Articles

Challenging the Tropes of Neoliberalism in Discussions of Newcomer Youth in Canada

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In this re-examination of empirical data sets, we reconceptualize, from the perspectives of numerous stakeholders, the limits of identity positions available to immigrant adolescents who enter schools in immigrant-receiving schools and neighbourhoods already experiencing racism, intergenerational poverty, lack of social, economic, and cultural capital, and large numbers of English language learners. Research data referenced from three separate secondary schools in this context examined the social integration of English as a second language/additional language students within a variety of school-related contexts, related policies and students' encounters with them, and students' experiences of academic segregation and mainstreaming. Our re-reading of data through a lens critical of neoliberalism reveals how educational stakeholders, including students, buy into and replicate specific tropes of neoliberalism, which may be damaging in the long run. We urge educators to re-examine the language we use to describe students who are multilingual learners and that they consequently use to describe themselves.

Dans le cadre de ce réexamen de plusieurs ensembles de données empiriques, nous reconceptualisons, du point de vue de plusieurs parties prenantes, les limites des positions identitaires disponibles pour les adolescents immigrants qui intègrent des écoles et des quartiers d'accueil des immigrants déjà confrontés au racisme, à la pauvreté intergénérationnelle, au manque de capital social, économique et culturel, et accueillant un grand nombre d'apprenants de l'anglais. Les données de recherche provenant de trois écoles secondaires distinctes dans ce contexte ont examiné l'intégration sociale des élèves pour qui l'anglais est une langue seconde ou additionnelle dans divers contextes scolaires, les politiques connexes et les interactions des élèves avec celles-ci, ainsi que les expériences des élèves en matière de ségrégation et d'intégration scolaires. Notre relecture des données dans une optique critique envers le néolibéralisme révèle la manière dont les acteurs de l'éducation, y compris les élèves, adhèrent à des stéréotypes spécifiques du néolibéralisme et les reproduisent, ce qui peut être préjudiciable à long terme. Nous exhortons les éducateurs à réexaminer le langage que nous utilisons pour décrire les élèves qui sont des apprenants multilingues et celui qu'ils utilisent par conséquent pour se décrire eux-mêmes.

Keywords: identity, immigrant, K–12 education, multilingual learners, neoliberalism

It is important to consider many factors when considering the "delivery" of English as a second language "services" to specific "target markets" of immigrant and refugee "consumers" in K–12 schools. The terms "target market," "delivery," "services," and "consumers" in the previous sentence have all been used deliberately. Although such market-oriented words and phrases, flagged by Holborow (2016) as "neoliberal keywords," may appear incongruous when contained in a single sentence in scare quotes, unthinking use of these terms in everyday classroom talk reflects a general acceptance that the teaching of EAL/ESL to students in K–12 academic settings (following Kerekes et al., 2021, hereinafter multilingual learners or MLs) has become increasingly influenced by neoliberal practices (Harvey, 2005; Peters, 2012) centred on business- and profit-oriented activities (MacPherson et al., 2005). Specifically, within current forms of capitalism, neoliberalism has become more than merely economic doctrine; it has morphed into a mode of governmentality in which market principles are applied to both public and private goods and services. Concepts like free markets, quantification of abstract notions, consumer freedom to choose, focus on deliverables, labour or human resource flexibility, and competition in the job market have crept into all of our social interactions, from education to employment, from health care to governance, from cradle to grave. Even concepts such as human rights, social justice, and popular culture have been influenced by neoliberal ideals, resulting in policies and practices that shape the trajectories and behaviours of individuals (Rojo & Del Percio, 2019). Included in this are the language patterns we adopt, of which Rojo and Del Percio (2019) have asked,

> to what extent is colonisation by business logic impacting on linguistic trajectories and practices? ... How do economic principles affect the way in which institutions and individuals view themselves and others, and how individuals present themselves in society? In everyday life, how are market principles colonising social life? (p. 3)

These and similar questions guide their edited book addressing how "language and communication intersect with all-encompassing regimes of power" (p. 4), reinforcing "neoliberal governmentality" (p. 3) in the banality of quotidian activity.

