**Students' multilingual resources and policy-in-action: An Australian case study**

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**Abstract**

In the context of increasing linguistic and cultural diversity in Australian schools, it is important to consider the value of students' multilingual resources for learning. This paper reports on an ethnographic case study conducted in an Australian metropolitan secondary school where the student body represented more than 40 cultures and languages, yet where the broader structures of education were dominated by a monolingual orientation. The study draws data from student artefacts, student focus groups, a staff questionnaire, and staff interviews to reveal the ways in which multilingual students and their teachers construct and enact language policy at the classroom level. Key themes to emerge from the data included students' application of multilingual resources for individual and collaborative learning and the way multilingualism and related practices, such as translanguaging, were valued by students. Additionally, the data illustrated teachers' situated approaches ranging from a resistance towards multilingual practices, through to active construction of a multilingual classroom. Teachers' approaches which facilitated students' use of their own linguistic resources for learning, and how these approaches were negotiated within a context otherwise dominated by monolingual pedagogies will also be discussed in the paper.

**Key Words**

multilingualism; education; language policy and planning; Australia; secondary school; translanguaging

**Introduction**

Linguistic diversity in Australia is increasing, with the most recent census showing that approximately seventeen percent of Australian residents under the age of 24 speak a language other than English at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013). Multilingual high school students bring rich experiences, cultural knowledge and multilingual skills to learning. Their multilingual resources include a knowledge of linguistic features such as text structure,

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grammar, vocabulary, and phonology in two or more languages; the ability to compare and contrast linguistic features of different languages; cross-cultural and cross-linguistic communication skills including interpreting and translating; an understanding of cultural practices; conceptual knowledge learnt through different languages; and multiple ways of learning and being a student (Cummins 2009; Saxena and Martin-Jones 2013, 287). However, multilingual students, especially those learning English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D), are not always viewed positively in regards to school participation and academic achievement. These young people often struggle to engage with a culturally and linguistically exclusive curriculum and be seen as valuable contributors to the school community, similarly to their counterparts in the US and elsewhere (see de Jong and Freeman Field 2010; García, Skutnabb-Kangas and Torres-Guzman 2010). Although multilingual resources offer the potential to support these students' school based learning, it is difficult to make the most effective use of these resources in an education system that assumes a monolingual and monocultural bias. Formal language policy in Australia, based as it is on assumptions of societal and individual English monolingualism, largely negates the multilingualism of students (Coleman 2012; Cross 2012). This paper argues that, at the level of policy *in action* – where students and teachers construct and enact language policy in their learning activities and classrooms (Lo Bianco 2010; Plüddemann 2015; Saxena and Martin-Jones 2013) – multilingual resources can be applied to support learning. This offers the potential to enhance learning for multilingual students in mainstream Australian schools.

The data presented in this paper are part of a larger ethnographic case study of a multilingual, multicultural Australian high school, where over 40 languages and cultural backgrounds were represented. Despite this diversity, like many secondary schools in Australia, the curriculum and institutional practice were rooted in English monolingual ideology (Coleman 2012; Cross 2012), in that curriculum texts, assessment practices, and instructional approaches were founded on historical assumptions of a culturally homogeneous and monolingual English speaking student body. Nevertheless, this paper focuses on the realities of multilingual practices within a linguistically heterogeneous setting, and the implications for language and education policy. The paper draws on the language planning and policy literature to identify the ways in which students' and teachers' attitudes and practices can reinforce or challenge the dominant monolingual ideology.

The voices of students highlight how being multilingual presents opportunities and

challenges that shape their experience of secondary school, and provide insight into translanguaging practices that are cognitive, communicative, make use of electronic media, and support the students' individual and collaborative learning. The voices of their teachers reveal how attitudes towards multilingualism are linked to personal experiences as well as broader dominant ideologies that shape language and education. The positions adopted by teachers represent a continuum from rejecting multilingualism, through to a passive acceptance of multilingual practice, and ultimately the active incorporation of multilingual resources in the curriculum.

The paper begins by reviewing literature on multilingualism, multilingual education, and language-in-education policy. An outline of the context and methodology of the ethnographic case study is then followed by a presentation of data on conceptions of multilingualism and applications of multilingual resources by students and teachers. The discussion section considers ways in which the practice of the students and teachers may conform to or challenge dominant monolingual practices.

