

# Introduction: Reframing language in teaching and learning: Leveraging students' meaning-making repertoires

Jacqueline D'warte and Yvette Slaughter

In recent years, in the context of rapidly changing globalisation, global movement and evolving 'super-diversity' (Vortevic, 2007, 2017) within populations in many countries, an 'unpredictable and unprecedented variation in individual linguistic repertoires' have evolved (Taylor & Snodden, 2013: 440). While linguistic diversity has long existed in many societies (e.g., Vaughan & Singer, 2018), the rapid diversification of expression through different modes of communication – technological or performative (dance, music, storytelling) - for example, has made these practices more vibrantly visible (e.g., Finegan & Rickford, 2004; Heller, 2011; Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015). For research scholarship looking at second or additional language acquisition, these shifts have helped problematize the act of classifying languages as bound entities. Challenged by the idea of language as practice, a distinct research perspective has emerged whereby multilingualism is viewed as a lived experience, focused on languaging, or 'a way of making use of all linguistic means from diverse sources to act semiotically' (Costley & Leung, 2020, p. 2). These practices are complex and interrelated; they do not transpire in a linear pattern nor function separately but encompass the 'linguistic, cognitive, social and emotional components of speakers' languaging' or translanguaging practices (Seltzer & García, 2020, p. 2). The linguistic repertoire of any individual speaker, therefore, is framed as dynamic and characterized by the language varieties people acquire, know and use within their communities. Languages can be expressed separately or intertwined for different purposes, in different places and spaces, or with different people, with these myriad communicative practices resulting in the development of rich and complex repertoires (Moore & Gajo, 2009).

This reframing of theory has important implications for education systems where school-aged populations are characterized by an evolving and dynamic cultural and linguistic diversity. In Australia, over 300 languages are spoken across its communities, including a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders languages and dialects, and languages from the nearly 200 countries from which non-Indigenous Australians originate. Currently, 49 percent of Australians were either born overseas or have at least one overseas-born parent, with approximately 21 percent of people predominantly using a language other than English at home (ABS, 2016). As a result, Australian classrooms are comprised of young people who are bidialectic/bilingual and plurilingual, and include speakers of languages other than English, monolingual speakers of English, and young people who are first language speakers of Aboriginal English (AE).

In contrast to this diversity, the conceptualisation of language and literacy, as framed by curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in the Australian education system, continues to impose a monolingual perspective onto teaching and learning practices (Schalley, Guillemin & Eisenclas, 2015). These entrenched structural limitations inhibit pedagogy as well as learning. Students can have a limited opportunity to develop and sustain the cultural and linguistic practices of their communities, leading to a silencing of existing and emerging multilingualism and hybrid language practices (D'warte, 2014). Within a framework of culturally sustainable pedagogy, Paris (2012, p. 93) argues that the

failure to 'make teaching and learning relevant and responsive to the languages, literacies and cultural practices of students across the categories of difference and (in)equality' perpetuates student disengagement and undemocratic practices within education systems.

Research framed within more heteroglossic perspectives are providing new avenues through which to recognise the complexity of individual linguistic and cultural knowledge, and the potential for researchers, educators, language communities and educational stakeholders to challenge prevailing educational practices. An important characteristic of these studies is that although schools of thought are forming around notions of translanguaging or plurilingual language practices, many research findings are highly contextualised and intimately linked to particular underlying education systems and their socio-political and sociolinguistic contexts (e.g., Garcia & Lin, 2017; Leung & Valdes, 2019; Tian, Aghai, Sayer & Schissel, 2020), deepening our knowledge of the limitations and affordances of these practices under different conditions.

However, in an English dominant nation, with an English only educational framework, we return to the question of how educators can create spaces for students' diverse linguistic practices - their lived experiences - in an English dominant education system. As Costley & Leung (2020, p. 2) argue, 'pedagogically oriented translanguaging can be a crucial step towards meeting the learning needs and trajectories of students in multilingual classrooms as it starts from a closer approximation of the actual lived experiences of multilingual learners'. The papers in this special edition explore this question across a range of contexts in Australia, framed by the understanding that the intersections of language and education are as much ideological and political as they are educational (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2017). While it is imperative that we continue to challenge the social and political discourses as well as the monolingual framing of educational structures in Australia, we recognise the role of the teacher 'as historical, sociological agent within larger (and political) contexts' (Cross, 2010, p. 434) and their critical role in engaging with pedagogical change. As Lo Bianco (2010, p. 165) argues, the decisions that teachers make 'ultimately constitute an enacted language and literacy policy'.

