

## **Latino/a Voices in Australia: negotiating bilingual identity**

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**ABSTRACT** In Australia, bilingual identity and home language retention/attrition in bilingual children has had little research attention. This is particularly true in the early years of life where identity construction emerges in the context of early childhood education. This article begins with an overview of the Australian context to focus attention on the limited provision of bilingual support in early childhood settings. By drawing on the work in identity and hybridity negotiation, the 'voices' of six Latin American parents are discussed to show how identities are negotiated and intersect with language retention within the social fields of 'race', ethnicity and gender differences. Three emerging themes are highlighted: the diversity of the parents' experiences in negotiating identity and language retention in family life; the parents' experiences of identity as multiple; and identity as a site of transformation and struggle in child rearing and gendered family practices. These findings demonstrate the significance of parents' perspectives and experiences of identity and language retention in raising their children bilingually, which can inform equitable and innovative practices in the provision of bilingual support in early childhood settings. In conclusion, the author invites early childhood educators to reframe their understandings of identity construction in young bilingual children.

### **Introduction**

Despite the seemingly liberal approaches toward linguistic diversity in Australia and a long-standing Community Languages program in Australian schools, the provision, maintenance and extension of children's home languages and literacy experiences, particularly in prior-to-school settings, remain sporadic and limited (Jones Díaz & Harvey, 2002). This article provides a discussion of the limited provision of home language support to bilingual children in early childhood education and raises issues about the impact of 'English only' early

childhood settings on the retention levels of children's home languages. Due to the scarcity of research in Australia that documents families' perspectives in raising their children bilingually, there are silences in how families and children negotiate bilingual identity. In an attempt to disrupt some of these silences, the discussion that follows draws on critical and cultural theory as a framework for investigating the relationships between language, identity and culture.

### **The Provision of Home Language Support in Early Childhood Education**

Despite widespread international and national research that consistently documents and endorses the various intellectual, sociocultural and linguistic gains from being bilingual, much of the work in becoming bilingual in early childhood settings remains problematic and unrecognised. Although the 1991 nationally based Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP) (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1991) represents a national and state coordinated attempt at language planning, of the 248 languages spoken in Australia, in 1996, as few as 31 community languages and 16 Indigenous languages were taught in Australian primary schools for a minimum of 2 hours per week (see the Australian Language and Literacy Council, 1996). Further, this policy has failed to include policy initiatives for children between birth and 5 years of age and it is not widely known amongst educators working in the early years of school (Jones Díaz & Harvey, 2002). Since the focus of this policy is directed at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education, it follows that there is limited provision of bilingual support at both state and federal levels for children in prior-to-school settings (Jones Díaz & Harvey, 2002). For young Australian children from bilingual backgrounds, access to the home language is impeded largely by a lack of federal, state and local government policy articulation, direction and funding. In practice, it rarely goes beyond the use of the occasional nursery rhyme or greeting (Jones Díaz, 2003).

In prior-to-school settings where there is support for home languages, they are often used as a transitional strategy for the purpose of bridging the gap between the child's home language and the language of the setting (Makin et al, 1995). Integration is the primary focus, but as Rhedding-Jones (2001) suggests, 'what has been named as "integration" operates as assimilation' (p. 138). Transitional strategies rely on bilingual staff who speak the same home language as the children to assist in settling into the new environment (Makin et al, 1995). Notwithstanding the fact that a high proportion of bilingual staff are indeed qualified teachers (from their respective countries of origin), their qualifications often remain unrecognised in Australia, as they are not employed as teachers, nor are they employed to teach languages. For example, in the field of education in 1993, only 32% of migrants born in non-English-speaking countries with teaching qualifications were recognised in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 1996).

In transitional strategies, as children's English language proficiency increases, provision of bilingual support is often withdrawn. As the priority is the acquisition of English, transitional strategies sustain discourses of monolingualism with the abandonment of support for the first language. In research undertaken in the south-west and inner-west regions of Sydney, Australia, Robinson & Jones Díaz (2000) surveyed 49 early childhood educators to investigate ways in which diversity and difference were incorporated into policy and practices. A significant area of this investigation centred on issues relating to practices and policies associated with home language support in early childhood settings. A major concern expressed by staff was children's ability to integrate and communicate their needs (in English) at the setting. This is problematic because staff equated children's ability to mix effectively with others and adapt to the setting with the ability to speak English, rather than a concern for the limited opportunities available for children to use their home language at the setting. There was a greater emphasis on the children's survival in the setting, rather than the language rights of bilingual children to have access to their home language (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2000, p. 77).

Transitional strategies can also lead to experiences of subtractive bilingualism, resulting in the eventual loss of the home language (Makin et al, 1995; Cummins, 1996; Corson, 1998). Subtractive bilingualism usually occurs when the second language is learnt at the expense of the first/home language (Wong-Fillmore, 1991; Corson, 1998; Jones Díaz & Harvey, 2002). Children are more likely to experience subtractive bilingualism in 'English only' early childhood settings, where young children may be exposed to English at an early age (Wong-Fillmore 1991; Jones Díaz & Harvey, 2002). Research suggests that the younger children are in acquiring English, the greater the likelihood that English will replace the home/first language and they will experience language shift (Wong-Fillmore, 1991; Jones Díaz & Harvey, 2002).