In fact, one need look no further than Freire's concept of "banking" education or, in applied linguistics, Norton's frequently used and cited "investment theory" and its relationship to identity (Norton, 2000, 2013) to understand how accustomed we in EAL/ESL contexts have become to market metaphors for human learning, not only in Canada but also worldwide (e.g., Gearing & Roger, 2018; Hajar, 2017; Norton & Gao, 2008; Sung, 2019) in the roughly three decades since its inception (Norton Peirce 1995). The concept of investment in language learning is "now considered foundational in applied linguistics" (Darvin & Norton, 2015), and certainly no Canadian teacher of EAL/ESL students in Canada is not at least passingly familiar with it.

This should hardly be surprising, given that Norton built on Bourdieu's (1986) uniquely economic formulation of social reproduction theory, introducing various forms of symbolic and material "capital" that some language learners are able to use to their advantage and others seek to increase by learning English. This is not to say that Norton's concept of investment is spurious, nor that it fails to recognize inequity or marginalization in language-learning contexts, nor that it fails to overturn our understanding of learner motivation, but rather that as a term, "investment" is market language, a fact that becomes almost invisible in its application, especially when those applications are critical and designed to counter power dynamics (e.g., Darvin & Norton, 2023). That even critical ideas are presented in market language points

toward the triumph of neoliberalism as an ideology; neoliberal market logics such as that put forward by Norton have become what Crehan (2016) elucidates as Gramscian "common sense," which is not the same at all as good sense.

In general, as members of the public, we do not question common-sense ideologies. For example, we trust that investigations are conducted in good faith, that education is good, that public servants serve the best interests of the public, that teachers act benevolently, that public boards act with integrity, that legal systems uphold justice, fairness, due process and neutrality. According to van Dijk (1998), "ideologies allow people, as group members, to organize the multitude of social beliefs about what is the case, what is good or bad, right or wrong, for them, and act accordingly" (p. 8). Ideologies exist in the minds of group members, but they emerge as frames in language, in ways of speaking, writing, and representing, that are used by group members. Stibbe (2021) talks about these not only as ideologies but also as "stories we live by," essential "frames" that not only shape how we perceive, think, and interact but also seep into the foundations of our institutions, becoming enshrined in our laws and public policies. There are many narrative frames about the role and function of Canadian public education, especially the somewhat naïve belief that education serves social justice and levels the playing field (e.g., Schmidt, 2021).

Perhaps the most cherished public narrative about newcomer ML integration in Canada K–12 schools is that of the non–English-speaking racialized immigrant who, by virtue of diligent language study and peer-to-peer as well as teacher-led language socialization, is able to demonstrate previously acquired excellence in sport, music, arts, or other admirable skills to new-found friends, emerge as a school leader, and integrate into elite social and academic circles in just a few years. Included in this narrative are language development, robust social experiences in and out of the classroom, deep and abiding friendships, participation in academic classes that will lead to tertiary education, out-of-school excellence, and intercultural understanding from newcomers and from dominant culture representatives (Lam, 2019; Lara & Volante, 2019; Volante et al., 2020). However, numerous studies have shown that this narrative is largely a myth, that MLs frequently experience isolation and segregation in and out of class (Antony-Newman & Niyozov, 2023; Goldstein, 2003; Kalchos et al., 2022; Kouritzin, 2004, 2010, 2012, 2017). Frequently, after navigating the trauma of leaving or fleeing their countries of origin, MLs experience school as alienating socially, linguistically, and academically (Smith et al., 2021).

