

Bilingual Schools Network supporting the creation of a Vision for Bilingual Education: Elaboration

Research has consistently shown that developing bi/multilingual skills have numerous benefits. These skills are also directly related to student learning in a bilingual environment at school. Here we outline the established research supporting the vision and mission of what could be a national vision for bilingual education in Australia. As eleven government bilingual schools in Victoria, our Network sees the urgency to advocate for the consolidation and expansion of bilingual education in Australia and, as such has developed the draft Vision for Bilingual Education as well as supporting documents. Our intention is to start a conversation that will clarify the importance of bilingual education in the Australian educational landscape and put in place the vision, policy and strategy that will assure the future of bilingual education in Australia. We highlight here, in particular, the current research showing the many benefits of a bilingual education. We demonstrate the recent and ongoing evidence that students who study within bilingual programs develop global citizenship skills, intercultural capability, enhanced cognitive flexibility, plurilingual mindsets and enhanced English literacy skills. Without doubt, bilingual education offers a range of benefits to its participants beyond the learning of an additional language.

Benefits of Bilingual Education for Students

Global Citizenship

In education, there is a growing global interest in teaching young generations to develop intercultural understanding and equating this with global citizenship. In 2015, the United Nations proposed 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) with goal 4 focusing on education. As part of its aim, goal 4 states that by 2030 *“all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, ... education for ... global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”* (United Nations, nd). It is argued that global citizenship is closely aligned with the notion of intercultural understanding as it is positioned within education (Liddicoat, 2009), and even more closely aligned with how intercultural understanding is positioned within language education (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Scarino, 2014).

Forthcoming research looking at intercultural understanding across the curriculum shows that language education is the strongest of the curriculum areas in Australia for assisting in deep learning about interculturality (Fielding, Galante, Bonar, Wang and God, forthcoming). Bilingual education is even better positioned to develop meaningful intercultural understanding as students undergo a transformational process of identity change as emerging multilinguals (Fielding, 2021).

Intercultural Capability

Intercultural capability is increasingly acknowledged as a key success factor and outcome of language learning. Bilingual education is shown as the key language learning approach to achieving this intercultural competence/capability (Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2018; Palacios Hidalgo et al 2021). In a recent study of bilingual education in Spain, Palacios-Hidalgo et al (2021) cite intercultural competence as one of three aspects of linguistic success in bilingual education. This positioning of intercultural competence as a key outcome of language learning in bilingual programs is noteworthy as it aligns with the Australian Curriculum outcomes for languages (ACARA, 2018). This study found that students who study in bilingual programs have strong self-perception of their intercultural skills. In another study Abduh and Rosmaladewi, (2018) found that improved intercultural capability was a key outcome of bilingual education in the Indonesian context. Lin (2022) has argued that bilingual education is the foundation needed for students in Taiwan to develop intercultural competence. Gracia, Rodriguez & Carpio (2020) indicate that in Spain the development of intercultural competence is one of the key aims of bilingual programs. There is consensus from a range of contexts around the world that bilingual education enhances intercultural competence. Indeed, it is seen as a core outcome of many bilingual education programs.

Plurilingual Mindset

Plurilingualism and pluriculturalism are enhanced through engagement in strong bilingual education programs (Galante 2020, 2021). Galante et al (2020) have proposed that a plurilingual pedagogical approach is appropriate for all students to engage with their full linguistic repertoire when learning in or through an additional language. Such an approach allows students to see their plurilingual skill as the norm (as opposed to the monolingual mindset embedded in many English-speaking contexts) and empowers students to draw on their full linguistic repertoire in making meaning and understanding others.

Engaging in multilingual tasks enhances language learners' plurilingual competence (Muñoz-Basols (2019). Muñoz-Basols argues this is the ability to move between, notice and compare different languages. It is possible to elaborate on his argument to show that engaging in learning in a bilingual program which moves between two languages of learning would enhance plurilingual competence in a similar way. Galante (2021) has developed a pluricultural competence scale to assist teachers in understanding and guiding students to recognise their own skill.

Chen et al (2022) undertook an empirical review of plurilingual pedagogies and found that these types of pedagogical approaches (including certain forms of bilingual education) enhance students' development of plurilingual and pluricultural competence, help students to develop a positive orientation to plurality, and affirm student identity. Fielding (2016) found that students learning in bilingual education programs in Australia benefitted from that learning in terms of their own plurilingual resources and their approaches to plurilingualism more broadly. It is therefore clear that bilingual/plurilingual experiences enhance students' plurilingual mindset as shown in research from a range of contexts.

