

# A Sociocultural Analysis of Language Learning: New Forms of Literacy Practices in a Language and Culture Awareness Programme

*Wendy Cumming-Potvin*

*School of Education, Murdoch University, South Street, Murdoch, Perth, WA, 6150, Australia*

*Peter Renshaw*

*School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus, QLD, 4217, Australia*

*Christa van Kraayenoord*

*The University of Queensland, Schonell Special Education Research Centre, Brisbane, QLD, 4072, Australia*

This paper reports on a sociocultural study conducted in a Catholic primary school in the Australian outback and provides insights into how policy related to Languages Other Than English (LOTE) programmes is implemented in a specific location and interwoven within the literacy practices of children, parents and teachers. A case study that tracked a Year Four student's learning and development during a Language and Culture Awareness Programme is discussed within a discourse of cultural and linguistic practices. Significant aspects of the student's learning related to a phenomenon called multi-tiered scaffolding temporarily disrupted the established literacy practices in the school community. Implications of the research for second-language teaching and learning in Australian primary schools are elaborated.

## Introduction

Global flows of trade and immigration continue to accentuate the profile of Australian schools as diversified and multicultural communities. Researchers in industrialised countries have argued that the inclusion of multicultural differences in the curriculum is necessary as part of a broad initiative aimed at adapting educational institutions to the phenomenon of sociocultural and linguistic diversity (Adler, 1993; Berthelot, 1991; Corson, 1998; Janks, 2002; Kamberelis & De la Luna, 1996; Kenner, 1999). In Australia, a national policy framework of equal opportunity and multiculturalism has been broadly accepted by Governments (Commonwealth and State) and school authorities (state and independent systems) as the appropriate response to meet the needs of children from diverse sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds. National policies and plans, such as *The National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* (Commonwealth Government, 1989), *Literacy for All* (Commonwealth Government, 1998) and the creation of a plethora of educational programmes such as Languages Other Than English (LOTE)<sup>1</sup> and English as a Second Language

(ESL) promoted an agenda that aimed for social justice and successful academic outcomes of all students.

Emphasising the efficiency and profitability of Australian businesses, a pragmatic revisioning of multiculturalism emerged in a context of economic rationalism towards the end of the 1980s. For example, the notion that LOTE should be used primarily as a resource to promote the Australian economy was popularised (Di Biase *et al.*, 1994; Djite, 1994). Whilst *The Australian Language and Literacy Policy* (Commonwealth Government, 1991) reaffirmed the importance of including LOTE for all students, it also emphasised the teaching of languages viewed to be economically significant for developing Australia's economy. *A National Strategy for the Study of Asia in Australia* (Asian Studies Council, 1988) reiterated the importance of language in international business. The focus on Asian languages *per se* represented a shift in policy to prioritise business and economic interests, and reflected the geographic reality that Australia is situated in the Asia-Pacific region.

Apart from these contesting economic and cultural aims of the policy terrain, there are difficulties related to implementing the national policy framework in primary and secondary schools. With regard to resources and material, teacher preparation and pedagogical practice, uneven quality control and inadequate communication with the school community have been documented in a variety of classroom settings as limiting some students' educational outcomes and opportunities (Luke, 1994, 1995; Singh, 1989; Walton, 1993). Complexities also reside in choosing the appropriate languages for LOTE programmes in terms of local, regional and national interests. Although *The National Policy on Languages* (Lo Bianco, 1987) identified the teaching of specific categories of LOTE, such as local Aboriginal languages and a variety of community-based or more widely spoken European and Asian languages (such as French, German, Mandarin Chinese and Japanese), the States and Territories largely control education matters. Whilst these Governments have targeted a number of priority languages, establishing continuity of LOTE programmes across schools, regions and states remains a challenge.

Primary and secondary school LOTE programmes have generally been implemented under a structure involving teaching specialists who offer subject-specific lessons. This prevailing practice has created a context of itinerancy for both LOTE teachers and programmes (Miller, 1997). LOTE teachers are submitted to multiple demands as they travel between classes and/or schools to instruct students in 40-minute time periods, while regular classroom teachers are provided with 'non-teaching time'. Such issues point to the need for exploring alternative options for LOTE delivery in Australian primary schools. One possible option involves implementing programmes which draw on the cultural and linguistic resources that children bring to school.

