

# Linguistic and spiritual identities: analysis of Australian Narratives

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A landscape photograph showing a white-barked tree in the foreground on the left, with a river flowing through a dry, brownish landscape under a clear blue sky. The tree's reflection is visible in the water. The background features more trees and a distant horizon.

# Book: *Language and Spirit*

- Exploring languages, religion and spirituality in Australia today
- (2022 Palgrave Macmillan)
- Narratives/ research studies

36 personal  
narratives  
about  
language/spirit

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## 4 chapters

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**Indigenous:** Dharug, Wiradjuri, Paakantyi,  
Gamilaraay, Nyoongar, Gumbaynggir;  
Gunggay

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**Diaspora: (Buddhism and Christianity):**  
Japanese, Chinese, Russian, Armenian,  
Niuean, Tongan, Korean, Ukranian;  
Vietnamese; Aramaic;

And

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**Diaspora (Hinduism, Islam, Judaism):** Hindi, Sanskrit, Nepalese, Tamil, Indonesian, Arabic, Hebrew

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**Teaching and school building:** Chinese, Hindi, Arabic, Farsi, meditational song, Bible translation Nyoongar

In common  
they speak  
about ...

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“heart” language intimacy to access spiritual

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Depth dimension of language

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Construction of religious identity accessed through language

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Identity in the intersection of language / spirit

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Sense of place/ displacement

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Language Communities- belonging!

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their children’s future : teaching/ learning

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wellbeing

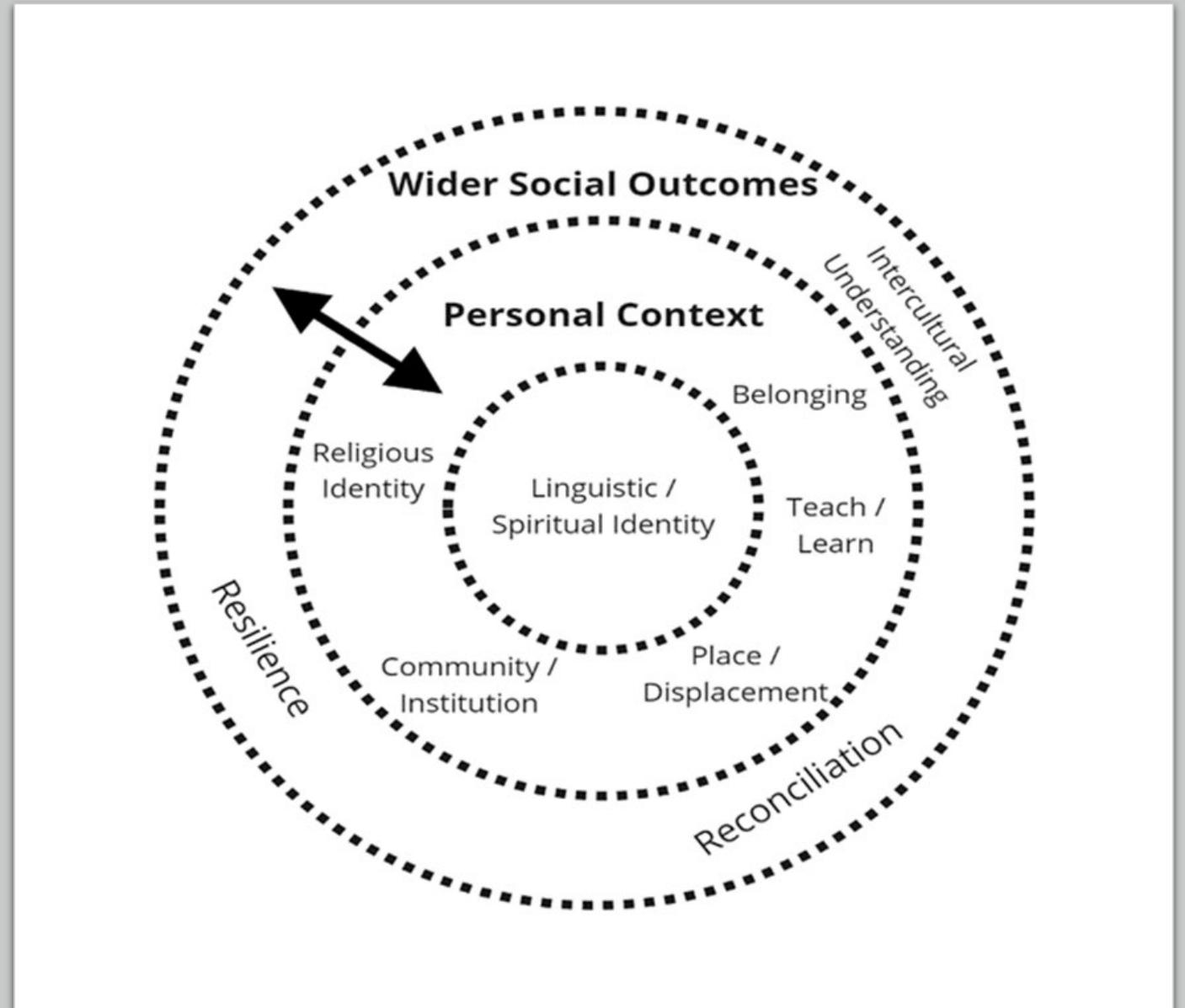
Language/spirit  
context in COD  
model:  
the 3 elements  
you need for  
great language  
learning

