

Bilingual, Monolingual or Semilingual Students with more than one Language

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ABSTRACT

A significant number of people living in Australia use another language at home alongside English and have cultural values and traditions different from those of Anglo-Celtic Australians. In 2001, Australia's overseas-born residents comprised 23% of the total estimated resident population and in 2001-02, 54% of Australia's population growth was from net overseas migration and (2001 Census). The 2001 Census has also indicated that, although 63% of the overseas-born population lived in either New South Wales or Victoria, Western Australia had the highest proportion of overseas-born residents in its population (29%).

More than 250 languages other than English (150 Indigenous Australian Languages and more than 100 languages of immigrant origin) are spoken daily in Australia (Lo Bianco, 1997). This means that there is a significant number of children growing up in Australia who come from homes where another language is used daily, and that there is a significant number of students in schools who use more than one language; one being the language of the home and the other being English.

A question that is the focus of much research and debate among linguists and educationalists is the level of proficiency of these children in both the language of the home and in the dominant language of the host country and the relationship of these to school achievement.

This paper presents the findings of a recent study conducted by the author on the Language Proficiency and School Achievement of a significant group of migrant students in Australian schools in South-Western Sydney discussing whether these

children are bilingual, monolingual or semilingual and the positive and negative implications of this language situation on school achievement. The paper will also address some of the pedagogical and educational issues in relation to language acquisition and language learning.