The central concern of this paper is thus to explore how significant aspects of learning that took place during a Language and Culture Awareness Programme (LCAP), facilitated the emergence of new literacy practices in a primary Catholic school located in the Australian outback. Framed within sociocultural theory (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) the LCAP involved a specific strategic intervention that disrupted established school practices regarding language learning. While directed at teaching French in a

year four classroom that consisted of 28 students, the programme was conceived broadly as providing enrichment by drawing upon the children's linguistic and cultural resources. For example, activities involving English, Danish and Dutch were also implemented. Everyday greetings, such as saying 'hello' and 'goodbye' in Japanese, were also introduced. Key practices of the LCAP were directed at enhancing students' LOTE learning through an integrated model (Bliesener, 1993) that related second-language teaching to the nature, purpose and structure of language, while embedding activities in other key curriculum areas.

The Year Four students, who had little or no experience with LOTE, were encouraged to construct and extend their knowledge in LOTE, and to draw upon any linguistic resources that were available to them. It will be argued that as the LCAP unfolded in the school community, processes of identity construction, LOTE learning and forms of scaffolding interwove to create socially just literacy practices in which students, parents and teachers engaged. It will also be argued that these structures offer an alternative approach to second-language learning in Australian primary schools. This perspective promotes the maintenance of LOTE in a society where the disappearance of minority languages occurs as second and third generation immigrants opt to speak only officially recognised languages. The maintenance of LOTE can be viewed as crucial for Australia's successful adaptation to the contemporary international context of globalisation and burgeoning migratory patterns.

The current LOTE programmes in Australian primary schools are implemented in isolation from the mainstream curriculum. This juxtaposition between LOTE and other learning areas relates to the predominant theoretical view that second-language learning is restricted to individual processing and production of language skills (Toohey, 2000). As a consequence, the adoption of sociocultural paradigms has occurred infrequently in second-language learning. However, over the past decade, an increasing number of researchers have investigated second-language learning from a social rather than an individual framework. Cummins (1996) and Saunders (1991) investigated the influence of socio-political factors on linguistic competence in second-language learners. Van Lier (1996) examined the scaffolding process, in particular, the interaction between teachers and students in an ESL classroom. Toohey investigated early childhood second-language learning as a socially situated community of practice by drawing on the work of sociocultural theorists, such as Lave and Wenger (1991) and Kirshner and Whitson (1997).

Since the 1980s, the interest in sociocultural paradigms has also been popular with researchers investigating the relationship between literacy, language and sociocultural practices in first-language learning (Beaumont, 1999; Cazden, 1994; Green, 2000; Heath, 1983; Luke, 1994, 1995; Rogoff, 1990). However, in both second- and first-language learning, research has focused on members of majority cultures learning their first language, or those from a minority culture learning ESL in school or home settings. Little research has been conducted, using a sociocultural perspective (Bakhtin 1981, 1984, 1986; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) to explicate middle primary students' LOTE learning, particularly in relation to LOTE programmes in a remote Australian setting.

## Background to the Study: Theoretical Considerations

The study was based on sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986), which views learning as constructed and negotiated through social interaction. In particular, we drew on the key concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) to theorise the kind of pedagogy that is likely to promote significant learning. Empirically, the ZPD has been studied extensively by focusing on scaffolding, which describes the process of graduated and strategic assistance offered by adults to support children's problem-solving activity (Bruner, 1983; Hammond & Gibbons, 2001; Wood *et al.*, 1976). Initially, many researchers perceived the concept of scaffolding as a linear process involving a sympathetic adult guiding a cooperative child, who gradually gained more control in the partnership. However, more recently, researchers have attempted to widen the traditional view of scaffolding by focusing more intently on the child's active participation in seeking solutions to problems (Renshaw, 1996; Rogoff, 1990; Stone, 1993). Such research has taken into consideration the sometimes conflictual nature which characterises social relationships during the scaffolding process. Despite their limited level of competence in a specific task, children assert their identity and viewpoints and will sometimes attempt to lead or control an activity. On other occasions children may resist requests by the expert to engage in an activity. In this study, we were particularly aware of the changing relationships between partners during scaffolding episodes both in school and home contexts.

## Methodology: Qualitative Approach to Examining Student Learning and Development

A qualitative methodology was adopted, which permitted flexibility in data gathering and allowed for the extension or adaptation of theoretical concepts. The focus on respondents' values, attitudes and perceptions facilitated an investigation of the dynamic and evolving realities of the classroom. Phase one of the study involved negotiating access to the field site and resolving gate-keeping issues to ensure trust was developed between the principal researcher (Wendy) and participants. Phase two focused on the pilot study to trial various data-gathering instruments in the classroom, such as direct observation, interviews and videotaped bilingual shared story experiences. Phase three, the main study, involved implementing a 'teaching experiment' through a variety of techniques. As described by Davydov (1994), the term 'teaching experiment' is based on Vygotsky's innovative type of experiment, which examines children's development by focusing on the assimilation of sociocultural practices. This type of experiment is characterised by active intervention of the researcher into the psychological and cultural processes being studied. It differs significantly from the verification method of experiment that attempts to isolate and control variables in the field site.