**Multilingualism, and its place in education and language policy**

The cognitive advantages of multilingualism are widely documented and include improved metalinguistic skills, creative thinking, additional language and literacy development, intercultural sensitivity, and attendant socioeconomic benefits in the context of a fast globalising world (Cummins 2000; García 2009; Hélot 2012). Yet, as García (2009, 110) pointed out, only with social and educational support for their languages and cultures can multilinguals fully benefit from such advantages. There is evidence that first language proficiency supports academic achievement in a second language environment (Benson 2009, 75), but to produce a significant impact both languages need to be promoted in school (Cummins 2009, 22). Successful learning by older learners also requires greater use of higher order thinking skills, and these skills can be supported through access to their home language (Benson 2009, 74; Harper and de Jong 2004, 153; García 2009, 76). Cummins (2009) and García (2009), for example, both argue that the key to the successful application of multilingual resources in academic learning is explicit attention to teaching for transfer of knowledge and skills from one language to another.

The concept of translanguaging helps to explain how multilingual adolescents draw on multiple language resources to understand and negotiate meaning and has been described as a

'multilingual discourse practice' (García 2009, 55). Translanguaging includes processes such as translating (expressing or considering parallel meaning in different languages), code switching (moving between different languages in thinking or communication), and negotiation of meaning, and occurs across all modes including electronic forms of communication (Canagarajah 2011). It necessitates a heteroglossic view of multilingualism in which an individual's linguistic repertoire operates as a single, complex, interconnected system, as opposed to seeing languages as separate autonomous entities (Canagarajah 2011; May 2013). Although translanguaging is a normal (even integral) aspect of multilingualism (García 2009, 62), it has 'traditionally been frowned upon in educational settings' (Blackledge and Creese 2010, 203). An increasing number of voices now call for it to be used as a resource not only in formal bilingual programs, but also in settings where monolingual norms otherwise prevail (May 2013).

This perspective argues that for multilingualism to flourish, schools need to affirm the 'multi-competence' of their learners across multiple meaning-making systems (Cook 1992). However, Australian education systems are dominated by a monolingual habitus; that is, the unquestioned assumption that a single language – English – is the basis for the operating norm (Gogolin 2013). At the institutional level, the monolingual habitus of Australia has its genesis in colonialism (Coleman, 2012; Lo Bianco 2008), and is sustained by a myth that all Australians share a single common national language and culture. This is realised in institutions by the exclusive use of one dominant language for classroom instruction, the production of learning materials and curriculum texts, and modes and forms of assessment (Benson 2013, 292). At an individual level, the monolingual habitus of teachers is reinforced through professional preparation as well as the education systems within which they work, despite increasing diversity in schools (Gogolin 2013, 42). In her study of Australian EAL/D teachers, Coleman (2012) identified that a monolingual, monocultural habitus was a barrier to multilingual learning because of assumptions of linguistic homogeneity and rejection of student languages and cultures.

The monolingual habitus is reflected in both de jure and de facto educational policy. Official education policy in Australia does not define a role for multiple languages as resources for learning within school systems. In curriculum designed for English language learners, multilingualism registers but only at the margins of curriculum documents (see ACARA 2014, for example). The absence of de jure policy to inform the education of multilingual

students means that teachers are left to draw on their habitus to determine 'what is considered normal' as the basis for de facto policy (Hornberger and Johnson 2007, 527). The resulting dominant practice is monolingually focussed, with the result being that the education of minority language speakers in Australian falls into the category of submersion education: an approach that fails to recognise 'learners' own languages in the classroom' (Benson 2009, 64; see also Molyneux and Scull, this issue). Submersion education has been found to impair the development of both languages (García, Skutnabb-Kangas, and Torres-Guzmán 2006, 16), and this approach makes education for multilingual students 'highly inefficient and exclusionary' (Benson 2009, 70). Thus, as is the case with second language learners in many English-speaking countries (May 2013), official policy and dominant practice in Australia disconnect multilingual learners from their multilingual resources.

It must be recognised, however, that policy not only carries with it 'constraints' on educational practice, but also 'possibilities' (Bowe, Ball and Gold 1992 in Cross 2009, 29). That is, the absence of an explicit policy creates a space in which students and teachers in linguistically diverse sites can exercise agency in reinterpreting, challenging, and re-forming dominant practice at the level of classroom action and interaction (Plüddemann 2015; Saxena and Martin-Jones 2013). As Hornberger and Johnson (2007, 511) argue, engaging with policy in this way highlights opportunities for students and teachers to 'pry open implementational and ideological spaces' for multilingual practice within settings that have otherwise been restrictive. The *bottom-up* development of teaching strategies for linguistically heterogeneous classrooms constructs teachers as agents of meaningful educational and social change (de Jong and Freeman Field 2010, 111), and there is increasing research into how this can generate more effective and equitable education for multilingual students (Skilton-Sylvester 2003, 170).

