

Righting wrongs and writing rights into language policy in Australia

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Abstract

Learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) in Australia appear to suffer from impoverished understandings of first and second language acquisition. In the name of accountability they are also caught up in arguable procedures for assessing literacy in classrooms widely characterised by linguistic, social and cultural diversity. Further, an alleged 'Literacy Crisis' exacerbates the facile model of literacy presented in policy. An examination of discourse in language and literacy policies suggests that a focus on 'teaching the basics' maintains existing distributions of power and knowledge within society. A regime of testing primarily aimed at accountability ultimately subjects education to market forces. Reporting the results of mass testing inevitably leads to comparison between schools, and hence enacts key doctrines of neo-liberalism: competition and individual choice. Neither of these doctrines serves indigenous Australians or immigrant and refugee families who are in the process of settling and have little voice. In such a context, is it possible to right policy wrongs and to write language rights into Australian policies that can satisfy the needs of all learners?

Key words: English as a Second Language (ESL), discourse, language policy and planning; bilingualism; Australia

Introduction

Any discussion of language policy in Australia must recognise that the context is that of a highly multilingual population. This necessitates not only a great deal of teaching of English as a Second Language¹ (ESL) but also close attention in policy to the consequences of this national context.

Australia has always been a multilingual continent. Historically, Australian policy has sometimes supported but more often ignored this fact². Post-colonial Australia

chose to subdue languages and promoted a monolingual English-only perception of Australia. But an Australia secure in its identity could acknowledge not only that its indigenous and Australian-born communities are already multilingual but also that Australia is in a good position to build on the linguistic adaptability of immigrant communities (Clyne, 2005).

The first official Australian policy on languages, the *National Policy on Languages* (Lo Bianco, 1987), recognized the multilingual nature of Australian-born and immigrant communities. This research reveals that unlike subsequent policy, this short-lived policy recognized the values of bilingualism including the contributions of immigrant communities across society. It presented bilingualism as a resource within communities that should be harnessed as a universal resource for the economic, social and educational development of the nation. Within this frame, English as a Second Language had a legitimate role in policy and supported both immigrants and Australian-born learners (Herriman, 1996; Moore, 1995). Later policies frame community

¹ I use the term "ESL", since it is currently the most common term used in Australia to describe the teaching of English to multilingual and immigrant students who do not speak English as their first language. The nomenclature and definitions of English language learners are under review and the preferred term, due to its inclusive nature, at the *National Symposium on Assessing English as Second/Additional Language in the Australian Context* held in Sydney on 20-21 February, 2009, was "English as an Additional Language or Dialect" (EAL/D) (University of New South Wales, 2009).

² See (Herriman, 1996; Liddicoat, 1991) for the history of Australian language policy

languages as a problem and consequently devalue multilingualism and English as a Second Language programs (Lo Bianco, 2000, 2001). My research suggests that economic discourse and competing priorities demote multilingualism and the desire of immigrant communities to maintain language. In the process, the voice of immigrants and their advocates is disabled or silenced (Ives, 2008).

Research methods and analysis

The motivation for my research was to gain a deeper understanding of the current status of ESL in Victorian schools in light of wider discursive shifts in society. I integrated linguistic analysis and social theory (Blommaert, 2005, p. 24; Fairclough, 1992, 1995) with a view to making recommendations that may improve ESL provision and practice. I give “illustrative examples” (Seale, 1999, p. 88) of the journey of ESL discourse in policy from 1970’s to the present. Guided by the processes of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which is described as a generic method, I immersed myself in “mute evidence” (Hodder, 2000, p. 703) and in the data that could be retrieved from the language used in policy texts. I continually compared the data from relevant eras in order to explore shifts in discourse. Grounded theory was the backdrop to the overall approach of Critical Discourse Analysis.

Research methods involved the close examination of documents. The absence of ESL in planning and policy from 1997 was apparent but the discourses that enabled this absence need to be located. I identified patterns in the data and reasoned inductively to create a holistic picture of ESL policy discourse. Policy texts were highlighted to bring attention to key words, phrases, patterns and themes. Comments on the data were recorded and key themes and discursive features were noted. Interdiscursivity and the characteristics of discourse from each era were identified and

recorded. Working across documents, I recorded comparative, contrastive and incommensurate data on a matrix. Elements that surprised, confirmed or challenged my understanding of the positioning of ESL within the policies were also noted.

