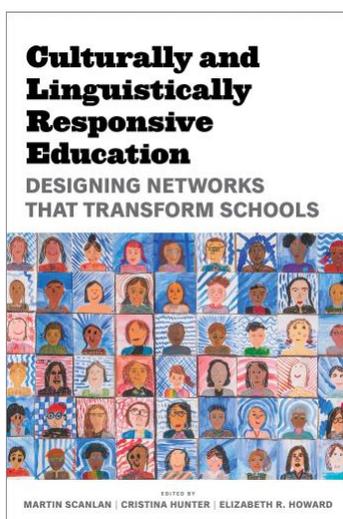


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**Review of *Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Education:
Designing Networks that Transform Schools*
Edited by Martin Scanlan, Cristina Hunter, and Elizabeth R.
Howard**

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Overview

The Two Way Immersion Network of Catholic Schools (TWIN-CS), an initiative of the Roche Center for Catholic Education in the Lynch School of Education and Human Development at Boston College, was established in Fall 2012 with the goal of seeding a sustainable network of bilingual Catholic elementary schools committed to reversing the marginalization of English Learners (ELs). In *Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Education: Designing Networks that Transform Schools* (2019), editors Martin Scanlan, Cristina Hunter, and Elizabeth R. Howard curate a multifaceted examination of the beliefs and practices that have catalyzed the growth and success of TWIN-CS.

A major thrust of Scanlan, Hunter, and Howard's argument is that designing scaffolded and supportive networks to provide culturally and linguistically responsive educational experiences for all students transcends the very specific context of TWIN-CS. More, by consistently stretching the definition of leadership through networks of distributed power, the editors offer a model which, convincingly, could be engaged with by various education stakeholders in various educational settings. The authors' insistence on the broader goals of this work make it feel as applicable and urgent to someone with my experiences—a teacher (not administrator) in secondary and post-secondary classrooms (not elementary) in public school settings (not parochial) where instruction is delivered exclusively in English (not multiple languages)—as to anyone else.

The theory of action undergirding TWIN-CS is that “strategic and scaffolded networking that is grounded in an asset-based orientation advances culturally and linguistically responsive schooling” (p. 11). To break that down: “Strategic and scaffolded networking” speaks to the dynamic relationships

that connect educators to each other within and across school contexts in order to “advance the organizational learning of the schools” (p. 11). “Asset-based orientation” refers to schools’ “viewing the knowledge and experience of students, families, and communities as strengths” (p. 11). And, “culturally and linguistically responsive schooling,” as specifically conceptualized by TWIN-CS, is marked by three defining features: it promotes all students’ sociocultural competence, it respects and cultivates proficiency in home and community languages in addition to English, and it provides a strong curriculum and instruction to promote high-level academic achievement.

Part 1: Context

Part 1, which is comprised of two chapters, describes the history of and the theory of action inspiring TWIN-CS. Early Catholic schools at the turn of the 20th century had a history of welcoming immigrant students with little to no tuition. Many of those schools, situated within immigrant parishes, even offered bilingual instruction in students’ mother languages such as Polish, Lithuanian, or Czech. However, since the 1960’s, increasing dependencies on tuition funds, decreasing school resources, and struggles to recruit and retain bilingual and biliterate educators who can keep pace with the swelling numbers of immigrant students have resulted in the linguistic marginalization of non-native English-speaking students.

Two Way Immersion (TWI) as a model of bilingual education was introduced in the United States in the 1960s, but it wasn’t until the 1980s that there was an uptick in TWI programs. Reviewing the research on TWI, Howard, Sugarman, and Christian (2003) described how the model was poised for expansion, given its potential to serve the increasing numbers of non-English speaking students and given the allure of a bilingual program to monolingual

English-speaking students. Within the TWI model, there is a full integration of native and non-native English speakers, who should ideally be represented in equal numbers, and bilingual instruction is offered in both English and a partner language (typically either Spanish or Mandarin, which are the most popular home languages among English language learners). That is, even though only a portion of students within TWI schools are designated as “English learners”, every student is an “emergent bilingual learner”.