'English only' early childhood settings have a strong impact on the retention levels of the home language. This is evident in Wong-Fillmore's (1991) research into home language retention of bilingual children in early childhood settings. Wong-Fillmore interviewed 1000 families living in the USA. She found that 60% believed that monolingual 'English only' day care centres were the cause of the loss of the home language. Her research highlights how loss of the home language caused serious disruptions to the interactions and communication patterns in the home due to the fact that the children were not able to use their home language to communicate with parents and grandparents.

Transitional and 'English only' strategies are not directed at language retention, bilingualism, or developing the linguistic resources of young bilingual children. Bourdieu's (1991, 1998) theory of social practice highlights how the 'cultural capital' (cultural knowledge and language practices) of children and families from diverse cultural groups is rarely valorised by the formal and often hidden cultural knowledges, practices and pedagogies in education. As suggested by Olneck (2000), 'schools [and early childhood

settings] obscure the very character of cultural capital and the processes of its reproduction' (p. 321). Not all children enter early childhood settings with identical configurations of capital. Children from Anglo middle-class, heterosexual, monolingual, urban and nuclear families often possess cultural capital congruent with the capital produced in early childhood pedagogy (Jones Díaz et al, 2001).

Bourdieu (in Grenfell & James, 1998) argued that capital attracts capital and that various forms of capital are interconvertible. This is evident in 'English only' early childhood settings, and settings that implement transitional home language support. The cultural capital exchanged in English has more currency than other languages. Hence, bilingual children are likely to 'cash in' their home language as a way of gaining access to social and cultural power constituted in the pedagogies of early childhood education.

### **The Silencing of Family 'Voices' in Raising Children Bilingually**

In early childhood education, emerging evidence suggests that families are silenced in their ability to raise issues, and express their concerns or aspirations with staff about their children's early bilingual experiences. Robinson & Jones Díaz's (2000) research showed very low levels of communication with families about home language retention, with 24% of respondents indicating that families made requests for discussion with staff about their children's bilingual experiences. In this research, there was little evidence pointing to the availability of opportunities for discussion with family members about such issues. This raises concerns about the quality of communication between families and staff. The lack of opportunity for families to share experiences and raise issues about their children's bilingualism either at the early childhood setting or in home/community contexts prohibits the sharing of knowledge about children's everyday experiences of growing up bilingual.

In research conducted by Makin et al (1999), families' perspectives of their children's early literacy learning was investigated. Many families expressed concern about the lack of opportunity to provide information to teachers, and it was apparent that teachers were generally not well informed about home literacy practices of bilingual families. Teachers were more aware of the home literacy practices of children whose parents were able to articulate confidently and share information (in English) with the teacher.

The discussion that follows attempts to give 'voice' to how some people from a minority community negotiate and renegotiate their identities around issues of 'race', ethnicity and gender in the context of raising their children bilingually. The voices from these data represent the experiences of inter-ethnic and interracial parents, single parents, and middle- and working-class parents from the Latin American community living in Sydney. Firstly, information about the cultural history and demographic background of Latin Americans in Australia provides a context to this discussion.

### **Latin Americans in Australia: multiple and hybrid identities**

According to Martin (1998), Latin American migration to Australia began in the 1970s and since that time, patterns of migration have reflected the economic, political and social tensions within the respective Latin American nations. In the 1970s, predominantly Argentinian, Uruguayan and Chilean migrants entered Australia. In the 1980s, Nicaraguans, Guatemalans and Salvadorians arrived under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program.

Prior to the 1960s, the White Australia Policy prevented the migration of many people from the Latin American region (Martin, 1998). This policy specifically affected those from the Caribbean, such as Dominicans, Belizeans, Haitians and Puerto Ricans whose mixed African, indigenous and European ancestry would have been seen as a potential threat to the racial cohesion in Australia. The 1996 census data shows that the countries with the greatest concentration of African hybridised identities are among some of the smallest communities living in Australia. For example, according to the 1996 census, there are as few as 11 people from the Dominican Republic; 15 people from Puerto Rico; 3 people from Haiti and 6 people from Belize.

Further, the 1996 census data showed that 82% of Spanish speakers reportedly spoke Spanish at home (this percentage includes both Spanish speakers from Spain and Latin America). While this includes many second generation Australians with Latino/a born parents, it also includes Australian partners of Spanish speakers. In Australia, there is no singular Spanish-speaking culture, rather a diversity of Latino/a cultures from the region of Latin America speaking varieties of Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French, Creole, and a small number of people who speak indigenous languages such as Mayan, Quiche and Mapuche. For example, Uruguayan migrants are often multilingual, speaking English, Spanish and Italian (York, 2001).

The concept of hybridity is a term reactivated by cultural studies to describe contemporary cultural reality of blended or mixed cultural and racial identities. For Bhabha (1998), hybridity is a strategy within which the subject constructs a renegotiated space set from the margins of exclusion, which is neither assimilation nor collaboration. He argues that hybrid identities 'deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy: the outside of the inside: the part in the whole' (p. 34). Hybridity is not produced by discrete cultural values and belief systems but, rather, the creation of something new out of difference, and the various ways of being and thinking are continuous yet contradictory (Hall, in Luke & Luke, 1998). Hall's (in Luke & Luke, 1998) definition of hybridity encapsulates the recognition that diasporic identities are 'those, which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference' (p. 4).