With this in mind, we here present a conceptual discussion in which we describe a finding resulting from re-viewing intensive and extensive research in ESL/EAL classrooms and communities in underserved contexts in one of Canada's major cities through a new lens. As Motha (2020) did, we look back on earlier experiences, thinking from theoretical perspectives critical of neoliberalism about that research. Reconsidering findings from three previous studies enabled us to better understand the extent to which neoliberal ideologies have crept into our ways of thinking about and interacting with multilingual learners, and even into how MLs think and interact among themselves. Although we are aware of the prevalence of racial inequalities and hierarchies, the tendency of the word *language* to act as a metaphor for race (Motha, 2020, p. 129), and the need to develop a raciolinguistic perspective in applied linguistics (Daniels & Varghese, 2020; Rosa & Flores, 2017), we focus on neoliberal critique for reasons of time and space, inviting readers to unpack our conceptualizations further.

To briefly situate the originating research, the first author was Principal Investigator for three separate but related research projects (Kouritzin, 2008, 2010, 2017) supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Prairie Center for Research on Immigration and Integration (PCERII), and the Imperial Oil Academy between 2008 and 2017. These research studies were conducted serially, but with overlapping years. The projects all examined the academic and social integration of ESL/EAL-learning immigrant and refugee students inside and outside the classroom during their entry into and continued study in public Grade 9–12 high schools.

Methods

Data were collected in three different newcomer-receiving high schools all located in "northern" neighbourhoods within a single school division in a Prairie city where "north" frequently references economic disadvantage, even intergenerational poverty (Toews, 2018). This consideration is important, because focal students and schools reflect a social class position in which their arrival and integration into the community were affected by the relatively lower socioeconomic status of the host community and school. The school populations in general reflected generational struggles with educational attainment, under-employment, and lack of social, economic, and cultural capital. Schools were perceived to provide limited opportunities to students who will therefore ultimately hold "resourcing positions" (Kouritzin & Nakagawa, 2018; Nakagawa, 2013), generally referencing exploited labour conditions, within the Canadian (global) labour market.

The research examined the social integration of MLs within a variety of school-related contexts, the ESL/EAL policies that were in place and students' encounters with them, MLs' experiences of academic segregation and mainstreaming, and the particular trajectories of war-affected MLs. All data generated were qualitative, intended to build understanding of the experiences of MLs arriving in Canadian schools, integrating into the existing social fabric of the established community, and developing and/or being assigned identity positions therein. In addition to observation and policy analysis, perspectives from a variety of positions were obtained in interviews, including MLs and English-speaking dominant culture (hereinafter DC) students, as well as teachers, counsellors, administrative staff, parents, and other school stakeholders, the majority of whom also represented dominant (white, English-speaking) culture. Our review of the data in view of emerging concepts of neoliberal governmentality and its pervasiveness in discourse and language studies (Rojo & Del Percio, 2019), and of the social construction of identity through language (e.g., Winter, 2015), caused us to recognize and reflect on the limited identity positions available to newcomer students.

These limits on the social construction of identity positions arise in a directed manner that disadvantages not only the linguistic aptitude of the MLs but also their longer-term educational and social development. Viewed through a lens of social, linguistic, and cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and through analytical approaches based on social positioning theory (Lawson, 2022), this suggests that the preconceived notions about immigrants' subordinate role in the socioeconomic hierarchies of the host community from professionals (i.e., teachers, immigrant support or social workers, administrators, etc.) and fellow members of the community are enforced (or reinforced) through lacklustre ESL/EAL attainment. Newcomer MLs in these settings are perhaps educated for failure within the host community so as not to undercut or threaten the limited resources afforded to the community. Specifically, there are pre-existing positions (Lawson, 2022) near the bottom of the social hierarchy that MLs are expected to fill rather than change.

Summary of Data Points

In this section, we first present an overview of the results of the research, pointing to a number of patterns that arose when the data were coded descriptively (Saldaña, 2021). Many of these themes have been discussed in other articles (Kouritzin, 2012, 2017, 2020; Kouritzin & Nakagawa, 2018), but it is important to acknowledge these findings, noting that they are consistent with other research in the field. This overview will be brief, providing context for the conceptual argument that follows. Below, italic emphases are ours, intended to signal foundational examples for our discussion that follows.