- **Capacity:** development of language proficiency and use, through formal teaching, and informal transmission.
- **Opportunity Creation:** contexts in which the use of the language is natural and welcome.
- **Desire:** creation of motivation in learning the language, proficiency brings emotional and other rewards.

- Community language schools, homes, communities, churches
- Family, friends, churches, faith communities
- Identity, togetherness, friends, wellbeing

# Listen to the voices

- 8 Domains of experience of language/ spirit
- Personal context: 5 domains
- Wider social outcomes: 3 domains



# 1. Religious identity

I was born and raised in a Catholic family in Vietnam...During the years I spent studying in Australia, I often used my mother tongue in my religious practice, such as when saying prayers, the rosary, reading the Bible, and singing hymns and carols in the Catholic Mass and liturgy. ..I understand more profoundly what I have listened to and said... I can connect with my beliefs on a deeper level. The Vietnamese language is our heart language— *Dich Muc Dao*

## 2. Community, institution

“Our church and language community represents the ‘heart and soul’ for our Tongan people. ... As Tongans we have four core values we try to live by. They are mutual respect, sharing, cooperating and fulfilment of mutual obligations, humility and generosity, and loyalty and commitment. These core values help shape our identity. These values are also used as a guide for how to treat people and for how to live by the Tongan way”.

*(Susitina Suli, The Tongan Church Community )*

### 3. Place/ displacement

“The Aramaic language is a bonding mechanism for a scattered Assyrian community in the Western world...Consequently, their native language has become a strong means of identification for the Assyrian people in a world where the retention of identity is essential to the survival of the nation. In belonging to the Assyrian community...there is a responsibility to encourage the use of the language within the younger generation”.

- *Archbishop Mar Meelis Zaia – The Aramaic Language of the Assyrian Community*

## 4. Belonging

“Language expresses that deeper knowledge of identity that does not change. A Wiradjuri person can go places, do lots of different things, learn new things, but they are still Wiradjuri. In class I encourage kids to talk about their origins. Everyone needs that sense of belonging. We don’t need a lot of lost children in Australia, we need strong kids who, once they know their identity, can speak up for themselves”.

*Diane McNaboe - “Strong kids who can speak up for themselves”*

## 5. Teaching and learning

- “ the kindergarten students have learnt 70 Chinese sight words. ...This is a very profound and satisfying way to spend time with children. We aim to develop the children’s language development, spiritual development and academic excellence together. In my experience, intercultural understanding, language proficiency and spiritual maturity are all involved in this teaching and learning”.

*Jianlian Liang – “Praying in Chinese: Teaching in a Bilingual Christian School”*

# Wider social outcomes

## 1. Intercultural learning

“I feel privileged to have access to all these languages as they are the key to cultural harmony, balance and understanding”

*Zohra Aly – Language diversity at the Iman Hasan Centre*

“learning languages to unlock understanding of people and develop respect for each other’s culture and sensitivities”

*Mala Mehta OAM*

## 2. Reconciliation

The Wiradjuri Council of Elders said we should teach both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. **I reckon it's the best form of Reconciliation, sharing and learning about one another's languages.** Learning that not everybody's language and culture are the same opens the students' eyes, and makes them a little bit more resilient, and helps them become a better human being.

*Diane McNaboe - "Strong kids who can speak up for themselves"*

"The goal of teaching or learning a language connected to a spiritual context, however, is important to help humans live a happy and complete life through attainment of spiritual treasure"

*Pandit Prakash Dhodari – "Sanskrit, peace and social Harmony"*

### 3. Resilience

I believe that learning language is building them ‘from the inside out’. ...the rest of the curriculum is building them ‘from the outside in’. But language is giving them identity and inner strength. I think the better they learn language, the better they can learn other things too”.

*Nathan Schreiber*

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“We have this ancient language with which we build our strength and culture. ...It is going to be an important factor in our kids’ educational outcomes and a big part of building strong and confident learners”.

*Aunty Louise Campbell – “Language is about what connects us, not what sets up apart”*

# A neglected partnership of great value

- Thankyou