For many Latin Americans, identity transformation and difference is negotiated within contexts of cultural heterogeneity, experienced in daily life through the multiple contradictions of living in two or more cultures (Acosta-

Belén & Santiago, 1998). Hybridity has a long trajectory in Latin American cultures (Canclini, 1995). This is characterised by indigenous, African and European cultural and racial influences, as the following extract from Anzaldúa (1987) poignantly illustrates:

Because I, a *mestiza* [1]  
Continually walk out of one culture  
And into another  
Because I am in all cultures at the same time. (p. 77)

Not surprisingly, hybridity is also characteristic of the wider Australian diaspora. Australia's diversity in population has always comprised significant levels of interracial/inter-ethnic origins (Price, 1993; Penny & Khoo, 1996; Luke & Luke, 1998). Consequently the Australian diaspora, with increasing inter-ethnicity and interraciality, is a demographic social reality, which the Latino/a community, along with many other communities, experience. Yet, in discourses of Australian multiculturalism identity is often conceived as fixed or unchangeable, predetermined and unified. Categories of ethnicity are constructed as homogenised entities, in which social and cultural histories are often silenced (Luke & Luke, 1998). Culture and identity are often conceptualised as fixed and static, emphasising rigid boundaries of values and beliefs, language, lifestyle, religion and cultural practices.

Further, public policy on multiculturalism has made assumptions that the organic solidarity of cultures are singular coherent systems of representation and practice (Luke & Luke, 1998). These assumptions extend to the Latin American community in Australia as a homogenised community, which ignores the impact of post-colonialism in terms of the relationship between Spain and its former colonies; national, political and regional differences between Central, Caribbean and South America (Langer, 1998), and the globalised political, economic and military domination of Latin America by the USA.

### **The Research in Context**

This research project involves the study of children and families from Latin American Spanish-speaking backgrounds, living and attending educational and community settings in the inner-west, south-west and eastern suburbs of Sydney. Approximately 23 children and 25 family members from different family structures, including extended families, single parents, low-income and inter-ethnic/interracial families participated. The data presented in this article draw on six of the 25 family members from the larger study.

The analysis presented here draws on the work of Hall (1996) and Bhabha (1998) to investigate the relationships between language, identity and culture. Data gathering involved the collection of demographic data using surveys, open-ended informal interviews and field notes. The survey questions were aimed at obtaining demographic data about the length of time in Australia,

ages of family members, levels of education, and the use of Spanish and English in various social situations. They were used to guide the interview discussion, which explored in greater depth the participants' views and experiences of migration, identity and the use of Spanish and English in a range of social fields. The interviews were audiotaped, and translated from Spanish to English by the researcher. However, a Spanish-speaking research assistant partially transcribed the interviews conducted in Spanish. The parents were selected through personal and community contacts such as ethnic schools, schools and playgroups.

Throughout the interviews, I drew on my own subjectivity as a bilingual English/Spanish speaking Australian, educator and mother of Latino/Australian bilingual children, to engage in conversations with the families about identity and language retention. Data from the interviews have been analysed using thematic analysis informed by frameworks of hybridity and identity negotiation, to identify major issues and discourses in relation to how parents and their children negotiate identity as bilingual Latino/a Australians.

### **The Participants**

The six parents interviewed were from different parts of Latin America, including Chile, Uruguay, Colombia, Peru and Australia. Five interview sessions were conducted, and in one interview, both parents participated. The participants comprised five women, and one male partner, and participants' children were aged between 1 year and 12 years. Two of the women were fluent Spanish-speaking Anglo-Australians. Of the remaining four parents, one migrated to Australia in childhood and the others have lived in Australia for many years. Following is a brief overview of the participants (pseudonyms have been used). Key aspects of the data relating to their children's access to and use of Spanish are tabulated in Tables I and II.

#### *Alicia*

Alicia and her partner (Diego) are from Peru and have been in Australia for 10 years. They are aged between 35 and 39 years and have two children, Salvador (1 year) and Pedro (5 years). Alicia was a high school teacher in Peru and is currently the primary caregiver of the children. Her partner has a Technical Diploma from Peru and is working as a painter. He is the main income earner and they have recently purchased their own home. Both Alicia and Diego speak Spanish exclusively to their children and Alicia is very pleased with Pedro's proficiency levels in Spanish. She expressed some concern for his English proficiency and commented that she is currently assisting him with home-school readers in English. Pedro does not attend Spanish classes. Alicia's reasons for speaking Spanish to her children were mainly due to her desire to maintain her identity. Her strong sense of identity and its link to language was evident throughout our conversation, as illustrated below:

Bueno, enseñando español a mi hijos no es mucho esfuerzo para mí. Es solamente parte del día de vivir. Es como una prolongación de nosotros mismos, o si me los pregunta por qué es importante, porque es la identidad que estamos proyectando a los hijos. Y entonces ellos van, van a saber quiénes son, um, sus padres, ellos mismos. Creo que en parte que ellos se honren entorno, su familia y nosotros.

[Well, speaking Spanish to my children is not very hard for me. It's part of my daily life. It's like an extension of ourselves, or if you ask me why it's important, because it's our identity that we project on to our children. And so they know who they are, their parents, themselves. I think its how they give respect towards their family.]

#### *Clarissa*

Clarissa is a single parent between the ages of 30 and 34. She has two boys, Miguel (10 years) and Xavier (7½ years). Clarissa identifies as an Anglo-Australian with a Jewish background. She speaks Spanish fluently and is a singer and dancer who performs in many of the local Sydney-based Salsa and Latino/a bands throughout Australia. Her children do not participate in Spanish classes. Until she separated from their father, Clarissa spoke Spanish to her children. Now, English is the main language spoken. However, her children are exposed to Spanish through her daily contact with musicians and artists in the Sydney Latino/a music scene and through ongoing contact with their father. She wrote in the questionnaire:

The children speak/learn and hear Spanish with their father and many people from the Latin American community on a daily basis.