A final point is that much of the current research on multilingual approaches to pedagogy focusses largely on bilingual programs for linguistically homogeneous groups of students. The increasing linguistic heterogeneity of classrooms in Australia and elsewhere (García, Skutnabb-Kangas and Torres-Guzman 2010, 26) means that conventional bilingual pedagogies such as whole school bilingual models or strategies relying on teachers and whole classes of students sharing the same languages (see de Jong and Freeman Field 2010) may not always be seen as relevant or workable. Nevertheless, research also makes clear that practices supporting multilingual development do not require homogenous bilingual

classrooms, or even teachers who share the students' languages (Cummins 2007; de Jong and Freeman Field 2010, 116; Skilton-Sylvester 2003, 173). The most important foundation for successful multilingual learning is for schools to value the languages and experiences of multilingual students. This includes acknowledging the role of home languages in students' identities and learning, and making positive use of the linguistic and cultural knowledge of students (de Jong and Freeman Field 2010; García 2009, 318-9; Hélot and Young 2006; Shohamy 2006; Velasco and García 2014). Cummins (2005), for instance, advocates that home languages be employed as learning resources in English medium settings for students to develop ideas, collaborate with others, record information and communicate to an audience. Teachers in linguistically heterogeneous settings can therefore draw on a range of multilingual resources to support their classroom strategies (see Benson 2013; Canagarajah 2011; Chau 2007; Cross 2012; Cummins 2006; de Jong and Freeman Field 2010; Hélot and Young 2006; Skilton-Sylvester 2003; Velasco and García 2014). This study examines how teachers and learners have worked with multilingual resources and practices in different ways and to varying degrees within the predominantly monolingual habitus of one Australian school.

## The study

Ethnographic approaches which give insight into the lived experiences of learners and teachers provide a counterpoint to macrolevel policy discourses at state or system levels that are most often centred on standardised test data. Ethnographic data gathered through multiple methods provide a thick description of the experiences and actions of learners and teachers (Geertz 1973; Hornberger and Johnson 2007) and are valuable for not only revealing how dominant ideologies in policy impact on learning and teaching, but, perhaps even more significantly, how the agency of students and teachers can challenge and reshape dominant practice (Saxena and Martin-Jones 2013). This ethnographic study demonstrates the dissonance between formal policy assumptions and the reality of the educational needs and practices of multilingual students. At the same time it also reveals practices of learners and teachers that have emerged to challenge such assumptions and respond to those needs.

### *Setting and data collection*

The research site was a non-government girls' secondary school with almost 600 students, located in the inner suburbs of Adelaide, South Australia. There was a high level of student linguistic and cultural diversity with 28 percent of students identifying as culturally

Australian, and another 48 cultures represented in the student body. The most common of these cultures were Afghan, Vietnamese, Indian, Sudanese, and Italian. Forty-eight percent of students spoke a home language other than English, representing 42 languages of which Dari, Vietnamese, Farsi, Dinka, and Arabic had the most speakers. Approximately one third of the school population were EAL learners, including students with refugee experience, migrants, and international students, all bringing with them different educational histories, including age-appropriate educational experience, or limited or disrupted prior schooling.

Seventeen students, all multilingual in at least their home language and English, participated in the focus group discussions that form the primary data set presented in this paper. Their length of residence in Australia and educational histories were varied, and some were enrolled in EAL classes while others were not. The profiles of students whose focus group data is included in this paper are summarised in Table 1 (all participant names are pseudonyms). Each focus group met once, with discussions lasting an average of 40 minutes each, and explored the students' beliefs about multilingualism, their experience of being multilingual at school and ways in which they used their linguistic resources in school, home, and social contexts.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Other ethnographic techniques used to inform the analysis included observation, interviews, and questionnaires. During observations, field notes were recorded by the researcher and sample student artefacts, such as portfolios and copies of research projects, were also collected as further types of data. Summarised in Table 2, student artefacts referred to in this paper include the language portfolios and research by students from a Year 10 EAL class and one student's final year research project.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

Given the school's diversity, all classes in the school included multilingual students and all staff interacted with multilingual students. Thirty-five of these staff members, including teachers, school leaders, and support staff, responded to a written questionnaire on their beliefs, observations and responses to students' multilingual practices. Respondents could be divided into three broad groups according to their multilingual experience (Table 3), with ten

staff (all teachers) identifying as multilingual (that is, with ‘bilingual’, ‘native’, or ‘professional’ proficiency in English and another language). Others had some language learning experience (designated as ‘Language Learners’), indicating they had either limited or beginning proficiency in one or more languages, while the remainder identified themselves as monolingual English speakers.

