Meta-knowledge, Critical literacy and Minority language education: The case of Franco-Ontarian Student Teachers

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Abstract This paper explores discourse practices of a minority community, the Francophones of Ontario, in relationship to identity, ways of talking, and membership in the community. Acquisition of discourses may involve, on the one hand, "going with the grain", that is, encouraging reproduction of inequity by acquiring discourses that further promote one’s subordination and colonization. On the other hand, "going against the grain" implies resistance in acquiring discourse practices that marginalize and subordinate. Moreover, cultures of silence in subordinated groups can be viewed as a trait of complicity with or as an element of resistance to dominant groups. However, through learning meta-knowledge and critical literacy, cultures of silence, complicity and resistance can be transformed within politics of difference. Being a member of a minority encourages diversity and differences. Engaging in a pedagogy of difference in minority language education can be the site to acknowledge hybrid identities, to transform and to reaffirm one’s place in society.

key words: minority language education, socio-politics, literacy. identity, discourses
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This paper reflects on the position of Franco-Ontarians studying to become English medium teachers. They are a minority, subordinate to the English-speaking community, and in many ways subordinate within the francophone community, to an elite that tends to marginalize and devalue certain forms of literacy and proficiency in their own language. These experiences are shared by many Franco-Ontarians in their own community. Using contrasts between primary (home-based) and secondary discourses, and between teaching-as-apprenticeship and teaching-as-learning, the notions of meta knowledge and critical literacy are introduced in a postmodern approach to the problem. In the same way that Franco-Ontarians dropped out of English secondary schools to avoid forms of literacy that were tantamount to cultural assimilation, student teachers take up cultures of silence as a means to resistance to marginalisation and devaluation. A ‘pedagogy of difference’ in minority language education is proposed as a way out of the impasse.

A theory of critical literacy needs to develop pedagogical practices in which the battle to make sense of one’s life reaffirms and furthers the need for teachers and students to recover their own voices so that they can retell their own histories and in so doing ‘check and criticize the history [they] are told against the one [they] have lived.’ ... it is important to examine [their] stories around the interest and principles that structure them and to interrogate them as part of a political project that may enable or undermine the values and practices that provide the foundation for social justice, equality, and democratic community (Friere and Macedo, 1987: 15).

Critical literacy refers to ways of talking, viewing, reading and writing that encourage people to analyze and decode ideological dimensions of texts, institutions, social practices, and cultural forms (ex. television, film) in order to reveal the inequalities that are the result of the relationship between power and knowledge. To challenge these inequalities is the first step towards transforming discriminatory practices and creating a more equitable and democratic society (Friere and Macedo, 1987). These authors point out the importance of developing critical literacy to gain a greater understanding of how identities are constituted.
Identity is often shaped through the social, linguistic and political codes of a dominant culture.

Meta-knowledge is an important pedagogical practice which facilitates the development of critical literacy. Meta-knowledge is defined as reflection involving explanation, analysis, and criticism of linguistic, socio-cultural and socio-political phenomena on all discourses oral and written. Meta-knowledge is necessary to the critical perspective in order to examine subjectivities and identity formation as historically and socially constructed.

In educational settings, terms such as meta-knowledge are often excluded from pedagogical discourse because the concept appears to destabilize teachers. Such a view is characteristic of anti-intellectualism and anti-theory and is clearly disempowering. It would seem to imply that 'meta' (knowledge about) is connected to some theoretical notion disconnected from the classroom setting.

Teachers have the obligation to strive to be simple, but never to be simplistic. To be simple is to find ways to give words relevance and concreteness in the everyday world of the student without falsifying the meaning of the theoretical ideas being expressed. To be simplistic is to abuse the act of translation by reducing theoretical ideas being expressed to a shadow of their original meaning in the misguided belief that students are incapable of grasping the central concepts underlying the theoretical formulations being discussed. The latter act of translation, notes Freire, is one of elitism (McLaren and Leonard, 1993: 7).

Excluding meta-knowledge from educational discourse and classrooms is viewed as a form of reductionism, the simplistic belief that teachers and students might not grasp the concepts underlying meta-knowledge. This simplistic reductionism is a common occurrence in education. It is a gate-keeping mechanism designed by those through whom power operates. At times, gate-keeping might involve teachers with their students, at other times, school administrators with their teachers, depending on the context.

Simplistic discourses are forms of disempowerment. On the other hand, promoting
socio-cultural and linguistic aspects along with pedagogical applications of meta-knowledge is clearly empowering. These practices, however, have socio-political implications. Gate-keepers would rather subscribe to simplistics, a form of elitism, to maintain the status quo of unequal partnerships between dominant and non-dominant groups or majority and minority groups3.