Policy and Discourse

Since 1987, governments, policy and discourse in education and community sectors have changed dramatically (Kalantzis, 1997). Such political changes are not exclusive to Australia, but have occurred in other English-speaking countries and developed nations (Apple, 2004). Neo-liberal principles have turned away from an inclusive language policy that supported multilingualism in countries such as Australia (Clyne, 2005; Lo Bianco, 1999, 2001). In 1991, not long after the *National Policy on Languages*, the *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* (DEET, 1991) activated an economic discourse that marginalised the voice of immigrant and indigenous communities and diminished support for language programs. In 1998 *Literacy for All* (DEETYA, 1998) demoted languages further by neglecting languages altogether to focus on an alleged national crisis in literacy standards³ (hereafter referred to as the ‘Literacy Crisis’).

At the turn of the millennium, an alliance of neo-liberal and neo-conservative principles nurtured racism and intolerance within Australia’s pluralist and multicultural society (Apple, 2004; Kalantzis, 1997). Coupled with this, funds for differentiated programs were ‘broadbanded’ into programs focused on foundational literacy in the primary years of schooling (Hammond, 2001; Michell, 1999). This resulted in the collapse of many ESL and literacy related programs in schools and introduced the notion that all teachers are teachers of language and

³The Literacy Crisis is alleged by Minister Kemp, which I describe later in this article and has been identified and discussed by academics in TESOL and literacy (Freebody, 1997; Hammond, 1999; Lo Bianco & Freebody, 2001)

literacy. Thereafter, the specialisation of Teaching of English as a Second or Other Language (TESOL) lost status and consequently advocacy for the needs and aspirations of ESL learners diminished (Lo Bianco, 1999, 2002).

The impacts of the ‘Literacy Crisis’ on ESL

In the policy context of the government’s alleged ‘Literacy Crisis’, languages and ESL became subservient to the ‘crisis’ and battled for survival (Lo Bianco, 2002). A silencing of ESL occurred concurrently with the ‘crisis’ in literacy standards that concentrated funds into early years programs and foundational literacy. The ‘Literacy Crisis’ focused teacher attention on standardised assessment and on meeting benchmarks, which ultimately shape classroom activities in ways that may not meet the language needs of ESL students (Davison, 1999; Davison, Leung, & Mohan, 2001; Hammond & Derewianka, 1999). Effectively, the ‘Literacy Crisis’ focused attention on literacy for mother tongue English speakers at the expense of programs for ESL students (Lo Bianco, 2000).

The ‘Literacy Crisis’ alleges that literacy standards are dropping and that education is in crisis. It asserts that children are less literate than their predecessors. Its policy demands that schools and school systems act on this in dramatic ways and commit to improving standards. These claims were based on data taken from benchmarking in reading levels (Davison, 1999; McKay, 1998) and standardised tests such as the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN⁴). The reliability of the tests is questionable because of their universal application and implied assumptions about the linguistic uniformity

⁴ NAPLAN tests have been applied nationally since 2008 and may soon be used as a basis to measure school and teacher performance. See <http://www.naplan.edu.au/>

of the student population⁵. In the case of immigrant ESL students, whose social and educational experiences may differ greatly from those of the incumbent population, a standardised test for mother tongue English speakers is highly unlikely to provide a context in which they can all flourish equally and in which they can demonstrate their knowledge of language and literacy in English (Davison, 2001; McKay, 2001, 2006)⁶.

The consequences of testing and benchmarking aimed at mother tongue English speaker are that bilingualism is presented as a deficit – a barrier to meeting outcomes in English literacy (McKay, 2001). Good policy would treat bilingualism as a resource to support English literacy development.

