

Language, Culture and Social Connectedness

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Edited by

Ann Dashwood and Jeong-Bae Son

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P U B L I S H I N G

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PREFACE

Diverse interest in language, pedagogy, identity and community has found expression through online interaction, networking and connectedness in the discourses captured in this book, *Language, Culture and Social Connectedness*. Issues surrounding language use in spoken, written and multimedia forms and in sociocultural responses, indigenous knowledges and ethnic perspectives are expanding in the 2010's, with consequential transnational implications for pedagogy in higher education. Language education is no longer oriented towards grammar, memorization and learning by rote, but rather using language and cultural knowledge as a means to communicate and connect to others around the globe. Geographical and physical boundaries are being transcended by technology as students learn to reach out to the world around them.

Embedded so closely in the way we live, and see the world, knowing how language works and understanding its influence on who we are as human beings with intelligence, with needs and wants, to share joys and jokes to play and be serious, all parts of our culture are wedded to the language and how we speak, read, write and listen. In particular, language learning can provide opportunities for learners to explore the ways in which language and culture interrelate and the consequences of this interrelationship for communicating with others. One of the roles which effective language learners need to develop is the ability to be intercultural mediators – people who can interpret the values, attitudes and practices of people from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds for themselves and for others.

Language is one of the most important forms of social capital in the modern world, and improving language skills is an urgent issue of social justice and one of the most effective forms of equalising opportunities. Migrants from non English-speaking backgrounds who come to Australia, for example the Sudanese refugee population of Toowoomba, are in urgent need of skilled, committed and pedagogically-sound help with their English. Without such help, a whole generation of Australian society will be denied opportunities, not just opportunities for individual betterment but opportunities for making the most of their citizenship and contribution to our nation.

This book explores some of the intricate relationships between language, culture and social connectedness in our diverse local and transnational communities. In a period of challenge in our history, there are tensions that connect and others that tend to disconnect endeavours across the social landscape. Connectedness includes relationships both formal and informal and the benefits those relationships bring to the individual as well as to society. Social connectedness describes the level of engagement and trust an individual has with others in their community and the roles they take on, their friendships and participation in different activities. People who feel socially connected also contribute towards building communities and society. They help to create "social capital" as networks that promote effective social functions.

The book presents nine chapters peer reviewed by independent experts in the fields of education, educational technology and applied linguistics. Chapter 1 illustrates how best practice principles of scholarship and engagement are cornerstones of transnational pedagogy which academics develop by means of creative partnerships with their students through interactive exchanges of knowledge. It argues that both principles strengthen the effectiveness of curriculum design and learning outcomes in university. Chapter 2 addresses the issue of the belated realisation by educators that many Indigenous Australian students speak very little standard Australian English outside classrooms. It points out that children hear a variety of languages in many different contexts and the language landscape is rapidly changing in indigenous settings, especially in remote communities. Chapter 3 illustrates how a university preparation program is enabling non-English speaking background international students to deal with their problems of academic and sociocultural adjustment to Australian university life. It demonstrates how it would be meaningful for a host institution to look into students' English language learning experiences and provide quality programs which respond to their practical demands.

Chapter 4 proposes an orientation of cultural diversity in English language teaching textbook design. It promotes opportunities for intercultural awareness in textbooks and acknowledgment of the global contexts in which English is now used to ensure a level of intercultural understanding and connectedness. Chapter 5 looks into cross-cultural experiences of Saudi Arabian women in Australia and proposes an authoritative discourse analytical framework as a means of analysing perceived cross-cultural conflict. It points out that the Australian cultural response to women wearing a head scarf contradicts the Arabic expectation with individual sensitivities not readily reconciled in the new

culture. Chapter 6 poses the challenges for teachers of connectedness and constructivism. It highlights that the capacity to learn through social connections has changed with modern information and communication technology and learning is being viewed as knowledge constructed by an individual from personal and shared experience.

