

# Language Education Policy and Identities Inclusion: Cultivating Distinctiveness

## SPRING 2017 INLEPS - A Bi-Continental Conference

### Purpose and Significance

Language Education Policy (LEP) is the process through which the ideals, goals, and content of a language policy can be realized in education practices. The discourses and curricula of LEP reveal and are related to status, ideology, traditions of thought, and a vision of what society should be. Such policy study includes its enactment into curriculum and teaching.

In the heightened security climate of Europe and the United States, however, often-unprepared teachers are charged with teaching students considered as “others”: inferior, backward, or even the enemy (Bhattacharyya, 2008; Fezete, 2009). Teachers linguistically and culturally integrate immigrant and refugee students into societies that may be unwelcoming. For example, Islamophobia has been documented on a large scale during the years after 9/11 in U.S. and European societies and schools (see Housee, 2012; Humphreys, 2010; Jandali, 2012; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2010; Love, 2011; Ogbuagu, 2013; Sensoy, 2014; Zaal, 2012). The media contribute greatly to the disrepute of migrant children and refugees (Hackett, 2014; McQueeney, 2014). Meanwhile, the largest refugee crisis since World War Two is ongoing, with 60 million refugees worldwide (almost double the number from 10 years ago) fleeing wars and structural and institutional violence, creating diasporic conditions (see Agnew, 2005; Chatty, 2010; Dawson & Farber, 2012; Hamel, 2002; Sorenson, 2007; Turton, 2003; Voutira, 1997).

Language education governed by policy is a transversal action—and linguistic and cultural assimilation is the norm. Policies usually follow agendas that unevenly affect students. Schools are not adapted to the linguistic, social and cultural situations of many of the immigrant families whose children are entering Western schools. These children learn who and what they are through language and content of knowledge that is often accompanied by misrepresentation and discrimination. Even the youngest of these students may be held responsible for the acts of a few adults, or stereotyped and misrepresented by corporate media. Existing structures within educational systems such as special education become legitimized forms of segregation, often misinterpreting language learning for disability (Artiles, Kozleski, & Waitoller, 2011).

Teachers play a role in shaping student identities. Most teachers may be unaware that identity is transversally tied to language education. A little noticed consequence of LEP is its effect on children’s identities as learned in schools in the new host countries where marginalization of languages and cultures occurs. Thus, learning is likely to cause identity *negotiation* rather than positive identity *formation* (see Gulson & Webb, 2013; Kunst et al., 2012; Saada, 2014). Through the proposed conference, we hope to re-label “identity” as distinctiveness: we change the focus to uniqueness and what is valuable. The right to languages and cultures affects identity and is also a human right.

Since LEP is complex, quickly evolving, and subject to trends and changing political views; it must be studied calmly. The comparative approach is ideal: first determine the flaws and merits of what has been done in many settings, then grasp the contextual variables that might apply in specific locations without generalizing too quickly. The absence of action may lead to systemic intolerance, injustice, inequity, mass discrimination and even cultural and linguistic genocide: perhaps displacing people is part of ethnic cleansing and redrawing political maps (Dawson & Farber, 2012); yet, the conference creates the opportunity for national and international scholars to formally address an approach that recognizes that languages are repositories of knowledge and can be the cultural bridges for peace education. The participants’ wide range of expertise will offer a diversity of perspectives and methodology: we hope to have present various academic fields (Education; Special Education; Sociology; Anthropology; psychology, policy, linguistics) as well as curriculum writers, policymakers, and most importantly practitioners whose anecdotes will shape the discussions (Teachers of all subjects and content-specific experts (Science, Math, Social Studies). The conference will be a “policy” event, as per the rules of UNESCO’s Peoples’ Voices Challenge, that allows us to form a Franco-Hispano-Anglo research group on LEP studies and inclusion, a recent field of study, and will result in publication of a book that will have theoretical and conceptual work for general researchers, in addition to practical chapters especially addressed to help teachers.

## Aims

1. Bring together researchers with no occasion to meet otherwise (as they work in different regions) to present a diversity of experiences, training, and approaches. This will foster debate on methodology, analytical means, and interpretation.
2. Discuss theoretical and methodological approaches as practiced in social research on migrant and refugee education. The conference will illustrate particular language education policies and practices as a framework for discussion.
3. Discuss and demonstrate specific analytical and interpretive approaches, such as semiotic analysis, conditional probability clusters, implicative analysis and the analysis of correspondence that are proper to the French-speaking/Spanish-speaking and English-speaking cultures of research in education, along with current American approaches in education research, such as autoethnography, participatory action research, organizational learning studies based on focus and video study groups, and narrative inquiry.
4. Bring together junior and senior researchers, educators and teachers with diverse perspectives to support the younger generation of professionals in this area.
5. Establish a Franco-Hispano-Anglo research group on LEP studies to strengthen the field and advance research, specifically the role of technology-based analyses *à la française*, social interactions, and group identity.