The problem of testing

So why are ESL students subjected to testing standardised essentially for native speakers of English? What discourse is at play to allow a scenario where teachers must test students when the tests bear limited relevance to ESL students? Policy-makers may feel that reading about student ability in the form of numerical data is beneficial but does it represent our students adequately for educational purposes? How is it that ESL students are placed in a position where their outcomes can

⁵ The claim that a single test can be standardized on a very varied learner population was seriously contested at the *National Symposium on Assessing English as a second/other language in the Australian Context*. (University of New South Wales, 2009). The “*Symposium*” included presentations from academics, practicing teachers, teacher educators and ESL experts working in state and territory government education departments across Australia. All presentations were based in research and were unanimous in the view that standardized testing was not inclusive of English language learners and did not provide assessment informed by classroom activities. The website for the event includes papers and recommendations arising from the Symposium. (University of New South Wales, 2009)

represent them as having 'literacy problems'? How can it be that bilingual students can be seen as a 'deficit' in literacy classrooms? An outcome that a native English speaker may be assessed to have 'failed', may equally be an outcome that an English language learner can be assessed as having 'achieved' (Cross, in press, pp. 7-8). Is it possible to respect the rights of bilingual students by applying a universal test to students and one-size-fits-all policy to schools?

The Discourse of Australian Language and Literacy Policies

Through the examination of the discourse of language and literacy policy it is possible to reveal a correlation between social and political changes and the impact of these changes on education and equity for ESL students. The three national policies on language and literacy that I have already mentioned, the *National Policy on Languages*, the *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* and *Literacy For All* differ from each other in style and discourse.

What follows is an outline of each policy according to the ways in which multilingualism is framed and the manner in which the policy orients languages as a 'resource', a 'right' or a 'problem' (Ruiz, 1984). I identify the ways in which each policy subdues or allows the voice of communities to be heard and the nature of the changes to education that stem from each policy.

The National Policy on Languages (1987) A collaborative style and an inclusive multicultural discourse

The *National Policy On Languages* framed multilingualism as a universal resource and advanced intellectual capital arguments for language and literacy. It brought together wide interest groups to develop a coherent approach to languages, ESL and literacy, based on clear underlying principles. It advocated intellectual and cultural enrichment, and respected individual, community and national interests. The

National Policy On Languages provides a philosophical framework in which ESL programs were nourished and developed (Clyne, 1988; Herriman, 1996; Moore, 1995)

Part One, Rationale, details the philosophical framework that underpins the policy⁷. The principles should lead to "explicit", "comprehensive" and "co-ordinated" action. They should allow for "balance", "economy" and "enhance excellence". They create space for active participation from various interest groups. The phrases "permitting appropriate action"; "enabling"; "competing interests...against the general needs of the nation"; "no intrusion"; "coherence", "a co-ordinated approach" and "redressing inequalities" encourage universal involvement and collaboration to enact the policy in alignment with stated principles. These

⁷ Philosophical framework of the National Policy on Languages (pp.6-9):

Specific principles will be characterised by:

- i. explicitness and clarity (permitting appropriate action by all relevant bodies and enabling review and evaluation over time);
- ii. comprehensiveness (enabling all affected groups, bodies and languages to participate);
- iii. balance and economy (enabling competing interests and claims to be measured against the general needs of the nation and the effectiveness, cost a feasibility of proposed actions);
- iv. a co-ordinated and national approach (this will attempt to ensure the various bodies associated with the enactment of the policy operate as far as possible with the same objectives, that there is no intrusion into the autonomous or particular responsibilities of State and Territory governments, and that as far as possible the roles of all groups are developed as a partnership);
- v. the due weight be allocated to the maintenance and enhancement of standards of excellence in language education (ensuring quality) and to overcoming disadvantages, social inequalities and discrimination (redressing inequalities).
- vi.

wordings pay respect to language rights and to all communities and organizations that were given a voice through a policy that respected a grass roots and bottom-up approach to governance and management.

The *National Policy on Languages* was optimistic that collaboration between government and civil society would maximise languages as a resource and build on existing linguistic diversity in the community (Clyne, 1988; Herriman, 1996, pp. 49-51 and 60-41). It was framed as a public declaration of “national expectations” that “initiates action” rather than being “prescriptive” (p. 70). Consultation and involvement are shown throughout the text and in the black and white photographs of a range of Australian communities. The collaborative process to produce the policy is evident in contributions from the states and territories (pp. 204-269) and in its commitment to represent a coalition of interests. The phrases “universal”, “contribution”, “balance”, “participate”, “needs of the nation” and “developed as a partnership” stimulate proactivity and ownership of the policy and the culture and programs that stemmed from it.