Chapter 7 explores how virtual university teaching and learning contexts via the Internet of a regional university's education faculty enabled students and teachers to traverse the geographical borders of Australia and Malaysia. It demonstrates that critical reflection and explicit understanding of the co-creation of the cross-cultural teaching and learning space are key elements in establishing and maintaining social connectedness among staff in a transnational partnership. Chapter 8 uses the notion of "in-betweenness" to interpret the experience of two refugee men coming to terms with the past, through their narratives, adjusting to a new culture, learning a new language and making sense of their lives in their new country. It highlights the role of literacy practices that take place outside educational settings as informing teaching in formal settings as they progress towards oral and literate proficiency in English. Finally, Chapter 9 chronicles the lives of a group of young Sudanese men and women from childhood village life, the carnage of civil war, thousand-mile treks into Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda seeking refuge in displaced persons camps. It tells of the intersection of Western literary culture, storytelling conventions and book production processes.

Overall, this refereed volume provides a unique opportunity to gain insights into the interrelationship among language, culture and social connectedness in our diverse landscape. To this end, we would like to thank the authors of the chapters for their collaboration and cooperation. We are also grateful for the reviewers of the manuscripts submitted to us: Peter Albion, Jon Austin, Michael Berthold, David Bull, Emma Caukill, Pauline Collins, Gina Curró, Tim Dalby, Aniko Hatóss, Andrew Hickey, Olga Kozar, Jill Lawrence, Marian Lewis, Peter McIlveen, Robin McTaggart, Warren Midgley, Karen Noble, Sang-Soon Park, Robyn Pigozzo, Wendy Richards, Clare Robinson, Kerry Taylor-Leech and John Williams-Mozley. In addition, we thank Adam McAuley-Jones for his editorial assistance.

Ann Dashwood
Jeong-Bae Son

CHAPTER ONE

LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS IN OUR DIVERSE LANDSCAPE: CONNECTING STUDENTS AND STAFF THROUGH PRINCIPLES OF PEDAGOGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

ANN DASHWOOD AND JILL LAWRENCE

Abstract

Social connectedness is pivotal to staff and their students for effective learning to take place. A longitudinal research project conducted at USQ developed a pedagogy to foster effective learning which evolved from transnational to best practice. It is based on five strategic principles: sustainability, flexibility, context (diversity), engagement and scholarship. This paper explores two of those principles, scholarship and engagement, which we argue foster social connectedness in the higher education context. For the purposes of the study, scholarship means respect for the integrity of diverse learning and teaching styles on the part of students and staff. Engagement means collaboration: teachers to learners, students to students, working creatively in partnerships through participation in interactive exchanges of knowledge. The paper argues that the staff's consideration of both principles strengthened the effectiveness of curriculum design and the learning outcomes of students.

Keywords: Student engagement, authentic pedagogy, scholarship, social connectedness, best practice, higher education

Introduction

This paper argues that social connectedness is a key strategy in assisting staff and their students to engage in effective learning and teaching. In particular, the paper explores the connections that students make with other students and staff in the academic context. As evidence data used were collected in a longitudinal research project at USQ. The project initiated in its first phase in 2005 developed pedagogy to foster effective transnational learning. The pedagogy is based on five strategic principles: sustainability, flexibility, context (diversity), engagement and scholarship. In 2007, the “transnational” pedagogy evolved into ‘best practice’ pedagogy; however the five principles remained pivotal. In its second phase, staff and student surveys (Burton et al., 2007) were conducted to test the pedagogy.

We explore two of the principles, engagement and scholarship, from the staff perspective, to ascertain how the principles are perceived to contribute to social connectedness. Social connectedness describes the relationship that individuals experience with others through their engagement with them. It engenders a sense of being connected socially, at work and in the community, through the roles take on and participation.

The paper first reviews the theoretical perspectives that underpin the study. The methodological approach is then explained before the results are discussed.