**Positioning the researcher: the socio-critical context**

In adopting discursive practices around politics of identity and politics of difference, I situate myself in postmodern pedagogy. Postmodernism is a significant departure from modernism. While it is not my intention to elaborate on the differences at this time, it is important to point out that many researchers interested in issues of language and society are in the modernist tradition. Within this tradition, some prefer to work with the concept of the linguistic vitality of a community, for example, researchers such as Fishman (Landry and Allard, 1994) who use models rooted in the sociology of language, and Tajfel and Clement (Howard, Giles and Bourhuis, 1994) who use models rooted in social psychology. Using surveys and questionnaires as important tools of data collection, theories such as these have called for the stratification, classification, categorization and normalization of the linguistic vitality of a community. To strive for universal application of the vitality theory is part of the modernist discourse. While these studies may have adopted a socio-historical approach, they remain apolitical, neutral and mask social inequalities.

Postmodernism, on the other hand, attempts to problematize the concept of normalization, breakdown hierarchical barriers and unmask inequalities. In the process, postmodernism challenges assumptions such as "cohesive and unified forms of knowledge" that underlie normalization and categorization. Postmodernism is characterized by pluralism, differences, and the decentering of knowledge. Forms of questioning within postmodern pedagogy vary. One that I undertake involves memory work. In other words, I trace the personal development that has led me to ask the questions I am asking and then I proceed to explore them. From a postmodern
perspective, this is what is known as the process of "positioning myself" in the research. As a result of my own socio-historical and political memory work, therefore, I have come to identify the characteristics I share with the struggle for critical knowledge within Franco-Ontarian education. This struggle is in many ways a personal struggle.

As a teacher from an ethnic-minority background associated with French teacher education, I am grappling with the issue of being a minority within a minority. My position at the university involves working with future teachers who will be in schools where French is the curricular language. As a teacher, I represent power and knowledge. I am conscious of potential inequities that might ensue as result of being in a seemingly dominant position. It is this experience of the relationship between power and knowledge that I share with pre-service teachers in helping them understand the inequity that gets reproduced in elementary and secondary classrooms between teachers and their students. To deny the political nature of the relationship between power and knowledge is to take up a position in favour of the status quo where certain forms of knowledge are privileged over others. This is known as "interested and situated" knowledge. It is important for these pre-service teachers to recognize that all knowledge is interested and situated because knowledge is socially, historically constructed and represents particular ways of seeing, understanding and explaining the world. Privileged forms of knowledge therefore reflect the interests of certain individuals or groups and are tied to power (Pennycook, 1994).

The pre-service teachers I work with are not comfortable with the idea that, as part of the elite of the community, they might be contributing to the reproduction of inequity, all the while being part of a subordinated minority. Moreover, they, as well as many individuals in the French community, are uncomfortable with the notion that as Franco-Ontarians, they must establish allegiance with only one culture, a French culture. In fact, most Franco-Ontarians share more than one culture, leading often to a sense of hybrid identity.

To recognize that one has a hybrid identity is to understand that conflict can exist within and across individuals and groups regarding identity, membership and discourses
practices. In recent years, for example, Franco-Ontarian communities have expanded to incorporate new arrivals, including French-speaking ethnic minorities. Within this context, however, there are traditional Franco-Ontarians who are struggling with an inclusionary vision given the battles they have fought individually and collectively to obtain the few rights the Franco-Ontarian community has experienced in the last twenty-five years. This article attempts to understand those members of the Franco-Ontarian community who have been here for centuries. Nevertheless, for both newly arrived and traditional Franco-Ontarians, it has been a fight for existence, a struggle to reshape and to reclaim their position in history as members of a non-dominant minority community. Theirs is a struggle within which:

... meaning consists of more than signs operating in context; it also includes a struggle over signifying practices which is eminently political and must include the relationships among discourse, power, and differences (McLaren, 1992: 322).

**Socio-historical context: The Franco-Ontarian minority**

Established in Ontario in the late 1600’s, there are today over 500,000 Ontarians who claim French as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada, 1986). French communities are located in various parts of the province with Francophone representation in each community ranging from 5% to 85%. The language spoken in the home can be French, English, and a non-official language. In 1986, 51% of French-mother-tongue claimants stated French was the only language spoken at home. Thirty-one percent spoke only English and 16% spoke both French and English. The remaining 2% also spoke a non-official language in addition to French. Over the years, Francophones have demonstrated a gradual shift toward more use of English. The reasons are many: the decreased usage of French in the community and in the home, the economic status attached to the French language, mixed marriages (exogamy), and the decline of the influence of the Catholic Church as a symbol of the preservation of the French language.

There is, however, recent institutional support for French in Ontario. First, as of 1968, Franco-Ontarians can receive an education through the medium of French in public
elementary and secondary schools. Second, in 1986, provincial legislation was enacted to provide support for government services in both languages in communities designated bilingual (There have to be at least 5,000 Franco-Ontarians within a community for that community to be designated bilingual). Finally, according to the new Canadian Constitution, English-speaking children of French mother-tongue Ontarians have the right to be enrolled in French-medium schools. With the maintenance of the French language, it is important to consider the implications for identity and membership in the Franco-Ontarian community. An examination of these issues, outlined below, forms the main body of the article.

