Announcing the 2011 Alan C. Purves Award Recipient

The 2011 Alan C. Purves Award Committee

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The 2011 Alan C. Purves Award Committee is pleased to announce this year’s award recipient, Ramón Antonio Martínez. His article, “Spanglish Literacy Tool: Toward an Understanding of the Potential Role of Spanish-English Code-Switching in the Development of Academic Literacy” (RTE Vol. 45, No. 2, November 2010), provides a compelling and relevant perspective on Spanglish as a pedagogical resource, not merely a linguistic or cultural phenomenon.

Ramón Martínez’s fine-grained qualitative study, conducted in a sixth-grade English language arts class in East Los Angeles, illustrates the substantial linguistic complexity and sophistication employed by bilingual middle school students. As he observes the students speaking, joking, and arguing—sometimes in English, sometimes in Spanish—Martínez focuses on the ways they utilize Spanglish to create meaning, rather than merely to compensate for lack of proficiency in one language or the other. This “deficit rationale” theory about Spanglish—that code-switching is a response to lack of linguistic skill—is so dominant that even students in Martínez’s previous studies have cited it to explain why they employ Spanglish. In fact, as Martínez amply demonstrates through first-hand observational data and solid application of theory, code-switching is a sophisticated linguistic skill that instructors and students can employ to further academic literacy. His article provides a blueprint for leveraging students’ code-switching skills into greater meta-cognitive awareness and new learning.
Martínez situates his investigation within the literature on code-switching, which substantiates shifts in language as grammatically competent and as having functions beyond linguistic “crutching.” Fundamental to Martínez’s theoretical argument is a cultural and linguistic resources framework that builds upon seminal ethnographic research (Heath, 1983; Zentella, 1997) focusing on the everyday language practices of students of color from working class communities. In light of the changing cultural and linguistic landscapes that shape our country (Census, 2010), particularly among growing Latino populations, a cultural and linguistic resources framework has never been more relevant to teachers. From this perspective, Martínez’s work not only guides teachers and teacher educators with classroom strategies to employ students’ linguistic resources, but also offers a sound rationale for broadening deficit ideologies about language varieties in the classroom.

Making use of Lee’s (2007) cultural modeling framework, Martínez specifically argues that the adeptness students demonstrate when speaking Spanglish is consistent with the skills required by the English Language Arts Content Standards for California Public schools. His analysis illustrates, for instance, how students shifted between languages for different audiences and to capture subtle nuances of meaning. To determine how Spanglish mediated conversation and social interaction in the classroom, Martínez employed participant observation and documented student conversations through the use of audio and video recording in both social and educational contexts. After collecting this data, Martínez conducted semi-structured, retrospective interviews (Rampton, 2003) during which he invited students to listen and watch themselves speak Spanglish. Applying ethnographic microanalysis of social interaction (Erickson, 2004) and calling upon Goodwin’s (1990) framework on the role of talk in building social organization, Martínez conducted an inductive approach to data analysis, looking for disconfirming evidence while generating codes, hypotheses, and analyses.

Martínez’s article is especially valuable as it recommends explicit strategies for mining Spanglish as a pedagogical resource in the classroom. Moreover, his article details connections between pedagogical theory, classroom practice “on the ground,” and the formal requirements of state standards. In this way, “Spanglish as a Literacy Tool” provides an excellent model for other teachers and researchers wishing to advocate for students to appreciate, invite, understand, and leverage their linguistic resources in the classroom, while contributing to the work of liberating dominant, deficit language ideologies so as to broaden research possibilities and the ways literacy is taught.

REFERENCES