Theoretical perspectives

There is an international trend towards enhanced teaching and learning effectiveness in universities. For example, Sorcinelli and Austin (2006, cited in Crowther & Burton 2007) cited Senge’s (1990) concept of a “learning organization”. The most effective institutions for the future are those “that approach educational development as collaborative, community work” (Sorenson, 2006, p. 21) and are engaged in authentic teaching (Newmann, Secada, & Wehlage, 1995). Holland (2005) claimed that *engaged scholarship with engaged teaching and learning* was “to be a force for institutional change and diversity” (p.12). There are also calls for universities to recognise plans to convert a “real world learning” vision into authentic student experiences (Young 2006, as cited in Crowther & Burton, 2007):

We are turning the traditional learning model around. We will be delivering a practical problem for all students to start their studies with and

through which students learn all their theoretical knowledge. So you engage students – they learn by doing things rather than being told things (p. 6).

Scholarship Principle

The study recognized the Scholarship Principle as respecting diverse learning and teaching styles and upholding excellence and integrity of scholarship across USQ disciplines (Dashwood et al, 2008). The academics indicated that they were aware of how they fostered the achievement of meaning-making among their learners in a similar way that Boyer (1990) articulated in “Scholarship reconsidered”. Boyer identified four areas of academic work: discovery, integration (making connections across the disciplines and placing specialties in a larger context), application and teaching.

Scholarship of teaching in a global sense involves staff engaging with research into teaching and learning. Critical reflection on professional practice at personal and collegial levels involves communicating in depth within discipline-specific contexts (Healey, 2000). In Australia, Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin and Prosser (1999) commented that scholarly teaching and learning are the core business of all our universities. This scholarly teaching perspective is discipline-specific, reflective, inquisitorial, responsive, and communicative (Trigwell et al., 1999) and is often viewed as the basis of most models of scholarly teaching. Through their ability to communicate the pedagogy of their discipline, academics are involved in creating opportunities for students to make scholarly connections for students in their engagement with the academic workplace. The practice and/or application of the discipline is reflected in the learning activities set for students. Discipline-based activity is reflected in curriculum documentation, in classroom materials and resources, and through writings that contribute to the discipline.

Engagement Principle

Student engagement in higher education encompasses recent phenomena such as ‘disengagement’ (Kuh, 2007) and ‘negotiated engagement’ (McInnis, 2003). A further research strand links student engagement with transition and retention (Tinto, 2005; Yorke, 2000), wherein *engagement* is vital because “the more time and energy *students* devote to desired activities, the more likely they are to develop the habits of the mind that are key to success” (Kuh, 2007, p. 3). Other research notes the importance

of academic engagement in curriculum design and delivery as more students work in paid employment (see McInnis, 2003), and have less time to develop social connectedness outside the classroom.

There are also projects analysing explicit engagement practices. In Australia there is the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) (ACER, 2008). The AUSSE was conducted for the first time in 2007 with 25 universities. It builds on the *National Survey of Student Engagement* (NSSE) in the United States. The AUSSE defines student engagement as students' involvement with activities and conditions likely to generate high-quality learning. It includes a wide range of academic and non-academic interactions that students have with the university. A key assumption is that learning is influenced by how an individual participates in educationally purposeful activities, and how the student is connected socially to the academic program's goals. While students are seen to be responsible for constructing their knowledge, learning is also seen to depend on institutions and staff generating conditions that stimulate student involvement (ACER, 2008).

Methodology

A mixed method approach was used for both surveys. In this paper the qualitative data from the staff perspective are reviewed.

Instrument: staff and student surveys

The staff and student surveys mirrored each other. For example the 53-item student survey was developed to measure students' perspectives of the five transnational education principles thought to underpin best practice in learning and teaching (Dashwood et al, 2007).

The staff survey was similar in format and structure. The survey was comprised of 49 items: five items exploring participants' demographics (e.g., location, languages spoken, teaching experience and age), and the 44 questions (as outlined above) measuring the five principles. 29 items elicited quantitative responses and 15 qualitative responses. The staff survey had a teaching focus. For example, the sustainability section asked staff "Can you identify a course in which you referred to ethical practice and sustainable futures to help students consider the impact of those issues on their professional practice? If Yes - Please describe how this was achieved or No - Please provide a comment".

