Reimagining language, community and identity in community language learning

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$\rightarrow$ lived multilingual experience, intercultural learning, connection, recognition, identity
$\rightarrow$ ambivalence, tension, complexity, legitimacy
$\rightarrow$ a developmental agenda, with a problematising stance and criticality

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Mem Fox & Helen Oxenbury: Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes

Setting the scene

The context of community language learning in Australia -1

- Some 100,000 students across Australia in 1,400 community language schools. In S.A. 9,000 students in 90 schools involving 50 languages → play a crucial role in sustaining the diversity of languages learning and use in Australia; represent 'lived' linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingual and intercultural exchange.
- The term 'community languages' [complementary programs], has been used since the mid 1970s, intended as a definitional category to capture the languages of migrant communities (Clyne 1991;2005).
- Community language learning has continued to evolve over almost five decades in distinctive ways in the societal and educational context of Australia, in response to migration history.
- Community language learning is situated between (1) the global context of the movement of people, their knowledges, languages and cultures which has altered the nature of linguistic and cultural diversity in societies, AND (2) the local context and the particular configuration of languages that are represented, shaped by the history of migration, in particular localities.

→ context of changing times → changing community languages

The context of community language learning in Australia -2

- Changing migration policies, with related forces of assimilation and integration.
- Changing policies on languages – continuously changing ideologies; changing policy goals → seeking to 'reduce' the diversity.
- Legitimacy of the community through language learning (Mercurio & Scarino 2005; Scarino 2014).
- Complexities in the provision of community languages learning; doing justice to the diversity of languages; doing justice to the diversity of learners in bridging languages, cultures, and identities (that young people may accept or reject); doing justice to teachers, parents, communities in considering the presence of particular languages in Australian society and education.
- Need to understand how the political history, demographics and the social status of particular languages and communities come into play in learning community languages.

→ Community language learning needs to respond to a changing world and its social, cultural, political, economic conditions and to changing local contexts.

Changing possibilities, expectations and provisioning – the case of South Australia - 1

- Community languages as a longstanding element of languages education in the state for the ongoing maintenance and development of languages in the Australian community.
- Began late 1960s/early 1970s.
- Ethnic Schools Association of South Australia (ESASA) [now Community Language Schools, SA] was established in 1979 to promote and support programs and develop cooperation between 'ethnic schools'.
- Provisioning strengthened through the recommendations of the Smolicz Report: *Education for a cultural democracy* (1984).
- An evolving, developmental story:
  - the settlement of recent communities has meant children with pressing needs to continue developing their home languages as they acquire English
  - language learning needs of children of established communities have continued to change
  - administrative and management arrangements have changed; since 2016 ESASA has been accorded greater responsibility
  - 2017, the ESASA commissioned a review (undertaken by the Research Centre for Languages and Cultures - RCLC) focusing on its role in providing support and strengthening students' learning of community languages; and to develop a Community Languages Strategy, encompassing policy and governance; learner experience, curriculum and assessment, teacher professional learning and support, evaluation and quality assurance, qualities, values and recognition, research.

Changing possibilities, expectations and provisioning – the case of South Australia - 2

- Community languages programs have continued to prominence as a form of provision in South Australia, as elsewhere in Australia.

- Growing attention to their place in the ecology of languages education.

- Recognition that they provide a community hub, that is important to communities

- State and federal government funding support

- …….but some ambivalence.

  → different motivations, affiliations on the part of learners; dynamic, multidimensional and usually 'unbalanced' repertoires; opportunities/ challenges; different perceptions, needs and understandings of teachers; different communities
  → connection and resistance
  → some ambivalence in relation to their relationship with mainstream languages provision

Reconceptualising: some key ideas

Changing theoretical understandings

- Changing theoretical perspectives in Applied Linguistics and related fields that inform community languages learning.
- Modernist conceptions of language learning are out of sync, but "the modern and the late modern worlds co-exist with increasing unease…" (Kramsch 2014, p.297).
- A fundamental shift from a monolingual to a multilingual and intercultural view of language learning.
  - Cenoz and Gorter (2011) proposed a holistic approach to the multilingual development of learners that takes into account all of the languages of the learners' repertoires
  - Cook (2005) developed the concept of 'multicompetence'
  - Li Wei (2011) elaborated a view of multilinguality and multimodality as a way of conceptualising the distinctive capability of multilingual students
  - Liddicoat & Scarino (2013) elaborated intercultural language learning as an orientation to language learning as 'moving between' linguistic and cultural worlds
  - Norton (2013) highlighted identity theory in language learning
- Ongoing research of Agnes He (2006, 2010, 2018) on the question of what happens to community/heritage language learners over their lifespan, from a developmental and identity perspective.
- From communicative competence to interactional competence to symbolic competence (Kramsch 2011).
- Supporting equitable multilingualism for all; recognising social justice as central to language learning (Ortega 2019; 2020).