In and out of class, MLs were integrated yet separate from DC students. Teachers were not seen to facilitate discussion between DC students and MLs. MLs reported that they did not like to ask questions in

class or out of class. In this regard, MLs reported worrying about appearing inferior to their classroom peers. MLs also reported insufficient time devoted to developing language skills and negotiation of content-area problems in class. MLs did not normally nominate topics in in-class or out-of-class conversations, even when it might be appropriate. Their work was frequently copied by DC students in subjects like math in which MLs were thought to excel, but the MLs were ignored in other contexts. MLs and DC students perceived such interactions differently. From the perspective of DC students, teachers treated all students equally by not interfering with group interactions. From MLs' perspectives, however, teachers demonstrated bias, overlooking or not realizing that the already-privileged DC students were being further privileged.

School observations outside the classroom also revealed two separate spheres in schools, one for MLs and another for DC students, as is explained in our third interview with an ML from the Philippines: "How do you meet new friends?," the first author asked, to which the ML replied, "I have no idea because I don't have any …" (Consuela, interview 3). It was noted that MLs normally sit with other speakers of their first languages, in and out of class. To a familiar observer, self-segregated cafeterias emerge—African-appearing (Black) students, Asian-appearing students (primarily identified as Filipino and Vietnamese), Hispanic-appearing students (speaking Spanish), and Caucasian-appearing students all sit in different areas, with groupings appearing to be based on a combination of perceived racialization and linguistic characterizations. Possession of cultural or economic capital also appears to determine who has access to DC spaces and who does not, with those MLs perceived as having the most material resources often having the most access (see also Santos Bocero et al., 2014).

Teachers and administrators revealed that 75–95% of the students in each of these schools "have ESL characteristics" (Administrator interview, 2012), which appears to reference racialization and lack of DC cultural capital. Twenty-eight of twenty-nine high-school teachers interviewed noted that neither their educational training nor their professional development had prepared them to teach MLs (see Kerekes et al., 2021); importantly, teachers reported that their expectations for ML achievement are (perhaps consequently) different from their expectations for DC students. Specifically, teachers' expectations for MLs were that they would not go on to tertiary education or enter a profession. In fact, the teachers reported that they did not have enough time to help MLs, acknowledging that many MLs were behind in terms of official curriculum, as this math teacher indicated:

> And umm, here's the sad truth. A lot of the ESL kids show up every day and are very sincere, are really trying and they end up with more time than my ESL kid who's frustrated, doesn't show up, doesn't show up unless … how do you say it, less frequent basis, they don't get as much of my time because now I've got to go back that much further and I'm not saying I ignore those kids, I'm just saying there is a big gap. (Teacher interview, 2011)

Noteworthy in teacher and administrator interviews across the three schools were descriptions and descriptors used to reference the integration/non-integration of MLs into schools' cultural milieux. For example, one counsellor noted that "they pick up the bad habits instead of coming in with their hard working dynamics that they had originally and then they see, 'hey, I can get a free ride'" (Counsellor interview, 2012). A physical education teacher explained that in team sports, "the ESL students are most willing participants, but the ones who always end up sitting out if there is one too many players on one side or the other" (Teacher interview, 2012), while an English teacher noted that "I expect them to try harder because they do, 99% are the top kids in effort" (Teacher interview, 2011). Similar comments came from science teachers, who noted that "they're the hardest working ones so I think I put them through higher expectations" and that students were "so sincere … they try so hard" (Teacher interview, 2012), while other teachers referred to MLs as "most of them, very very hard-working students and try their hardest to be successful," "far more motivated," "so bright, fun, and determined," "who work really hard, and have two

jobs" but who are "constantly taking one step forward and three steps back" (Teacher interviews, 2011–2012). Words that kept appearing in interviews with all stakeholders included "hard-working," "determined," "tough," "polite," "appreciative," "obedient," "humble," "respectful," "well-mannered," "bright," "quiet" (Teacher interviews, 2011–2012; administrator interviews, 2013; counsellor interviews, 2014–2015), and several other words that collectively paint a picture of resilience, willingness to adapt, and the pioneering values that DC residents of Canada tout as ideal.

