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## Language Diversity as a Bridge Between Cultures

The challenges in bridging the gap of student alienation in school settings has been a hot topic in the media in recent years. Alienation can be defined as “a decreasing sense of belonging in terms of learning, teachers and classmates at school” (Hascher & Hadjar, 2018 p.172), such feeling can cause physical, mental or psychological problems for the individual. They further alienation, “as the estrangement of the learner from what they should be engaged in, namely the subject and process of study itself... as the inability to engage or contribute in ways which are meaningful and productive for the realisation of [one’s] potential and learning requirements”(Hascher and Hadjar 2018 p.176), The linguistic diversity that is present in Australian classrooms has increased immensely in recent times and schools are made up of students, “who come from diverse cultural, religious, linguistic backgrounds” (D’warte, 2015, p.196). This is seen as a major issue as students are often left out due to their inability to speak English as proficiently as a non-bilingual student creating exclusion, alienation and racism, “Educational disadvantage was most likely in those school settings where ‘whiteness can be seen as the ‘norm’ and non-whites ... as the ‘other’”( Forrest, Lean & Dunn, 2015, p. 620). Although the Oxford English dictionary defines language as a, “system of spoken or written communication used by a particular country, people, community, etc., typically consisting of words used within a regular grammatical and syntactic structure” (Oed). Language is merely just a method of communication, it affects us culturally, socially and our ways of thinking, “Language is most obviously a form of human communication. In all its manifestations - oral, written, non-verbal - language is the most sophisticated and fundamental form of human communication. It is less obvious that language fulfils a wide range of other functions but these are critically important to individual and social life” (Lo Bianco, 1987, p. 1).

It is policies like the Multicultural Education Policy that furthers the gap between bilingual and monolingual students and reinforces dominant discourse and further prompts power imbalances. Resulting in students whose first language is English display dominance and more power over bilingual students who often feel left out and excluded. I will discuss my personal experience as an English language learner who prior to the age of eleven years did not know a word of English and was constantly excluded for being bilingual. Therefore, there is a necessity for these dominant discourses to be examined and reconsider the way in which linguistic and culture diversity is portrayed and studied, to allow for bilingual students to be included in classroom settings. Furthermore, this essay will look at the responsibility of the teacher in endorsing classroom activities that includes and facilitates to all student’s needs. Teachers are to be receptive that bilingual students bring knowledge, skills, and, understanding to the classroom which is in relation to the curriculum (D’warte, 2015, p.197). This essay outlines functionalism and post-colonialism in terms of linguistic diversity and English language learner students who fall through the gap of these social theories.

The inequality faced by ELL students is still present in multicultural Australia today, where student feel isolated and excluded in the classroom due to English being their second language. As an ELL student I personally experienced exclusion and feelings of alienation in my high school years because of my diverse language and culture, where “Diversity is often undervalued, positioned as deficit or difficult, and sometimes made invisible” (D’warte, 2015, p.199). At the age of eleven, instead of being enrolled into primary school which was more age

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appropriate I was enrolled into the local high school in their English as a Second Language section. Intensive English Centre, as it was called, although part of the high school, it was physically fenced off from the mainstream high school. Even though everyone in the IEC had a different language and cultural background, we all used English as we were learning to communicate with one another, however, we still “lived outside was considered to be mainstream ‘standard’ English” (D’warte, 2015, p.199).

Cruickshank states, “Policy initiatives foreground the promotion of languages for all students along with the maintenance and development of community language”( Cruickshank, 2014, p. 41). However, policies such as The Multicultural Education Policy although in place and practiced, it did little to give me the feeling of belonging into the school community. After finishing the required timeframe in IEC and I was seen as eligible to be shifted to the mainstream high school to start my first year of secondary schooling. Again, I was physically excluded in the mainstream high school because I came from a non-English speaking background and was an ex IEC student. In the Multicultural Education Policy, it states, “Students who are learning English as a second language are provided with appropriate support to develop their English language and literacy skills so that they are able to fully participate in schooling and achieve equitable educational outcomes” (MEP.1.4). Although this is a great initiative and it was practiced in my school, where an ESL teacher would walk into to any one of my classes a few times a week and do literacy work with me. As a result of my linguistic diversity and non-English’ speaking background I was put to the back of the class and segregated from my peers who did normal class work to do literacy work. This created a physical and emotional distance between my peers and I, was always seen as the person who didn’t speak ‘proper’ English, was excluded from group activities and the teacher would almost always had to put me in a group herself because I was never chosen and this has carried on to my university years where I resent group work due to the fear that I will be left out. D’warte states, Linguistically diverse students are always looked down on and it is presumed that they cannot excel academically, (D’warte, 2015, P.199) and I personally experienced this in year eleven. Although I was topping all my classes I was not allowed to do advanced English in the Higher School Certificate because it was assumed that I cannot perform to the standard of the monolingual students. Linguistic diversity is unique and each students’ learning capabilities’ differ, therefore polices need to be tailored for each student’s needs, allowing students to perform and participate in activities according to their learning capabilities.