#### *Camellia*

Camellia and her partner (Stefan) are originally from Uruguay and have lived in Australia for 18 years. They have two children, Marsella (12 years) and Gabriel (18 years). Camellia is the primary caregiver and works as a nurse's assistant. Stefan is a cleaner, and was a farmer in Uruguay. Their children speak fluent Spanish, although Marcella responds in English and Spanish to her parents and, according to Camellia, Marcella's English is more dominant than her Spanish. However, both Camellia and Stefan speak Spanish exclusively to each other and the children in the home. Camellia and Stefan's communication is in Spanish, and they considered this to be the fundamental reason why Marcella's Spanish is proficient:

Sí, sí, porque todo está en inglés, entonces parece que para ella es más fácil comunicarse en inglés, más fácil, que en español. Pero si tiene ella que comunicarse en español, porque sabe que la persona no le va a entender lo ...

[Yes, yes because everything is in English, so it appears that for her it's easier to communicate in English than in Spanish. But if she has to, she will use Spanish because she knows that the person doesn't understand ...]

*Magdalene (Maggie) and Julio*

Magdalene is Anglo-Australian and her partner (Julio) is from Colombia. Julio has been in Australia for 17 years. They have two girls, Sara (21 months) and Loanna (7 years). Maggie and Julio are equally involved in the caregiving and parenting of the children. Julio has a postgraduate university degree from Colombia and works as an artist in Australia. Maggie has a university degree from Australia and works as a manager in information technology. The children do not have access to formal Spanish language classes. However, the children see 'abuelos' (grandparents) from Julio's family on a regular basis and the grandparents speak to the children in Spanish exclusively. Julio and Maggie have a wide social network of friends and family in the Latin American community where their children have opportunities to use Spanish.

Maggie speaks fluent Spanish with Julio and the two girls. According to Maggie and Julio, Loanna is highly proficient in Spanish. A recent family reunion in Colombia and Cuba gave Loanna and Sara daily opportunities to speak Spanish. Maggie commented in the interview that she was surprised at her daughter's ability in Cuba. She was able to use the formal verb conjugations when addressing senior members of the family.[2] Since their return to Australia, Maggie and Julio have tried to continue speaking Spanish to their children. While the parents do not force their children to speak Spanish, they were highly supportive and positive toward their children's use of Spanish. Maggie's relationship with her children appeared to be in both English and Spanish, while Julio spoke only Spanish to his children. He spoke about the importance of identity and his reasons for speaking Spanish to his children:

I think the best thing we can give her [Loanna] is for her to understand where she comes from and to value that and appreciate that.

*Juanita*

Juanita was born in Chile and her husband (Sam) is Anglo-Australian. Juanita is a midwife, but she is currently working at home caring for their youngest child. Sam is an accountant and works long hours. Juanita came to Australia with her family when she was 9 years old. She speaks Spanish to her parents, who migrated to Australia due to political unrest during the mid-1970s. Juanita has two children, Daniel (7 years) and Molly (19 months). Daniel attends a local after-school Spanish program, one afternoon per week. Daniel and Molly have close contact with their 'abuelos' and are exposed to Spanish when extended family members gather for family events. For Juanita, speaking Spanish is important, especially in terms of identity. She made the following comment:

Because I'm Chilean, it's my mother tongue and there's something romantic about the language, and an identifying form too, you know, and uhm, there's something in English that doesn't, express everything I want to say, and uh, so I think it does you know that you're saying it identifies you.

Table I provides information about the families' use of Spanish at home, with extended family and within mainstream and non-mainstream educational settings. The parents and their children are listed and family members with whom the children speak Spanish are indicated. The educational and family contexts in which they speak Spanish are also included.

Participants and their children	With mother	With father	With extended family	Within mainstream educational settings	Within non-mainstream educational settings	Due to family visits overseas
Alicia (Salvador and Pedro)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Clarissa (Miguel and Xavier)	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Camellia (Marsella and Gabriel)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Maggie and Julio (Sara and Loanna)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Juanita (Daniel and Molly)	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No

Table I. Summary of children's access to Spanish.  
Source: Questionnaires, interviews and field notes.

Table II summarises the children's proficiency in Spanish as reported by their parents. The children and their ages are listed. Children experiencing subtractive and receptive bilingualism are indicated and the children who are proficient Spanish speakers are included.

Children and ages	Experiencing subtractive bilingualism	Receptive understanding of Spanish	Proficient Spanish speaker
Salvador (12 months)		Yes	
Pedro (5 years)			Yes
Miguel (10 years)	Yes		
Xavier (7.5 years)	Yes		
Marsella (12 years)			Yes
Gabriel (18 years)			Yes
Sara (21 months)		Yes	
Loanna (7 years)			Yes
Daniel (7 years)	Yes	Yes	
Molly (19 months)		Yes	

Table II. Spanish proficiency of the children as reported by parents.  
Source: Questionnaires, interviews and field notes.

### Discussion

While the data illuminate significant issues associated with hybridity, identity and language, findings are by no means conclusive. Rather, the discussion that follows highlights three emerging themes: diversity of the parents' experiences in negotiating identity and language retention; the parents' experiences of identity as multiple, transformative and contextual, and identity as a site of transformation and struggle in child rearing and gendered family practices.