Organizing the Text: Parts One to Four

Part One of this article looks at issues of discourse practices, identity and membership. A social definition of discourse has been adopted and it refers to ways of being, talking and valuing in the world: namely, identity kits (Gee, 1990). Part Two, going with the grain, explores complicity and colonization within Gee's framework (1991) which proposes that meta-knowledge and critical literacy are dependent on the acquisition of primary and second discourses. Part Three shows that going against the grain, resisting the acquisition of secondary discourses, has frequently led to an illiteracy of resistance.

Part Four, critical knowledge and cultures of silence, deals with pedagogical concerns related to developing meta-knowledge and critical literacy in the Franco-Ontarian setting. French is the curricular language and school-based discourses and literacies are secondary discourses. The conclusion explores hybrid identities and ends with a proposal for a pedagogy of difference. By virtue of being a minority, Franco-Ontarians can move across zones of cultural diversity to rethink relationships of self and the collectivity within the broader picture of society and rearticulate the link between marginalization and centrist (mainstream) positions within a pedagogy of difference.

Part One: Discourse practices, identity and membership
In my discussions with pre-service teachers for the French schools, I have felt their malaise. Despite the fact that they are Francophones, they often feel or are made to feel that their French is adequate at best. They might be more comfortable speaking English. Yet they know they do not have membership in the majority group. Initially, students who enroll in the program may have thought of just getting a job; unconsciously, they also make a commitment to the future of Franco-Ontario with all its complexities, struggles and contradictions—which best translates as hybrid identity. The one-year pre-service program in French education at the Faculty contributes to the development of a Franco-Ontarian identity. But what kind of identity? How much of this awakening to a Franco-Ontarian identity gets raised as critical knowledge (i.e. power relations, complicity, oppression, resistance)? (reflections from the author's journal)

Assumption 1 ...Discourses are connected with displays of an identity (Gee, 1991: 155).

Being in a language minority situation, a Franco-Ontarian has more than one primary discourse. Primary discourses are defined as the primary process of enculturation (Gee, 1991) and are often used in informal situations such as in the home. In addition to primary discourses being inherently plural, so are secondary discourses. Secondary discourses involve interaction with those with whom one cannot assume a lot of shared knowledge and experience. These types of discourses are often used in `formal' situations such as institutions. Multiple literacies such as school-based literacy and community-based literacy are examples of secondary discourses (Gee,1991). All discourses are linked to a complex identity which is at the heart of such issues as colonization, complicity, power-knowledge relation, and resistance. These issues will ultimately influence how Franco-Ontarians develop meta-knowledge and critical literacy.

According to Gee (1991), a person need not be fully fluent in a language. However, a person must be fully fluent in a social definition of discourse. Non-fluency in a discourse marks that person as a non-member of the group, an outsider not having the identity or social role. In a minority-setting, a person can be an outsider to the minority community. As an outsider, the person might internalize ambivalence about identity and membership in the
community. Gee also proposes that a given discourse could reserve a sort of 'colonized' role for the person. For example if one is not fluent in the school-based dominant discourse, the discourse marks the person as a subordinate. This form of subordination is used as validation for the prestige and power of the discourse of the other, in this example, the dominant discourses. The majority of these pre-service teachers have internalized as part of their identity the belief that they control school-base discourse just enough to keep signalling that others (the gate-keepers) in the discourse are their betters. The pre-service teachers thus become complicit with their own subordination within their own community. Moreover, by virtue of their discourses and membership in the minority community, they have internalized the view that they are outsiders (and perhaps subordinate) with respect to the majority group.

There are then two forms of subordination, one, within the minority group and the other, by the majority group (Frenette and Gauthier, 1990). To understand the notion of subordination within the minority group, one needs to refer to the socio-historical context described earlier. Prior to 1968, French-medium instruction was limited only to elementary schools. Franco-Ontarians who chose secondary education in French, had to attend a private (Catholic) high school. There were tuition fees and therefore, many were excluded from participating. Those who went on in French became the elite and constituted the dominant group within the Francophone community. Several among them went on to do their own form of gate-keeping of Franco-Ontarians, placing many of them, because of their primary discourses, in a subordinate role within their own community. Moreover, within a French Roman Catholic society, gendered positions were clearly delineated. In this highly patriarchal society, power and knowledge operated mainly through men. Knowledge gained by women was often effected through joining religious orders. This reality persisted up to the mid 1960's. The patriarchal influence is still strongly felt as many Franco-Ontarian women find themselves in traditional roles of knowledge/power.

Today, while Franco-Ontarians receive French-medium instruction at the primary and secondary levels and three community colleges⁴, there is nevertheless a prevailing,
alienating notion in that, in the process of getting education in French, Franco-Ontarians are acquiring secondary ‘authoritative’ discourses. This raises a series of questions: first, are the dominant Franco-Ontarians gate-keeping, thus allowing only a certain elite to succeed within the system? It has been my experience during my years as a teacher in the Faculty of Education, that several Franco-Ontarian pre-service teachers do not feel comfortable with their own discourses because of the ‘standards’ of fluency (secondary discourses) that the gate-keeping elite require in order for them to be able to teach in French. Moreover, as a result, the pre-service teachers become insecure about the knowledge they have. Second, to what extent are those through whom power operates invalidating the histories and disempowering the voices of these pre-service teachers? Faculty teaching-personnel need to challenge their own practices so that pre-service teachers who leave the Faculty do not in turn impose and perpetuate forms of gate-keeping by reproducing inequities within their own students because they, as teachers, become the elite through which power operates.

