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How University Students View Themselves as Literate Beings: Implementing Literacy Self-Evaluation Interviews in the United States and Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how university students in the US and Hong Kong perceive themselves as literate and biliterate beings. All the participants in Hong Kong are biliterate in at least two languages (including Cantonese, Mandarin, and English), whereas only 40% of the U.S. participants are biliterate in at least two languages (including English, Spanish, German, and Portuguese). This study examines how the participants define and situate literacy as well as literacies from multiple perspectives by considering their academic as well as socio-political contexts in the US and Hong Kong. In addition, a majority of them have posed the issue of how English is perceived differently from other languages they use.

INTRODUCTION

Often we as educators know very little about university students' literacy backgrounds or experiences, especially regarding culturally and linguistically diverse students. We began our inquiry as we worked with undergraduate and graduate students at universities in the US and in Hong Kong. We started investigating university students' attitudes and self-perceptions concerning how they define themselves as literate beings in their first language as well as their second and other languages. In order to do so, we developed a set of questions to examine and document how the students define literacy (see Appendix).

In recent years, a number of heuristic tools have been developed to understand elements regarding the literacy attitudes and perceptions of K-12 students. A few of these include the Burke Reading Interview (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005), the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna & Kear, 1990), the Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995), and the Writer Self-Perception Scale (Bottomley, Henk, & Melnick, 1997/1998). These tools can help teachers and K-12 students collaboratively explore multiple elements of literacy. At the same time, concerning university students, effective tools to understand adult literacy and biliteracy can be challenging to identify. This article responds to the need of having a reflective tool to understand

the critical aspects of literacy by introducing the Literacy Self-evaluation Interview for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Adults (LSI). At the same time, we illuminate study participants' voices from the US and Hong Kong to demonstrate how the university students view literacy and biliteracy issues in their societies.

The Literacy Self-evaluation Interview as a Way to Explore Situated Literacies

Street (2012) made a significant contribution in revealing that literacy is socially constructed rather than directed by cognitive or psychological aspects. Freebody and Hornibrook (2005) support the notion that literacy is socially and culturally constructed, and state that "literacy practices can be interpreted as reflections, adaptations, or modifications of the relations of power that are continually being rebuilt in the site of their use" (p. 375).

Situated literacies are categorized as advocacy research based on an ethnographic approach. According to Cherland and Harper (2006), advocacy research in the category of situated literacies "does not assume that literacy is some unitary thing that people have but rather that literacies are things that people do" (p. 120). At the same time, situated literacies promote the notion that literacy needs to be studied in various domains such as home, school, the workplace, and the community. It is important to note that situated literacies beyond the school setting can often position what literacy is for a particular group of people (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 2011; Heath & Street, 2008; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Situated literacies are examined and documented through ethnographic methodologies, which often include interviews, observations, and document analysis in order to explore the literacy practices of a particular social and cultural group (Heath, 2012; Heath & Street, 2008).

Various researchers have pointed out a significant need for understanding and valuing linguistically and culturally diverse adults' literacy backgrounds (Freeman & Freeman, 2011; Gutierrez, 2002; Handsfield & Jimenez, 2008; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). We are adopting one of the ethnographic inquiry methodologies, namely interviews, by developing and implementing the LSI. Wells (2009) illuminates the significant contribution of dialogic inquiry to understand the roles of literacy from personal as well as social perspectives. The interview can be a valuable tool to generate interactive and dialogic inquiry to explore and value adult students' biliteracy knowledge and experiences.

The Literacy Self-evaluation Interview for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Adults

The Literacy Self-evaluation Interview for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Adults consists of a set of questions about one's first language and second language (see Appendix). We have administered the set of questions to university students' enrolled at a public university located in Hong Kong and a public university located in the Southwest region of the United States. Both locations are considered socio-cultural, historical as well as political borderlands. In all, 87 students from the two sites participated in this study. We use participants' voices to introduce some of the Literacy Self-evaluation Interview questions.

