

Primary school students' experiences of intercultural communication

*Internationalising Learning and
Teaching in Academic Settings
Colloquium, November 2009*

Ruth Fielding, The University of Sydney
r.fielding@usyd.edu.au

Introduction

- Intercultural communication explored through the researcher's interaction with primary school students
- year 5 and 6 students' accounts about their communication in two (or more) languages
- how it feels to learn in an environment where languages are valued
- future undergraduate and postgraduate students of our universities

Linking to Prior Literature

- a key consideration for universities is development of mutual understanding (Hughes, 2008)
- growing numbers of international students, and increasing diversity amongst local students' linguistic and cultural experiences
- international education involves moving between *at least* two languages and cultures (Crichton & Scarino, 2007)
- “a social, linguistic and cultural act that involves dialogue, a process which is central to intercultural awareness” (Crichton & Scarino, 2007, p. 4.4)

Linking to Prior Literature

- Internationalisation involves two aims: to prepare graduates who are internationally knowledgeable; and to prepare graduates who are interculturally competent (Stone, 2006)
- Intercultural Communicative Competence (Corbett, 2003)
- Five “savoirs” (Byram, 1997)
- Knowing about, Knowing how, Knowing why and Knowing oneself (Moran, 2001)

Prior Literature...

- NSW language education context, intercultural communication within languages syllabus outcomes of *moving between cultures* and *making linguistic connections* (Board of Studies, 2003)
- Students describe intercultural competence as their ability to compare their languages and cultures and negotiate an identity within those two or more languages and cultures
- Bilingual identity being the ways that bilingual people position themselves between two languages and cultures (Fielding 2009b, Kanno, 2003)

The present study

- Students in a primary school program in NSW who participate in a bilingual education program
- investigated through questionnaire, journal and interview
- Examining connection to their school and home languages
- Accounts of two or more languages and two or more cultures

Students' Voices:

“it’s good even if they don’t understand I like that they learn it still” (Genevieve)

“all my friends ... they speak, like, all these really cool languages ...it’s just so much better to know that other people speak other languages not just me” (Antonia)

“well, yeah it does help you and it just makes you feel better of yourself...so you’re like different...and you can say well I speak a bit of French and just to put you on that different side and stuff” (Elizabeth)

Students' Voices:

“ if um I go to a school completely just English I say I’m from France and they say that’s amazing we’re all from Australia... and here it’s full of French people so I feel a bit more comfortable”

Students' Voices:

Do you think it's important to you to feel both French and Australian cos you've got that connection?

Genevieve: yeah I've got two different backgrounds, which I like

So you think that makes you a bit different in a good way?

Genevieve: yeah I'm not just from one culture, from France AND Australia (students own emphasis)

and do you think that helps you to understand people who are from other countries and how they might feel a bit better?

Genevieve: yeah when I talk to people in France they speak fully French and some of the jokes I don't get or anything but um I do like that. Yeah there's the difference between living in France all your life and living in Australia

Teachers' Voices:

- “They have a great acceptance of other languages and that kind of thing.” (Anna)
- “...it's open to any language so then the kids come in with any language and they deliver this exact structure in whatever language so we've had Serbian, Mandarin, Italian in past years” (Anna)

Teachers' Voices:

- “They used to be excellent and they’re no longer excellent and... that happens sometimes, if they feel different than the others cos they’re not regular students they’re the Francophone students and they don’t want to feel different.” (Luc)
- “some of them this year are beginning to get a bit more reluctant to speak in French because they’re at that age where they’re getting a bit more embarrassed so we try to play lots of games” (Trish)

Conclusions

- school context as a factor that enhances these students’ levels of confidence with bilingualism
- also a factor that makes students more understanding of people from a variety of cultural backgrounds
- bilingual education settings that foster a positive model of bilingual education also enhance intercultural communication and understanding
- Students educated in increasingly intercultural ways in their primary and secondary schooling bring valuable skills to university

References

Bain, L. Scott, S. & Steinberg, A. (2004) Socialization Experiences and Coping Strategies of Adults Raised Using Spoken Language, *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*; Vol. 9, No. 1; pp. 120 –128.