Nonetheless, given the structures that are in place, it appeared more difficult for MLs to integrate and to achieve any standard notion of success, even though their goals are, in the words of one recently-arrived ML, "same like everybody", to go to "medical school, but not liking to study so a good job: I don't want to go to work for $10 per hour" (Lukasc, interview 3). MLs reported that they want to become doctors, engineers, lawyers, airline pilots, and other high-prestige professions requiring economic resources for entry that they did not possess. Therefore, as one social studies teacher noted,

> there's a kind of sense across Canada that having an economic immigrant is better than having a refugee student and the reason is that the economic immigrants tend to be educated. I've totally changed my perspective on that. The kids here, the refugee kids, they made it, they survived; absolutely, they are the smartest ones going. (Teacher interview, 2012)

Unfortunately, as students, teachers, and administrators also note, between the time of their immigration and the time of tertiary education entry, MLs frequently lack sufficient time to gain the required cultural and economic capital necessary for university; they therefore cannot access credentials they need to pursue those occupations. Taken together, the findings suggest that a number of changes are required for ML success, including the need to rethink paradigms and models of schooling from the perspective of a diverse student body.

Discussion

Therefore, here we focus on the need to rethink paradigms and models of schooling, referencing how our data percolated down and were distilled into local contexts, ultimately supporting the endgame of broader neoliberal discourses regarding choice, competition, and the free market. In this context, it is useful to refer to this definition of neoliberalism:

> [N]eoliberalism is a philosophy viewing market exchange as a guide for all human action. Redefining social and ethical life in accordance with economic criteria and expectations, neoliberalism holds that human freedom is best achieved through the operation of markets. Freedom (rather than justice or equality) is the fundamental political value. (Dean, 2009, p. 51)

In this context, Blacker (2013) argues, teachers, students, and administrators recognize that they are trying to squeeze students into a model of schooling that was developed for a different time and for different students, but they do not appear to be able to conceptualize or articulate what a new educational order—one not based on the availability of cheap fuel and the efficient batch processing of students (p. 54)—would look like.

Summarizing multiple perspectives on teaching toward the academic and social integration of MLs while focusing on instructional and policy recommendations developed with insight from research participants does little more than describe what is happening inside the four walls of schools as currently conceived. Even when we critically analyze the data described above in terms of power and language and/or racism (e.g., Lee, 2015), we get no further than describing what is, and possibly what should be,

within a system predicated on understanding education as a distinctly human activity happening in schools, in which humans are the sole makers and arbiters of knowledge, rather than understanding education as a reproductive process that predates both capitalism and schooling. What kept coming up in these data were the descriptions of MLs, used by MLs themselves, their teachers, their administrators—in fact, by all school stakeholders. Teachers note MLs' excellent work ethics and their "kindness," "toughness," "defensiveness," and "determination," no matter what they have been through. That is, MLs are admired for their resilience in the face of various forms of adversity and for their willingness to reinvent themselves.

In interviews, MLs mentioned being shy to ask for help, timid, not wanting to be too demanding. They are perhaps too obedient, too willing to take whatever is given to them without questioning. They are prepared to do anything the teachers ask of them, and whatever it takes to get a job done, meaning that their strong work ethic is frequently mentioned. In physical education, MLs are viewed as the most willing participants but the ones who "always end up sitting out if there is one too many players on one side or the other" (Teacher interview, 2012). One principal noted that MLs who have an athletic skill, or a talent for music, "will be welcomed in social events more easily" (Principal interview, 2012), meaning that those who present with (or as) the most viable and valuable commodities will gain the most access to the social "market." Teachers also note that while DC students will often excuse a bad mark as "the teacher writing a bad exam, or the teacher having unacceptable standards" (Teacher interview, 2012), the MLs are more inclined to blame themselves. In fact, many of the teachers note that the MLs are different from DC students, even if their goals are the same. MLs have different experiences and another whole series of loyalties. MLs are perceived as not having "instant gratification syndrome" (Teacher interview, 2011) like DC students do; that is, MLs are less likely to need to be entertained in class, less likely to browse through cellphones except for emergencies during class, less likely to demand instant answers to their questions, less likely to be disruptive. In short, MLs appear to be favourably compared with DC students.