## Overview

This bi-continental conference will address:

- Teacher training on issues of identity, language and culture to meet the specific needs of the new migrant populations served;
- School adaptation to the linguistic, cultural and social situation emerging from mass migration;
- The urgent need for new policy solutions;
- Repositories of knowledge in immigrants' languages and way of life, and the trauma migrant and refugee children have been through and still face, in order to create approaches that deal equitably with their losses and rights.

Issues that will be debated:

### A. Documentation (Policy) Issues

- Language education policies in place.
- Teacher preparation to welcome migrant and refugee children.
- LEP linking linguistic, cultural, and social integration with identity processes.

### B. Teacher-focused Issues related to these students

- Multilingual education experiences of families—the home languages and schooling experiences in the new country, types of literacy by culture, intergenerational language shifts; Nation-state<sup>1</sup> and nation-state 2 connections (ie ties to the home country, heritage language classes, community events);
- Language challenges and the clash between home values and the dominant society's values; school and social contexts as beneficial or hostile;
- Potential for teachers to intervene positively on migrant children's identity formation both linguistically and culturally valuing the home culture.

### C. Pedagogy-focused Issues

- Teacher-initiated strategies;
- Prospects for change: input from teachers on what is needed in terms of resources, training, and so on;
- How policy can respond to the actual pedagogical demands as well as students' linguistic/cultural realities.

### D. Institutional issues

- How schools are organized to support new kinds of students;
- Assumptions about graded learning that force teachers to classify and assess students in particular ways;
- Boundaries between schools and local communities that impede organizational learning to support plurilingual schools

## Curriculum

Our conference agenda is comparative, international, intercultural, and crosslinguistic. We focus on teachers and LEP in the process of displaced children's schooling. The conference on two continents will be in two parts.

### Part 1: LEP and the Perceived Identities of Immigrant Children

This will be in the United States at the **University of Wisconsin–Madison, March 15-17, 2017** and comprise discussion of the research methods and approaches in various parts of the world. All the invited scholars will participate in the discussions and debate. We favor discussions, formal presentations will be few, only to initiate dialogue and focus on productive work (See Nibbs et al, 2016; Lepore, 2015; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Turner & Brown, 2008). On the final day, we will debate the directions of the field and whether shared practices should be advocated.

### Part 2: LEP and Inclusion

This will be in France at the **University of Paris 3 Sorbonne Nouvelle, May 24–26, 2017** and include case studies enabling better interpretations of human experiences, followed by roundtable sessions to examine future directions for field research and educational solutions. On the final day, we will create a research group and discuss the development of a website and the format for the resulting publication from the conference.

## Conference Description

**Length:** Each part will cover 3 days to allow students and participants from other countries to attend. A 3-day conference allows participants to ask for a short leave and return in time to resume normal activities. The proposed objectives can be reached in 3 days, with Part 1 initiating the methodological work and Part 2 creating the research group.

**Format:** Discussion framed by short talks and case-study illustration. Participants will illustrate their methodology and praxis by inviting other scholars to discuss content based on actual data. In a field where objective analysis and subjective interpretation mix, it is important to share experience; this will be of particular help to younger researchers. Sharing methodology and knowledge with discussion between groups observing the same material will reinforce deep field-based debates.

**Structure:** Each day will consist of 5 hours presentations, with the morning session from 9 am to 12 pm, and the afternoon session from 2–4 pm. This schedule leaves time for interpersonal meetings focusing on projects during lunch and after 4 pm. Teacher panels will be ongoing—we want to hear their anecdotes and practices. Educator panels will produce culturally-relevant and realistic pamphlets and Power Points to upload to the online platform.

Prior to the conference, articles and documentation will be sent to the participants to prepare and to foster discussion. The participants not giving a talk will prepare handouts for comment during time-sharing roundtables. Conference details will be on paper and in e-format.

At the conference, there will be integrated work and discussion, demonstration of specific approaches, and illustration of critical case studies exposing a wide range of contexts, methodology and data interpretation related to LEP and immigrant and refugee children in schools. We will discuss the development of a research group, and a website, and a book.

After the conference, we will produce a report and establish a website with references, key resources, and a digital data bank illustrating case studies. This website will be open to all academics and professionals studying and working in the field and will serve as the platform for a professional group. Finally, we will publish a refereed edited volume at a University Press.

**Historical continuity:** This bi-continental conference is a follow-up in a series of intercontinental conferences on LEP that were initiated by the International Network for Language Education Policy Studies in 2013 in Shanghai, followed by conferences in Granada, Spain, Brisbane, Australia, Kaohsiung, Taiwan, Nanjing, China, and Townsville, Australia. It is the first time the research network will focus on inclusion, an urgent and crucial topic today regarding the mix of languages and cultures and the situation of children, and it is the first time we will meet in the United States and France. We plan conferences in 2018 in Medellin, Colombia and Marseille, France.

## Other Outcomes and Products

Building on this international network, we want to gather educational experts and collaborators with a resource database, beginning with the Franco-Hispano-Anglo group to create an online platform of material-sharing with a focus on migrant children, LEP and inclusion. We also plan to submit an expert report to UNESCO as part of its Sustainable Development Goals (<http://en.unesco.org/sdgs>). This report will have an “on-the-ground” policy perspective.