We implemented a set of literacy interview questions (see Appendix). The interview forms consist of two parts: Part I for adult learners' first language (L1) backgrounds and views and Part II for their second language (L2) backgrounds and views. However, for this article, we discuss the two parts (L1 and L2) in an integrated manner.

BACKGROUND OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Prior to sharing our findings of how the linguistically and culturally diverse university students perceive themselves as literate beings, we situate the 87 participants in the two sites, in the US and Hong Kong.

Participants in the US: General Backgrounds

Of the 35 participants, 31 are female (88.6%) and four are male (11.4%). Most participants, 54.3% (n = 19), are between the ages of 20 and 29. Twenty-five percent (n = 9) of participants are between the ages of 30 and 39, and 20% (n = 7) of them are between the ages of 40 and 54. A little less than half of the participants are Mexican Americans (45.7%; n = 16), followed by White (40%; n = 14).

Twenty-eight of the participants are U.S. citizens (80%). Sixteen out of the 28 U.S. citizens also self-identified as Mexican Americans. The rest of the participants indicated Mexican, (5.7%; n = 2), Brazilian (2.9%; n = 1), Asian American (2.9%; n = 1), and German American (2.9%; n = 1). Two participants did not specify a nationality (5.7%; n = 2). The majority of the participants are local born (77.1%; n = 27); that is, they were born in the city where the university is located. Three (8.6%) of the participants reported that they were not born locally. Among the remaining participants, there are four longtime immigrants (11.4%) and one recent immigrant (2.9%).

Language Backgrounds of the Participants in the US

The majority of the 35 participants indicated 'English' is their first language (77.1%; n = 27), followed by 'Spanish' (20%; n = 7) and 'Portuguese' (2.9%; n = 1). According to the LSI, more than half of the participants (60%; n = 21) are monolingual while the rest are bilingual. Eight (22.9%) participants stated that their second language is English and six (17.7%) participants stated their second language is Spanish. Considering the fact that this university is located in a border state next to Mexico, there is a large number of bilingual English-Spanish speaking students in this region of the US. This substantial presence of English-Spanish speaking bilinguals in the demographics is also reflective of its socio-cultural, political, and historical contexts. The majority of the U.S. participants also work while they study at the university.

Participants in Hong Kong: General Backgrounds

Of the 52 participants, 43 are female (82.7%) and nine are male (17.3%). The majority of the participants are between the ages of 20-29 (75%, n = 39). More than half of the participants are 'Chinese' (69.2%; n = 36) while the others, about one-third of the participants (30.8%; n = 16), did not specify their ethnic and/or racial backgrounds. Only one participant (1.9%) indicated a 'British' nationality. The majority of the participants are local born (86.5%, n = 45). That is, they were born in Hong Kong. Regarding the remaining participants, 7.7% (n = 4) are longtime immigrants, and (5.8%, n = 3) are neither local born nor longtime or recent immigrants. Similar to the participants in the US, the majority of the participants in Hong Kong also work while they study at the university.

Language Backgrounds of the Participants in Hong Kong

All 52 (100%) participants' first language is Chinese. Among them, the vast majority (84.6%; n = 44) specified their first language as 'Cantonese.' One (1.9%) specified it as 'Mandarin' (otherwise known as Putonghua in China and Hong Kong), and one (1.9%) specified it as 'Fujianese.' The remaining six (11.5%) specified 'Chinese' as their first language without a precise specification. Almost all the participants indicated 'English' as their second language (98.1%, n = 51). Among them, 51.9% (n = 27) reported 'English' only, 43.3% (n = 22) reported 'English and Putonghua,' 1.9% (n = 1) reported 'English and Japanese,' and 1.9% (n = 1) reported 'English and Zhongshan dialect.' One participant (1.9%) reported 'Putonghua' as a single second language. The fact that the LSI revealed that English as L2 is the overwhelming majority among participants is indicative of its historical legacy and standing world language status in the post-colonial Hong Kong society.