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

A further ten staff were interviewed. These staff members included teachers, support staff, and school leaders. Table 4 summarises those participants whose interview data appears in this paper. Each semi-structured interview lasted 70 minutes on average and focussed on their observations of multilingualism amongst the student body as well as their opinions and approaches regarding multilingual resources.

[INSERT TABLE 4 HERE]

Analysis of the data took an inductive approach, with iterative readings of artefacts, transcripts, and questionnaire data drawing out ‘persistent’ themes from each of the student and staff data sets (Yin 2010, 219). The student data generated patterns of use of multilingual resources, while the staff data suggested different categories of responses to student multilingual practices. It was the ways in which the teacher attitudes and practices converged or diverged with those of students that became the primary analytical focus, and key examples of these are reported below.

**Findings**

The students and teachers revealed ways in which multilingual practices, in the context of their broader monolingually oriented space, came to be enacted, challenged, accepted, or encouraged in classrooms and the school yard. The examples from the data which follow highlight cases where teacher beliefs and practices connected or contrasted with those of the multilingual students. The findings are organised around themes that emerged on conceptions of multilingualism, translanguaging, the use of multilingual resources for individual learning and collaboration, and multilingual strategies implemented by teachers. These examples characterise different positions taken by teachers, from a rejection of multilingualism, through to passive acceptance, towards active employment of multilingual teaching

strategies.

***Conceptions of multilingualism***

Students were found to be aware of the advantages in drawing on their multilingualism. These advantages included access to additional cognitive tools, further language learning ability, expanded spheres of communication, and affective development. The students also recognised difficulties related to their language development and identity formation.

First, all members of the focus groups articulated various ways in which multilingualism benefited their thinking. Zahera, who contributed her language research project, concluded that "it is always recommended to know and learn more languages as it has benefits for the brain and socially." Thelma felt her home language was an additional resource in her cognitive repertoire: "sometimes I forget that I have it, I have the other language, and then it just hits me and I'm like, I have this tool I can utilise." This tool also allowed her to consider ideas using different languages, in that: "you're able to process different things, in two different perspectives."

Access to expanded communicative repertoires was also important to students. In her reflection, Faria demonstrated sensitivity to the use of her languages in different contexts; for example:

> I communicate with people of my culture during the holidays because I stay home and if I want to go out I go to family friend's house whom are Afghans and they speak Dari which I have to use Dari. But if it's school days I speak English with my teachers and friends. I speak in Hindi sometimes with my Indian friends. (Faria)

However, a sense of the complexity of multilingual resources and the positive values that students ascribed to them were not always evident in the views of teachers. One notable response from teachers, for instance, was that multilingual practice should be confined to private spaces, and Clare demonstrated this attitude when explaining that home language conversations in the schoolyard may offend monolingual English speakers:

> They feel relaxed and they can talk to each other in their own language and they get excited and you can see, which is wonderful. But when they're going at 90 miles an hour, and a non person speaking it is near them, I just always say to them, "just remember, make it, you know, not so loud. Or just… try the English when somebody

else is around you. Then the moment somebody's gone, go for it." (Clare)

This view of home language conversation, even outside of lesson time, as a form of social transgression was also reflected in questionnaire responses, more commonly amongst monolingual staff (seven responses) and language learners like Clare (three responses) than those who were multilingual (two responses).

There were also occasions when students talked about other students choosing to reject their multilingual identities. In one focus group Priya and Riya gave the example of teenagers in their community who pretended to be monolingual. Priya explained: "they pretend to forget the language", and Riya elaborated: "just to, you know, like, make themselves look cool". Another student, Kiran, went so far as to express a desire to be a monolingual, because "in one language, they can understand everything. Whereas one person might be multilingual and may not understand all language perfectly".

***Translanguaging***

In each of the focus groups as well as in some of the language research projects, students gave insight into their translanguaging practices and language hybridisation when socialising with friends in person or online, communicating with family or in individual or collaborative learning. Layla, for example, emphasised the intentional nature of her translanguaging in English and Arabic, stating: "I've never actually spoken to someone in Arabic without meaning to". For Layla, such decisions were based on context. As she put it, "with family members that speak both English and Arabic… I mix them up". Her choice of language was also at times very conscious, based on conveying her feelings accurately: "actually a lot of the time I find that words lose their meaning when they're translated".