The issue of subordination is further compounded by the notion that the idea of developing secondary discourses is nevertheless predicated on acquiring primary discourses (such as in the home) in French. As has been discussed earlier, these primary discourses seem to be disappearing. The generation of young Franco-Ontarians in their twenties and thirties increasingly speak less and less French in the home (Mougeon & Beniak, 1994). Nevertheless, as parents, they send their children to schools where French is the medium of instruction. The children, however, might not be fluent in a French primary discourse. Maintenance of identity and culture operates through primary discourses. If these discourses are not present in the home, what does that mean for identity and membership within the Franco-Ontarian community? Can institutions (such as schools) be the site for both enculturation and socialization into the Franco-Ontarian community and primary and secondary discourses in French?

Because of the differential status attached to non-dominant discourses, exclusion and devaluation are common threads in the identity of the Franco-Ontarian. Many Franco-
Ontarians are excluded by the dominant group within the Francophone community because of their ways of talking. Moreover, most Franco-Ontarians are excluded from the majority (English-speaking dominant) group, the second form of subordination by the majority group. Franco-Ontarians have been historically disadvantaged socio-economically and been subject to assimilation to the majority group. Legislation governing education in Ontario shows the extent to which Franco-Ontarians were deprived of acquiring secondary discourses, leaving them "illiterate" (Mougeon & Beniak, 1994; Wagner, 1991). As was mentioned earlier, those who could not afford to pay their own way for secondary education in French, either left school or went on to an English publicly funded high school. Most members maintained their identity and culture through their primary discourses in the home. Nevertheless, restriction in the use of the minority language led to the following results: "lower levels of literacy, over representation in the functionally illiterate categories, higher secondary school drop-out rate, minority educational underachievement and lower economic status of adult members of the minority group" (Caron-Réaume, 1994:3).

Devaluation by the majority dominant group means that the minority group's ways of being (values, beliefs) are not considered important---not legitimate. These values and beliefs constitute, for Franco-Ontarians, ways of reading the world that are not part of the general schema of values subscribed to by the broader segments of the majority society. As members of the minority group, Franco-Ontarians' experiences, living reality, and histories are rendered voiceless. How? By negating, diminishing, or perhaps more powerfully, "rendering invisible" the experiences and discourses of the minority. The majority just doesn't see the minority community, and its discursive and cultural practices. According to Brodkey (1992), "a discourse, in theory, represents all humans as subjects. In practice, however, some humans fare consistently worse than others across discourses, for some are commonly represented as diminished" (p.312). Franco-Ontarians have been marginalized and "othered as unknowing" not part of the "we", namely, "those who know" and "have" the power. The status of the community as a subordinated minority means that their forms of knowledge have been diminished to "non-knower" status. The members of
the community have been `devoiced' and rendered invisible.

Franco-Ontarian discourses are situated in a socio-historical struggle between the discourses of `we' (non-dominant), and the discourses of the `other' (dominant). The discourses of the `other' refers to Bakhtin's notion of authoritative discourse (the word comes with its authority already fused to it). Rodby (1992) states that for many teachers, the goal of education is, in Bakhtin's words, to "assimilate another's discourse" (1981:342). It is hardly surprising that in the Franco-Ontarian context, authoritative discourses promoted by the teacher can be ones that the student quite often rejects and by so doing opposes the Other. Within the student, there is tension and resistance. However, there is also the notion that authoritative discourses can be viewed as ways to `success'. Consequently, `going with the grain' is tantamount to being complicit in one's own colonization, giving consent to one's own subordination by dominant majority and minority groups.

Part Two: Going with the grain

If my parents were Franco-Ontarians, they would not be literate in their own language, French. And so it is for many Franco-Ontarians I know whose parents are in this situation despite the fact that they went to school in Ontario. ...Moreover, I know many children who come to school not knowing any variety of French as a primary discourse. Their primary discourses could be in English or in another language. (reflections from the author's journal)

Assumption 2 Several secondary discourses, in Western society, are likely to be acquired in school settings. It might be considered unusual, however, to acquire primary discourses of the community to which you belong in the school setting, especially if you have no primary discourse that links you to the community and the school.

The primary discourses spoken at home display one or more cultural identities and at the same time promote community membership (Allard, 1993). As was mentioned earlier, many children who come to French-language schools in Ontario do not have a
primary discourse in French. This raises questions about cultural and linguistic identity and membership in the Franco-Ontarian community. As well, it begs the questions raised earlier whether schools can promote the acquisition of primary discourses in French. At present, the Ministry of Education (1994) has developed a policy document that aims to promote linguistic planning in French-language schools for children who do not have primary discourses in French. This document also addresses secondary discourses, and meta-knowledge that incorporates critical literacy. However, the manner in which primary and secondary discourses, meta-knowledge and critical literacy are to be taught remains to be explored.