Procedure

The staff survey was distributed online via a secure USQ website in February 2008. Staff were sent separate invitations to participate and to complete the survey online. No incentives were offered for participation. Data from the survey were collated electronically and scored and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS – standard version 16.0). Qualitative data from the survey were collated electronically in Microsoft Excel sheets and analysed using categorized qualitative responses.

Participants

A total of 55 USQ academic staff completed the online staff survey from 469 full time and part time staff: a response rate of 11.72%.

Discussion

Scholarship

Staff reflected on their teaching and identified examples of the principle of scholarship in their response to the question: “Can you identify a course that contributes to your understanding of issues related to scholarship?” From their independent written responses on the questionnaire, nine categories emerged. Table 1 shows the frequency of reported instances that staff noted in relation to scholarship.

As Table 1 shows, 26% of the staff comments highlighted learning styles as a main contributor to scholarship. The authors recognize that the definition of scholarship in the survey did prioritize learning styles and that this narrow definition may constitute a limitation of the study. Assessment (22%) and organization (15%) were also perceived to be important features of their scholarship while teaching quality (10%) also rated highly.

The qualitative data explain how staff perceived the links between each of the features above and scholarship.

Table 1: Positive instances of categories of response to scholarship

Scholarship Category	Positive Instances	%
1. Learning style	18	26
2. Assessment	15	22
3. Organisation	10	15
4. Teaching quality	7	10
5. Other	5	7
6. Examples	4	6
7. Materials	4	6
8. Academic skills	3	4
9. ICT	3	4
Total Instances	69	

Learning style

In terms of learning styles, prominent in the staff' thinking was the problematic contrast between their own approaches to learning and those of their students.

The interface between the academic and students' learning styles was perceived by staff to be scholarship. For example when designing activities, staff iterated that learners' needs were key factors:

By teaching students individually, addressing each student's need for improvement

Other staff acknowledged the impact of learning styles and used the medium of technology to connect students to their learning community:

By teaching students individually and addressing their needs for improvement means I tailor activities to suit even taking into account learning styles for those kinaesthetic and extrovert learners as distinct from the visual read and write learners who learn from modelling and those who do not attend lectures and prefer me to 'breeze' the class.

Assessment

Assessment also drew on principles of scholarship in which assignments incorporating oral and on-line tasks were prepared. In some instances computer managed assessments (CMAs) were used to help students to focus and keep on task. Academics aimed for diversity in the types of

assessment, creating opportunities for students to prepare a proposal for each assignment, acknowledging their preferred conditions to undertake assessment and how it would be marked. Others provided the scaffolding for tasks and specific resources in a sequenced organization that provided variety and staged the skills needed to complete the assessment items in class and on the web. One reported:

Specific tasks are needed to push students beyond content knowledge to critical reflection;

Academics demonstrated through the construction of assessment tasks that central to their scholarship were opportunities for students to connect to their disciplines in critical ways.

Organisation

Staff perceived that connecting to the content and each other in a range of organized ways provided the framework to learning. Interactive discussion was valued as a means of connecting content and of connecting students with each other and the lecturer. For courses offered in face-to-face mode on campus as well as by distance, a business lecturer's reported view of scholarship clearly indicated an active sense of making the social connections for his students with their learning community:

Springfield intensive mode courses are very interactive and provide opportunities for discussion with and between external students.

Many others valued a "case study" approach and the practice of inviting speakers from the workplace and from industry into sessions. Where practicable, simulated settings substitute well for in-situ experience particularly in project management and clinical courses in which theory was applied explicitly to a task in a professional area. Teaching in a tutorial followed by strategic practice was a measure to staff of the effectiveness of their scholarship:

Learning is a socio-cultural practice that requires students to be situated in particular contexts. Therefore the use of relevant authentic tasks is very important.