Enhanced Cognitive Flexibility

Substantial research has shown that as long as students have support for literacy development in their first language, students in bilingual programs can perform better than peers in monolingual programs (Fortune 2012; Genesee 2008; Lindholm-Leary 2001). In the Australian context, Fielding & Harbon (2022) explored the NAPLAN outcomes of students in bilingual programs and demonstrated that the students in bilingual streams in primary school outperformed their peers who were in monolingual classes by at least 7% in their NAPLAN assessments. This research provided local data to support international research which has long shown a cognitive benefit for learning bilingually and has shown the transferability of literacy skills across languages (Cazden et al. 1996; Cummins 1979; Lo Bianco 2000; Murray and Combe 2007).

Bialystok, Craik, and Luk (2012, p.248) argue that there is six decades worth of evidence of the cognitive benefits of bilingual education, and yet negative 'fear and anecdote' continue to prevail within broad perceptions of bilingualism in the wider community. In terms of the specific types of cognitive benefit that have been proven, Genesee (2015) has reviewed all the prior research into the cognitive benefits and summarised in this way: '*A bilingual advantage has been demonstrated in the performance of tasks that call for selective attention (e.g. Bialystok 2001), including tasks that require focusing, inhibiting, and switching attention during problem solving*' (2015, p.6). He also indicates that bilingual education is beneficial for students with academic challenges as well as for students who already perform well at school (Genesee 2015). Blom et al. (2017) investigated four types of cognitive advantage with children aged 6–7 in the Netherlands.

They found that bilingual children demonstrated an advantage in focus and selective attention but no significant difference for working memory. Bartolotti and Marian (2012) found that bilinguals manage cross-linguistic interference more effectively than monolinguals. By teaching participants a new language the researchers measured how the bilingual and monolingual participants dealt with linguistic interference, and found that bilinguals were better able to navigate this when learning a third or fourth language compared to monolinguals learning a second language.

In a meta-review of research into the cognitive benefits of bilingualism, it was summarised that: Bilinguals do sometimes have an advantage in inhibition, but they also have an advantage in selection; bilinguals do sometimes have an advantage in switching, but they also have an advantage in sustaining attention; and bilinguals do sometimes have an advantage in working memory, but they also have an advantage in representation and retrieval. Together, this pattern sounds like 'mental flexibility', the ability to adapt to ongoing changes and process information efficiently and adaptively (Bialystok, Craik, and Luk 2012, p247).

Of particular interest in relation to 'mental flexibility' are the effects shown in relation to metalinguistic skills which may impact upon the development of literacy in both languages of a bilingual student (Cromdal 1999). Research into metalinguistic skill associated with bilingualism has debated many of the details and components of metalinguistic skill. There is some consensus that metalinguistic skill is neither exclusively linguistic nor cognitive in nature, rather it involves cognitive, linguistic and metacognitive processes (Bialystok 1986; Cromdal 1999). Cromdal's (1999) study of bilingual children in Sweden found that bilingual children performed more highly on analysis and control tasks in relation to grammar. They noticed and corrected sentence errors more than the monolingual group. Early in the bilingual journey metalinguistic benefits can already be measured (Cromdal 1999).

Enhanced English Literacy Skills

Literacy skill has been shown over the past few decades to be enhanced by additional language learning and our understanding of literacy skill has recognised for some time now that bilingual and multilingual children can transfer their literacy understandings across languages (Cazden et al. 1996; Cummins 1979; Lo Bianco 2000; Murray and Combe 2007). Hamers and Blanc (2000) argued that the skills that are developed by literacy development are also the skills that develop through bilingual experience. These skills are: heightened metalinguistic skill and linguistic awareness. Metalinguistic skill is the understanding of how languages work, and the ability to understand and break down language into its constituent parts. This type of skill helps students to decode and understand all languages more easily.

Fielding & Harbon (2022) examined the literacy outcomes of students in four bilingual programs in NSW, Australia. It was found that all students in the bilingual streams within each school outperformed their peers in the monolingual streams by an average of 7%. This outperformance was shown at both Year 3 and Year 5 assessment (Fielding & Harbon, 2022). This research dispelled some of the myths surrounding bilingual education which had previously argued that students might initially experience a dip in literacy performance before ultimately showing advanced skill. In this particular study, no dip in performance was evident and the heightened skill was demonstrated from early primary school onwards (Fielding & Harbon, 2022). In an educational setting which places a high value on English literacy outcomes through standardised testing bilingual approaches are a clear choice to enhance literacy outcomes in schools.

Benefits of the Bilingual Program for Schools and Communities

Normalising the Value of Multilingualism

Normalising bilingual education enables the wider community to see the value of multilingualism more easily. Education in Australia has traditionally been shaped by what Melbourne-based scholar, Michael Clyne, called a monolingual mindset (Clyne, 2005) and policy continues to be developed according to monolingual norms and the associated assumption of the higher value of English compared to other languages.