However, viewed from another angle, such comparisons and discursive regimes put MLs and DC students into deleterious competition with one another, in which the symbolic indexing of both English and the dominant culture serves as a proxy for cultural capital, which is pitted against the symbolic indexing of the characteristics of hard work, obedience, and determination. Interestingly, these latter characteristics were said to be, in earlier stages of capitalism, important for entry into the employment market. Social, cultural, and linguistic ideologies such as these not only bolster competition between individuals, constructing some students as more deserving than others, but also both ultimately render MLs as inadequate to the task of succeeding in a free education-cum-employment market and signal a "shift from pedagogical to market values" (Block et al., 2012, p. 6) in educational thinking.

As noted above, the teachers think MLs have predominantly positive characteristics; compared with DC students, MLs are neither assertive nor argumentative. However, MLs are also viewed as afraid to talk or to ask questions, retiring and reticent to make waves in their interactions with others, and as participating only peripherally in class-based group work because they are unable to assert themselves verbally. In short, MLs are constructed as victims who are adaptive and desirous of changing themselves to fit in with the situation. Therefore, the goal for educators who are influenced by such discourses and social constructions is to empower MLs, to enhance their self-esteem by optimizing their skills, and thereby to normalize continuous adaptation. Striving, in this paradigm, should ultimately render MLs sell-able in the economic market that is controlled by the DC.

As we have argued regarding other contexts (Nakagawa & Kouritzin, 2021), discursive regimes that position L2 students as "victims needing recognition and redress" (Dean, 2009, p. 5) force them into subject positions in which they are only permitted to speak as those who have suffered and who are consequently now inadequate to the task of being victorious. Dean (2009) further explains this position, suggesting that it is linked to victim permanence:

> They must speak as those who have lost, those who are losers. One who feels the political impulse to struggle, who is ready for a fight against injustice, is not injured enough to speak. For many leftists, the attraction of the position of the victim is thus double: one is always morally correct—for who can deny the suffering of the victim?—and never politically responsible—for victims are too weak and injured to govern. (pp. 5–6)

All of this fits in with the neoliberal subject stance suggested by Blacker (2013), in which we accept neoliberal governmentality, believing that individual agency means calculating the costs and benefits to ourselves of every choice we make, thereby accepting the necessity of becoming Foucault's (2004, cited in Christiaens, 2019) risk-taking entrepreneurs of ourselves:

> If we could only make ourselves better, faster, stronger, smarter, etc., in short get our training and education right, our bright futures would once again be assured. A complete morphological makeover may be required, admittedly, but as long as we are able to adapt our perennial inadequate selves to the rapidly shifting needs of capital accumulation, a kind of market-based eudaimonia is ours for the taking." (Blacker, 2013, p. 20)

At the same time, this also fits with the changes reflected in education more generally, valuing the vocational part of education more than broadening the perspective, shifting from seeing the intrinsic value of education to seeing the instrumental value of education, and from creating informed citizenry to preparing economically productive employees. As Hamann (2009) explains, the "neoliberal subject is an individual who is morally responsible for navigating the social realm using rational choice and cost-benefit calculations grounded on market-based principles to the exclusion of all other ethical values and social interests" (p. 37). The neoliberal ethos "strives to ensure that individuals are compelled to assume market-based values in all of their judgments and practices in order to amass sufficient quantities of 'human capital' and thereby become 'entrepreneurs of themselves'" (p. 38).