The Literacy Self-evaluation Interview for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Adults

In this paper, we focus on the following six questions (see Appendix for complete list), which helped us understand the literacy attitudes and perceptions of the linguistically and culturally diverse university students from the LSI questions we developed.

- How do you define literacy?
- How does the rest of the world perceive your first language?
- How does the rest of the world perceive your second language?
- In your society, is it important to be literate in your second language?
- What are your literacy and biliteracy learning experiences?
- Do you think being a literate person in your second language offers you a better chance to change the society you belong to?

We are illuminating each of the questions above to understand and identify university students' literacy and biliteracy socio-cultural backgrounds.

How Do You Define Literacy?

The first question we asked participants, "How do you define literacy?" is a general question to help us understand how the students view and define literacy. In fact, 27 of the 87 participants responded, "Literacy is the ability to write and read." That was the most common response from the participants in the US and Hong Kong. Here are examples of other responses students from the US and Hong Kong shared with us:

- Literacy is the way we define ourselves and communicate (a participant in the US).
- Literacy is everything we do (a participant in the US).
- Literacy is anything around you that pertains to words and meaning (a participant in the US).
- Ability to use a language (a participant in Hong Kong)
- Actions and behaviors which have been modified by the society (a participant in Hong Kong).
- How many words which the people already know (a participant in Hong Kong).

Literacy is commonly associated with reading and writing. However, over the course of the semester through on-going dialogic interactions with the participants we begin to realize that the participants began to discuss and explore literacy attitudes and perceptions from multiple perspectives, such as the social as well as personal aspects of literacy.

How Does the Rest of the World Perceive Your First Language?

The next question, “How does the rest of the world perceive your first language?” is specifically concerned with the participants’ first language (L1). Participants in the US and Hong Kong have various L1 backgrounds, such as Spanish, Portuguese, and English (participants in the US), Cantonese, Putonghua, and Fujianese (participants in Hong Kong).

Participants in the US

The participants in the US who spoke English as their L1 responded that the rest of the world perceived English as “important,” “an asset,” “a dominant Language,” “valued,” “a necessity,” and as “accepted.” Also, some participants who speak English as their L1 referred to English as “an international language,” “the most widespread and common language in the world,” “a universal language,” and “a global language.” Responses regarding English as the L1 were overwhelmingly positive. However, the responses of the US participants whose L1 is Spanish were more diverse and the perceptions were more divided than the participants whose L1 is English. Here are some positive responses regarding Spanish as the L1:

- Spanish is an asset.
- Spanish is very much valued in some countries.

Here are some negative responses:

- A lot of people in the US dislike it [Spanish].
- As a child, I was made fun of because of my first language [Spanish].
- I was laughed at because I spoke Spanish, yet that is not the case in certain parts of this country [US].

Participants in Hong Kong

The majority of the participants in Hong Kong (92%, N = 47) responded that the rest of the world perceived their L1, Cantonese, rather negatively. Some of them mentioned that the rest of the world perceived Cantonese as a dialect of Chinese (rather than a language), neither widely used nor international. Here are some of the negative responses:

- The rest of the world perceives their first language as a language that is difficult to learn.
- Not important.
- Not influential.
- The rest of the world is not familiar with the language [Cantonese].
- Not popular.

There were only two participants who responded positively concerning their L1 (1 Cantonese, 1 Putonghua):

- The rest of the world perceives Cantonese and Mandarin as having a long history.
- Chinese is growing in importance, popularity, and strength and more and more people are learning Chinese these days.

The participants' responses concerning their first language reveal how each language is socially and politically situated by the speakers, who belong to specific societies and communities.

How Does the Rest of the World Perceive Your Second Language?

Participants in the US and Hong Kong provided us with important information concerning how their second language (L2) is viewed by the rest of the world. There are two L2s mentioned most often by US participants: English and Spanish. Some of the participants who reported English as their L2 responded in these ways:

- In our society English is important.
- English is important.
- English is a dominant language here in the US, and I needed to learn [it].
- It [English] is required in schools as it is viewed as a global language.