Teaching quality

The quality of teaching was often subsumed in other traits. Lecturers need the confidence and social skills to create:

Opportunities for students to approach a task in different ways,

In order for such high level of skills development to occur, students have to demonstrate they are socially connected so that in a course, they might:

Reflect and share their progress to learn by doing, to collaborate.

Engagement

Staff identified examples of the principle of engagement in their response to the question: “Can you identify a course that contributes to your understanding of issues related to engagement?” From their independent written responses on the questionnaire, nine categories emerged. Prominent was the category of strategic organisation, with ICT and interaction/collaboration also recognized as contributing to engagement. Table 2 shows the frequency of reported positive instances that staff noted in relation to engagement.

Table 2: Positive instances of categories of response to engagement

Engagement Category	Positive Instances	%
1. Strategic organization	24	32.5
2. ICT	11	15
3. Interaction & collaboration	8	11
4. Materials & resources	7	9.5
5. Professionalism	7	9.5
6. Assessment	6	8
7. Personal	6	8
8. Practicum	3	4
9. Other	2	2.5
Total Instances	74	

Strategic organization

In terms of coding, strategic organization encompassed tutorials, team based activities, problem-solving, critiques, small classes, residential schools, group work, study groups, team work, forums, PowerPoint presentations, workshops, telephone tutorials and class debates. The data suggest that staff perceived that these activities and approaches contributed to student engagement. These collaborative and interactive curriculum choices reflect the literature that maintains that an involving pedagogy engages students and is itself a critical feature of quality curriculum. For example, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005, p. 646) record that:

With striking consistency, studies show that innovative, active, collaborative, and constructivist instructional approaches shape learning more powerfully, in some forms by substantial margins, than do conventional lecture-discussion and text-based approaches.

Certainly it was clear that collaboration was a priority for some staff:

All work within the courses that I teach is structured around group participation and collaboration;

My course was rewritten with this in mind , to focus students on activities rather than just a transmission/content heavy approach;

All of the project management courses require students to engage with their learning and assessment in the context of their workplace and work colleagues.

In many discipline areas staff not only reflected how they developed students' capabilities for social connection but also how they contextualised them to their specific discipline area.

In Literature:

My course uses weekly activities that involve engagement with and critique of content in a collaborative environment (group work, in class knowledge exchange on Study Desk etc.) using problem solving tasks scaffolding of content and assessment including critique of secondary material.

In Public Relations:

In public relations practice and techniques, I have set up the course where students work in groups and develop in parallel with course instruction on

developing campaigns - a public relations campaign for an actual client. This then translates into higher marks in their next course, the capstone for the major Public Relations Project. I haven't measured this yet, but anecdotal evidence points to a massive improvement in marks for the course overall and a marked reduction in the number of failures.

In International Relations:

In two courses I use a seminar format which includes activities that are designed to engage students in particular issues/controversies that relate to content...students are encouraged to do various group activities and discussions to engage them in their learning.

In Business:

I incorporate an analysis of management of case studies by small and large group discussions, individual & small group presentations of discussion findings to group; comparison of group management approaches.

The engagement (passion) of staff themselves is also perceived to be a major contributing factor in fostering student connectedness as the following anecdote shows:

My lectures are more like huge tutorials where students are invited to speak and be recorded, debate, act in teams and take ownership of the presentation. I run up and down like a game show host and give rewards (books, gifts, silly toys) as entertaining items for use. Where accidents happen we turn them into opportunities for learning...eg if a mobile phone goes off I ask all students to choose a ringtone then to play in waves across the theatre, then to create words and movements to particular ringtones. We also work backwards from ideas suggested by the students. I draw a huge cartoon and the students create song/rap words on political and social/ethical issues raised in their study experience-we then sing and perform-creating Cantastoria on a huge scale. The student teachers take these ideas to their own teaching and schools are thrilled at their creative flair. Students work in groups of 6 and teams of 18 to create workshops for schools-they must sequence the workshops- plan and create all activities and The costumes and props they create, the music and art they offer are wonderfully original. Students say that this is the first time in their study experience they have actually got to know other students properly! I love my work and regard it as a privilege to open up the space for learning: the students love their learning.