Gee's model for teaching (cf. Table 1) has validity in helping all children to acquire primary and secondary discourses in or outside school and is applicable to the Franco-Ontarian context. Gee has two meanings for the word to teach: first, to apprentice someone in a social practice (discourse) wherein you scaffold their growing ability to say, do, value, believe, within that discourse. In this context, "teaching", according to Gee (1991), facilitates acquisition. The second meaning of teaching is to learn by a process of explanation and critique that breaks down material for analysis and fosters the development of meta-knowledge (cf. Table 1).

Table 1. Gee's model for teaching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>teaching-as-apprenticeship</th>
<th>acquisition</th>
<th>primary discourse</th>
<th>secondary discourse (ex. literacy)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>teaching-as-learning</td>
<td>meta-knowledge</td>
<td>critical literacy</td>
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According to this model, both forms of teaching are essential. Teaching-as-learning cannot occur without teaching-as-apprenticeship. The latter, however, can take place without teaching-as-learning but this, according to Gee, can lead to successful but "colonized" students. What does it mean to be "colonized"? It is a form of acquisition through apprenticeship of secondary discourses (e.g. school-based literacies) without any learning of meta-knowledge and critical literacy. Much of the teaching-as-apprenticeship often involves authoritative secondary discourses, ones that students do not easily appropriate. Moreover, from a traditional perspective, it is possible for a pseudo form of "teaching-as-learning" to take place in the classroom. This is, however, often not intended to develop meta-knowledge in order to explore critically dominant and non-dominant discourses and challenge power-knowledge relationships embedded in discourse practices. The meta-knowledge that can occur in these more traditional contexts involves analysis and exploration of the language code and excludes any critical socio-political perspectives that are necessary to promoting critical literacy (Masny and Ghahremani-Ghajar, 1994; Masny, 1993).

If the development of meta-knowledge does not include critical literacy, what then are the educational aims for Franco-Ontarian society, its members, their identity and their culture? In the current context, Franco-Ontarians go on to school to acquire authoritative discourses that may bring about alienation from their identity and membership in the Franco-Ontarian community because the primary discourses that the children come to school with are devalued. They have internalized the role of the outsider within their own community because of the gate-keeping occurring by those who are in a dominant position within the community. This is a form of colonization. It is underscored by constant 'tests' of fluency of the dominant (primary and secondary) discourses used as 'gates' to exclude and colonize.

When Franco-Ontarians have rejected school-based literacies, it has resulted in
high over representation in the functionally illiterate category. To remedy this situation, campaigns for functional literacy have sprouted nationally (and internationally). Functional literacy, however, can be viewed as another term for literacy of the colonized. In this context, according to Freire (1972), literacy is dehumanizing, dysfunctional and domesticating. As a domesticating act, Lankshear (1993) states that “teaching literacy sides with the structured investment of superior power in minority and majority elites; enabling the elites to retain their power advantage over oppressed minorities by helping to secure the consent of the oppressed to their own domination” (p.99). This occurs by demonstrating that the problem of literacy/illiteracy is an individual rather than a collective societal issue. The individual is the one with the ‘pathological' problem. Those ‘in the know' want the individual to succeed and offer this generous gift of success, literacy.

In this view, literacy is a form of colonization. Many adults unknowingly buy into literacy-as-colonization and therefore become complicit in their own oppression. Others will oppose and reject such forms of literacy. Such opposition in subordinated groups can lead to either illiteracy of oppression or illiteracy of resistance (Wagner and Grenier, 1991). Both forms of illiteracy can undermine identity and membership in the minority community. Illiteracy of oppression is the result of assimilation in schools and in society in general. Illiteracy of resistance implies not wanting to buy into the system. Since there were no publicly-funded French language high schools until 1969, many Franco-Ontarians, in order to resist losing their language, dropped out of the English-language secondary school, thus rejecting assimilation. Only those who could afford to attend French private schools organized by religious communities completed their secondary education in French.

To find out why people have been rejecting literacy, it is necessary to examine the socio-historical and political implications that underlie variations in discourse practices. Considered from these perspectives, literacy can be a form of alienation, in which legitimate voices (primary and secondary discourses) get marginalized and/or excluded. In this context, the status quo is perpetuated. "If we conjure only those ideas that we already have the words to express, then our presence in history remains more or less comfortably
static" (McLaren and da Silva, 1993: 62). A self-fulfilling cycle ensues: the status quo allows dominant groups and non-dominant groups to engage in discourse practices that promote the status quo. "...Conjuring only that which we already have the words to express", we move comfortably with the grain. However, it is important to consider ways to move beyond current discourse practices that alienate and marginalize, and chart possibilities for discourses to interrogate, to define, to situate, and to name oppression (complicity) and resistance: namely, to develop strategies to go against the grain.