Here are some of the responses given by participants whose L2 is Spanish:

- Here in the Southwest of the US Spanish is acceptable.
- Spanish is looked down [on].
- It [Spanish] is perceived negatively.

Bilingual US participants' responses about their L2 reflected that society and the rest of the world situate English as a more accepted and valued language than Spanish. As for participants in Hong Kong, there were a number of multilingual participants. We noticed that they gave us very similar responses regarding English as their L2. A majority of the participants in Hong Kong situated English as an L2 quite positively. Here are some of the responses:

- English is widely used around the world.
- English is an international language.
- English is a world/global language.
- English is a tool for communication.
- English is a business language.
- English is a formal language.

At the same time, 15% (n = 8) of participants in Hong Kong positioned the hegemonic status of English with reservation. Here are some examples:

- The [high] status of English will be replaced by Chinese one day.
- English is actually considered a global language, but still some places would avoid using it because of political issues.

- While traveling in Europe, it [English] wasn't looked upon favorably because it was associated with Americans.

The responses from the two universities are quite similar in terms of the participants' positive perception towards English. However, participants' views of their L1 when it is a language other than English are contrasting. The majority of the participants viewed their L1, in this case, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Fujianese, as highly as their L2, English. As for L1 speakers of English, their views of their L1 are quite positive, yet their views on their L2, when it is a language other than English, are not very positive.

In Your Society, Is It Important to Be Literate in Your First Language?

This question examines the issue further by inviting participants to share how they situate their L1 and L2 in the societies in which they live.

Participants in the US

Thirty-four of the 35 participants responded that it was important to be literate in their L1. It is important to note that 27 participants use English as their L1, six of them use Spanish as their L1, and one participant is an L1 speaker of Portuguese. Here are some responses by participants whose L1 is English:

- It is important to know English to find a job here in the US.
- English is necessary for a person to be able to communicate and function in the society.
- In our society it is pretty much mandatory to be a literate person. If not, you are looked down on for not keeping up with certain expectations.

One L1 speaker of English provided a different perspective here. According to her, "It is important to learn a language other than English." Here are some responses from the participants whose L1 is Spanish or Portuguese:

- Here [in the US southwest] you get paid a little bit more if you know Spanish.
- Being bilingual [Spanish & English] can help us find a better job here [in the US southwest].
- [Our] first language is very important in order for us to develop our second language more effectively and meaningfully.

Participants in Hong Kong

Forty of the 52 participants responded that it is important to be literate in their L1 (46 Cantonese, 1 Mandarin and 1 Fujianese, and no response from 4 participants). Cantonese is the dominant L1 for the participants in Hong Kong. Here are some of the responses by Cantonese L1 participants:

- Cantonese is the language that people in their society use to communicate here [in Hong Kong].
- It [Cantonese] is important to communicate with others in daily life and at work.
- Being literate in Cantonese is important in their society with career development.
- Knowing Cantonese is being respected by others in the society [in Hong Kong].

On the other hand, 10 participants indicated that being literate in their L1 is not significant. Here are some of their responses:

- It is not [important] being literate in Cantonese because there are other alternatives, English and Putonghua, to be used to communicate. These alternatives are more important than Cantonese.
- Here in Hong Kong, English is more important than Cantonese.
- It is not so important to be literate in my L1 (Fujianese), and it is rare for me to speak the language. I just speak the language with my family.

According to participants in the US and Hong Kong, their first languages are being valued by them. What we find interesting here is that the same participants, who identified their L1 rather negatively in terms of how their society is viewing their L1, in this case Spanish and Portuguese, view their L1 positively based on their own interpretations of L1 rather than the perception of it held by members of their societies.

In your Society, Is It Important to Be Literate in Your Second Language?

Our next question invited participants to discuss how their societies situate their second language.