Staff provide evidence that they consider that authentic/real world/work based learning activities and assessment also engage students with the

discipline, if not their future professions. In nursing, for example, staff reflected that engagement is engendered by:

Interactive tutorials where students explore current literature and relate content to clinical knowledge and skills and clinical decision making; In class we develop care plans and use simulated case studies from actual patient histories; I use discussion groups presenting to the class on reflections of clinical practice and, of course, clinical placements.

In Engineering:

The course is a team PBL course so interaction with other team members -other teams and staff are critical to the success. The problems are real world engineering problems, so hopefully this gains the interest of the student. Students must interact with each other, noting and using prior knowledge and experience of each members and organising tasks through individual learning goals. Interaction between teams is done via a critique of project reports;

In civil engineering, courses require students to facilitate their own site visits to see real life versions of the theory contained in the coursework. Another course requires students to interact in group discussions regarding open ended questions relating to the coursework.

In Education:

Conducting a schools workshop with local school community required working collaboratively with both uni and school personnel; practical activities, real-life interviewing to develop interviewing skills;

We consider what we want to achieve with the students and also consider what type of learning turns students on. Essentially it becomes a discussion about pedagogy and what makes authentic pedagogy. Students believe that authentic pedagogy is about engaging with real people in real life learning situations so we provide them with that.

The evidence demonstrates that intrinsic to engagement are connections: connections between staff and students and between students and students as well as connections that link students with their discipline and future profession.

ICT

ICT was also recognized by staff as contributing to engagement. USQ is a multimodal institution with a large cohort of external/online students so it is important that staff consider ways to engage students in all modes.

WebCT, course home pages, the study desk, discussion boards, Knowledge Garden, blog posts and discussion forums were perceived to contribute to engagement. Staff also gave examples of how they organized these to generate social connections and thus student engagement:

The discussion group is available to all students in each course, for example in group supervision and group clinical placement - any student with resources/discoveries is encouraged to share with others;

Through participation in the discussion group, providing scenarios based on the course content and having students make shared responses;

Students are required to design, evaluate and critique using learned content & approaches. They are required to share simple interpretations of reality on web discussion group;

I ask students to get involved in the discussion board and provide interactive learning objects;

Students creating wiki pages with other students in the course; working with other students to prepare presentations using online tools students; presenting online presentations to their peers; using knowledgeGarden.usq.edu.au as an optional student learning community;

Use of online discussion boards and participation marks for these.

Interaction and collaboration

Staff also perceived that interaction and collaboration played a role in developing student engagement. Participants cited examples in relation to class discussions, participation, face-to-face discussions and helping others through activities like mentorships:

The majority of my law subjects have involved open discussion: collaboration among both students and lecturers; hands on learning, valuable facilitation, student-student dialogue, we discuss the theories and put it into real life situations;

My course in interpersonal communication incorporates weekly exercises and activities that have the students interacting with each other in applying and developing communication skills;

Professional mentorships and group presentations are vital;

I always use interaction activities during the teaching times to enable the students to apply what is being taught. I use games to engage them.

Some staff acknowledged however that interaction and collaboration are not always comfortable for some students:

Students have different learning styles. Some respond to more interaction than others.

The evidence confirms that effective curriculum design, in this case in relation to scholarship and engagement, enacts an engaging and involving pedagogy. The *AUSSE* (ACER, 2008), for example, provides clear guidance around the “activities and conditions likely to generate high quality learning” (ACER, 2008, p. vi) and reports that “all aspects of engagement have a strong positive relationship with a range of general, specific, social, personal, ethical and interpersonal capabilities” (ACER, 2008, p. ix).