This special issue contributes to the growing focus on context-specific research designed to build a richer understanding of how students' linguistic repertoires can be privileged and leveraged for learning. To this end, the articles in this edition focus on research into innovative pedagogical interventions across a complex range of language learning contexts in Australia, including the general classroom, English as an Additional Languages (EAL) contexts, Modern language learning domains, and classrooms with speakers of Aboriginal English and other Indigenous languages and dialects. Researchers across these projects are joined in the belief that the language practices of students are rich, diverse and complex and should be interwoven into the school experience, rather than ignored or problematized. The research presented here is also influenced by recent attention to embodiment and multimodality (Block, 2014; Cummins, 2005) and the growing application of innovative visual methodologies (D'warte, 2014; Kalaja and Melo-Pfeifer, 2019) in second language learning.

### [Reframing pedagogical practices in diverse Australian classrooms](#)

Many young Australians speak a wide variety of languages and dialects of English, drawing on multiple ways of learning and understanding across multiple spaces in their everyday lives, yet these experiences are rarely acknowledged in their educational lives. In the first article of this special edition, D'warte argues that rather than building on this linguistic diversity, Australia's national

assessment program continues to relegate difference to a problem fixed by further commitment to standardized English curriculum and assessment practices. In this environment, attention is given to what is perceived as limited or lacking in young people's knowledge of the English language and literacies practices most valued in school. D'warte presents research from super-diverse (Vortevac, 2007) mainstream primary classrooms. Positioned as co-researchers, students' and teachers explored the language practices, knowledge and experiences students used inside and outside of school, including the use of the visual method of language mapping (D'warte, 2014). This work was then moved into the pedagogical space, with teachers integrating new knowledge and reflection into their practices. Findings reveal that mapping began to facilitate learners' agency and engagement in language learning as well as prompting teachers to employ flexibility and creativity in lesson design and employ translanguaging practices that built on and extended students' individual and collective linguistic resources.

Slaughter and Cross' research also looks at the concept of reflective practices but within an English as an Additional Language (EAL) education. Based at the primary level in a government English intensive school for refugee and migrant children, their work explores teacher stance and pedagogical choices in relation to linguistic diversity. They argue that while many teachers identify with the idea that drawing on the full breadth of students' linguistic repertoire can further language development, a lack of reflection on stance can perpetuate monolingual orientations, while a lack of pedagogical guidance can result in disengagement with this issue. In this research, language mapping is used as a tool for building teachers' awareness of their students' communicative lifeworlds, for reflecting on their stance towards students' languages (other than English) in EAL contexts, and their pedagogical choices in light of this work. The findings illustrate pedagogical practices which go at least some way to subverting the dominance of English-only structures, as well as demonstrating that teacher positioning towards the use of first languages is dynamic, responsive to both changes in student context, and to new knowledge gained through the language mapping activities.

Turner's work is also based at the primary school level, but within the context of a bilingual school program. Turner posits that language separation has traditionally influenced teaching and learning in bilingual programs as a way to protect the minority language, or the language not spoken at a societal level. However, Turner's research adheres to the growing call to engage with the complexity of students' language practices, including the use of home languages not present in the bilingual program. Turner suggests that the English-medium (dominant language) classroom can be an effective site for exploring how to leverage and affirm students' home language practices in bilingual education, as well as to support the minority language in the program. This research emanates from a Japanese-English primary level bilingual program and investigates the transition from 30% of instruction in Japanese to a program evenly split between Japanese and English instruction (50/50). In this design-based study, a Foundation teacher and a Year 5/6 teacher worked towards English curriculum objectives by incorporating languages their students spoke at home, including Japanese, into the English medium classes. Findings revealed differentiated responses by students at separate year levels, indicating that engaging with translanguaging in similar contexts requires understanding and working with students and the ways they position their linguistic resources as they progress through schooling.