#### *The Diversity of Parents' Experiences in Negotiating Identity and Language Retention*

All five families live in the inner west region of Sydney. All parents reportedly spoke Spanish at home and placed emphasis on their children learning Spanish, yet none of the children had access to Spanish in mainstream prior-to-school or school settings (see Table I). Only two children from two families had access to Spanish outside the home through an after-school Spanish program (see Table I). The only other support for Spanish outside the home was through overseas trips to visit family in Latin America or through extended family contacts in Australia (see Table I). According to the parents' perceptions of their children's Spanish proficiency, of the 10 children, four were proficient in Spanish, three were experiencing subtractive bilingualism, and the remaining four appeared to have receptive understandings of Spanish, where they are able to understand what is said to them, but are not yet able to respond in Spanish (see Table II). In this small sample, the children's access to Spanish highlights a split between children's English-speaking public domains of mainstream Australia, and the Spanish-speaking private domain of the family. For these families, issues of language retention and bilingualism appear to be confined to the private and less powerful sphere of the home and extended family. This was also evident in

the research of Robinson & Jones Díaz (2000), where the work of maintaining the home language was seen to be the responsibility of the parents, reinforcing a public/private split between what happens at home and what happens in mainstream prior-to-school and school settings.

One of the parents, Juanita, spoke about her son's subtractive and receptive experiences of Spanish. Due to persistent middle ear infections that had resulted in hearing problems, the use of grommets was necessary. Consequently, she was advised by her doctor to abandon the use of Spanish at home. Prior to this advice, Juanita spoke to Daniel in Spanish exclusively up until he was 2 years old. However, following the doctor's suggestion, she stopped speaking Spanish to Daniel and he subsequently developed a receptive understanding of Spanish. Due to this, Juanita is currently trying to retrieve his Spanish by speaking Spanish with him and their daughter:

He said [the doctor], at the time, look, best to just speak to him in one language, because it's hard to find out how the hearing is uh impaired, and even though he has grommets [grommets], they might not be successful, he might need grommets [grommets], again ...

She continued:

and oh so we had to, we thought well, we don't want him to have this speech therapy because then you know, we'll have to have speech therapy in Spanish, [and] in English. It would just be muddled up, and we were a bit worried about it, and uh, so we decided just to do the English.

During this time, her son was attending an early childhood setting. If Juanita had opportunities to communicate her concerns to staff, they could have provided her with reliable information about bilingualism and speech therapy. This would have enabled her to make an independent and informed decision about whether to abandon the use of Spanish or not. Daniel's subtractive experiences of Spanish are attributed to the fact that English replaced Spanish in the home. After the interview, Juanita commented on the difficulties she had been experiencing in trying to encourage Daniel to speak Spanish, due to the fact that he responded to her in English exclusively and showed little interest in responding in Spanish. If Juanita had been given opportunities to talk through or access information about such issues, she may have decided to continue to speak Spanish to Daniel and hence opportunities to use rather than simply understand the language would have been available to him. Early childhood educators have many opportunities to support families in such crucial decisions, or point them to information sources or refer them to other professionals who can assist.

Despite the fact that Clarissa and Maggie speak Spanish as their second language, being second language speakers of Spanish does not prohibit them from playing a significant role in the retention of Spanish with their children. Their proficiency in Spanish and their awareness of their children's use of the two languages makes a significant contribution toward their children's Spanish trajectory and is central to their children's use of the language. For example,

Maggie's observations of her child's use of the formal third person verb conjugation, and Clarissa's determination to speak Spanish only to her children in their early years – 'I suppose that's why I was so determined that they weren't in their early years going to speak English to me, or with their dad' – demonstrates high levels of awareness about the learning of languages and languages use, perhaps brought about through their own experiences of becoming bilingual. The experiences of Clarissa and Maggie contradict assumptions that to be bilingual one must be from a non-English speaking background, or have a migrant experience in which learning English is what makes it possible to become bilingual. They also provide evidence that 'native speakers' of the home language do not always do the majority of the home language work in bilingual families.

In summary, the diversity of experiences in negotiating identity and language retention by these families is significant. The different social contexts in which each family uses Spanish and English according to the social fields in which they are used highlights bilingualism as dynamic and fluid. This characterises the hybridity within the Latin American diaspora, as the connections between hybridity, language and identity are apparent in the parents' views on the retention of Spanish and its relationship to their children's identity as Latino/a Australians.

#### *Identity as Multiple, Transformative and Contextual*

Throughout the conversations issues of identity emerged. All parents had something to say about identity that had direct links to their use of Spanish and English, in relation to both themselves and their children. In the conversation below between Clarissa and myself, she talked about her family's experiences of identity.

*Clarissa:* If you ask them [the children] what their nationality is they'll say Australian, I mean they think, I suppose if you ask them maybe what language they speak they'd say both, English and Spanish, and they definitely know where their parents are from. They would know, Mar[io] they'd say 'my father's from Ecuador' but they are Australian and ...

*Criss:* ... That's where they locate themselves.

*Clarissa:* ... Yeah and I suppose it's true, I mean because I'm not [from Ecuador]. I'm um, when I think of whereabouts my grandmother came from, or where my, the people from that generation and my dad's family lived around, when he came to Australia but he always identified himself as Australian, and it's funny only now in the past few years I've had to identify myself as not just Australian you know, but Australian *but from these roots because* [Clarissa's emphasis] people have been asking about the language and the music and my *different looks* [Clarissa's emphasis].