At around the same time the TWI model gained traction. Ladson-Billings (1995) elevated the notion of culturally relevant pedagogy as an educational value system that strived to center students’ cultures and languages in school settings. Part of what was revolutionary about Ladson-Billings’ rendering of culturally relevant pedagogy was its specific commitment “to collective, not merely individual, empowerment” (p. 160). In the years since, the framing has migrated first towards “culturally responsive pedagogy” and later “culturally sustaining pedagogy”, with each iteration assuming a more adamant belief that students’ home cultures and languages are assets in the classroom and must be treated as so by educators.

While this approach applies to all students, the stakes are particularly high for non-native English speakers who are frequently obliged to participate in bilingual education models that bend towards “hegemonic Whiteness” (p. 10). The effect is that ELs are either isolated from their native English-speaking peers or immersed in English-only settings that aspire to stamp out home languages and cultures. The solution to the marginalization of language-minoritized students, Flores and Rosa (2015) write, is not to “improve” their English or encourage their ability to “code switch” between English and their home language. Both of these practices still center English. Instead, the solution is

“to engage with, confront, and ultimately dismantle the racialized hierarchy of U.S. society” (p. 167). If executed properly, TWI is a tool for dismantling these hierarchies within schools and communities.

Applying TWI as a lever of culturally and linguistically responsive education within the context of a school network, Scanlan, Hunter, and Howard illustrate how Wenger’s (1998) sociocultural theory of organizational learning can amplify professional knowledge and expand professional capacity. Scanlan and Hunter, who are both associated with Boston College, and Howard, an associate professor of bilingual education at the University of Connecticut, helped launch TWIN-CS in 2012. The original structure placed the design team as the network’s hub. The design team’s purpose was to distribute resources and support to a periphery web of member schools. A dozen member schools were selected to participate that first year based on their demonstrated vision, willingness, and ability to sustain a TWI program. Each of these member schools formed an in-house implementation team of teachers, administrators, and parents to conceptualize and execute the school-based program. And, each implementation team brought on an external mentor—an outside consultant who specialized in dual language instruction—to serve as a non-evaluative “critical friend” in helping the schoolwork toward its individual vision.

By design, early information flows originated with the design team and moved outward to the implementation teams and mentors. Between the spring and summer of 2013, for example, the design team hosted a series of virtual webinars for the network and facilitated the first annual summer academy, a five-day professional retreat for member schools to collaborate, learn, and plan. As the network grew—it reached twenty schools during the 2018-2019 school year—knowledge and resources no

longer exclusively originated with the design team, implementation teams, mentors, and even individual teachers had organically become the sources of their own knowledge and resources. While the central design team played a critical role in *seeding* transformation, these “micro-hubs” that emerged at local school sites played a critical role in *growing* transformation (pp. 166-167).

The structure of *Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Education* mimics this distributed power dynamic, with the editors, who belonged to the central TWIN-CS design team, offering the general framing in Parts One and Three and the contributors, who participated in TWIN-CS as mentors, supplying the meat of the book in Part Two: Practices. The six chapters that comprise Part Two (chapters three through eight) each offer a sliver of the processes, practices, challenges, and negotiations that defined the audacious work of transforming a school community.

Chapter 3: Engaging in Critical Conversations

TWIN-CS mentor Corey Maslowski, who is also a principal of a public Spanish immersion school, writes about the purposeful, and sometimes difficult, dialogues that must accompany organizational shifts towards a culturally and linguistically responsive education. Maslowski writes that “without addressing prejudice and bias directly, a purportedly culturally and linguistically responsive school—such as a bilingual school—can paradoxically perpetuate the same social inequities as its monolingual precursor” (p. 39). School leaders can’t externally impose new value systems on their school communities, but they ought to make ample opportunities for individual stakeholders to “internally co-create” these underlying values via “engagement in deep and critical conversations” (p. 33). Maslowski leans on Heifetz and colleagues’ conception of a “productive zone of disequilibrium”

in order to describe the sweet spot of critical conversations where participants’ discomfort motivates change but is not so severe as to cause paralysis. From Maslowski’s experience, one of the toughest conversations to transpire within TWIN-CS concerns how school values manifest in scheduling and whether instruction happens in the partner language for 50 percent of the school day or more. Whether the content is about scheduling or something else, critical conversations are a tool to manage the massive shifts that accompany transforming schools to a TWI model.