In the study, translanguaging was particularly evident in electronic modes of communication. Year 10 EAL students conducted research into language use as part of a term-long unit of work entitled *Language, Literacy and Identity*, and an international student, Top, researched the use of hybrid Chinese-English (or 'Chinglish') by 39 of her Chinese-speaking friends. She found that hybrid language practices were often functional, normal, and playful. An excerpt from her research project is presented below:

- Functional: Chinglish is not a formal language so there is no special grammar rule. So we don't have to worry about being wrong when we use it. We don't have to think a

lot like we did when using English and Chinese. As long as both communicators understand, it will be fine,

- Normal: It is just a daily conversation actually but we use a lot of Chinglish,
- Playful: We mix the Chinese grammar and English grammar together. So there will be some sentence with ridiculous grammar.

One example of this last feature can be seen in Figure 1, with Sarah's statement in Chinglish: "I laugh bird when I heard his new song….so undingable…", full of meaning for Top and her friend.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Top also showed that this translanguaging was most often accomplished through electronic media such as text messaging or online chat, rather than oral conversation (Figure 2).

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

Her independent analysis of a Chinglish conversation further revealed metalinguistic sensitivity (Figures 1 and 3). Top was able to demonstrate through her sophisticated research project that, through her own heightened sense of metalinguistic awareness and access to otherwise largely unexplored and documented linguistic practices, she could contribute to furthering an understanding of translanguaging.

[INSERT FIGURE 3~~4~~ HERE]

Although students revealed a complex capacity to manage their multilingualism as it related to academic and social lives, staff—including both multilinguals and language learners—demonstrated a more limited understanding of translanguaging that reflected either resistance or passive acceptance. None seemed to consider the active use of translanguaging as a resource to support learning. The only staff interviewee who spoke of personal experience with hybrid language practices was Judy, who expressed a resistant view. She described her family members' use of hybridised languages negatively, as "broken Mandarin with a bit of English", elaborating, "except the English is Singlish… so it's really bad, broken".

Another multilingual teacher, John, also held a negative attitude towards translanguaging grounded in a view of separate monolingualism rather than recognising the connectedness of students' multilingual repertoires. Reflecting on his own efforts to become an English monolingual when he migrated, he stated, "It would be, I decided, much better in terms of progressing with my language if I really tried to like almost forget my language." He did not relate to translanguaging, believing it difficult and unnecessary to use more than one language in thought or communication. As he put it:

> The people who live here but still think in their native language, unless they are linguistic giants, they can like easily switch from one to one and use to think at the same time in both, I am not like this. (John)

Steve, a monolingual English speaker who had learned different languages while travelling, also took a view aligned with separate monolingualism but, in contrast to John, it was a positive one. Describing his own language learning experience as, "always trying, always failing", Steve saw multilingual students' communicative and cognitive flexibility as admirable yet beyond his reach:

> I just don't know what it'd be like to be able to have two lots of thoughts in my head at once... I just can't imagine it. I just can't understand how people can be bilingual. I just can't understand. (Steve)

Beyond these comments though, staff did not acknowledge the ideas or practices associated with translanguaging anywhere in response to the open questions in the questionnaire or during interviews.

***The use of multilingual resources to support learning***

There was a notable contrast between the rich and purposeful ways in which students used their multilingual resources to support their own learning, and the low value that many teachers assigned to the use of home language in the context of the curriculum. Students used their multilingual resources individually to support language, literacy, conceptual learning, and access to information. Mathematics was a significant domain for multilingual learning for six of the focus group participants, especially as it related to their interpretations of word problems. For example, Celeste explained, "When you read it you will think in Cantonese, like what this question is actually explaining. And then you will think of it that way and afterwards you will just write your equations". Two other students similarly explained that

they switched from English to their home language to think about “maths worded problems… when you read them and you don’t understand them” (Riya); specifically “for like, thinking, but not numbers” (Priya). In other words, access to the students’ multilingual resources helped facilitate thought processes through the home language and thereby supported mathematics learning.