In the above conversation, Clarissa located her identity with that which she is not, 'and I suppose it's true, because I'm not [from Ecuador]'. Hall (1996)

suggests that identity negotiation is about using the resources of history, language and culture in the processes of becoming, rather than being. Clarissa is not Latina, yet she calls on her cultural resources of language and music as a tool to enable her to renegotiate her identity as Anglo-Australian from a Jewish background, as someone who is able to speak and perform in Spanish: 'I've had to identify myself not just Australian but Australian ... *but from these roots* because people have been asking about the language and the music and my *different looks*'.

Hall (1996) suggested that identity negotiation is also linked to how we might be represented and accepted by others. Earlier in the interview, Clarissa commented:

I never cease to answer the question of where are you from, and when I say Australia, they say, yes but where are your parents from? I go Australia, oh yes but where are your grandparents from, and they want to go through my whole history of family history before they will actually accept that I'm Australian.

Clarissa's experience of constant questioning from others about her Australian identity is not an uncommon experience, and it is a significant factor in the constant negotiation of identity. For Clarissa, this constant interrogation of her family history means that her identity as Australian is scrutinised due to the fact that her appearance is not Anglo-Australian.

According to Hall's (1996) definition of identity, importance is placed on the recognition of a common origin or shared characteristic with another person or group. Earlier in the interview, Clarissa also called on resources of language, culture and music to reflect on her allegiance and belonging to the Latin American community: 'and being in amongst that community by being married to a South American ... meant that ... I had to take it all on'. Clarissa's entry into the community took on another dimension through her music and performance: 'entering into the community as a performer in the music and everything and dance meant that I took it on even more'. For Clarissa, speaking Spanish resulted in her experiences of identity being subject to change and transformation: 'So it is definitely the language was the first point in changing a lot of what I am or not what I am or who I am, but what I appear, who I appear to be, because, um, I suppose I have [been] Latinalised'.

In the following conversation, Juanita described her experiences of identity during her visit to Chile:

*Juanita*: ... anyway when I went there and I went with Robert, my husband, we went back and uh ... all of the sudden everybody looked like me, all of the sudden I just felt like ...

*Criss*: ... you were back.

*Juanita*: ... I was back and, it was just lovely to, all of the sudden I wasn't boring, it was just ... I can't explain it any better ...

*Criss*: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you weren't different ... you were the same as everyone else ...

*Juanita:* Yeah, now and he was the foreigner and uh he, Robert's lovely, but it was just funny that all of the sudden I'm okay and I, I know they find that I have a bit of an accent because of my English.

Questions of identity arise from 'lived experiences' in which the process of identification is never complete and constantly in the process of change and transformation (Hall, 1996). This transformative and contextual nature of identity and belonging is emphasised through Juanita's repetitive use of the phrase 'all of the sudden'. In the first instance, she described her feelings of sameness: 'all of the sudden everybody looked like me'. Yet this is contrasted, in the second instance, where she expressed a sense of belonging: 'all of the sudden I just felt like ... I was back'. In the third instance, 'all of the sudden I wasn't boring', she encapsulated her own sense of 'self'. The perception of her own identity contrasts with that of her husband being 'the foreigner'. In each use of 'all of the sudden' there is a different expression of identity; relating to belonging, sameness, and 'the self'. These changes are brought on by the shifting and transformative contexts in which she found herself upon her return to Chile.

To Hall (1996), identity is a process of articulation and subject to the play of difference in which the marking of symbolic boundaries is significant. Symbolic boundaries are markers or signifiers of difference, represented in language and accent constituted in difference. Juanita's comment, 'I'm okay and I, I know they find that I have a bit of an accent because of my English', highlights her experiences of symbolic boundaries associated with her accented Spanish and her husband being 'the foreigner' (in Chile). These comments represent important sites of difference that also constitute her hybridised and multiple identity of migrating to Australia and being married to an Anglo-Australian.

In another interview, Alicia drew on cultural history and national identity to talk about how indigenous Peruvians are excluded in discourses of nationhood:

*Alicia:* En el país de donde yo vengo se estudia mucho de la identidad nacional

*Criss:* Sí, identidad indígena, identidad cultural, Peruana ...

*Alicia:* Sí porque como tú sabes hay dos culturas, la indígena que tú mencionas y la otra que es del origen occidental, o sea la cultura occidental. Entonces valorar los dos es muy bueno. Pero en mi país se le da mucho valor a uno, que es el occidental, el ah eh el, nativo se ha dejado de lado, si tienes algún rasgo nativo, en tu manera de hablar, y ya eres dejado de lado, entonces.

*Alicia:* In my country, they study national identity in depth

*Criss:* Yes, indigenous identity, cultural identity, Peruvian ...

*Alicia:* Yes because like you know there are two cultures, the indigenous culture that you mentioned and the other which originated in the 'West', or Western culture. So to value both is good. But in my country they give

more value to the one that is Western, and the native, they have put aside, if you have native roots in your way of speaking, and so you are cast aside.

In the above conversation, Alicia's reference to the marginalisation of indigenous Peruvians, 'the native, they have put aside', is a demonstration of Hall's (1996) argument: that identities function through their capacity to exclude or leave out, and as a consequence every identity has its 'margin'. Hence, those on the margins (according to Alicia) are the indigenous Peruvians, whose 'native roots' and 'way of speaking' are 'cast aside'. Such constructed forms of closure in Peru operate to exclude indigenous identities, through the process of valorising European Western cultural and linguistic practices: 'they give more value to the one that is Western'. Alicia's insights here parallel Laclau's (in Bhabha, 1994) conclusions: that identities are constructed through unification and occur within processes of power and exclusion ('[b]ut in my country they give more value to the one that is Western'). Unity is thus a necessary foundation for homogeneity, which operates as a constructed form of exclusion.