As Lasagabaster (2017: p.593) asserts: *'The current globalized context demands the education of the general public about the benefits of bilingualism as social, economic, and cultural capital'*. There has long been evidence of the benefits of bilingual education, and a need to recognise linguistic skill more broadly than just legitimising English language skill. Yet most of this evidence has not translated across into the understandings held by the wider community and general public (Bialystok, Craik, and Luk, 2012, p.248).

Researchers in multilingualism, second language acquisition, applied linguistics and language education have been calling for a "Multilingual Turn" for a number of years now (Conteh and Meier, 2014; Hajek & Slaughter, 2015; May, 2014; Slaughter & Cross 2021). This body of work argues that multilingualism is the norm for more people than monolingualism and they argue that this needs to be reflected within education and recognised more broadly in society. This work highlights how monolingual norms have developed for political purposes rather than as a reflection of reality (Conteh & Meier, 2014).

There is a mounting call for the normalisation of plurilingual pedagogies and to challenge the ongoing monolingual bias in the Australian education system (Slaughter & Cross, 2021). Plurilingualism is a growing reality for homes across Australia, and even more notably in Victoria.

Approximately 350 languages are listed as spoken in homes across Australia (ABS, 2022). Nationally 27.6% of the population in 2022 were born in another country and in Victoria, the percentages are higher. In Melbourne 32.6 % of the population use a language other than English at home (Multicultural Commission of Victoria, 2020). In NSW *"More than a third (35.9%) of students came from homes where languages other than English were spoken"* (NSW Government, 2019). There is an upward trend of plurilingualism in Australia and current predictions are that this trend will continue. Building on the international work that has developed calling for a multilingual turn in language education, we can look at the successes of bilingual education in Australia for further evidence of the need for wider community acceptance of multilingualism (Fielding & Harbon, 2022).

Meaningful and Sustainable Language Learning

Bilingual education programs make language learning meaningful through their integration of language with another curriculum area (or areas). School commitment to taking such an embedded approach to language learning also ensures better sustainability than is seen in other forms of language education. Fielding (2015) explored four language (non-bilingual) programs in NSW to understand what made them successful and sustainable. It was shown that programs that went beyond the minimum mandate in terms of time such as bilingual programs or programs with a substantial time allocation were the most successful, by signalling to the community the value of languages in education and providing visible action in terms of timetabling, space (special classrooms) and promoting the language program within the school. The Asia Education Foundation (AEF) has also identified some elements that sustainable languages programs commonly feature (AEF, 2014a). The AEF identifies that sustainable languages programs have a clear rationale, clear purpose and clearly defined outcomes (AEF, 2014a). They also identify that a sustainable languages program has sufficient resources and clear teaching strategies that are suitable for each level of schooling (AEF, 2014a). One key factor they identify is that sustainable languages programs move beyond being integrated and move into being "incorporated" into schools by which they mean *"language permeates the life of a school and its community, and that there is a pride and ownership of the program by that school's community"* (AEF, 2014a, resource 38). The AEF in a further document, state that "sustainable" languages programs teach language intensively throughout both primary and secondary schooling and that language is viewed in such programs as central to their aims (AEF, 2014b, Resource 41). This would position bilingual programs as the optimal models of language education according to these criteria. Bilingual programs have the added benefit of addressing multiple curriculum areas simultaneously.

References

ACARA. 2018. <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/media/1075/general-capabilities-intercultural-understanding-learning-continuum.pdf>

Asia Education Foundation. 2014a. Resource 38: What we know about sustainable language programs. Available from: http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/for_teachers/professional_learning/languages/learning_project/project_resources/resource_38_what_we_know.html Accessed 21/07/2014.

Asia Education Foundation. 2014b. Resource 41: Sustainable Language Programs 3. Available from: http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/for_teachers/professional_learning/languages/professionallearningproject/learning_project/project_resources/resource_41_sustainable_language_programs_3.html Accessed 21/07/2014.

Abduh, A. and Rosmaladewi, R. 2018. Promoting Intercultural Competence in Bilingual Programs in Indonesia, *SAGE Open*, 1–7, DOI: 10.1177/2158244018788616

Bialystok, E. 1986. "Factors in the Growth of Linguistic Awareness." *Child Development*. 57: 498–510.

Bialystok, E., F. Craik, and G. Luk. 2012. "Bilingualism: Consequences for Mind and Brain." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*. 16 (4): 240–250.

Blom, E., T. Boerma, E. Bosma, L. Cornips, and E. Everaert. 2017. "Cognitive Advantages of Bilingual Children in Different Sociolinguistic Contexts." *Frontiers in Psychology*. 8: 552. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00552.

Cazden, C., B. Cope, N. Fairclough, J. Gee, M. Kalantzis, G. Kress, A. Luke, C. Luke, S. Michaels, and N. M. Nakata. 1996. "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures." *Harvard Educational Review*. 66 (1): 60–93.

