess students.
	We need to replace accumulation-based curriculum and instruction with a focus on communication and idea-building.	