Participants in the US

A majority of the participants view that it is important in their society to be literate in their second language. For these participants, English or Spanish is their second language. At the same time, the biliterate participants commented that it is not very common for them to discuss their second language issues. One participant told us:

People in the US assume that English is the best of the best among all the languages, and being a Spanish and English speaker I often question that with “How about Spanish and other languages people use?” English isn’t the only language we have.

Although the biliterate participants themselves view Spanish as valuable, they felt that often Spanish is not valued as highly as English is in the US. The participants whose L2 is English shared their perceptions concerning English as their L2:

- It is required to know English if we want to function here in the US [so] I learned to use English at school.
- It is good to be literate in English and Spanish here in the Southwest. I have no choice here but to learn English.
- Being literate in English can be helpful and useful in the US. I can't function well just speaking my language, Spanish.
- It is important to be literate in English in the US because a person will be looked down upon if they speak their "native" language.

At the same time, here are some of the responses we gathered from the participants whose L2 is Spanish (English is their L1):

- I like to study a foreign language. I choose to study Spanish since I live in the Southwest.
- It is important as this helps to cross language barriers.
- It is quite helpful to know more than one language.

It becomes evident that English is viewed as a more "valuable" and "important" language than Spanish. Although the biliterate participants acknowledged the value of being bilingual/biliterate, they are aware of how their L2, Spanish, is being perceived by their society.

Participants in Hong Kong

For many participants in Hong Kong, English is their second (or even third) language, except for one student who identified Putonghua as his L2. The majority of the participants responded that it was important to be literate in English as a second language in Hong Kong.

- English helps me get a better job.
- English provides me with a better career path.
- English provides me with better opportunities, such as being more competitive and marketable.
- English helps me to achieve a better academic achievement.

One participant, who identified Putonghua as his L2, responded that he views Putonghua as important in his society because of globalization. Overall, the participants situated their L2 positively. More importantly, there is a very strong tendency for English as second language to be valued and viewed more highly than other second languages both in the US and in Hong Kong. The following section discusses participants' literacy and biliteracy learning experiences.

What are your Literacy and Biliteracy Learning Experiences?

The last question we highlight, "What are your literacy and biliteracy learning experiences?" has three follow-up questions which are more personal regarding the participants' L1 and L2

experiences in general. These sub-questions help us understand their literacy learning experiences in their L1 and L2. Here are the sub-questions:

- What are some of your positive/negative language learning experiences that caused you to like/dislike or get good at your first language?
- Do you think formal language instruction was more helpful in building up your literacy proficiency in your second language, or was informal language exposure more helpful in doing so? Please explain.
- In your opinion, what makes a language learning experience in one's first/second language enjoyable? Please explain.

Participants responded to these questions reflectively by revisiting their literacy and biliteracy learning experiences.

Participants in the US

Only 21% (n = 7) of the biliterate participants responded that they had had an enjoyable L2 literacy learning experience:

- Being able to communicate with others in Spanish is an enjoyable learning experience.
- It is enjoyable to have peers who are patient and encouraging when I use my second language (Spanish). This makes the learning experience enjoyable.
- It was helpful to have a good and effective language teacher to learn my L2 (Spanish)
- It was enjoyable when I could make direct connections with my real life.

Some of the biliterate participants (36 %; n = 12) responded that learning their L2 was not a positive experience:

- Literacy and language learning environments should be comfortable and not over-stressful.
- Instructions need to be able to connect with students' cultural backgrounds.
- It was boring to study my L2 (English).
- My Spanish classes focused too much on grammar, and it was not very enjoyable.

The remaining participants (43%; n = 15) gave us neutral responses rather than making direct connections with their own L2 learning experiences:

- It is important to immerse oneself in language.
- It is more enjoyable to study interesting topics.
- Interactive classes seem to be effective.

Participants in Hong Kong

Twenty-three percent (n = 12) of the participants in Hong Kong responded that it was enjoyable for them to study their L2 (English).

- Games and other entertaining activities and teaching tools made my learning fun.
- Learning English through music was enjoyable.

- It was enjoyable to read interesting books.