A questionnaire, which focused on home language practices, was completed by each family in the Year Four classroom. The pilot and main studies involved semi-structured group and individual interviews with 37 participants. To trial the student interview protocol, three groups of five students were interviewed during a pilot study. During this period, a group interview was also conducted with three parents, who each had at least two children attending St Gabrielle's

School, a Catholic primary school. During the main study, individual interviews were conducted with three parents of the three case study students to obtain in-depth information about their home literacy practices. Individual interviews were also conducted with a Year Three classroom teacher and the teacher of the school's Japanese LOTE programme. The Year Four teacher from the selected classroom and a Year Six classroom teacher (who participated in the pilot study and worked closely with the year four teacher) were interviewed together. In the selected Year Four classroom, three groups of four students were interviewed (including case study students).

Direct observation of students' social interaction in formal and informal first- and second-language learning situations was conducted. During the main study, over a period of six months, Wendy participated in the school community in her multiple roles of teacher, researcher and parent. A major focus of the intervention involved implementing the LCAP, which aimed to sensitise students to language and culture with an approach that integrated LOTE learning to other aspects of the primary school curriculum.

During successive waves of data collection that tracked Year Four students' learning and development in first- and second-language settings and a range of contextual conditions, three case studies of individual students were constructed. Observations of students' actions under a range of literacy activities conducted in LOTE and English were analysed. Through videotaped recordings, an extensive array of dialogic sequences were gathered, which were triangulated through multiple data sources such as semi-structured interviews, work samples, journal entries and document review.

### **Observations from the Field Site: Contending Responses to Diversity**

The Catholic primary school (henceforth designated St Gabrielle's School) that served as the setting for this study, is a coeducational institution, catering for students from Years One to Seven (approximate ages from 5 to 12 years). In 1998, office records indicated that at the beginning of the school year, 17% of the parents of students enrolled at St Gabrielle's School were born overseas. Twenty-six birthplace countries were recorded, which represented the European, African, Asian and American continents. Despite this diverse population, the school possessed an historic narrative steeped in providing a Catholic education, which was offered through English instruction.

Whilst the aim of the curriculum was one of shaping citizens who displayed their Catholic identity, school practices that overtly promoted allegiance to the Commonwealth Government or the British monarchy and/or reinforced the expression of an Anglo-Celtic Australian identity were also observed. All prayers and religious ceremonies espousing Catholic values, such as Eucharistic celebrations and preparations for Lent and Easter Sunday were conducted in English. Weekly school assemblies began with a display of the official version of the Australian flag (associated with an Anglo-Celtic version of Australian history and settlement), and the singing of the national anthem in English. This ritual was followed by a collective pledge during which students asked God to bless their Queen, their country and to make them good citizens. In addition,

presentations performed at weekly school assemblies, or during community-based festivals generally, aimed at enhancing students' English-language speaking and singing skills. For example, participation in the local eisteddfod festival was a compulsory component of the Year Two to Seven curriculum and individual classes practised choral speaking and singing items, which culminated in community performances.

In contrast to the aim of teaching a Catholic curriculum and improving students' English skills, collective practices designed to promote and respond to diversity were observed infrequently. These practices received a brief mention in the school's newsletter and were often presented with an emphasis on visual or performing arts. For example, for one week during the school year, Aboriginal culture was introduced to the students via art and craft activities, such as creating traditional Aboriginal dot paintings. In addition, a theatrical group sponsored by the Queensland Arts Council presented a 'one-off' performance of African songs and dances.

### **The school's existing LOTE programme**

In 1998, the school principal opted to implement a Japanese LOTE programme in the upper primary years because state funding had recently been made available for teaching Japanese. Due to difficulties related to recruiting specialist LOTE teachers in outback areas, a regular classroom teacher who had completed some tertiary courses in Japanese was chosen to teach the classes. Evidence gathered from observations and interviews suggest that the initiatives taken to implement this LOTE programme can be viewed as tokenism and in some instances as counter-productive. For example, a physical area reserved for LOTE was absent from the school; the allocation of rooms accommodated several specialist subject areas, which were taught exclusively in English, such as singing, learning assistance and orchestral tuition. All school displays and notice boards made exclusive use of English. In this sense, whilst many of the physical icons in the school were representative of Catholicism, such as statues, bibles and candles, the physical environment also reflected a predominantly Anglo-Celtic heritage.