**Part Three: Going against the grain**

I situate myself in the minority Francophone community. Coming from an ethnic minority, I was going against the grain since most individuals from an ethnic minority go with the dominant group and perhaps grow unconsciously complicit with their own subordination within the group. Being with the majority is a more comfortable site. Nevertheless, you are an outsider. I am an outsider within the minority community. Who is an insider, now that I think about it? (reflections from the author's journal)

**Assumption 3** Secondary discourses are necessary prerequisites to meta-knowledge and critical literacies.

Resistance is linked to meta-knowledge and critical literacy. This link has far-reaching implications for Franco-Ontarian education because it brings to a level of critical consciousness the relationship between power and knowledge. Secondary discourses in this case are paramount in exploiting meta-knowledge. Meta-knowledge can develop through classroom learning or through certain life experiences. Exposure to discourses in another language, for example, can lead one to become aware of how discourses in one's own first language work. In the case of Franco-Ontarians, knowledge of discourses in a second language is inevitable, but does it allow them to become aware of how discourses in their own language work? If there is this inevitable knowledge of discourses in a second
language, then why is this knowledge not put to the service of the first language. For most Franco-Ontarians, the second language would be English. Many French teachers would view tapping English language awareness to be counterproductive since one is trying to develop competence exclusively in the French language.

Critical awareness is common among people who are somewhat marginal to a discourse or to a culture, and such people have access to insights into the workings of these discourses or cultures that more mainstream members do not. Accordingly, Franco-Ontarians should have considerably high levels of meta-knowledge and are ripe for critical literacy. Why has it not happened? Perhaps through their teaching practices, educators are complicit by saying "no" to developing the level of meta-knowledge that explores critically discourse practices embedded in relationships of power and knowledge. In this context, one needs to ask whose interests are being served. Many minority students, according to Gee (1991), have great difficulty with certain "mainstream" discourses, many of which are school-based. These often conflict (in values, attitudes, ways of acting, thinking, talking) with their own home and community-based discourses. However, while problems arise in gaining the social goods that society ties to the mastery of mainstream discourses, these conflicts can also lead to reflective thought and meta-knowledge. Freire and Macedo's perspective (1987) on meta-knowledge and emancipatory literacy is that awareness of these conflicts is critical in promoting social change.

The students' voice is fundamental to the development of emancipatory literacy since it is the only means through which they make sense of their own experience of the world. Their voice should be legitimated as valid discourses within the school setting. Restricting students to their own vernacular, however, leads to a linguistic ghetto. A broader meaning of students' "empowerment" should include an understanding of the value of mastering the standard dominant language without silencing students' voices by a distorted legitimation of the standard language. Empowerment should be a means that enables students to "interrogate and selectively appropriate those aspects of the dominant culture that will provide them with the basis for defining and transforming, rather than
merely serving, the wider social order” (Freire and Macedo, 1987: 152). Accordingly, the task of critical educators is to provide

...the conditions for individuals to acquire a language that will enable them to reflect upon and shape their own experiences in the interest of a larger project of social responsibility. It is a language that operates critically ...by brushing common sense experience against the grain, by interfering with the codes that bind cultural life ...(McLaren and da Silva, 1993: 49).

The above quote can be interpreted as an appeal to meta-knowledge and critical literacy as a way of critically challenging the status quo by disrupting unconscious taken-for-granted discourse norms that reproduce social inequalities. In the Franco-Ontarian context, the development of meta-knowledge and critical literacy is a means to question and interrupt/disrupt discourse practices that challenge identity both in relation to membership in their immediate community and to the broader ones as well. Many Franco-Ontarians have internalized the conflict of identity and community-membership and knowingly or not go with/against the grain. Developing meta-knowledge and critical literacy are essential in that they bring greater awareness of situated knowledge and power relationships. An important question for consideration in the Franco-Ontarian context would explore how critical knowledge evolves within prevailing cultures of silence: those that mute, others that provide the context for resistance.

Part Four: Critical knowledge and cultures of silence
My students who might represent the elite by virtue of being at the university are somehow still made to feel that they do not have "the goods" (at least in French) and whatever "goods" they have in their other discourses and language(s) get denied. What does this do for self-esteem, identity and a sense of belonging? Why does one have to deny one's hybrid identity? (reflections from the author's journal)

Assumption 4  Mainstream (dominant) children often acquire school-based
literacies through experiences in the home both before and during school.

While children from the mainstream often have opportunities at home to acquire discourses required in schools, many children in the Franco-Ontarian setting are stigmatized for not having a priori the linguistic and cultural capital that schools `ostensibly are charged with delivering' (Bourdieu, 1971). When they get to school, they cannot practise what they do not have, and they are exposed mostly to a process of acquiring dominant secondary discourses. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, many school-based secondary discourses conflict with the values and viewpoints in non-mainstream children's primary discourses and other community-based discourses. When conflict or tension exists between any two of a person's discourses, it can deter mastery of one or the other or both of the conflicting discourses, or at least affect the fluency of a mastered discourse on certain occasions (Gee, 1991). For example, conflicts for Franco-Ontarians can exist between French and English primary discourses. Moreover, tension might be said to exist in using two secondary discourses especially when one is more fluent in the discourse of the majority group (English) and not that of the minority group.