In shifting the focus to secondary school EAL students, Choi and Slaughter argue that the 'multilingual turn' has opened up a variety of creative, participatory methods that better enable researchers and educators to explore language learners' linguistic repertoires, language practices and resources, and linguistic experiences. Their research explores the use of what they call 'language trajectory grids' with senior secondary EAL students, to make visible their English language learning experiences. The grid activity involves plotting learners' experiences onto a chronological grid and mapping their emotions, practices, relationships, and life circumstances with their language learning experiences. The authors use a narrative structure to explore the 'small stories' (Barkhuizen, 2009) told through students' grids, and discuss the affordances of such devices in creating space for teachers and learners to critically reflect on the complexities of contemporary multilingual language journeys. An understanding of the situational factors that influence dispositions towards language and identity development can, they argue, serve as a potent starting point for students and teachers to challenge established histories of deficit discourses and dispositions towards language teaching and learning.

Dutton and Rushton explore translanguaging practices at a secondary level in the English classroom. They argue that tensions exist between the intentions of teachers to address diversity and the competing influence of a high-stakes context that prioritizes monolingual classroom practices and diminishes teachers' use of engaging pedagogy. Viewed through the lens of socio-spatial theory, they highlight how the ideal of education for diversity is re-shaped by the everyday practices in schools and systems. Their article reports on ethnographic research involving secondary school, subject English teachers seeking to challenge routinized monolingual practices and reimagining their classroom practices in the reading and writing of poetry. The use of what they call translanguaging poetry pedagogy, created 'space' to support a dynamic process in which students could use all their linguistic resources to produce identity texts. The resultant translanguaging space and the symbolic propensity of poetry helped students to develop powerful personal representations. The authors reinforce the need for pedagogies that acknowledge students' diverse backgrounds and honour their languages and identities.

Oliver, Wigglesworth, Angelo and Steele focus on the positioning of Australian Aboriginal students' linguistic repertoires in the context of primary level schooling in Aboriginal schools in the Australian state of Western Australia and the Northern Territory. They argue that translanguaging provides a useful resource for multilingual learners and maintain that although translanguaging is a relatively recent term in academic research, in Indigenous Australia, it has been a consistent practice across time and space (Indigenous communities). Their research focuses on how translanguaging in the classroom can draw on the complex linguistic practices of Australian Aboriginal children, indicating the valuable role their languages play, while also enhancing the development of their Standard Australian English (SAE) in the classroom. While significant challenges persist in engaging with translanguaging within a monolingual educational framework, particularly for Australian Aboriginal children, they argue that such practices potentially provide greater agency for children as well as giving credence to their multifaceted linguistic and cultural identities.

### Reframing the future

A key feature of these papers is the ongoing imperative to force a shift in thinking, from a focus on what young people "lack" in terms of English language, to instead identifying and productively mobilising the full range of linguistic resources and communicative repertoires they bring to

learning. The studies in this special edition offer illustrations of the small, but powerful changes that teachers can employ in their pedagogical practices, within diverse multilingual classrooms in English dominant contexts. Commonly the authors have sought to understand or to draw upon the breadth of students' linguistic repertoires, both inside and outside of the school environment, in order to enhance students' engagement in their school learning, to reframe the pedagogical stance of teachers towards students' diverse and rich language practices, and to contribute to the development of theory and pedagogical practice in diverse, multilingual, language learning contexts.

Another key priority that emerges across these papers is that students and teachers must learn *about* and *with* each other, and the complexities of this endeavour are acknowledged across these studies. The collaborations between students, teachers and researchers produced examples of innovation classroom practices that enhanced learning for student and teacher participants and generated translanguaging pedagogies that may be applied across classroom contexts. Ultimately, these studies offered evidence of the potential to expand students' full repertoire, that is their home language practices as well as their English languages and literacies, knowledges and skills.

At the same time, however, these research endeavours also recognise that the lived linguistic experience of students, and the practices of teachers are as much ideological and political as educational, and the influence of dominant monolingual, monocultural educational frameworks can weigh heavily. In this special issue we strongly argue for the agentive potential of translanguaging practices in expanding the complex language and literacies knowledge and skills of all Australian students. We have emphasized the complex interplay between language, identity and agency in diverse classrooms and how recognising and exploring this interplay can potentially enhance language teaching and language learning. As we move forward, we seek to understand how to build inclusive practices that challenge hegemonic dominant language practices which work to exclude multiple voices and the ways of knowing of all students. We see this as crucial future research. Possible future research includes the potential for longitudinal research and ongoing data collection in these contexts, offering further complexity to the findings and interpretations presented here. Additionally, research that investigates teaching and learning partnerships with families and the wider community and the ways these ideas can be taken up in pre-service teacher education is also needed.