Chapter 4: Assuring Model Fidelity

María Cristina Ladas, a TWIN-CS mentor and the coordinator for Spanish, French, and Chinese immersion programs in a public school district in Arizona, details a “fidelity assurance” system she developed with the implementation team at her partner TWIN-CS school. Ladas explains that deciding on a TWI model and developing an implementation plan can appear like the capstone to this work. However, the real efforts of sustaining a TWI program over time are ensuring that schools and teachers remain faithful to the chosen model, that that model is working as intended, and, if not, that implementation teams are responsive to making changes. Fidelity assurance tools which support those efforts can range from intricately detailed rubrics, like the Center for Applied Linguistics’ “Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education,” to simple checklists of non-negotiables, such as how much instructional time should be delivered in each language. While the central TWIN-CS design team had offered the “Guiding Principles” as a tool, Ladas and the implementation team at her partner school crafted a simpler, streamlined tool that centered the inquiry: “What evidence do we have to support assurance?” (p. 73). Returning to this framing question over time pushed the local implementation team to reimagine their

English/Spanish teaching teams, their assessments, even their classroom set-up and procedures in order to revise the model to be more faithful to their vision. The instrument also resonated with other TWIN schools, and was shared with the full network during a summer academy.

Chapter 5: Leveraging Networks for Coordinated Professional Development

In this chapter, Bridget Yaden, a TWIN-CS mentor and professor of Hispanic studies, tackles the topic of coordinated professional development across TWIN-CS. Particularly for culturally and linguistically responsive schools, she advocates that “high-quality, consistent, timely, and applicable PD is a key factor of success” (p. 93). Formally, the TWIN-CS design team has a slate of scaffolded professional development opportunities, including bi-monthly webinars for implementation teams and mentors, the annual summer academy, in-person consultations, and internet-based resources. Less formally, Yaden describes the process of professional development as organically developing from grassroots collaborations between implementation teams and their mentors. Yaden writes, “these mentors, as outside facilitators and coaches who do not have the evaluative function of a principal, help reduce the perceived risks among the staff for trying something new or asking questions” (p. 89).

Yaden describes the specific instance of her and her design team struggling to make sense of an assessment tool provided by the central TWIN-CS design team. Through informal conversations with other schools, new possibilities for meaningful assessment bubbled up. From here, the professional development cycle took on a life of its own through in-person workshops, phone conversations among TWIN-CS mentors, mentor-facilitated webinars for the whole network, the collaborative construction of a novel Spanish assessment tool, the development of transparent new methods for sharing assessment

results with parents, and the ultimate decision to increase Spanish instruction time in the early grades. Yaden’s portrayal of the yield of coordinated professional development demonstrates the value of both leveraging existing scaffolded network supports and creating site-specific shared learning opportunities to best meet school needs.

Chapter 6: Building Teacher Capacity Using Critical Reflections

Margarita Gomez Zisselsberger and Gloria Ramos Gonzalez, TWIN-CS mentors and, respectively a literacy professor and literacy consultant, bring us as close to TWIN-CS classrooms as we get in this volume by recounting how teachers’ critical reflections were informed by students’ work. Working with TWIN-CS schools on different coasts, the authors and their school communities joined forces as they moved through cycles of teaching, reflecting, and learning during bilingual writing units. “This complex process requires that teachers be cognitively and emotionally invested, and willing to grow as educators,” the authors write. “Teachers learn through critically reflecting on their beliefs and practices, then exploring strategies for improvement” (p. 95). In the example offered in this chapter, the mentors work alongside teachers as they strive to holistically assess students’ writing across English and Spanish classrooms.