Discourses involve, at least while being in them, active complicity with values that might conflict with one's home and community-based discourses (Gee, 1991). In the Franco-Ontarian context it is tantamount to saying that on the one hand, many are made to feel that they are outsiders within their own community by the dominant Francophone group; and on the other hand, they are considered not to be part of the club of the dominant majority group even when they have full mastery of a dominant majority discourse in English. In other words, many Franco-Ontarians, because of their socio-political history, find themselves members of 'no club' or at least are ambivalent about community membership and identity. This ambivalence is a trait related to subordinated groups that is reproduced within cultures of silence.

Daily, Franco-Ontarians are reminded of their minority existence and the politics of difference that they are born into (e.g. through the media, and institutions). Accordingly,
they are often socialized/enculturated into *cultures of silence*. Cultures of silence are adopted either through being `complicit in' or through `resisting' the power relation with dominant groups. Silence and complicity are at the root of oppression and colonization, and as Freire and Macedo (1987) imply, cultures of silence are linked to oppression.

However, when rooted in resistance and transformed into a basis for resistance to oppression and inequality, cultures of silence can be advantageous. For instance, in a given situation where individuals are unable to accommodate or adapt, they can become consciously aware of what they are trying to do, or being called upon to do, and often gain insight into what is happening. This insight (`meta-knowledge') can make them better able to manipulate the discourse that is dominant within a social group. Such insight, coupled with liberating literacies that include a theory of the society and their position in it, can lead to the adoption of a transformative perspective through silence --- a position known to be adopted by many Franco-Ontarians. In other words, when in a given relationship of knowledge-power, conscious of their minority position, it is deemed that the best way to achieve transformative action is to take part in a hidden and invisible manner. This is achieved by taking the traits, namely, hidden and invisible, conferred by the majority group (which doesn't see the minority group to begin with), and using these traits as ways to succeed. In this context, the act or action itself is not seen as a threat to the majority group because it doesn't understand the implications of the act. On the other hand, for the minority community, the act or action may be an important step toward reconfiguring the knowledge-power relationship between both groups. I would like to suggest then that, in this context, Franco-Ontarians can be seen to be advancing while resisting. While this culture of silence as praxis can lead to transformative action, one needs to consider the further question, whether silence itself can be liberating?

The classroom can be one of several educational sites to restore the voices of the marginalized and disenfranchised to history. This means that it can be a site not only to voice human oppression and human freedom but to act upon that reality through critical knowledge of voice. As used here, the concept of voice refers not just to `saying' but also
to `hearing'. By developing meta-knowledge and critical literacy, cultures of silence `can transform into' cultures of voice. A pedagogy of difference is a framework that can help us understand how the voices (experiences) of the students and teachers have been subject to historical and cultural constraints which constitute part of identity formation in a subordinated minority context.

**Conclusion: Hybrid identities and politics of difference**

How then do people come by discourses that are linked to identity and cultures of voice? Franco-Ontarians have several discourses linked to a hybrid identity. They belong to the minority and in this case their status is subordinated to the majority (dominant) and often monolingual group. Membership in a minority group, however, encourages diversity and requires critical examination of rival interpretations within and across subjects, thus promoting politics of difference. Such a position can be advantageous in constructing "... affirm[ing] difference and unsettl[ing] otherness" (Trinh,1988: 76). Discourses within a pedagogy of difference lead one to read the world, to voice (hear and say) different narratives that allow one to engage in critical literacy practices that are linked to transformative action. Moreover, by engaging in politics of difference which challenge and interrogate Otherness, subjects become `border-crossers' in order to understand `otherness', and to reshape subjectivities. Accordingly, meta-knowledge and critical literacy are significant aspects in promoting a hybrid identity formation that is liberating as opposed to being oppressed by one's `hybridness'.

Critical educators have an important role in helping Franco-Ontarians understand that the oppression they are made to feel because of their hybrid identity is a gate-keeping mechanism. This form of power relation has to be deconstructed through praxis so that one's identity is no longer silenced. A Franco-Ontarian hybrid identity is characterized by an affirmation of differences. This means that a Franco-Ontarian hybrid identity is shaped consciously by ambivalence about issues of identity and commitment to membership within the Franco-Ontarian community because, at the same time, Franco-Ontarians cross
borders into different communities. Moreover, a Franco-Ontarian hybrid identity is deliberately constituted by/with contradictions. Franco-Ontarians live much of the time in another language with various discourses. When Franco-Ontarians incorporate the conflicts and critically challenge the struggle, they are claiming their marginalized position in history as members not only in the Francophone minority community but also within the broader segments of Canadian society. Franco-Ontarians, consequently, can engage in politics of difference, moving back and forth between cultures and discourses. These are differences that

... rearticulate and reshape identity so that identities are transformed and in some instances broken down but never lost....identities immersed not in centrist politics which leaves individuals to function as obeisant servants of the power brokers, but identities which affirm them as reshapers of their own histories (Lankshear and McLaren, 1992: 425)

**Pedagogical Implications: Pedagogy of Difference**

In the Franco-Ontarian context, critical educators should promote a `language of possibility' (Simon, 1987) to question familiar assumptions, and to challenge and deconstruct power relations. In a pedagogy of difference, the curriculum should be organized in ways that encourage and enable students to make judgements about how society is historically and socially constructed, how existing social practices are implicated in relations of equality and justice, as well as how they structure inequalities around dominant and non-dominant discourses within majority and minority groups. Finally, politics of difference is related to border crossings and to a pedagogy of difference that involves opening up to diverse cultures, including those of silence. These forms of awareness facilitate an understanding of "how fragile identity is as it moves into `borderlands crisscrossed' within a variety of discourses, experiences and voices" (Giroux, 1992: 34).