Baker, C. (2006a) Bilingual Education, *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, Boston: Elsevier, pp. 772-780.

Bartram, B. (2006) An examination of perceptions of parental influence on attitudes to language learning, *Educational Research*, Vol. 48, No. 2, pp. 211-221.

Board of Studies (2003) *French K-10 Syllabus*. Sydney, Board of Studies NSW.

Brown, D. H. (1994) *Principles of language learning and teaching*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

References

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Commonwealth Government (2009) Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning in Practice – Modules and Report-in Brief, Canberra: Commonwealth Government. Available from: www.iltlp.unisa.edu.au

Corbett, J. (2003). *An intercultural approach to English language teaching*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Crichton, J. & Scarino, A. (2007) 'How Are We to Understand the "Intercultural Dimension"? An Examination of the Intercultural Dimension of Internationalisation in the Context of Higher Education in Australia'. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 30, No. 1, p. 4.

Cummins, J. (1996) *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society*. Ontario: California Association for Bilingual Education

References

Cummins, J. (2000) *Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Cummins, J. (2003) Bilingual Education: Basic Principles. In J. Dewaele, A. Housen & L. Wei (Eds) *Bilingualism: Beyond Basic Principles*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Eisenclas, S. and Trevaskes, S. (2007) Developing Intercultural Communication Skills through Intergroup Interaction, *Intercultural Education*. v18 n5 p413-425 Dec 2007

Fielding, R. (2009a) 'Student Negotiation of Bilingual Identity' In S. May (Ed) *Language Education and Diversity (LED) 2007 Refereed Conference Proceedings*, University of Waikato, New Zealand.

Fielding, R. (2009b) *Speaking Two Languages is a Gift: A Case Study Exploring Student Bilingual Identity*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, The University of Sydney.

References

Hughes, R. (2008) 'Internationalisation of Higher Education and Language Policy: Questions of Quality and Equity'. *Higher education management and policy*, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 102.

Kanno, Y. (2003) *Negotiating Bilingual and Bicultural Identities: Japanese returnees betwixt two worlds*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Kirsch, C. (2006) Young Children Learning Languages in a Multilingual Context, *International Journal of Multilingualism*, Vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 258-279.

Kramsch, C. (2008) *Third Places in Applied Linguistics*, Plenary Talk, AILA 2008 15th World Congress of Applied Linguistics, Essen, Germany, 28th August 2008.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

References

McNamara, T. (1987). Language and social identity: Some Australian studies. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 10, pp. 33–58.

McNamara, T. (1997). Theorizing Social Identity: What do we mean by social identity? Competing frameworks, competing discourses. *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 3, pp. 561-567.

Moloney, R. (2007) *Intercultural Competence in Young Language Learners: A case study*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, The University of Sydney.

Moloney, R. & Harbon, L. 'I speak therefore I am: Self-perceptions of identity in immersion program language learners as an expression of intercultural competence', *University of Sydney Papers in TESOL*, Vol. 3, 2008.

References

Norton, B. (2000) *Identity and Language Learning: Gender, Ethnicity and Educational Change*, Essex, England: (Longman) Pearson Education.

Rew, A. & Campbell, J. R. (1999) The Political Economy of Identity and Affect. In J. R. Campbell & A. Rew (Eds) *Identity and Affect: Experiences of identity in a globalising world*, London: Pluto Press, pp. 1-38.

Stone, N. (2006). "Conceptualising Intercultural Effectiveness for University Teaching". *Journal of studies in international education*, Vol. 10, No. 4, p. 334.

Wigfield, A., Eccles, J., Iver, D., Reuman, D. & Midgley, C. (1991) Transitions During Early Adolescence: Changes in Children's Domain-Specific Self- Perceptions and General Self-Esteem Across the Transition to Junior High School, *Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 552-565.