Evidence gathered from semi-structured interviews indicated that teachers' and parents' perceptions of the LOTE programme ranged from describing it as enigmatic in content and structure to problematic and peripheral to the mainstream curriculum. All six parents interviewed declared they were uncertain about the existence and/or the structure of the school's LOTE programme. Two of the three classroom teachers interviewed also perceived the programme to be problematic due to the absence of a specialist LOTE teacher, thematic continuity and collaboration with classroom teachers. The following extract taken from the teacher group interview illustrates an upper primary teacher's dissatisfaction with the programme:

And now they've got Japanese once a week in Year Six and twice a week in Year Seven and once a week in Five. But it's really hard because the Japanese teacher is actually a teacher on staff. Sometimes he can't come to our classes because he can't get a relief teacher. So there's no continuity. And I would actually like to see a LOTE programme where he sat down with us and said 'This is what I'm doing in Japanese this term.' So when I'm doing

my programme, I might be able to expose the kids to some books where there's some Japanese characters, or like they were doing these business cards . . .

The absence of collaboration with regular classroom teachers appeared amplified by the LOTE teacher's preference to work independently. The following extract taken from the semi-structured interview conducted with the LOTE teacher illustrates the practice of teaching LOTE in isolation from the mainstream curriculum:

I don't usually encourage them [the Year Five, Six and Seven teachers] to stay. I think that's just me. I mean, I'm not overly confident. They can't judge me though, because they don't know what I'm teaching. (John (the LOTE teacher))

Aside from the structure of the programme, this preference to work in isolation appeared related to the LOTE teacher's lack of confidence in Japanese conversational skills.

Evidence gathered during parent and teacher interviews also suggested that the school's LOTE programme did not receive unilateral parental support. Parents' perceptions of LOTE learning generally involved: embracing LOTE, conditionally supporting LOTE, and rejecting LOTE. As illustrated in the following extract taken from the parent group interview, Melanie, a parent at the school, describes what can be interpreted as conditional support for LOTE:

I mean, I wouldn't want to take away any of what they [the students] do now. I mean, I think what they're doing is very important, and I certainly wouldn't want to see them take English off them.

Melanie's concerns about introducing LOTE in an overly intensive manner connect explicitly to the notion of restricting 'English learning time', which is viewed implicitly as detrimental to English language development.

A minority of parents who rejected certain elements of the programme appeared to hold irrational fears related to LOTE learning. During the parent group interview, Sharon, a parent at the school, stated that several parents with whom she had conversed were vehemently opposed to the teaching of any LOTE. As illustrated in the following extract taken from the parent group interview, according to Sharon, some parents viewed learning a second language as compromising their children's learning in English:

. . . there are parents who object vehemently to any languages being taught. I guess it's racist. And you have to face . . . I guess if somehow you can reassure these parents that these children are not, I mean their education is not being compromised by learning a language. I don't think it would be. But there would be parents who would feel their education is being compromised, even if the 15-minute time slot was taken.

Sharon's linking of racist attitudes to resistance to LOTE suggests that parents had debated the curriculum and were divided in their attitudes.

## **The Language and Culture Awareness Programme (LCAP)**

As noted above, the LCAP was framed within sociocultural theory (Bakhtin, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) as a specific strategic intervention that disrupted established LOTE pedagogical practices by creating new learning partnerships between the school and community. Bilingual experts from outside the school, such as university researchers, local teaching and research professionals and the City Council librarian, participated in the LCAP by observing or animating activities in the classroom or community, offering technical advice or providing conceptual feedback via telephone or e-mail. Newsletters were written to inform parents of themes introduced in class. Parents were also invited to visit the classroom to read or tell a story. Those parents who spoke a LOTE were invited to incorporate some of these words into the story.

The implementation of the LCAP in the Year Four classroom involved a wide range of literacy activities. A focal point of the programme consisted of six bilingual shared story experiences, which were conducted in classroom and community settings. These experiences were created for second-language learning environments via an adaptation of shared story models from the works of Holdaway (1979), Luke and Freebody (1999) and van Kraayenoord and Moni (1999). For example, the 'code breaker' role introduced theme words or expressions in LOTE via songs, poems or games, prior to the story reading. The 'text participant role' involved actions such as students taking notes or examining story elements such as plot, language use or illustrations during the storyreading. The 'text user' role consisted of students using language in English or English and LOTE through written or oral activities, such as 'Memory Match Games', drawing or letter writing. Follow-up tasks included shared partner reading, bilingual language and literacy games and informal evaluation sessions.