Conclusions

The staff survey data showed that staff’s consideration of the principles of scholarship and engagement strengthens curriculum design and delivery. Exploring the scholarship and engagement principles has shown that social connectedness is a key ingredient in assisting students to engage with both the discipline and their learning community within the institution. Further, the evidence shows that staff who considered these principles to be important perceived that their inclusion in curriculum design enhanced the student outcomes. For example, staff who considered the implications of students’ learning styles found their students were more connected to the discipline. Those teachers who prioritized engagement in the management and delivery of their course materials engendered more positive learning outcomes for their students by assisting their feelings of social connectedness.

This paper has specifically explored the staff perceptions of two of the principles developed by the best practice learning and teaching pedagogy. Further research needs to be conducted to cross reference the student and staff data in relation to each of the five principles and to explore whether all the five principles contribute to students’ social connectedness, and in turn, enhance their learning outcomes.

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CHAPTER TWO

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE LANDSCAPES, SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AND CLASSROOM PRACTICE IN AUSTRALIA

GINA CURRÓ AND ROBIN MCTAGGART

Abstract

In this paper we revisit our own research to extend understanding of the social context of language landscapes of Australian Indigenous students. The disconnection between home and school languages or discourses is made explicit. “One of the areas of greatest diversity to confront teachers... are the ‘language landscapes’ surrounding the children [in Indigenous communities]” (Simpson & Wigglesworth, 2008, p. 1). We argue that without knowing about the process of language socialisation in the Australian Indigenous multilingual landscape, teachers will remain powerless with respect to improving classroom practice. In Indigenous settings, especially in remote communities, children hear a variety of languages in many different contexts and the language landscape is rapidly changing. Our study addresses the belated realisation by educators that many Indigenous Australian students speak very little Standard Australian English (SAE) outside classrooms.

Keywords: Indigenous language socialisation, multilingual landscapes, invisibility of creoles and other language varieties, Standard Australian English, Australian Indigenous students

Introduction

Justice in education for Indigenous Australian students cannot be achieved without examining the antecedent conditions for their learning, because of the powerful influence these conditions have on curriculum, classroom

practice and learning outcomes. An important goal for all Australians is the expectation that Indigenous students will be the beneficiaries of appropriate educational experiences. "If the school system is dealing unjustly with some of its pupils, they are not the only ones to suffer. The quality of education for all the others is degraded" (Connell, 1993, p. 15). This paper highlights the critical role that a crucial antecedent condition - students' language backgrounds - plays in the construction of social identity, family literacy practices, language behaviour patterns, and oral language socialisation. The disconnection between students' home and school languages or discourses and their prospects for classroom learning has been well established (Simpson & Wigglesworth, 2008; Gee, 2008, 2004, 1996; Luke, Land, Christie, Kolatsis & Noblett, 2002; Batten, Frigo, Hughes & McNamara, 1998; Luke & Kale, 1997; Romaine, 1994, 1991; Connell, 1993; Lawrence, 1994; Schieffelin, 1990; Kaldor & Malcolm, 1979).

We have based the paper upon a recent case study of action research by teachers using Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL¹) strategies with Indigenous students in northern Queensland, Australia. Teachers with recent, well-regarded and relevant pre-service education or professional development were identified as study participants. We wanted to ensure that a range of language situations was encountered and that these were reasonably accessible to the researchers, preferably not through telephone or the Internet. Where and by whom was the latest and best English as a Second Language (ESL) for Indigenous education being practised? Our aim was to determine how to prepare teachers with the skills required for teaching students when English is not their first language, particularly Indigenous students, in relation to pre-service teacher education and teacher professional development (Queensland College of Teachers, 2009). After initial enquiries with recent researchers in the region and consultation with the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT), it was agreed that collaboration with the Cairns based Far North Queensland Indigenous Schooling Support Unit (FNQ ISSU) would provide the richest case material. Classroom teachers, learning support teachers, principals and other participants were identified in consultation with ISSU staff.²