Conteh, J. & Meier, G. 2014. *The Multilingual Turn in Languages Education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Chen, L. Karas, M. Shalizer M. & Piccardo, E. 2022. From "Promising Controversies" to Negotiated Practices: A Research Synthesis of Plurilingual Pedagogy in Global Contexts, *TESL CANADA JOURNAL/REVUE TESL DU CANADA*, 38, 2, p.1–35.

Cromdal, J. 1999. "Childhood Bilingualism and Metalinguistic Skills: Analysis and Control in Young Swedish–English Bilinguals." *Applied Psycholinguistics*. 20: 1–20.

Fielding, R. 2015. *Exploring Effective and Sustainable Language Programs in NSW Independent Schools: A Snapshot of Language Learning in 2014*. Sydney: Association of Independent Schools of NSW.

Fielding, R. 2016. Students' use of their plurilingual resources in Australian schools, *Language and Education*, 30:4, 361–377, DOI: 10.1080/09500782.2015.1114631

Fielding, R. 2021. A multilingual identity approach to intercultural stance in language learning. *Language Learning Journal*, 49(4), 466–482. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2021.1912154>

Fielding, R & Harbon, L. 2022. Dispelling the monolingual myth: exploring literacy outcomes in Australian bilingual programmes, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 25:3, 997–1020, DOI: 10.1080/13670050.2020.1734531

Freebody, P. 2007. "Building Literacy Education: Pasts, Futures, and "the sum of effort"." In *Future Directions in Literacy: International Conversations*, edited by A. Simpson, 95–113. Sydney: Sydney University Press.

Galante, A. 2021. Translation as a pedagogical tool in multilingual classes: Engaging the learner's plurilingual repertoire. *Translation and Translanguaging in Multilingual Contexts Journal*, 7(1), 106–123. doi: 10.1075/ttmc.00064.gal

Galante, A. 2020. Plurilingual and pluricultural competence (PPC) scale: The inseparability of language and culture. *International Journal of Multilingualism*. doi: 10.1080/14790718.2020.1753747

Galante, A. Okubo, K, Cole, C. Elkader, N. Carozza, N. Wilkinson, C. Wotton, C. & Vasic, J. 2020. "English-Only Is Not the Way to Go": Teachers' Perceptions of Plurilingual Instruction in an English Program at a Canadian University, *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 4, pp980 – 1009.

Genesee, F. 2015. "Myths About Early Childhood Bilingualism." *Canadian Psychology* 56 (1): 6–15.

Hajek, J. & Slaughter, Y. 2015. *Challenging the Monolingual Mindset*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Hamers, J., and M. Blanc. 2000. *Bilinguality and Bilingualism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lasagabaster, D. 2017. Language learning motivation and language attitudes in multilingual Spain from an international perspective. *The Modern Language Journal*, 101, no. 3: 583–596.

Liddicoat, A. 2009. Evolving ideologies of the intercultural in Australian multicultural and language education policy. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. DOI:10.1080/01434630802369429.

Liddicoat, A., and A. Scarino. 2013. *Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning*. West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell.

Lin T. 2022. The Foundation of Intercultural Communication: The Practice and Challenges of Bilingual Education in Taiwan, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 1–13

May, S. 2014. *The Multilingual Turn: Implications for SLA, TESOL and Bilingual Education*. New York: Routledge.

Muñoz-Basols, J. 2019. Going beyond the comfort zone: multilingualism, translation and mediation to foster plurilingual competence, *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 32:3, 299–321, DOI: 10.1080/07908318.2019.1661687

New South Wales Government. 2019. *Schools: Language diversity in NSW, 2019*. CESE Bulletin. Sydney: Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation.

Palacios-Hidalgo, F.J. Gómez-Parra, M.E. Huertas-Abril, C.A. & Espejo-Mohedano, R. 2021. Participation in bilingual education programs as a key factor to linguistic success: the Spanish case, *Language and Education*, DOI: 10.1080/09500782.2021.1933019

Pérez Gracia, E. Serrano Rodríguez, R. & Carpio, A. 2020. Promoting intercultural through content and competences within bilingual education: teachers in action, *Intercultural Education*, 31:4, 407–426, DOI: 10.1080/14675986.2020.1747348

Scarino, A. 2014. Learning as reciprocal, interpretive meaning-making: a view from collaborative research into the professional learning of teachers of languages. *Modern Language Journal*. DOI:10.1111/j.1540-4781.2014.12068.x.

Slaughter, Y., & Cross, R. 2021. Challenging the monolingual mindset: Understanding plurilingual pedagogies in English as an Additional Language (EAL) classrooms. *Language Teaching Research*, 25(1), 39–60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820938819>