### **Researching change**

The purpose of the 'teaching experiment' was to explore the use of innovative pedagogies, such as the LCAP, whilst ascertaining the possibilities and constraints for emerging forms of literacy practices. To record events, practices and artefacts in their cultural milieu, both non-participant and participant observation was used. During participant observation, Wendy engaged in an active role, such as marking students' work, conducting bilingual shared story experiences or animating English-reading groups organised by the classroom teacher. These participant observations were retrospectively recorded in a research journal. Frequent observations permitted the gathering of repeated evidence concerning the unforeseen and unexpected ways that students expressed new practices, across a range of linguistic and physical contexts (in the classroom, assembly area, playground, etc.). Videotaping was also conducted to capture moments of daily classroom life and to triangulate the accuracy of field notes.

As a resident of the isolated field setting and parent at St Gabrielle's School, Wendy was able to enhance her personal reflections due to an intimate association with the school, parish and civic communities. Whilst the multiple roles of researcher-parent-teacher allowed privileged access to teachers, parents and children across many different contexts, maintaining discretion during



interpersonal relations connected to these contrasting roles was important to the success of the fieldwork. A process of reflection and action was utilised in an attempt to respect respondents' confidentiality while upholding the aims of the study.

As the study evolved, established classroom practices situated within the 'taken-for granted' school regime were disrupted. The LCAP offered alternative pedagogies that contrasted greatly to the school's containment policy of LOTE teaching involving separate lessons that appeared to have no impact on other curriculum areas or students' home activities. Of particular interest was how non-traditional spaces were created in the classroom and how the students populated these spaces with their own linguistically diverse voices. The question of how these spaces related to other contexts, for example the relationship between social interaction in school, home and community settings was also examined. The investigation of how knowledge, strategies and values were transferred between various settings and partners focused on the 'intertextuality' of teaching and learning processes. Initially, this process involved gathering information about the school and class community. At a more specific level, case studies were constructed to record the learning and development of three students (Jerry, Sarah and Tom), in the Year Four classroom; results from Sarah's case study are presented here.

### **Background to Sarah's case study**

Prior to migrating to Denmark from the Netherlands, Sarah Yeppison's mother received the majority of her education in Dutch. While residing in Denmark, she married, had two daughters and perfected her ability speak Danish. In the early 1980s, Sarah's parents immigrated to Australia from Denmark with their two young daughters, aged five and two years. After spending several months in a major coastal centre, they settled in an isolated city of the outback, where their third daughter, Sarah was born. As the Yeppisons increased their use of English following migration to Australia, they and their two eldest daughters experienced bilingualism. This meant an increasing ability to function in more than one language for family members, as they added English to their Danish-Dutch repertoire. However, following the Yeppisons' settlement in the outback, the process of learning English gave rise to a 'language switch' whereby Sarah's parents acquiesced to their two eldest daughters' insistent requests to communicate only in English.

This 'language switch' has been described as common in child migrants who begin to reject their home language as they encounter strong forces of assimilation in the community (Oliver & Purdie, 1998; Saunders, 1991; Wong Fillmore, 1991). Lambert (1977) first used the term subtractive bilingualism to describe the situation of bilingual students from minority-language groups whose first language was gradually replaced by a more prestigious second language. On the one hand, the Yeppisons' decision to speak predominantly English with their children points to linguistic practices perceived as facilitating migrants' integration in the host country. Mrs Yeppison stressed the fact that she and her family needed to speak English to make friends, attend school and obtain employment. On the other hand, this 'language switch' appeared to promote a process of

subtractive bilingualism for the Yeppisons' daughters, who gradually lost their motivation and skills for using Danish and Dutch.

The children's decreasing use of Danish and Dutch appeared to have a significant impact on the relationship between the immediate and extended family. In an informal conversation, Mrs Yeppison described the sadness she felt when her daughters (particularly the two younger ones), could not communicate with their grandmother during her trips to Australia. This intergenerational isolation appeared amplified not only by the physical distance separating the Yeppisons from their extended family, but also by the girls' inability to express or share their Danish identity on a linguistic level.

### **Progress for Sarah: Non-traditional spaces**

During the LCAP, Sarah's progress in learning and development was observed in non-traditional spaces characterised by a group context of negotiation. The term 'non-traditional' was chosen due to its prominent use in educational discourse to encapsulate teachers' attempts to build on students' previous knowledge by providing open-ended questions and affirmative or directive strategies to support students' oral language development through risk taking (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994). Such learning experiences include cognitively challenging and purposeful tasks that integrate knowledge from other subject areas. Because teachers are not perceived to be the single source of authoritative knowledge and social control is dispersed, non-traditional spaces also blur the boundaries between teachers and students.