Moreover, as referenced in stakeholder comments throughout and inherent in Canada's immigration policies, there is a perception that economic immigrants and entrepreneur immigrants are more advantageous to the school and to a community (and to the country) because they've been previously educated, and they have what is frequently thought of as the right set of skills—urban values, lifelong learning, technological prowess, among other things—that will allow them to become contributing, integrated, tax-paying citizens in Canada. Taking a critical perspective, some teachers argued that, in fact, the MLs who have struggled the most and are overcoming the most, those from refugee and war-affected backgrounds, despite their trauma and lack of a capitalist education, have survived, which is proof of their resilience. In fact, in some instances, development of ML resilience is viewed as a goal to pursue in K–12 classrooms in Canada (Geres, 2016).

Having developed resilience and adaptability, MLs who have overcome the most may be perceived as particularly desirable immigrant newcomers. However, according to Chandler and Reid (2016), resilience has a dark side, explored in depth in the Conversation podcast "Don't call me resilient" (https://dont-call-me-resilient.simplecast.com). Resilience, within a neoliberal framework, references a "degraded subject" lacking autonomy and agency (Chandler & Reid, 2016, p. 1). Chandler and Reid argue,

> The resilient subject is one that has been taught, and accepted, the lessons concerning the danger of autonomy and the need to be "capacity-built" in order to make the "right choices" in development of sustainable responses to threats and dangers posed by its environment. Thus the process of constructing resilient subjects requires divesting peoples and individuals of any belief in the possibility of determining their own conditions for development and security and accepting

> instead the necessity of adaptation to the "realities" of an endemic condition of global insecurity and to the practice of "sustainable development" instead. (pp. 1–2)

Therefore, they suggest, resilience may signal development of neoliberal subject positions, in which MLs become resigned to "permanently struggle to accommodate [themselves] to the world" (p. 4).

In our data, similarly, when students, teachers, and other stakeholders noted that MLs lack sufficient time to gain prerequisites for obtaining credentials needed for high-cultural-capital occupations, MLs were seen to have been already robbed of the choice to become flexible, lifelong-learning neoliberal subjects poised to assume positions as systems analysts and knowledge workers. That is, educational attainment was not seen to be beyond MLs' abilities (in fact, they were uniquely behaviourally and intellectually well suited to academic pursuits), but rather MLs were seen as those who would have chosen to compete in the educational and employment "free" markets, to thereby have access to forms of institutional cultural capital and education (Price, 2014, p. 581), if only they had had time to optimize their access to it. It is a painful irony that many MLs were positioned by themselves and others as being victims of circumstance, prevented, for reasons beyond their control, from entering the educational and employment "markets" many of them had come to Canada for. MLs here are assigned victim identities: "if only" they had arrived earlier, then maybe they would have been positioned to compete.

Citing one competitive advantage, MLs all felt that it was a good thing to speak more than one language; they felt sorry for those DC students who could not speak two or more languages. MLs said that speaking two languages lets you travel in the world and know what people are saying, to get jobs like translation, to talk to people from other countries, and to be cool. However, MLs noted that DC students should not be forced to learn other languages because it is not important for them. DC students would only benefit from knowing another language because then they would be able to help people from other countries—and their peers in other countries would not get mad at them if they travelled. Viewed in this manner, MLs may be dynamic subjects, able to adjust their cultural and linguistic repertoires, readily adapting to the increasing diversity of society, and thus ready to participate in the service of neoliberal economic and political interests at home and globally. It is possible that they desire to position themselves as "having the plurilingual language skills desired by transnational corporations" (Flores, 2013, p. 516). However, speaking languages considered to be non-marketable, those newcomers who inhabit the lower socioeconomic strata are not positioned in this way; only immigrant elites speaking the languages of globally competitive economies may emerge as plurilingual "fluid language users able to continuously accumulate new language competencies … necessary for the development of a new citizenship to fit a new common communicative sphere" (Flores, 2013, p. 514).