Artefacts also revealed the use of students’ multilingual repertoires to access specific information for their independent research projects. Sanam’s experience of interviewing boat arrivals for her final year research project using Dari, for example, highlighted her skills in employing diverse multilingual resources to negotiate meaning and develop her understanding. Sanam first accessed information written in English, then conducted interviews multilingually: “two of my interviewees were non-English speakers, so the challenge I faced was to change the question from English to Dari and speak in Dari during the interview”. Sanam also communicated electronically with one interviewee:

> I did one more interview in Dari through email. I wrote my questions in a paper in Dari language took a photo of that and send for my interviewee. It was a bit hard for him to read my hand writing. That is why I explained every question he did not understood by texting. (Sanam)

She explained the range of linguistic skills used: “I listened to my interview recording both in Dari and in English as well as read the answers from the email, translated the Dari in English and wrote them down”. Sanam translated spoken and written Dari into English, exemplifying the complex multilingual skills students can employ in their learning without the structured support of teachers. However, despite Sanam’s capacity to access unique sources of information – as well as take the initiative to strengthen and extend her linguistic skills – she was assessed based on her final written work in English, rather than acknowledging the multilingual skills that were a critical part of her learning.

In contrast to the sophistication with which students employed multilingual resources for learning, survey results demonstrated that, in 90 percent of responses, teachers consigned multilingual practices to low stakes activities, such as private, oral, and temporary activities transitioning to English. As Figure 4 demonstrates, teachers recognised potential applications of home languages in social communication, oral, and private use such as personal notes, but multilingual practices were not highly valued for written work or assessment related tasks.

[INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE]

Steve, a school leader, believed that due to the use of English in assessments, home language use would necessarily remain low stakes. He contended, “in the end if you can’t write it and if you can’t say it, you’re marginalised. We’re insisting upon English… because that’s how this system works... And any mucking around is only going to be marginal”. Even where students made use of multilingual resources in their own learning, these approaches were unlikely to be valued where assessment policy and teacher practice were focussed on English monolingual performance.

***Multilingual connection and collaboration***

In addition to individual use of multilingual resources, at least two thirds of the student participants were found to connect with and support each other in the classroom using not only English and their home language, but also other linguae francae, generally a common language used in a country of previous residence. Faria, who identified Hazaragi as her dominant language, wrote about speaking Urdu, which she originally learned while living in Pakistan:

> Students don’t have to speak only English at school. They can use other languages beside their mother language, an example which I have is that I grew in Pakistan but my nationality is Afghanistan. Although the language of these two countries are not the same but I can understand and can speak both of them. (Faria)

> I have never been to Urdu school but I learnt it by watching cartoons in Urdu language. Apparently Urdu is similar or close to the same as Hindi. So, sometimes I speak in Hindi with my Indian friends which helps me to improve my Urdu. (Faria)

Urdu and Hindi proved to be important mediating languages for content learning as well as language development. In supporting a newcomer to her class, Selena explained that, “sometimes I helped the new international student, came from India. I spoke to her in Urdu”. A Hazaragi speaker, Selena used Urdu learnt in Pakistan, to communicate with Divya, whose home language was Gujarati and whose second language was Hindi, and help her understand subject content and vocabulary, as well as classroom English language.

Cantonese served a similar mediating purpose. Alice, an international student from Mainland China, reported being the only student in her Cantonese-speaking friendship group who spoke Mandarin as her home language. These students socialised and studied together through the medium of Cantonese to the degree that Alice felt that since arriving in Australia, her Cantonese had improved just as much as her English. The multilingual communication strategies of the students using linguae francae encompassed significant social and linguistic complexity. Students drew from their full multilingual repertoires, not only their home language or English, to identify and use languages effectively in each situation. Students used their shared multilingual resources for social interaction, to mediate content and English language learning, and as a resource for multiple language maintenance.

Though perhaps unaware of its complexities, teachers were conscious of multilingual student collaboration with questionnaire respondents identifying "talking with other students about school work" as the most commonly observed home language practice during lessons and study time. In art classes that Audrey taught, some students embraced the use of Persian script. Audrey described how a classmate supported Zahra, a student of Afghan background with limited Persian literacy:

> Zahra was trying to do a visual assignment using Persian text, but she'd get herself in an utter mess because it wasn't natural to her. So Farida would check everything for her... it was really interesting to watch it happen. (Audrey)

By working with these students, Audrey reported that she felt she learned a great deal herself about the different educational experiences and language practices of her students and their families.