Part Two outlines a policy in which multilingualism is a resource and ESL is a positive and necessary program to support linguistic diversity. It discusses the importance and prevalence of languages, of Englishes and of literacy in Standard Australian English. Four broad strategies underlie the policy⁸. Part 2B “English for All” (pp. 78-93) discusses English for mother tongue and second language learners and its relevance to intellectual development

⁸ The four strategies are: The conservation of Australia’s linguistic resources; The development and expansion of these resources; The integration of Australian language teaching and language use efforts with national, economic, social and cultural policies; The provision of information and services in languages understood by clients” (p.70).

and the “universal aims of schooling”⁹ (p. 79). The policy “gives primacy to efforts to enhance mastery of English” (p. 81) and maintains a need for Australia “to educate a linguistically more adaptable population”. It recognizes that many Australians are adding English “to an existing linguistic repertoire” (p. 85). The overall purpose of ESL teaching is firstly for students “to obtain full access to English proficiency and, highly desirably, to aim for first language maintenance where possible” (p. 87). Various models for child ESL education are presented and bilingual education is acknowledged as ideal for linguistic and cognitive development as well as contributing to “bolstering the self-esteem, family cohesion and identity of children”. The policy continues to explain a complex relationship between proficiency in English and educational success, by linking it to a “consonance” between home and school values. It advocates “coherence” between all ESL programs and that “ESL ought properly to be seen as part of English language education” (p. 92).

The Australian Language and Literacy Policy (1991)

A directive style and a discourse of economic reform

The *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* claimed to build upon the principles of the *National Policy on Languages* but in fact foregrounded economic reform and laid the discursive ground for its eventual replacement. The underlying principles of the *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* are based on an unquestioned need for economic reform. It claimed to be consultative, yet its economic discourse distanced community consultation and participation. Indeed much of the criticism of the *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* (Herriman, 1996; Moore, 1995) was that it replaced the *National Policy on Languages’* consultative style with a directive style of

⁹ As defined in: The Quality of Education in Australia

decision-making. It prioritised foreign languages that were linked to trade as well as literacy and ESL for more efficient and safe workplaces. Funding for child ESL was increased but adult ESL was outsourced. The policy allowed child ESL programs to expand but undermined multilingualism by devaluing community languages. It also imposed outcomes-based assessment on adult ESL, which had negative consequences for programs, pedagogy and the ESL profession (Moore, 1995, 2001, 2005).

Far from building on the *National Policy on Languages*, the *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* in fact diverged from it and introduced an economic discourse. This is apparent through word selection, the proportion of text devoted to economic concerns and policy priorities. Although it states that Australia is a “multilingual and pluralistic society” it asserted a wider need for micro-economic and macro-economic reform. It foregrounded human resources arguments for education maintaining: “...a better appreciation of the possible contribution to national development which may be made through ... Australia’s best resource – its people” (p. 3).

The choice of the words “afford” and “human resources” highlight the human resource argument:

“Australia can no longer afford to be insular and introspective if it wishes to compete successfully in the global economy. For Australia to achieve its goal of becoming a truly ‘clever country’, it cannot ignore the needs and capacities of its human resources” (p. 12).

The heading “The Context: Priorities and Initiatives” (pp. 12-31), suggests the possibility of addressing universal intellectual, cultural and educational aims for language and literacy. Instead, it is a 20-page section devoted to economic reform

and devolved responsibility of government¹⁰.

The policy does not state a philosophical framework drawn from the principles of language and literacy education but frames these as skills needed for Australia’s economic development in an “increasingly internationalist world” and a “global economy”.

“An Australian language and literacy policy must be seen as part of a broader process of national social policy development. The ALLP is relevant to other current employment, education and training issues. It must be informed and must itself inform the broader contemporary environment of education, social and economic policy. It must be firmly anchored in policies addressing the nature of Australia as a multilingual and pluralistic society within an increasingly internationalist world, and policies addressing the needs for both micro-economic and macro-economic reform”. (p. 12)

The *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* lists 351 submissions from individuals and organizations, which may represent either consultation or protestation. The controversy arising from the Green Paper (DEET, 1990) preceding the White Paper (DEET, 1991) however, attests to the wide

¹⁰ “The Context: Priorities and Initiatives” (pp. 12-31) are detailed under the following headings:

- Opportunities, access and responsibilities for Australia’s human resources
- Economic security and productivity for individuals, enterprises and the nation
- Trading with the World
- The shared role of governments, the private sector, business and industry, the broader community and individuals in language and literacy
- Broad funding responsibilities for language and literacy
-

and effective community consultation of the *National Policy on Languages*. In contrast to the collaboration in the *National Policy on Languages*, the *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* talks of “shared roles” and “responsibilities”. The meanings of ‘responsibility’ and ‘consultation’ are distorted when government is devolving responsibility and demoting consultation with the subjects of the policy (Clyne, 1997).