Through the reflective cycles based on student writing, the mentors and teachers tried to anticipate and then support ways that students may draw on “cross-linguistic strategies” (p. 99) in their writing. The authors offer a critique of monolithic language frameworks, which imagine one language to be activated while another lays dormant, and of parallel bilingualism frameworks, which conceptualize a bilingual speaker as two monolinguals. Instead, the authors write, “teachers explored the idea of bilinguals consistently drawing on all their language resources regardless of the linguistic task” (p. 104).

They opt to use the terminology of “holistic bilingualism” instead of the more popular framing of “translanguaging”, though the two are seen as intricately related concepts with the same underlying aim of deconstructing myths of how multilingual students simultaneously leverage their skills within and across languages.

The mentors and the English and Spanish teachers they worked with developed anchor charts of common vocabulary and transition terms, studied student writings to notice patterns of language use, and developed a holistic rubric that rewards bilingual strategies carried across linguistic contexts.

Chapter 7: Cultivating Family Engagement

This chapter, contributed by Amie Sarker, a TWIN-CS mentor and an associate professor of education who focuses on preparing teachers for linguistically and culturally diverse settings, is also among the most satisfying of the volume. Sarker offers a specific, imitable example of an ambitious family literacy project that she spearheaded at her TWIN-CS site. “Culturally and linguistically responsive schools are a social frontier where different worlds collide while creating intersections of shared interest” (p. 119), Sarker writes. She shows us through the “Faith and Familia as Funds of Knowledge” project and how she nestled into those intersections, making it a hospitable place for families.

Sarker led the development of the “Faith and Familia” project in her role as mentor, working closely with teachers and other mentors to actualize it. The guiding principles of the project all declared the import of making sure both students and their families had physical and linguistic access to books and of valuing the role of home and community in fostering student literacy: “parents’ funds of knowledge were explored, valued, and harnessed to

build relationships and foster students’ language and literacy development” (p. 117). Toward this end, Sarker prepared tubs of bilingual books and curated a list of discussion prompts and response ideas for families, which she shared in a bilingual letter home and presented during an in-person meeting with the help of bilingual teachers. She also arranged backpacks, journals, and folders for students to use as they shuttled books and materials from school to home. With network and school support, the project has evolved as an exemplar of the visionary and logistical effort demanded of educators committed to building relationships with families and to fostering asset orientations of students’ funds of knowledge.

Chapter 8: Distributing Leadership

Iliana Alanís and Mariela A. Rodríguez, TWIN-CS mentors and university faculty who focus on dual language education for Latinx children, draw parallels between the values of distributed leadership and those of a culturally and linguistically responsive model. The authors write that “distributed leadership posits that successful educational leadership practices are often not restricted to the work of an individual but instead distributed across the school context through key stakeholders” (p. 140). Within TWIN-CS, the matrix of distribution is particularly sophisticated, with the design team distributing power among mentors and implementation teams, with school administrators distributing power among mentors, teachers, and communities, and with teachers distributing power among families and students. School administrators, who assume the traditional “leadership” position, function more as “change agents” (p. 139), empowering and supporting all stakeholders as they develop professionally.

Clearly, distributed leadership can be problematic without shared values. As the authors write, “it

requires a team who shares a common vision and calls for leaders to foster critical conversations around culture, language, race, and power” (p. 142). Centering the vision of a culturally and linguistically responsive education for all students demands that leaders cultivate school environments in which all stakeholders take ownership over progressing that vision individually and through collaboration.

Critical Discussion

There are three noticeable links missing in this book that prevent this model from being easily fastened to other contexts. First, the elevated status of mentors both through their contribution to this volume and through their contributions to TWIN-CS on the ground. While deferring the bulk of the book to mentor authors is a model of the distributed leadership propounded by the editors, it is worth calling attention to the fact that other voices—namely those of teachers, administrators, and parents—were missing. As such, there is a lost opportunity to share the experience of these transformations as understood by those members of the network closest to the students. Also, with exclusive focus on TWIN-CS sites in which Spanish is the partner language, we do not hear from facilitators of programs where the partner language does not use the Roman alphabet, as is the case with Mandarin-English two-way immersion programs.