The defining characteristic for teachers, however, was not necessarily the positive value ascribed to multilingual learning like that displayed by Audrey, but the inaction that accompanied this. With the exception of Clare, all the interviewees expressed doubt about how to convert beliefs about the value of multilingual resources into pedagogical action. Rather, their positive stance was expressed simply by permitting students to use their home languages in the classroom – as something incidental to learning and teaching – but without any active encouragement to capitalise on multilingualism as a resource to be strategically exploited. Where students used their languages to access information and sources for independent research, assessment still focussed on English language texts. Teachers' attitudes included "I don't mind it" (Audrey), "There's no harm in that" (Dennis), "I do not interfere"

(John), or “I don’t interrupt them” (Gerta). As Judy elaborated, “I think it’s just the act of not saying no to their home language. Then naturally they will want to use it”. Thus, multilingual learning strategies remained the student’s responsibility. Judy further explained: “if the girls find a way to use their language to associate with what I’m teaching then that’s great”.

***Teacher-led multilingual learning***

Even within this restrictive context, the data also showed that a small number of teachers were beginning to incorporate multilingual resources into teaching programs and classroom practice, although these varied in their relevance to students and contributions to learning. Clare, for example, a teacher of Religion, spoke about attempting to employ multilingualism in her class: “the three prayers that we say here at school, Mr Mohammadi translated into their language. Every couple of weeks they stood up and said their prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Our Father in their language”. Although these Christian prayers were translated into Dari, some of the students who read them were speakers of other languages, and many were of Muslim faith.

Judy was another teacher who explored different ways of incorporating student languages into her teaching. As she explained in an email, some of her graphic design students could better demonstrate creativity and critical thinking by brainstorming and developing notes in their home languages: “when asked to write their responses in English, they could only express one to two points. When asked to write their responses in their own language, they came up with an additional four points” (Pers. Comm. April 2014). Judy worked hard to win her coordinator’s approval to integrate this technique in her students’ next assignment, yet all three students ultimately elected to undertake their tasks in English. Judy observed that the reasons may have been to avoid perceived additional work and because “the girls didn’t want to feel ‘different’ to everyone else” (Pers. Comm. April 2014).

Although Clare and Judy’s initiatives met only limited success, other teacher-led approaches were more effective. Giving the students’ point of view of one such activity, Kiran and Ana described a Year 9 EAL task where “we had to translate the school policy in our language, so then other people from other countries can then understand it more easily”. The students developed a DVD with images, multilingual voiceovers, and English subtitles explaining school activities to parents. Ana recalled that when she took it home to her parents, rather than finding it useful: “I think they find it funny”. A somewhat more successful task, this had

potential for positive impact on students and parents in terms of connecting school and community in a playful way.

In another example, Steve recounted working with a Dinka speaking student in an otherwise conventional drama production where the student "took Oberon's part and I translated it into [modern] English. And then she translated that into Dinka, and then she said it in Dinka". This was a great success in Steve's eyes:

> She performed that role in a way she could never have done... Rather than her trying to take that language and fit into it, she came the other way. You know, she went into the role rather than the role being forced on her. (Steve)

Steve relished the student's personal contribution to the play, her dramatic performance, and the learning that resulted for the class. Calling the experience, "a moment, a crowning glory in a way", he was nevertheless left questioning, "how realistic is that all the time?" Steve's concerns related to the marginalisation of multilingual approaches in assessment and the additional workload for the student and teacher. This was an example of a teacher's actions challenging the dominant practice, but remaining constrained by monolingual assessment policy.

**Discussion**

Although the texts that comprise Australian educational policy are still largely shaped by English monolingual assumptions (Coleman 2012; Cross 2012; Schalley, Guillemin and Eisenschlas 2015), it is valuable to expand the conception of policy to account for the everyday practice of students and teachers (Hornberger and Johnson 2007; Plüddemann 2015; Saxena and Martin-Jones 2013). The data made it evident that in this school much of the practice of multilingual students, along with the attitudes and practices of some of the teachers, did not conform to the monolingual English approach dominant in Australian education. Each instance of students or teachers engaging multilingual resources in the school represents an opportunity to reconsider dominant practice (de Jong and Freeman Field 2010). Although students' multilingual practices actively challenge de facto language policy, it is not until teachers purposefully apply these multilingual resources in classroom practice that more enduring transformation is made possible (Benson 2013, 295; García, Skutnabb-Kangas, and Torres-Guzman 2006, 38).