The *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* envisages a “shared role of governments, the private sector, business and industry, the broader community and individuals in language and literacy” (p. 26, section 2.4). It devolves responsibility for literacy education to individuals. Skills can be “bought” from the “expanding” post-compulsory education sector, which is “integrating [its] efforts more effectively with the national interest.” This devolution of responsibility marks the introduction of a neo-liberal discourse that will subsequently flourish.

With the title “Australia’s Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy” it is noticeable that “language” is in the singular and it is clear that the language concerned is English. English is declared to be Australia’s official rather than common language. The *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* frames language and literacy as developing human resources and emphasises the value of English for employment, and of particular languages for trade (Herriman, 1996). These foci undermine and de-prioritise Australia’s language ecologies and ESL. They suppress “overcoming the past neglect of Australia’s linguistic resources” (Lo Bianco, 1987, p. 18) and use trade as the main rationale for language learning. The *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* recites the *National Policy on Languages’* reasons for learning languages (p. 62) but adds that languages can “improve employability”. Using economic arguments to bolster the rationale for language learning, employers are urged to “reward”

language knowledge which “need not be an additional cost” if funded through the schools system. Moreover, the “users of the products of education” (employers) should be involved in policy making as “there is little advantage to the nation” in spending money acquiring language skills “if employers have no plan to seek out, take advantage of and reward the skills available to them” (p. 29-30).

The Australian Language and Literacy Policy supports social cohesion arguments to promote “greater tolerance” and “greater confidence” inter-generationally, but confirms its serious doubt that languages are a resource, particularly when it implies that they may be “a nuisance” (p. 62). Bilingual programs that would support existing linguistic resources in communities are described as “effective” but “expensive” (p. 52).

The *Australian Language and Literacy Policy* tended to point to an ‘economic crisis’ rather than a ‘literacy crisis’. It did however lay the groundwork for Minister Kemp to proclaim a ‘literacy crisis’ that the *Literacy For All* policy would deal with.

Literacy For All (1998)

An authoritarian style and a discourse of crisis

There is no evidence that *Literacy For All* allowed space for community groups to be heard or for teachers to advocate for marginalized groups such as immigrant families. In fact it distanced communities, professional associations and teachers by presenting the policy within the context of the alleged ‘Literacy Crisis’. *Literacy For All* responded to the alleged crisis by imposing accountability measures. The ‘Literacy Crisis’ was promoted under the Howard government to reform education through ‘top down’ policy and therefore without consultation. It was accompanied by skepticism about the value of the work of teachers, enabled by the media focusing on allegedly poor literacy standards in schools. *Literacy For All* set a “challenge” for schools through the ministers of education that was

driven by Minister Kemp via written policy and various public appearances (Kemp, 1996a, 1996b).

Dr Kemp's Bert Kelly Lecture entitled "Schools and the Democratic Challenge" marked a decisive moment in a strong discursive shift to promote the neo-liberal principles of choice, accountability and state regulation through standardized testing and benchmarking (Kemp, 1996b). The lecture characterizes an era of turmoil for literacy teachers and the distancing of professional opinion in the name of "accountability". Kemp spoke of a "cult of secrecy" around literacy achievements that "must be addressed as a national priority". Any understanding of the complexities involved in language and literacy learning were markedly absent in Kemp's presentations. He focused on the need for professionals and policy makers to be "accountable" and mentioned "literacy problems" and "illiteracy" that must be measured, on the grounds that "Clearly education policy and practice has failed to improve the literacy standards of a significant proportion of young people." (Kemp, 1996b).