Understandings of language, culture and identity

'…since we exist in language, the domains of discourse that we generate become part of our domain of existence and constitute the environment in which we conserve identity and adaptation… We humans, as humans, exist in a network of structural couplings that we continually weave… *Language was never invented by anyone only to take in an outside world. Therefore it cannot* be used as a tool to reveal that world. Rather, it is by *languaging* that the act of knowing, in the behavioural coordination which is language, bring forth a world. We work out our lives in a mutual linguistic coupling, not because language permits us to reveal ourselves but because *we are constituted* in language in a continuous becoming that we bring forth with others'.

Maturana and Varela 1987/1998, 234-235

Considering understandings of Language - 1

- A reappraisal of languages as well-defined, codes (i.e. sets of grammatical and lexical items) that can be separated from each other and linked to distinctive communities of users.

- Seeking to view language not as an entity but a process, as one sort of meaning-making activity through usage in verbal interaction and texts, a set of mobile, semiotic resources rather than a bounded, static body of knowledge (Levine 2020, p.11).

- Language does not exist independently of its use in social and cultural interaction in diverse contexts → social processes are enacted → inherent *with* variation, yet modelling of languages as static, fixed entities.

- Conceptualising language as developed in everyday use in everyday lives.

Considering understandings of Language -2

And in relation to community languages consider:

- Language learning and use as lived; both the language/s and learners/users themselves are in constant change.

- Attitudes and beliefs in relation to (1) particular languages or varieties, (2) bi/multilinguality and bi/multiculturality, and (3) positioning of learners
    - → notion of *repertoires*: all the languages that learners experience in their socialisation and educational experiences

- Hierarchies of languages: languages of prestige; community languages that are offered in the mainstream; community languages that are offered through community languages provision only – with what kind of impact?

Languaging and translanguaging

- Language learning as the integrated development of language and the person (Kramsch 2002).

- Language learning as meaning-making: interpretation, creation and exchange of meanings; human meaning making as an interlinguistic and intercultural process.

- Learners "moving between" languages → translanguaging (Li 2011)

    "The act of translanguaging then is transformative in nature; it creates a social space for the multilingual language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and making it into a lived experience" (p.1223).

→ with translanguaging as a legitimate multilingual not just compensatory practice.

Considering understandings of community

- A definitional category in languages education; 'community' referencing nation states and language as the possession of members of these nation states, understood as a singular, static, homogeneous group; assumption that people identified with a single language and single community into which they were born (Scarino, 2008); movement of individuals in and out of communities.

- Shift towards making more salient communities of diverse users with different goals, experiences, motivations, affiliations – within and across generations and contexts; diversity along multiple lines including class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and multiple memberships and identities; also a way of belonging/connecting/identifying.

- Learners as highly diverse, not 'generic' but as complex, social actors, with distinctive life worlds, interacting with parents, grandparents, teachers, peers in diverse contexts, actual and virtual.

Considering understandings of identity - 1

- Identity is not a fixed social and cultural category or defined 'essential' characteristics, but rather, it is dynamic and formed in interaction in an ongoing negotiation of how people relate to each other and the world.

- As Hall states:

    Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps, instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process and ways of constituted within, not outside representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term 'cultural identity' lays claim. (Hall 1990, p.51).

- Identities are performed, formed and transformed in ongoing ways, through social interactions in communicating in different contexts.

- Identities or subjectivities are constantly being constructed in the positions people take up in discourse → (McNamara 2019).

- Identities may be self-perceived/other perceived.

Considering understandings of identity - 2

- Who are the learners? Who can they be? → multiple memberships and manifold identities.

- In any *experience* of interaction and through the interaction learners are re-developing themselves as members/non-members of communities – their knowledge, understandings are shaped, re-shaped, negotiated and changed.

- As He (2010) states:

    … identity is treated not as a collection of static attributes or as some mental construct existing prior to and independent of human action, but rather as a process of continual emerging and becoming, a process that identifies what a person becomes and achieves through ongoing interactions with other persons. (pp.77-78)

- → These understandings have been incorporated in the re-development of community language learning in South Australia.