Students in the study overwhelmingly demonstrated positive attitudes towards their

multilingualism, and applied a range of their multilingual resources to individual learning and collaboration at school. Students' perception of the benefits of multilingualism mirrored the additional cognitive and communicative resources recognised by Cummins (2000, 2009), García (2009), and Hélot (2012). This was evident, for example, in Zahera's reflection on multilingualism and Thelma's focus group comments characterising her languages as additional tools. Students including Faria and Layla also demonstrated sophisticated metalinguistic skills when they reflected on their multilingualism (Cummins 2000; García 2009), and student research projects highlighted the contribution that multilingual adolescents can themselves make to further our understanding of translanguaging. Top's research in her project is one example which particularly related to hybrid language practices in computer-mediated contexts (see Canagarajah 2011, 6). In individual learning and collaboration, students utilised elements of their multilingual repertoires, including linguistic knowledge, metalinguistic understanding, conceptual knowledge embodied in different languages, and complex cross-linguistic communication using lingua francae (Canagarajah 2011, 8; Velasco and García 2014). Multilingual learning for these students was both complex and resourceful, diverging from prescribed monolingual ways of learning and challenging de facto policy.

In contrast to students' rich multilingual practice, the monolingual habitus was most obviously manifested in the rejection by some staff of students' multilingual resources. This was seen when students' audible languages were prohibited, as in Clare's policing of student schoolyard language use. It was also evident when teachers failed to acknowledge the legitimacy of multilingual identities and hybrid language practices (see de Jong and Freeman Field 2010; García 2009; Hélot and Young 2006), such as Judy's and John's rejection of the legitimacy of translanguaging. Where translanguaging is denigrated, unacknowledged, or not understood, its use as a pedagogical resource remains limited. These rejections reinforce exclusionary monolingual approaches and constrict multilingual identities and ways of learning (Cummins 2006; Velasco and García 2014) to the extent that some students may prefer to identify as monolingual. Teacher rejection of multilingualism sustains the de facto monolingual English language policy and propagates educational disadvantage for multilingual students (Shohamy 2006). However, dominance need not equate to exclusive practice, and it is clear from the data that students and some teachers did find ways to engage with multilingual resources for learning.

The most common response to student multilingual practice by teachers was the position of

passive acceptance. These teachers observed students and accepted their use of multilingual resources and collaboration but felt unable to convert this attitude into purposeful and active pedagogy (Coleman 2012; García, Skutnabb-Kangas and Torres-Guzman 2006, 21). These teachers included Audrey, Dennis, and Gerta, and at times John and Judy, who recognised to some extent the problematic mismatch between policy and their students' multilingual experiences and approaches to learning. However, there are limits to the transformative potential of passive support and genuine educational advantage requires focussed and explicit multilingual learning strategies (Benson 2013, 292; Canagarajah 2011; Cummins 2006). Thus, although passive acceptance of students' multilingual learning contrasted with dominant monolingual practice, it did not actively challenge or transform policy.

Multilingual students took an initial step towards challenging policy when they engaged their multilingual resources in asserting their identities, interacting socially, and learning both individually and collaboratively. It was in the interaction between student and teacher approaches that the transformative potential of multilingual practices emerged. Students' agency was supported and the challenge to policy was strengthened where teachers made conscious decisions and took positive action to incorporate multilingual resources in their teaching. The data revealed varying levels of success in student engagement and learning outcomes, as can be seen in the experiences of teachers Clare, Judy, Steve, and students Kiran and Ana. One limiting factor perceived by teachers was external assessment focussed on English language tasks, demonstrating how the language of assessment 'washes back' to classroom practice (Benson 2013, 294; Schalley, Guillemin and Eisenschlas 2015). However, multilingual practices that appeared very successful included outcomes that were meaningful to the students and/or related to assessment, technical and practical support, and involved "sustainable" tasks in the sense of not imposing significant additional student or teacher workload (see de Jong and Freeman Field 2010; García 2009, 318).

**Conclusion**

This ethnographic investigation revealed a linguistically heterogeneous high school as a site of complex multilingual practice on the part of students. For the multilingual adolescents here, multilingualism was a strong and generally positive aspect of students' identities as individuals and learners. Despite a lack of attention to multilingualism in official policy and curriculum, students employed their multilingual resources in sophisticated ways as part of individual and collaborative learning, and in so doing, drew on a wide range of cognitive,

linguistic, metalinguistic, communicative, and social skills. Students did this with varying degrees of support from their teachers, from outright rejection of multilingual practices, through to passive permission to make use of their own multilingual resources in the classroom, towards active application of such resources into the curriculum. Although teachers had little influence on externally determined assessments, they were able to incorporate multilingual approaches into their interactions with students, teaching resources, and classroom practice. Teachers could choose not to subscribe to the dominant monolingual ideology which shapes Australian education. Additionally, the absence of official policy for the language of education in Australia created opportunities within this school for many students and some teachers to begin to open up small but important opportunities for multilingual resources to support learning.

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