## References

- Australian Bureau of Statistic (2016) Cultural Diversity: Who We Are Now. Retrieved <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/2024.0Main%20Features22016>
- Barkhuizen, G. (2009). An extended positioning analysis of a pre-service teacher's *better life* small story. *Applied Linguistics*, 31(2), 282–300.
- Block, D. (2014). Moving beyond 'lingualism': Multilingual embodiment and multimodality in SLA. In May, S. (Ed.), *The multilingual turn: Implications for SLA, TESOL and bilingual education* (pp. 54–77). New York: Routledge.
- Costley, T., & Leung, C. (2020). Putting translanguaging into practice: A view from England. *System*, 92, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102270>
- Cross, R. (2010). Language teaching as sociocultural activity: rethinking language teacher practice. *The Modern Language Journal*, 94(3), 434-452.

- Cummins, J. (2005). A proposal for action: strategies for recognizing heritage language competence as a learning resource within the mainstream classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 80, 585–592.
- D'warte, J. (2014). Exploring linguistic repertoires: Multiple language use and multimodal activity in five classrooms. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 37(1), 21-30.
- Finegan, E., & Rickford, J. (2004). *Language in the USA: Themes for the Twenty-first Century*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Garcia, O., & Lin, A. (2017). Translanguaging in Bilingual Education. In O. Garcia, A. Lin and S. May. (Eds.), *Bilingual and Multilingual Education, Encyclopedia of Language and Education* (pp. 117-130). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Heller, M. (2011). *Paths to post-nationalism: A critical ethnography of language and identity*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Kalaja, P., & Melo-Pfeifer, S. (2019). *Visualising Multilingual Lives*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters
- Leung, C., & Valdes, G. (2019). Translanguaging and the transdisciplinary framework for language teaching and learning in a multilingual world. *The Modern Language Journal*, 103(2), 348-370.
- Lo Bianco, J. (2010). Language policy and planning. In N.H. Hornberger, & S.L. McKay (Eds.), *New perspectives on language and education: Sociolinguistics and language Education* (pp. 143-174). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Lo Bianco, J. & Slaughter, Y. (2017). Language policy and education in Australia. In T. McCarty (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of Language and Education, Language Policy and Political Issues in Education*, v.1. pp. 449-461. Cham, Switzerland.: Springer.
- Moore, D., & Gajo, L. (2009) French voices on plurilingualism and pluriculturalism: Theory, significance and perspectives. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 6(2),137–153.
- Paris, D. (2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy: a needed change in stance, terminology and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 41(3), 93-97.
- Pennycook, A., & Otsuji, E. (2015). *Metrolingualism: Language in the City*. New York: Routledge.
- Schalley, A.C., Guillemin, D., & Eisenclas, S.A. (2015). Multilingualism and assimilationism in Australia's literacy-related educational policies. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 12(2), 162-177.
- Seltzer, K., & García, O. (2020). Broadening the View: Taking up a Translanguaging Pedagogy with All Language-Minoritized Students. In Z Tian, L Aghai, P Sayer, & J. L. Schissel (Eds.), *Envisioning TESOL through a Translanguaging Lens: Global Perspectives* (23-42). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Taylor, S.K. & Snoddon, K. (2013). Plurilingualism in TESOL: Promising controversies. *TESOL Quarterly*, 47(3), 439-445.
- Tian, Z., Aghai, L., Sayer, P., & Schissel, J. L. (Eds.). (2020). *Envisioning TESOL through a Translanguaging Lens: Global Perspectives*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Vaughan, J., & Singer, R. (2018). Indigenous multilingualisms past and present. *Language and Communication*, 62(B), 83-90.
- Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30, 1024–1054.
- Vertovec, S. (2017). Talking around super-diversity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42(1), 125-139.



Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

**Author/s:**

D'warte, J; Slaughter, Y

**Title:**

Introduction: Reframing language in teaching and learning: Leveraging students' meaning-making repertoires

**Date:**

2020-11-06

**Citation:**

D'warte, J. & Slaughter, Y. (2020). Introduction: Reframing language in teaching and learning: Leveraging students' meaning-making repertoires. LANGUAGE TEACHING RESEARCH, 25 (1), pp.5-11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820971753>.

**Persistent Link:**

<http://hdl.handle.net/11343/258828>

**File Description:**

Accepted version