On the other hand, 25% (n = 13) of the participants noted that their L2 learning was not enjoyable:

- I wanted to have more opportunities to practice English.

Participants from the US and Hong Kong made a number of suggestions to make the L2 learning experience more enjoyable instead of discussing negative experiences they had. Some of the participants commented that they felt it was important for them to share their suggestions with us since they were interested in talking about their language learning experiences in depth. The remaining participants (46.2%; n = 24) gave neutral comments and responses. Also, it is important to note that five participants (9.6%) did not answer these questions.

Do you think being a literate person in your L2 offers you a better chance to change the society you belong to?

We ended the interview with this question to invite the participants to share their views on biliterate individuals in their societies.

Participants in the US

Seventy eight percent of participants in the US responded that being highly literate in their L2 allows them to change the society in which they live. At the same time, a number of native speakers of Spanish commented that English is often valued more highly than their first language, Spanish. They feel that Spanish needs to be valued more, since it is also a valuable language especially in the borderlands in the Southwest. One student commented, “We need to value not only our own dominant or first language but other languages as well, especially Spanish around here.” Only one participant responded negatively to the question:

What would I want to do? Being highly literate in a second language is not necessarily required to give one a better chance to change the society, especially if you speak English as your first language here in the US.

Other participants’ responses were neutral, and they did not mention whether being literate in their L2 could make a difference in their society.

Participants in Hong Kong

Seventy-nine percent of participants (n = 41) in Hong Kong told us that being literate in their L2 (English, except for the 1 Putonghua speaker) offers them a better chance to change the society in which they live. Some responded in the following ways:

- Being highly literate in English, people can be regarded as educated or smarter than others here in Hong Kong.
- Being literate in English helps one to have a higher social status and recognition.
- Hong Kong is an international city, thus being literate in English offers people a better chance to change their society to become more global.

On the other hand, 15% (n = 8) of them did not think that being literate in the L2 could give them a chance to change their society.

- English can allow me to have more opportunities, but it is inadequate in terms of changing the society.
- My first language (Cantonese) is more significant than English.

The majority of the participants from the US and Hong Kong stated that being biliterate could help them gain an opportunity to change the society. In the U.S. Southwest (Mexico-United States borderlands), Spanish, English, or Spanish-English bilingualism are the dominant language combinations (Smith, 2007). Also, regarding the borderlands, Smith states “Students living in a bilingual society require dual-language learning to ensure social and economic mobility. However, in monolingual communities, respondents stated that a second language is helpful but not necessary to more fully participate in society” (p. 594). The interviews with participants affirm what Smith (2007) stated. Participants noted that English is being valued more highly than Spanish. In addition, some of the participants demystified the notion that English was a more important language where they live. They expressed that individuals needed to learn languages other than English. In this case, Spanish is also a valuable language in their communities.

In Hong Kong, Cantonese and English are the two major languages bearing crucially dual or diglossic social functions, albeit the former’s status as a spoken variety of the Chinese language. Poon (2007) states the duality as “Both Chinese and English are used in education, business, and the media. Chinese is used mainly in the home and socially, whereas English is the preferred language in public domains, such as the judiciary” (p. 432). The participants’ responses also illuminated the nature of bilingualism in Hong Kong. We observed a view similar to what the U.S. participants expressed. Participants in Hong Kong also expressed how English was being “valued,” and it seemed to be a key for success in the society. At the same time, through the inquiry into their biliteracy, a number of the participants revealed that they felt that their L1, Cantonese, was also a valuable and significant language in their society despite the fact that Cantonese is not an “international” or “global” language.

This study shows that English is perceived as the “more privileged” and “more valuable” language by participants in both the US and Hong Kong. However, as we discussed their biliteracy issues further, participants began to revalue their L1s (here, specifically Spanish and Cantonese) by positioning themselves as biliterate beings. The LSI questions we developed facilitated the process of talking about biliteracy issues. Through the implementation of the LSI, we came to know that it is imperative to have multiple ways to help university students and other adults revalue their languages (Goodman & Goodman, 2011) other than English.