These non-traditional spaces allowed Sarah to extend her use and understanding of language by searching for relationships between the structure and function of languages or by initiating questions or statements to bilingual partners of differing ages. These spaces were often characterised by pedagogy and learning that integrated home, school and community practices. In this context, while engaging in scaffolded activities, Sarah extended her metalinguistic awareness while constructing her identity through social interaction. For example, when Sarah's mother animated a bilingual shared story experience in the classroom, Sarah's behaviour can be interpreted as proactive. In the following extract from the classroom activity 'Danish code breaker' (11/3/98), Sarah directed her mother's attention to the vowels as she reflected on the structure of Danish. Sarah's mother also provided feedback similar to that noted in home reading practices, during which Sarah was accorded a fair deal of control. Data gathered from the parent interview indicated that Mrs Yeppison sometimes incorporated Danish words into shared story experiences at home and encouraged Sarah to invent parts of the stories.

**Sarah's mother:** So, if we look at the alphabet, so these three letters, the E, the O and the A. [She begins to write the letters on the story-board]

**Sarah:** Are those vowels?

**Sarah's mother:** Yes. We also have the non-vowels. Do you know your vowels?

**Students:** A, E, I, O, U.

- Sarah's mother:** [writes them down on the storyboard] And these are extra vowels in Danish. The *œ*, *ø*, *å*, *I*. Can you remember that?
- Sarah:** [repeats] *œ*, *ø*, *å*, *I*.

Here, Sarah's spontaneous repetition of the vowels can be interpreted as a strategy for managing learning.

In particular, a phenomenon described in this paper as multitiered scaffolding allowed Sarah to extend her LOTE learning and momentarily adopt the voice of authority. For example, in multi-tiered scaffolding, children performed other activities with peers, which had originally been scaffolded by the teacher or Wendy. This form of scaffolding involved Sarah participating in a network of dialogue that took place intermittently and spontaneously via peer-peer, teacher-student or child-adult interaction. In the classroom, the process of scaffolding originated in Wendy's actions as a pedagogical facilitator. She created a 'Memory Match Game' by distributing the equivalent versions of French and English words, which the students cut out and turned face down to play with a partner. Several days later, Sarah brought the French Memory Match Game home and asked her mother to help her play it in Danish during an informal home-based activity entitled 'Danish Memory Match Game' (29/3/98). To adapt the game to a Danish equivalent, Sarah and her mother collaborated to discover conceptual links from French to Danish. However, the revised version of the game included the original English words from the French-English translation. Thus, playing the new game involved making associations between three languages. The scaffolding process continued as Sarah explained the rules of the new 'Memory Match Game' to her eldest sister.

During multitiered scaffolding, Sarah was also able to construct an identity based on newly discovered perceptions of herself. Sarah reshaped and personalised LOTE material and evolved towards perceiving herself as a speaker of LOTE. Here, Sarah played an active role that was similar to the one adopted during home reading with her mother. In the following extract from 'Danish Memory Match Game' (29/3/98), Sarah associated the pronoun 'I' with the Danish language game.

1. **Sarah:** I'm going to play the Memory Game at home in Danish with my Mum after school.
2. **Researcher:** That's great Sarah.
3. **Sarah:** My Mum changed the French words to Danish. And we're going to cut them up.
4. **Researcher:** It sounds like fun.
5. **Sarah:** Then, I'm going to show my sister how to play when she gets home from uni.

More specifically, in turn 1, it can be argued that Sarah's association of the pronoun 'I' with the verbs 'going to play' promoted an image of accomplishing a personalised task. In turn 3, Sarah used the pronoun 'we' to designate the collaborative partnership formed between her mother and herself. Again, Sarah's active involvement in shaping the learning process was illustrated through the connection of the pronoun 'we' with specific planning steps. Finally, in turn 5, following the researcher's posi-

tive feedback, Sarah used the pronoun 'I' to designate herself as an active processor of languages who shared information with another family member.

During these types of purposeful tasks, Sarah extended her LOTE learning and collaborated with partners of differing ages. Fleeting moments of growth were revealed as the social interaction emphasised the sharing of expertise. Sarah also began to shift towards a self-perception based on harmonious adherence to multiple groups. As Sarah collaborated with a variety of partners, she expressed her concurrent membership in three different groups: the dominant Anglo-Celtic group at school, the Danish linguistic and cultural group at home and the French linguistic and cultural group introduced via the LCAP.

This dynamic reorganising of one's sense of self has been documented by Norton (1997) who argued that children from bilingual families mediate their identity in the languages they speak, understand and write. During an informal classroom activity (Dutch Birthday Card, 7/4/98), Sarah used LOTE in a purposeful yet informal manner to create meaning for a peer by translating a Dutch birthday card into English. In addition, as Sarah collaborated with a group of peers to make a farewell card for a fellow student, she appropriated the use of a French expression by writing *Bonjour* in a card which was created during an English activity animated by the classroom teacher.