Community language learning in South Australia

Review findings

- In 2016, there were 91 ethnic school authorities affiliated with ESASA, teaching 42 languages, largest numbers in Greek, Arabic and Vietnamese.
- Enrolments are principally primary school students (85%).
- Students value their experience highly, but struggle to maintain their commitment in upper year levels and feel their learning is not sufficiently recognised in their mainstream schools.
- Teachers are largely volunteers with varying levels of qualifications in language teaching and education in general, and are highly committed to maintaining their languages and improving their practice.
- Current professional learning provision is somewhat dated, and lacks differentiation, coherence and a tertiary accreditation pathway.
- Curriculum design and program development are fragile. Teachers are seeking greater guidance in this area, including curricula that take account of particular learner groups in these programs, language specificity, and some degree of alignment with the *Australian Curriculum: Languages*.
- The accreditation/re-accreditation process yields information on the nature and quality of overall provision and compliance, but does not focus sufficiently on quality in language learning itself and improvement in curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment. (Scarino, Kohler with Loechel 2018)

Proposed strategy – areas and actions

Policy and governance	Clarify roles and responsibilities; develop data management systems; develop strategy to promote value and recognition; shift to participatory engagement with stakeholders
Learner experience	Profiling learners; incentives for innovation projects to increase engagement
Curriculum and assessment	Develop a framework and procedures for a differentiated approach; establish project to develop language specific curricula; support development in all languages; continue support for SACE; establish means for sharing
Teacher professional learning and support	Establish coordinating committee; develop differentiated suite of modules (inc. leaders); explore accreditation options; trial and evaluate delivery options (f2f/online/blended); facilitate sharing and mentoring of 'new' teachers
Evaluation and quality assurance	Develop and trial guide of essential features and conditions for learning languages including professional learning for leaders
Qualities, values and recognition	Improving communication and connections with mainstream schools; provision of high-quality, publicly available information on website, consider change of name
Research	Track learner achievement/pathways/retention; evaluate curriculum implementation; develop innovation projects; investigate senior secondary issues and connections with mainstream schools

A reconceptualisation of program provision

- A *differentiated approach* as a fundamental principle for justice.

- Differences impact on orientation and goals of the programs, and the nature, scope and level/s of language learning that can be expected.

- A developmental agenda for all programs, but tailored to the nature and history of the establishment of the program for particular languages, recognising different learners and needs.

- Need to shift from 'having a place' towards a differentiated, developmental approach that is relevant to specific languages; their communities and their migration vintages; and, in particular, their learners. (Scarino, Kohler with Loechel 2018)

Curriculum and assessment framework for community languages - 1

- Development of framework for curriculum design, with a companion document that provides case studies of language-specific curriculum development based on the processes elaborated in the framework (see Scarino, Kohler with Loechel 2021).

- Principles incorporated in the design, based on theoretical reorientation/s: language/culture; communities, identities, and informed by teacher practice.

- Working alongside 5 case study teachers: different languages/levels/ contexts: reciprocal process of exchange between researchers and teachers throughout the process of curriculum development.

Curriculum and assessment framework for community languages - 2

The Framework is based on the following principles:
1. Language learning is multilingual and intercultural.
2. Language learning is focused on developing language and literacy and on developing communication with an understanding of the role of language and culture in meaning exchange and identity development.
3. Language learning is personal and socially interactive.
4. Language learning is situated and supported by communities
5. Language learning is focused on concepts.
6. Language learning is experiential and focused on action/ engagement.
7. Language learning is reflective and reflexive, promoting metalinguistic awareness.
8. Language learning is developmental and is focused on building connections over time, across the whole program.
9. Language learning is coherent across the program.
10. Language learning is subject to ongoing formative evaluation.

(Scarino, Kohler with Loechel 2021, pp.18-20)

→ Process of development described, beginning with profiling learners and their life worlds followed by a description of the context, the nature of learning specific community languages, and the goals and then the strands/sub-strand of the design, a curriculum overview with modules and units.

Developmental trajectory for community language learning in South Australia

- Community languages development in South Australia is on a supported, trajectory: review, research, curriculum development, professional learning.

- A reconceptualisation of community language learning as multilingual and intercultural in orientation.

- An orientation that seeks to understand (1) how people make sense of themselves, their world and other people in and through languages (2) how people understand and create meaning through their use of languages and through where they are situated culturally, and understanding the power of language.

- Justice to student learning and their identity formation.

- Justice to teachers and communities through collaboration.

What's next?

- The foundations have been set; supporting resources and processes have been developed; planning for curriculum and program development in different community languages, maintaining a differentiated approach.
- Related professional learning in place.
- Intended to provide rich learning, honouring the histories of the languages and their learners, honouring language learning/use and the development of subjectivities; recognising the tension between 'planning' and designing teaching and learning on the one hand and being responsive to the realities of situated students and contexts in classrooms and beyond.
- Need to better understand the learner experience and what it means for those students who flourish and those for whom it might be alienating → a new project in 2022 to capture learner experience [*Being multilingual: the experiences of young people learning community languages*].

→ drawing on *imagination* and creativity AND maintaining a problematising stance and criticality in order to accomplish development

→ working towards communities themselves as authors.

Thoughts, comments, questions?

Thank you

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