Moreover, the concept of class is ubiquitous. In high schools in inner-city districts, it is not just MLs versus DC students, but students who come from other socioeconomic disadvantages are also perceived as having lost before they began (Nakagawa & Kouritzin, 2021). The MLs are not uniform, some being described as "profoundly ESL" (District resource administrator interview, 2014). In schools in which some DCs have what is termed "ESL/EAL characteristics" (Administrator interview, 2011), thereby referencing race, poverty, home language usage, Indigenous backgrounds, and so on, a hierarchy of MLs emerges. In these schools, DC students have frequently experienced generational struggles with education, under- or unemployment, and economic precarity, while the MLs still view these struggles as temporary. Teachers and administrators noted that some of the things that all of these disadvantaged students (disadvantaged, that is, in comparison to other schools in other areas of the city, not within the school) respond to are order, predictability, and stability, all of which are reflected in the school in gestures of respect for authority, in immediate covering over of graffiti or any defacing of school property, in monitored and emphasized school safety, and in building cleanliness and preservation of its architectural beauty (Administrator interview, 2013).

One other thing that emerged in the discourses we encountered in our research is perceived competition between these schools and other urban schools. In neighbourhoods where both household incomes and accumulated wealth were lower than in other areas of the city (as is the case for most schools ultimately attended by refugee and landed-immigrant students from some backgrounds, namely, southeast Asian, Middle Eastern, African, and Central American) and where schools are attended mostly by white DC students and/or highly educated, often elite in educational or economic terms, MLs, there is a competition to have students attend the best school that familial resources can afford. As Price (2014) and others (e.g., Piller & Cho, 2013) have noted, schools in poorer neighbourhoods are under a great deal more pressure to help their students, not only to learn English but also to compete effectively in the educational (and thus economic) market in order to be able to pursue funded higher education or technological programmes; the "kicker" is that in order to do so, schools would have to do more with less.

In our data, such stratification along class lines had already occurred, limiting the prospects for all students. Adding non-English-speaking, often resourcing, students from resourcing nations (Kouritzin & Nakagawa, 2018; Nakagawa, 2013) to a school already perceived to be providing limited opportunities to students who will ultimately hold resourcing positions in the economic market only augments and makes clear the structural barriers to the operation of free markets in terms of pursuing "success" for some students. The paradox is that NIMBY (not in my backyard) is affordable in other schools, so social policies regarding the placement of certain kinds of MLs in particular schools where they have immediate access to cheap or public housing compound the problem and further prevent MLs from being able to commodify themselves adequately—perhaps through the spin of plurilingualism (Flores, 2013)—to compete in the economic and employment market. In short, the neoliberal values of both choice and competition are "illusory notions in the context of unequal distribution of resources" (Price, 2014, p. 583), while those students who are most marginalized are subject to discursive regimes that position them as colluding with the global capitalist economy.

Conclusion

In the process of a decade-long series of qualitative research projects, the researchers uncovered how some (though certainly not all) of Canada's public schools may be inadequately suited to meet the increased demands of ML education, especially in contexts in which a school's community is already impoverished. These findings also suggest that in contexts with inadequate professional training and material conditions in the schools, teachers and host community members engage with MLs through a process of managed identity production. The features of this type of identity production enforce a kind of explicit racial/linguistic division between students, limiting the roles for MLs to those of subordinate rank in the existing class or ethnic classification in these schools. In plain-speaking terms, we suggest that the education received by the MLs studied in these contexts was aimed at having them become second-class citizens, not leaders. MLs are thus assuming the identity positions of victims—and victims do not lead.

The consequences of this process of subordination for MLs is that they are educated to follow and are limited in the extent to which they can experience full social integration within the school. This is likely to have longer-term implications for their economic and social integration into the society beyond school as well. In the context of Canada's increased efforts to solicit and retain immigrants as part of both domestic labour and social reproduction policies, the integration of newcomers is paramount. Their ascension to leadership positions in the coming decades will be a marker of that integration. In support of this aim, we have argued the need for awareness of the processes of neoliberalism as they unfold in everyday classroom and school discourses, and consequently for greater professional training for and material support to teachers, administrators, and support staff where especially low-income migrants arrive in Canada.

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