Literacy For All comprises a set of goals agreed to by ministers of education that aim to ensure "real improvement" (p. 5) in literacy standards of primary school children through state-regulated testing. It identifies ESL students as a "heterogeneous group" whose needs "require[s] consideration" for the "improvement of literacy outcomes of all children" (p. 33) since ESL and disadvantaged students are both identified as underachieving in literacy. Despite this, literacy is a "challenge" but ESL students only "require consideration". *Literacy For All* does not include a philosophical framework or discussion of Australia's linguistic resources and the nexus between language and literacy. Indeed its focus on the crisis in standards works to restrict the scope of English literacy (Doecke, 1997) as well as the linguistic resources that can enhance students' skills (Lo Bianco & Freebody, 2001).

The title "Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools" excludes languages, second language development and adult education by omission. It announces that foundational literacy in English is crucial for further study, training and work (p. 7). Accountability is fore-grounded via directive statements without an accompanying context, framework, rationale or philosophical statement.

Despite stating that: "Educational accountability should be undertaken co-operatively, not from above" the *Literacy For All* had a top-down, authoritative tone and no community presence (Lo Bianco, 2001). Unlike *Literacy For All's* predecessors, teachers and educationalists are not presented as partners in educational and policy-making processes but are distanced. *Literacy For All* casts doubt that teachers are willing to be accountable seemingly on the grounds that they do not aim for high standards. In effect, the policy de-professionalises teachers by seeding the idea that they don't work hard enough or aim for high standards:

"By developing high standards teachers can demonstrate their willingness to be accountable.....as well as making their work more transparent to the public" (p. 6)

Accountability is fore-grounded via directive statements without an accompanying context, framework, rationale or philosophical statement. The goals and sub goal agreed to by ministers in March 1997 claim to be "inclusive of all children":

"That every child leaving primary school should be numerate, and be able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level.

That every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years" (p. 9)

These narrow goals do not relate to community desires for multilingualism or to complex notions of literacy for a world that is experiencing significant, ongoing technological change. They relate to a narrow and monolingual concept of literacy, the setting of standards, state-regulated assessment and a philosophical framework that omits bilingualism (Cross, in press). Educators, communities and other subjects of the policy, were not invited to participate through contribution, implementation or review processes, which were determined by state and federal ministers alone. Instead, accountability measures were used to ensure that standards improve. The rationale for accountability and directives in the policy are to be found in the language of urgency and in the context of the alleged 'literacy crisis' that pre-empted the policy's release. It asserts a directive authority over teachers through headings about what teachers and schools "will" do.¹¹

Parental involvement is linked to accountability. The policy maintains that there need to be "new ways" of encouraging teachers to develop "high standards" and "demonstrate their willingness to be accountable" (p.6). These statements suggest that teachers have not been accountable. They distance teachers. They lead to intensification and diminished control

in schools (Apple, 2004, p. 25) to strengthen neo-liberal principles where the "market" dictates and the state regulates.

In Kemp's public appearances, mention of ESL students is notably absent. References to ESL students in *Literacy For All* are limited and are dispersed throughout the text referring to ESL students with a variety of labels that are not defined. Section 5, "Aspects of Literacy" discusses the diverse needs of children "including those who speak English as a second language, bilingual students and indigenous students" (p. 31). The policy asserts that ESL students have "on average, lower English literacy levels than students from English-speaking backgrounds" and that they therefore need to be considered but offers no further insights into this other than the use of the ESL Scales (Curriculum Corporation, 1994) or ESL Companion (Board of Studies, 1996) as useful support for early years educators. It alludes to some "possible advantages" of bilingual education but neglects to state its own position on bilingual education. It mentions the benefits of ESL professional development for teachers, but again, neglects to state its own position. We are left with the message that literacy is a "challenge" but ESL merely "requires consideration" (p. 33).

In stark contrast to the directives for literacy, the direction for ESL teaching is expressed by mentioning some interesting documents and studies that taken together do not constitute a plan. Instead, ESL programs were broadbanded under the umbrella of literacy programs. The Commonwealth continued to provide ESL for newly arrived immigrant children but generalist ESL funding was abandoned by collapsing funds into literacy. With broadbanding, it was left to the states and territories to decide how they would spend funds across a broad range of literacy-related programs, including ESL (Lo Bianco, 1998; Michell, 1999).