This interactive and sometimes unpredictable sharing of language between peers appeared to rupture the predominant teaching-learning pattern observed at St Gabrielle's School, which involved much teacher-talk, student passivity and the exclusive use of English. In such traditional spaces, students were centrally positioned as English-speaking Christians in a Catholic community. Their social and personal identities were formed in ritualised school practices. Here, students used the subject 'I' in conjunction with practices such as singing hymns and reciting prayers. However, as Sarah applied her knowledge of French, Danish or Dutch to communicate, she began to view herself as a speaker of LOTE. Here, Sarah used the subject 'I' in connection with newly discovered abilities that affirmed an emerging sense of self. It can be argued that this affirmation related to intellectual challenge and allowed Sarah to apply information gained in a preceding context while harmoniously expressing membership of groups such as the Anglo-Celtic monolingual majority and the minority of first-language English speakers who use LOTE.

## Discussion: The LCAP's Disruption of Learning Patterns

Used in conjunction with a number of other sociocultural research strategies, the 'teaching experiment' successfully disrupted the existing ways of being a student in a school community. Through scaffolded LOTE activities, Sarah was exposed to situations that acknowledged alternative values, such as exploring a diverse sociocultural environment and establishing collaborative power relations. Sarah expressed new linguistic understandings by making conceptual links or analysing grapho-phonetic structures across languages. Further, Sarah and her mother temporarily adopted or shared the role of expert as they engaged in bilingual shared reading experiences, translated from Dutch to English or created trilingual word games. Here, the research model provided insight into

the intersection of the practices of individuals, families and institutions, which punctuated daily social interaction.

In this sense, the implementation of the LCAP provided Sarah with possibilities for growth, which were scaffolded by teachers and by Sarah's mother in class and at home. When Mrs Yeppison accepted the invitation to conduct a bilingual shared reading experience in the classroom, she extended the story reading by discussing her family's migration to Australia. With Sarah's assistance, her mother displayed pictures to illustrate the story and organised a taste testing of Danish pancakes, which were prepared regularly at home. This family-oriented participation ruptured traditional notions of parental involvement at school, in that it allowed Sarah and her mother to collaborate and adapt their engagement in the LCAP. Outside the classroom Sarah and her mother continued to appropriate the aims of the programme by choosing to visit the LOTE section of the city library, attempting to speak Danish more often at home and reviewing the LOTE newsletter.

On a more abstract level, this form of parent-child participation can be interpreted as an informal role shifting into the formal scripts of classrooms. As Sarah made initiations, the interweaving of these informal and formal elements facilitated the widening of traditional speech patterns observed in classrooms, such as 'initiation-response-evaluation' (Mehan, 1979). As Sarah and her mother collaborated with the classroom teacher and students, they briefly succeeded in bridging the chasm observed between the sociocultural and linguistic diversity in the community and the general absence of institutional support for such diversity. In this sense, the LCAP appeared to provide new possible communities for both daughter and mother.

From a broader sociocultural perspective, it can be argued that this form of participation promoted collaborative power relations, which were consistent with the Commonwealth Government's agenda of social justice. Whilst this term was positioned from diverse perspectives, the common theme focused on providing equal opportunities for all Australians. Sarah's progress involved spaces in which social justice was translated into practice through the generation of knowledge that embraced diversity. However, it appeared that Sarah's appropriation of the notion of social justice depended on scaffolding provided by partners of differing ages. In the area of second-language learning, such interaction revealed a fleeting, yet spontaneous integration of LOTE into class and home settings.

In these non-traditional spaces, Sarah also drew on her own cultural and linguistic resources to appropriate the notion of celebrating diversity, which was introduced via the LCAP. Here, Sarah actively participated in partnerships that extended and validated LOTE learning during LOTE classes, in other curriculum areas and at home. In this sense, it can be argued that the 'teaching experiment' facilitated a momentary widening of the normalised school curriculum to incorporate linguistic and cultural aspects of minority groups. This brief affirmation of cultural and linguistic identity can also be viewed as consistent with the Commonwealth Government's notion of identity based on inclusiveness, which encourages all Australians to share their diverse cultures and traditions.