A more substantial reason for pause, though, is how dependent TWIN-CS is on the hefty contributions provided by the mentors. Ladas, for example, helped the English and Spanish teacher teams coordinate their curriculum, assessments, classroom spaces, and classroom procedures. She developed a document to serve as a fidelity assurance tool. She facilitated network-wide learning experiences to share the fidelity assurance tool with other schools in the network. Yaden describes meeting with the principal at the start of each school year to develop

an annual plan. She describes coaching the implementation team through iterative cycles of professional development and helping them develop and then share a holistic assessment tool for student writing. This is all to say that mentors’ roles in the implementation of the TWIN-CS model goes far beyond cheerleaders and sounding boards; they are the sherpas bringing their schools into new territories. The cruciality of mentors translates to an added layer of capacity that many schools will not be able to access. Without the support of these outside experts, who received compensation, it is unclear that this model could have been as successful.

Second, the financial support that enabled TWIN-CS is hinted but not detailed. The editors offer that there was “some initial donor support”, but the bulk of the initiative was financed by Boston College. There is some indication that these funds support the central design team and the local mentors. They also enable the five-day summer academy. Local schools, it appears, contributed from their own coffers to send staff to the summer academy. The haziness of the financial details is a significant omission that sidesteps a very real obstacle many schools will face in attempting to procure financial support to fuel this work.

And third, in highlighting the successes of TWIN-CS, there is minimal attention devoted to the problems that could suffocate these efforts. A key tension of TWI implementation as described in Howard, Sugarman, and Christian’s (2003) research review back in 2003 and reiterated through the present volume is how to swim upstream against the strong current of English monolingualism:

While practitioners, parents, and policymakers may embrace the ideals of equal status of the two languages and two language groups, similar achievement patterns for language minority and language

majority students, and fully developed bilingualism and biliteracy for all students, many forces work against the full realization of these ideals. (p. 48)

We can sense these forces at work throughout the book, however, these challenges are not fully engaged, leaving readers less equipped to anticipate them.

For instance, the editors share that during the first year of TWIN-CS, some schools faced “insurmountable challenges” leading some of the original dozen participating schools to drop out (by the 2018-2019 year only eight of the original twelve schools remained). The editors tease that “some schools lacked the resources and time to overcome urgent fiscal matters” (p. 23). However, it is unclear what it would have taken *to overcome*. At other points in Part Two, the mentors paint challenges in broad strokes. They describe tensions that emerged between English and Spanish teacher teams. They describe challenges around translating content from English into partner languages and around interpreting curriculum. They gloss over tumultuous transitions that led to teacher resignations and student transfers. A satisfying treatment of these challenges would have delved deeper into the lessons learned from them so that those following in the footsteps of TWIN-CS could be cognizant of the traps.

Implications

Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Education provides an inspiring and compelling portrait of how TWIN-CS leveraged their network structure to advance a culturally and linguistically responsive model of bilingual schooling for all students. The schools, mentors, and educators featured in Part Two and the network-wide data featured in Part Three are a testament that these schools made very real, meaningful strides toward their goals. Since 2012, schools within TWIN-CS saw enrollment numbers and student achievement go up. They saw their mission and values come to life in their classrooms and communities. Parents not only became more involved as a whole, but those parents who are involved also better reflect student demographics. The network, originally anchored to the central design team, has become diffuse, with more people in more roles taking ownership over creating and sharing knowledge.

Scanlan, Hunter, and Howard implore readers to make audacious changes towards a culturally and linguistically sustaining model of multilingual and multiliterate education. Whether the network is replicable without the financial and human capital that buttressed TWIN-CS, the model presented here offers a vision of what’s possible when stakeholders hitch themselves to a bold vision of equity, and independently and collaboratively commit to doing the hard work.

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