¹¹ *Literacy for All pp 5-6:*

- Better educational accountability through improved assessment and reporting
- Parents will be fully informed about their children's education
- Schools will focus on the needs of students
- Students and their parents will have a choice of schools
- Schools will focus on outcomes which prepare individuals for work and for longer term learning
- All students will be given and equal opportunity to learn
- Schools will have less regulation and greater autonomy
- Schools will support quality teaching

Restrictions in Language and Literacy Policy in the 2000's due to the 'Literacy Crisis'

The shifts in discourse outlined above are reinforced by a gradual restriction in the scope of policy. These restrictions marginalise languages, teachers, communities and broader understandings of literacy that value "accountability over substance" (Cross, in press, p. 7) and strengthen cultural and linguistic homogeneity at the expense of minority groups and the acceptance of diversity. Restrictions occur across the areas of languages, ESL, literacy, assessment, voice and participation.

The *National Policy on Languages* presented languages as a 'resource' but *Literacy For All* presented languages as a 'problem' and reinforced a default conservative position of Australia as a monolingual, English-only speaking community. The focus on foundational literacy in *Literacy for All* has continued to dominate (Cross, in press) and is supported by the ongoing belief in a 'literacy crisis' which needs to be addressed through accountability measures and standardised tests. This reductionist model of literacy also supports the view that children are responsible for their own success or failure (Cross, in press, p. 7).

The discourse of each policy and the presence or absence of consultation determine the degree of voice and participation in the creation and implementation of policy (Lo Bianco, 2001). The *National Policy on Languages* sought community input and invited collaboration from multilingual communities. In contrast *Literacy For All* sought no community input and imposed measures and actions that it claimed would lead to success for all students. The discourse of *Literacy For All* shows it was unwilling to consult widely and thereby restricted voice for minority communities. In stating that it was a policy for "all" and broadbanding programs, it disallowed differentiation that would meet

the needs of minority groups. The policy disabled voice and denied the participation of bilingual communities in both its creation and its implementation.

The current status of ESL in Australia in the context of policy with a neo-liberal discourse focused on competition and the individual

In 2007, the Australian Labor Party led by Kevin Rudd replaced the conservative government that had alleged the 'Literacy Crisis' and written *Literacy For All*. Neo-liberalism however, was not replaced. The neo-liberal principles of individual choice and market forces continue to be the context for Australian education systems. The devolution of responsibility to schools and a focus on accountability through standardised testing continue to be key features of educational policy.

Current federal policy has broadbanded ESL further. *Literacy For All* broadbanded general ESL programs but continued to tag funds for newly arrived ESL students. In contrast, there is no longer specialised funding for new arrival programs in federal policy and any decisions about how to provide such programs are left to the discretion of the states and territories (Michell, 2009).

Neo-liberalism works towards distancing community and professional voice further (Lingard, 1991; Michell, 2009). Many current systems are already out of the practice of consulting educationalists and communities, so any efforts towards consultation need to begin with major efforts to support participation from minority groups in the interest of consultative policy-making and participatory democracy.

Neo-liberalism places education in a marketplace. It maintains that it is possible to measure the education of children as if they were all the same and can have the same accountability measures imposed upon them. It supports the idea that competition and markets will improve

standards through competitive processes. It rejects principles of equity and social justice that had formerly supported languages in the community, English language learning for bilingual children and systems that aspired to educational success for all students. It also struggles to include community and professional voice and as a result, reduces participation and community confidence that policy is inclusive.

Conclusion

The cultural and social change nurtured under the Howard government led to an increased perception of Australia as an English-only speaking community. Because of this change the discourse of policy needs to make a stronger move towards inclusive policy that acknowledges multilingualism and supports differentiated educational programs. If we are to truly view linguistic adaptability as a resource for global citizens, policy cannot undermine the multilingualism of the population and ignore the needs of minority language groups to maintain linguistic adaptability. Reliable testing needs to take account of linguistic diversity. All languages need to be valued, not just languages for trade. If all languages were valued, and if the nation fostered English as a Second Language programs to support English language learning as necessary to success in general society, then Australia could create a culture where linguistic adaptability would be a resource and not a hindrance to achieving strong outcomes in literacy. To promote inclusive literacy policy, there is a need to write language rights into all levels of policy and policy implementation.

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