The participants told us that being literate can change their personal and social situations in the societies where they live. Biliterate participants’ responses demonstrate how literacy is both personal and social, and how closely these aspects are interrelated.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Through the implementation of the literacy/biliteracy interview questions in the LSI, we learned how critical it is to value and understand university students’ diverse language and cultural backgrounds. We illustrated how we used the LSI questions at two culturally and linguistically

diverse sites, in the US and in Hong Kong. We learned how willing participants were to discuss their attitudes and perceptions regarding their various literacy and biliteracy experiences. We found the LSI questions effective and informative because they engaged university students in conversations about how they viewed their literacy and biliteracy learning experiences and issues. The interview process helped us and the students to contextualize and situate their language experiences (Gee, 2011). We were able to engage in in-depth conversations about the issues of biliteracy and second language learning experiences, as well as examine how our societies view issues surrounding biliteracy. The more we begin to understand students' literacy attitudes and perceptions about language, the more we clearly position the need to value and understand their complex, dynamic literacy and biliteracy experiences and backgrounds.

Conversations around the LSI questions and responses helped participants position themselves so that they could speak powerfully and authoritatively about their first and second language experiences, both positive and negative. Through our conversations, we could deconstruct and demystify cultural constructs about biliteracy that disempower linguistically and culturally diverse students, especially for those whose L1s are not English. Through the process of inquiry, we have been able to initiate discussions and invite university students to collaborate with us to explore and revalue the languages they and other students bring to school. The participants were enthusiastic in discussing their first language and second (for some third) language experiences, especially when they were introduced to positive aspects of their first language other than English. It seems that we need to create more dialogic space for educators and their students to talk about students' valuable as well as diverse cultural and linguistic experiences, and these need to be valued at school as resources (Ruiz, 1984), rather than as deficits. For us, the Literacy Self-evaluation Interview for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Adults is an effective way to create those dialogic spaces.

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APPENDIX

Literacy Self-evaluation Interview for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Adults

PART I — GENERAL AND FIRST LANGUAGE LITERACY QUESTIONS

1. How do you define literacy?
2. How does the rest of the world perceive your first language?
3. In your society, is it important to be literate in your first language? Why or why not? In other words, what are the advantages and disadvantages?
4. In your self-assessment of literacy competence, which are your strongest and weakest language skills in your first language? On what basis do you assess your current level of literacy competence (or proficiency) in your first language?
5. What are your first language learning experiences?
 - a. What are some of your positive/negative language learning experiences that caused you to like/dislike or get good at your first language?
 - b. Do you think formal second language instruction was more helpful in building up your literacy proficiency in your second language, or was informal language exposure more helpful in doing so? Please explain.
 - c. In your opinion, what makes a language learning experience in one's first language enjoyable? Please explain.
6. Do you think that being a literate person in your first language offers you a better chance to change the society you belong to? Why or why not?

PART II — SECOND (AND BEYOND) LANGUAGE LITERACY BACKGROUNDS

1. What is your definition of a literate person in a second language?
2. How does your society perceive your second language?
 - a. How does the rest of the world perceive your second language?
 - b. When do you use your second language?
3. In your society, is it important to be literate in your second language? Why or why not? In other words, what are the advantages and disadvantages?
4. In your self-assessment of literacy competence, which are your strongest and weakest language skills in your first language? On what basis do you assess your current level of literacy competence (or proficiency) in your first language?
5. What are your biliteracy (or multiliteracy) learning experiences?
 - a. What are some of your positive/negative second (and beyond) language learning experiences that caused you to like/dislike or get good at your second language?
 - b. Do you think formal second language instruction was more helpful in building up your biliteracy proficiency in your second language, or was informal second language exposure more helpful in doing so? Please explain.
 - c. In your opinion, what makes a language learning experience in one's second language enjoyable? Please explain.
6. Do you think that being a literate person in your second language offers you a better chance to change the society you belong to? Why or why not?