In summary, as described by Clarissa, Juanita and Alicia, identity operated on a number of different levels in varying contexts. For Clarissa, experiences of identity negotiation are through language, music and performance, whilst Juanita's experiences of identity are constituted in difference brought about by her trip to Chile. Alicia's comments about the marginalisation of indigenous Peruvians and their exclusion from discourses of Peruvian nationalism are poignant as they highlight how the construction of identities draws historically on unity and homogeneity to be viable, sustainable and powerful.

*Transformation and Struggle in Child Rearing  
and Gendered Family Practices*

In many Latin American cultures there are often stark binaries between masculinity and femininity: 'males make the rules and laws: women transmit them' (Anzaldúa, 1997, p. 260). In discourses of Latino masculinity, there is an emphasis on 'machismo', 'an exaggerated sense of masculinity stressing such attributes as courage, virility and domination' (Stavans, 1998, p. 230). Castañeda (cited in Darder & Torres, 1998, p. 12), argues that women are placed in opposition to men, perceived as inferior based on biological assumptions that 'in the divine order of nature, the male sex of the species is superior to the female' (p. 27).

In interracial and inter-ethnic families, gendered power relations can often be renegotiated around these binary positions of masculinity and femininity. Child rearing and family practices become the site of transformation and struggle where dominant discourses of femininity that position women as nurturers and primary caregivers of children, and discourses of masculinity, which construct men as the disciplinarians of the family, can

often be destabilised. For example, Maggie is highly conscious of the need to renegotiate and destabilise Latino masculinity in the parenting of their children:

but also, just on that identity thing. You at that time were falling into that stereotype of a Latin male form of discipline of the family, and that's something we have worked on for years and fought against.

From Maggie's perspective it seems that both she and Julio have tried to challenge the tendency of 'falling into that stereotype of a Latin male'. Yet, Julio's perspective on child rearing and discipline is a version of renegotiated Latino masculinity, as he appears to be more concerned about their parenting practices, and authority with their children, rather than renegotiating his position in Latino masculinity as the disciplinarian father. This is evident in the statement, 'I think there should be some very clear lines in which the parents have the authority to make decisions'. The extract below followed an incident that took place during the interview in which Loanna hit her younger sister, but lied about her involvement as the perpetrator. Julio reflected on his intervention in the incident:

and they [the parents] have to be clear in the moment in which they have to follow them otherwise there will be real trouble. If there is not that line, then as a parent you [are] someone that provides material goods and when you are not good any more they [the children] don't care about you.

In the above extract Julio's emphasis on the need for parental guidance, 'I think there should be some very clear lines in which the parents have the authority to make decisions', contrasts against Maggie's awareness of 'falling into that stereotype of a Latin male form of discipline of the family'. These differing positions about parenting highlight the tensions in the transformation and struggle between Maggie's desire for a negotiated masculinity and Julio's concern for clear parental guidance.

It appears, then, that for Julio and Maggie, not only power relations and Latino masculinity are implicated in the work of renegotiating child rearing and family practices. Language is also a significant factor in this process, as demonstrated by Julio's reference to his use of Spanish in his dealings with Loanna. He goes on to say, 'there is a direct relation of my how I am affected by the way I think I have dealt with Loanna, however, that is incredibly influenced by language'.

For Maggie and Julio, the absence of clear guidelines and frameworks from which they can draw can present challenges for them as they try to refigure normalising gendered discursive practices relating to child rearing. Indeed, Luke & Luke (1998) argue that in discourses of multiculturalism, there are absences in practical models and vocabularies that explain how inter-ethnic and interracial families can reconfigure identities, cultural and family practices. They argue that there are few role models from whom interracial couples can draw, particularly in the immediate family, requiring taken-for-granted monocultural, monolingual and gendered normative practices to be destabilised and re-formed into new cultural practices.

In summary, the differing perspectives represented in the above extracts between Julio and Maggie illustrate the ambiguities, tensions and uncertainties that impact on the renegotiation of child rearing and family practices. In this family, Maggie expressed concern about Julio enacting the stereotype of the Latin male and Julio was adamant that parental authority in the parent-child relationship should be clearly defined. For Maggie and Julio, the use of Spanish is significant, particularly for Julio as most of his communication with his children is in Spanish. The use of Spanish plays a significant role in the parenting practices Julio uses with his children. Further, the findings from the interview data from Maggie and Julio suggest that because of the lack of research about how interracial and inter-ethnic families can reconfigure identities and cultural and family practices, further research is needed about how questions of identity, language and child rearing practices are sites of struggle and transformation.

### **Implications for Early Childhood Practice**

Constituted in the education of bilingual children, there is often a disregard for and denial of the role of language as a major force in the construction of identities, which 'ignore[s] the way language may either confirm or deny the life histories and experiences of the people who use it' (Macedo, 1998, p. 275). This has direct implications for bilingual families and children as experiences of identity and the use of the home language are mediated and negotiated against a backdrop of dominant English-speaking contexts.