...to speak differently so that their narratives can be affirmed and engaged critically along with consistencies and contradictions that characterize such
experiences.....to hear the voices of those who have been traditionally silenced..... to address the question of how representations and practices that name, marginalize, and define difference as the Devalued is actively learned, internalized, challenged, or transformed..... to critically interrogate how the colonizing of differences by dominant groups is expressed and sustained..... (Giroux, 1992: 32-33).

Many of the issues that Giroux raises apply to the Franco-Ontarian context. As members of a non-dominant/subordinated minority community, they need to challenge the representations they have internalized. In Friere and Macedo's words, it is important to critically interrogate the histories and stories they have been told with those they have lived. The struggle that many Franco-Ontarians experience needs to be transformed into a struggle for critical knowledge, the foundation for social justice.....

References


**Endnotes**

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the International Conference on Language and society in a changing world, Dublin, June
1994. I want to thank Sue-San Ghahremani-Ghajar, Anne-Marie Caron-Réaume, Mary Lou Soutar-Hynes and Lionel Desjarlais for their support. Their helpful comments are not necessarily an endorsement of the views proposed by the author.

2. Postmodern discourse may be unfamiliar to some readers. Here are some key concepts. (a) Subjectivity: the subject is a cultural construct. The subject is constituted in language and within a particular socio-cultural and socio-historical framework. While the subject might believe that s/he has the power to interpret and control meaning, it is also meaning that confines and defines the subject. In other words, the subject constitutes and is constituted by language. Moreover, the subject takes up varied subject positions depending on the context (student, teacher, colleague). Accordingly, the subject is diverse, decentered, and multiple. (b) Identity formation: identity is not fixed but shifting as it is reconstituted socio-historically. Identity might also be viewed then as subject positioning through discourses or "regimes of truth" (Usher and Edwards, 1995). (c) Voice refers to discourse shaped by historically and culturally mediated experiences and situated in a universe of shared meanings of a particular community. (d) Knowledge-power relationship is from Foucault (1980). Knowledge and power are interrelated. Power operates through knowledge and individuals. (e) Knowledge is situated and interested. Knowledge is situated when it is rooted socio-historically and politically. Interested knowledge refers to certain forms of knowledge that are privileged over others and dominate in a particular context. Knowledge represents an ideological position because it reflects the interests of certain groups. (f) Colonization in this context refers to students who are marginalized because of the authoritative discourses privileged in the classroom which silence their voices.

3. In Ontario, the majority group refers to the Anglophone community while the minority group refers to the Francophone community. Within each community, there are those who are dominant, often gatekeepers, maintaining mainstream values. Those who are not the dominant members of a community are those often marginalized and excluded from the mainstream. Many Francophones within their own community would feel excluded/marginalized because of the variety of French they speak or their accent. They are stigmatized for not having the standard variety in their repertoire. It is not so much whether they are proficient or not. The benchmark for mainstream is the standard variety. Consequently many francophones are marginalized in their own community. In relation to the majority community/context (anglophone), all francophones are marginalized.

4. At present, there are 4 universities in Ontario that offer certain programmes in French: University of Ottawa, Laurentian University, York University, and...
5. Immersion programmes in Canada initiate children in the English-language majority system in primary discourses in French. While an important goal of immersion programmes is to allow children from the majority community to have wider knowledge about the other official linguistic group in Canada, the question is whether the introduction to primary discourses in French is intended to have students' cultural and linguistic identity tied to a particular Francophone community in Canada. The primary discourses of immersion children are often the ones found in the home that ties into their cultural identity and community membership.

6. These forms of discourse are intended to convey information in an explicit manner by means of the linguistic code (precise vocabulary, exploiting a vast array of syntactic and pragmatic resources) with minimum reliance on paralinguistic cues. Accordingly, secondary discourses are virtually ideal in exploiting meta-knowledge. Primary discourses, according to Gee (1991), do not contain meta elements of language that would allow them to conduct extensive critique of other discourses, primary and secondary. It is important to remember though that one cannot arrive at meta-knowledge without developing primary and secondary discourses.

7. "In many cultures where there is no overt analytical teaching, some people still gain a good deal of meta-knowledge about what they know and do. This appears to come about because they have had certain experiences which have caused them to think about a particular discourse in a reflective and critical way" (Gee, 1991:148). For example, the Vai of Liberia and a non-literate group, the Limba of Sierra Leone, have a great deal of meta-linguistic and reflective sophistication in their talk about language.