The primary criterion for selecting teacher participants was that they had worked on ESL with the ISSU staff and brought about changes in their practice as a result of that experience. We wanted some 'before and after' thinking by the participants and expected that teachers would have at least five years of experience or thereabouts. We also sought a range of schools by location and language backgrounds of Indigenous students. Observing

the typical canons of naturalistic case study espoused by Kemmis (1980), Stake (1978; 1985) and MacDonald & Walker (1975), we analysed the literature, documents and other materials, consulted with other educators working in the field including teachers involved in professional development of other teachers, and interviewed teachers and principals. The eventual audience for the research was judged to include the Board of the QCT, teachers, ESL specialists and speakers, unions, parents, teacher educators, educational researchers, students and school leaders. Two key findings emerged from the study. When they studied the Indigenous student discourses, teachers were amazed at the language they used and noticed the students used vocabulary derived from English, but with grammar from several Indigenous languages ranging from traditional languages to creoles and other varieties. A less surprising outcome was that the teachers reported that adaptation of TESL strategies for their teaching situations led to higher engagement and improved language learning across the curriculum.

The first part of the paper is divided into several sections – the process of language socialisation in Indigenous communities, divergence between home and school language, validating home languages in the classroom (accounts from classroom teachers), the changing language landscape, and access to the curriculum. Here we extend the discussion of the language socialisation issues underlying the study and then turn to some of the testimony of teachers to illustrate the ways in which they had changed their teaching practice, and indeed their teaching lives. Towards the end of the paper is a summary of *Book language as a foreign language – ESL strategies for Indigenous learners* (McTaggart & Curró, 2009), where sections on Professional Standards and Indigenous students, and Recommendations can be found.

Language socialisation in Indigenous communities

This paper represents an attempt to locate language socialisation within several contexts – the home, school, and communal living sites in Indigenous communities. In multilingual Indigenous communities the process of language socialisation is not widely understood. By investigating theories of language learning and research methods for language socialisation research we understand more about acquisition and learning in Indigenous language contexts. The reason for focussing on the home as the site for language socialisation is because “little attention has been paid to how children acquire language when they hear a variety of languages in multilingual contexts, and when they may hear speakers

switching from one language to another in the course of a sentence” (Simpson & Wigglesworth, 2008, p. 18). While formal grammars of Indigenous languages have been written, these mainly serve the language learning interests of anthropologists and linguists themselves, and tell us little about the language socialisation experiences of children in those communities. Generally, public debate on language and literacy in remote Aboriginal communities seems unable to move beyond deficit theories. Instead of devoting attention to the Aboriginal language context and everyday literacy use in social and cultural practice, the focus is on schools, methodology, curriculum and the failure of students to meet national English literacy and numeracy benchmarks (Kral & Ellis, 2008).

We acknowledge Gee’s (2008) general argument that access to dominant discourses is contested and that this is an important social justice issue. He warns us that education systems favour children from certain social groups while discriminating against others (Gee, 2004). “Literacy is never a stand-alone classroom phenomenon... School literacy instruction is always embedded in community matters of cultural identity, economic access and social power” (Luke & Kale, 1997, p. 17). Language “acts as an ‘agent’ for the transmission of culture and it is through language socialisation that children acquire ‘the ways and world views’ of their culture” (Romaine, 1994; Schieffelin, 1990, as cited in Simpson & Wigglesworth, 2008, p. 156). This view of literacy is not one which limits itself to reading and writing (instructional or intentional pedagogy). Viewed instead as a dominant cultural process, it becomes a powerful source of socialisation, part of everyday social practice.

Children who learn to read successfully do so because, for them, learning to read is a cultural and not primarily an instructed process. Furthermore, this cultural process has long roots at home – roots which have grown strong and firm before the child has walked into school. Children who must learn reading primarily as an instructed process in school are at an acute disadvantage (Gee, 2004, p. 13).

Clearly, research into language socialisation processes has an important contribution to make towards understanding human behaviour and communication in educational settings. Some scholars believe that language socialisation comes in two flavours: “... socialisation through the use of language and socialisation to use language” (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986, p. 163). All cultures have their own patterns of interacting, communicating and making meaning, and language. Sociocultural structures and processes are closely interrelated occurring across a range of social experiences and contexts. In other words spoken communication, such as verbal utterances