For early childhood educators working closely with bilingual families and their children, it is essential that they recognise that growing up bilingual is about negotiating social and cultural identity, and social practices and languages in everyday lived experiences. Bilingual children's understandings of themselves are mediated in the languages they speak, understand, read and write (Jones Díaz, 2001). This means it is imperative for early childhood educators to understand the complexities in children's identity construction in relation to the use of the home language and the impact of English.

Early childhood educators need to critically examine their use of languages in the early childhood setting, in terms of how 'English only' pedagogies can silence bilingual families and prevent them from raising issues about their children's use of the home language in various social fields. Furthermore, approaches to home language support undertaken at the setting need be evaluated in regard to the effectiveness of the program in promoting children's interest in and use of the home language both at the setting and in home/community contexts. For example, it is important that staff avoid the use of home languages as a transitional strategy to prevent subtractive bilingualism. As children's proficiency in English increases, the home language should be supported and not withdrawn. In practice this means that bilingual staff who share the home language/s of children should play a critical role in promoting and extending the home language so that bilingual children do not

have to 'cash in' their home language in exchange for English, but rather, make use of English and the home language to access social and cultural power at the setting.

The intersections between identity and difference need to be fully acknowledged when looking at the ways children and families negotiate everyday lived realities through which identity is constructed. In order to do this, early childhood educators need to understand identity as fluid, and language as separate but not exclusive to how it shapes and renegotiates family life. Acknowledging that language and identity are significant issues in children's lives will enable staff to draw on children's 'lived experiences' in meaningful ways.

To be effective in making meaningful links to children's everyday experiences, it is crucial that we understand the fact that identities are transformative and contradictory. This is particularly important in regard to how identities are frequently unmarked, invisible and often silenced in early childhood contexts. For example, lack of staff knowledge about children's cultural identity can be based on parents' non-disclosure of their own identity. This can be common in interracial/inter-ethnic families and second and third generation Australian families where children may appear as 'Anglo-Australian' and monolingual, yet engage in diverse language and cultural practices in their communities and with their families. In practice, this means that opportunities for children and families to talk about how they experience identity in multiple ways should be made available. It is vital that educators listen and respond to family experiences by providing opportunities that enable a move away from fixed notions of culture as 'celebration'. Educators need to take the time to find out about family cultural and language practices and make connections to these practices through experiences that acknowledge and incorporate the day-to-day and contradictory aspects of cultural and language practices that are represented in our communities.

As early childhood settings in Australia are increasingly more diverse, it is crucial that there are understandings that the relationships among bilingualism, family practices, and power relations in inter-ethnic and interracial families can reconfigure child rearing and family practices. Implicit in such practices, the gendered discourses of masculinity and femininity often remain sites of transformation and struggle between parents. It is important that early childhood educators recognise that there are often ambiguities and uncertainties located at the intersection of these struggles. Educators should not assume that there is agreement between parents about how they raise their children and they should be cognisant of the possible ambiguities and tensions that may exist between parents (and possibly with extended family members) that can be brought about through the coexistence of two (or more languages) and cultural differences.

The use of both the home language and English are important factors affecting child rearing and communication practices between parents and children. For bilingual families, where English and home languages are used

simultaneously in the home, the impact of English on the home language can have significant effects on communication patterns between adults and children (Wong-Fillmore, 1991). This is a particular concern for parents whose English proficiency is limited and for children whose ability to understand and respond to their parents in the home language is poor. Child-parent relationships can be constrained and family cohesion disrupted when parents who are struggling with English are forced to communicate in English because their children no longer understand the home language. Therefore, early childhood educators need to be aware of the possible complexities that families may experience in child rearing and communication due to the use of two (or more languages) in the home. They need to be sensitive to parental concerns in raising their children bilingually and be prepared to offer support, resources and reliable information that can assist them.

### **Conclusion**

This article has highlighted the need for research about how bilingual children experience growing up bilingually, particularly in prior-to-school settings where the impact of English on the home language is significant (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2000). This discussion has identified the need for appropriate resources and support for young children and their families as they struggle to retain their home language against a backdrop of dominant English-speaking contexts. In this regard, early childhood educators need to provide reliable and accessible information to families as a way of supporting families endeavouring to retain the home language.

Early findings from the larger study from which these data have been taken suggest that the diverse experiences and multiple voices of parents challenge notions that cultural groups are homogeneous. Such notions of homogeneity within cultural groups polarise difference within fixed social categories and cultural practices. For example, in the context of this study, while all six parents spoke Spanish at home, not all the parents were Latin American, yet they all experienced varying degrees of negotiation and transformation of Latino/a identity and cultural practices. The experiences and perspectives of bilingual parents and their children have been highlighted as they negotiate day-to-day identity construction and the use of languages in the context of hybridity and difference. These data point to the need for further research into how inter-ethnic and interracial families reconfigure and renegotiate gendered power relations that structure family and child rearing practices. This is particularly important in relation to how these practices are shaped and constituted through the use of languages spoken in the home.

In this article, I have introduced alternative and contemporary frameworks by drawing on critical and cultural theories of identity to show how early childhood educators can reframe their understandings of identity construction in young children. With this in mind, they are more likely to appreciate the complexities and contradictions in identity negotiation, which

can ultimately acknowledge the intersections between language and identity for bilingual families and their children.

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#### **Notes**

- [1] Mestiza is a racial categorisation used in Latin America to describe an individual with indigenous and Spanish ancestry.
- [2] In some countries in Latin America, such as Cuba and the Dominican Republic, the third person formal 'usted' is used in addressing elder family members as a mark of respect.

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