The theory of functionalism creates inequality, by placing students into groupings and classifications like ESL, ELL and so on, which is reinforced buy “universal individual development of English literacy” (D’warte, 2015, P.196). Functionalist claim that education is a bridge between the home and school, and education allows students to be leaders and have power, however many ELL, and ESL, students fall through these theories as they are continued to look down on and not given a proper chance to succeed. Going back to my personal experience I was not allowed to do a certain subject because I was not seen as good enough. For many ELL and ESL students the education system and the home environment is completely segregated, where they speak their mother tongue at home and practice their own culture and at school there are trying to fit into the mainstream society, into a culture and language that is enforced upon them by universal standards (D’warte, 2015, P.196), and their individual, linguistic and cultural diversity is not taken into consideration. If teachers were to incorporate different cultures into their pedagogies’, student alienation would be reduced immensely, as students will not be afraid to share and celebrate their individuality. By following the social theory of functionalism where society works as a whole and the gap between the home and the

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classroom is narrowed students will feel less excluded and the gap between what is considered mainstream English language speakers and linguistic diverse students will narrow immensely. This connection between the home and school will allow teachers to understand individual student cultures and included activities into their curriculum that will include diverse language students.

Unequal power relations with minority population groups, especially migrants and indigenous Australian still continue to exist in Australia due to its colonial viewpoints, "Contemporary Australian society is often characterised as increasingly multicultural, but still struggling to disengage from a legacy of white-Anglo privilege and cultural dominance Forrest, Lean & Dunn, 2015, p. 621). Further schools are still influenced by national power, this is furthered in, "Australia has a federal political structure in which schooling remains, according to the Constitution, a 'residual power' of the States and Territories( Lingard, Creagh & Vass, 2011, p.318).

Students are still feeling left out and alienated because they belong to a minority group and their 'otherness' is established in the community because of the language they speak or their different cultural practices. The post colonialism theory aims at including linguistic and culturally diverse student into the school curriculum as a way of minimising individuals' feelings of alienation. Post colonists argue for the damaging effects of colonialism be incorporated into the school curriculum to be explored, questioned and spoken about. (Dr Erika, lecture 2). Although Australia is a multicultural society with a diverse range of linguistic, cultural and religious diversity and "it has been estimated that 15% of the Australian school population are from LBOTE" (Lingard, Creagh & Vass 2011, p. 319). It however, as a post-colonial state that is established on colonialist views remains to be dominated by colonialism. where, "there are power relations and internal division based on ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious identities" (Ferfolja, Diaz, and Ullman, 2015, p.10). The western way is seen as a hierarchy and is privileged, though we as a society are shifting and transforming into a hybrid space, hybrid as defined as, "borrowing, blending, and lending between cultures" (Ferfolja, Diaz, and Ullman, 2015, p.9-10). Taking this into consideration, it is useful for teacher to incorporate different cultural practices into their pedagogy in an attempt to minimizing student alienation and exclusion. Diaz, in their chapter, 'Silence in growing up bi/ multilingual in multicultural globalised societies' state, "identity is connected to language retention, particularly in terms of growing up bi/multilingual" (Diaz, 2015, p.115).

Highlighting that identity in constructed through language and culture, and, "an important function of identity is its capacity to build homogenous boundaries" (Diaz, 2015, p.120). Pedagogy implanted by a quality teacher will ensure student alienation is decreased, by incorporating methods to involve all students regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The teacher has the power in the classroom and through their pedagogical methods they are able to create social justice, "educators must employ active critical consciousness in order to become learners of student habitus" (D'warte, 2015, p. 208).The teaching and schooling environment is responsible, "to provide compulsory education, serving both individual and societal functions such as equal opportunities, selection, allocation and socialisation" (Hascher and Hadjar, 2018, p.172). It is evident that it is the responsibility of the schools and teachers to accommodate for all students cultural and language diversities. The recognition of students cultural and language difference is significant, as it gives them a sense of identity and belonging and cultural capital, because of their language, knowledge and background (D'warte, 2015, p.200), as opposed to feelings of alienation and exclusion in the

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