These results deepen the concept of appropriation (Vygotsky, 1978), which has been refined since the 1980s to include the notion of community membership

(Beaumont, 1999; Dyson, 1993; Renshaw, 1996). The use of a sociocultural perspective facilitated the identification of previously unmapped links between LOTE learning and the manner in which students construct their identity across diverse settings. As Sarah appropriated linguistic expressions in French or spontaneously used pedagogical material in French or Danish, she transferred cultural resources from one learning experience to another, for example from school to home or LOTE to first-language settings. Using the concept of voicing (Bakhtin, 1984, 1986), Sarah's appropriation in the area of LOTE can be explicated as an internalisation of the words of others. Here, by positioning herself explicitly as 'author' and 'agent' through the use of the subject 'I', Sarah revealed a complex sense of identity – an identity that was intertwined with the languages and voices of others who held membership in the community.

The phenomenon described as multitiered scaffolding also extends the widely accepted notion of scaffolding as an expert-driven process (Bruner, 1983; Hammond & Gibbons, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) by analysing the nature of scaffolding as change involving contexts, languages and group memberships. Under informal and collaborative conditions, a zone of proximal development was created for Sarah through the process of sequential, triangular interaction that involved the interplay between a multiplicity of past and present 'voices'. Here, scaffolding comprised sequenced partnerships involving at least three individuals. The first partner provided scaffolding for a second partner. The second partner then provided scaffolding for a third partner(s). Whilst the second round of scaffolding often occurred almost immediately, it sometimes took place several days later in a new context. As Sarah adopted the role of teacher in a LOTE context, she expressed a 'voice' (Bakhtin, 1986), which served not only to scaffold students, but also to create a wider sense of community for herself. On a broader level, the social interaction observed in these English and LOTE activities revealed socially just learning spaces, which promoted collaborative power relations (Cummins, 1996) for a democratic and multicultural society.

## Conclusion

Over the past two decades, the question of integrating diverse sociocultural perspectives into the school curriculum has given rise to a number of governmental policies, educational programmes and academic studies both overseas and in Australia (Berthelot, 1991; Commonwealth Government of Australia, 1989; Corson, 1998; Heath, 1983, 1988; Kamberelis & De la Luna, 1996; Olneck, 2000). Results from this study provide insights into how new forms of literacy practices emerge in a specific location and across the lives of children, parents and teachers. They also provide an opportunity to reflect on whether Australia's current LOTE initiatives are adequately responding to the needs or interests of diverse school communities.

Despite the limits of the single setting of the LCAP, the results locate issues of LOTE learning in Australian primary schools within a discourse of cultural and linguistic practices. A number of issues, which surfaced at St Gabrielle's School, can be discussed more generally in terms of implications for LOTE teaching practice and curriculum design. First, Sarah's progress during multitiered scaffold-

ing connected home and school learning and highlights the importance of investigating innovative avenues for family participation in LOTE programmes. Second, the structure of the LOTE programme at St Gabrielle's School, which focused on providing relief time for classroom teachers, parallels the wider issue of local LOTE initiatives being silenced through piecemeal implementation, isolation and inconsistent levels of support. Third, the temporary interest generated by the LCAP in the general school community indicates the need to address the more profound problem concerning the vaguely defined role of LOTE in the regular school curriculum. Finally, the constraints and possibilities for identity construction observed in St Gabrielle's community emphasise the necessity of widening the Anglo-Celtic, Christian definition of Australian identity that currently pervades curriculum materials and teaching strategies.

During the LCAP, Sarah was able to appropriate knowledge introduced in second-language learning in the classroom. Through the process of multitiered scaffolding, these informal learning situations also allowed Sarah to spontaneously reinforce and extend her LOTE learning at home. However, these types of home-school connections occurred infrequently and momentarily. The introduction of the LCAP at St Gabrielle's School foreshadows a possible alternative to the containment mode of LOTE currently operating in Australian primary schools. The LCAP provides for children's general enrichment of linguistic awareness by valuing families' existing linguistic resources. LOTE becomes a vehicle for exploring and revealing processes of language learning, which are closely related to identity construction.

Due to the current marginalisation within the primary school curriculum, LOTE teaching is generally restricted to 30-minute time slots with a specialist teacher travelling from class to class in a school or across schools. The integration of LOTE classes into the mainstream curriculum, the diversification of teaching strategies and the development of home-school relations are necessary to meet the challenge of adapting Australian schools to diversity. However, an effective institutional adaptation to sociocultural and linguistic diversity will require not only the local dynamism of LOTE teachers, but also the collaboration of parents, principals, classroom teachers and State and Commonwealth Governments.

## Correspondence

Any correspondence should be directed to Dr Wendy Cumming-Potvin, Lecturer, Murdoch University, School of Education, South Street, Murdoch, Perth, Western Australia 6150 (potvin@central.murdoch.edu.au).

## Note

1. The States, Territories and the Commonwealth of Australia use the term LOTE to describe all languages other than English, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, Australian Sign Language and classical languages (Curriculum Corporation, 1994).

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