

# Connecting with students' home languages to improve English literacy

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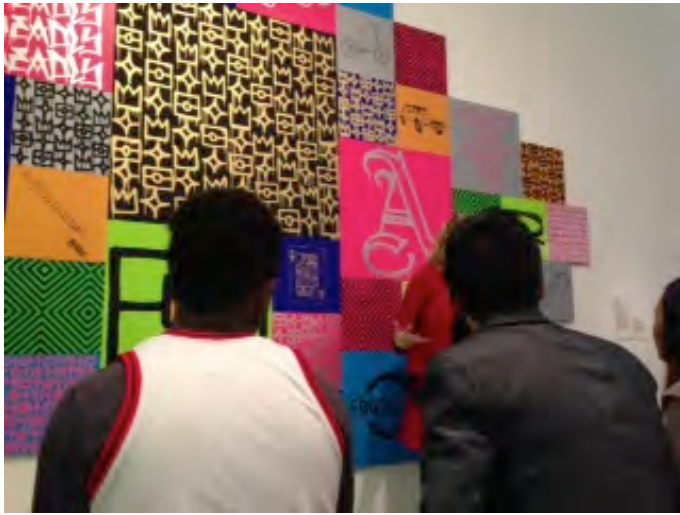
# Aims

- Theories behind why students' home languages are valid in English literacy learning
- Explore strategies for bringing home languages into class practice
- Two student stories

# TONY LIDDICOAT (2013) PRESENTATION ABOUT PLURILINGUAL INDIVIDUALS: LANGUAGES, LITERACIES AND CULTURES

## Terminology

- Plurilingual = individual's distinct language repertoires. Diverse and varied according to individuals' learning and language environments.
- Multilingual = societal language use, eg Eritrea has three official languages; or community-wide, eg. many Australian communities
- Monolingual: one language is dominant, official, sometimes seen as 'adequate' and 'normal' eg. Australia. Economic mobility arguments can lead to justification of exclusionist policies such as the "English Only Zone" discourse.



Diverse backgrounds of teachers and students:  
my 'plurilingual' background

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## Do literacy teachers love languages and come from diverse backgrounds?

What are your diverse backgrounds?

What do you love about languages?

What are some of the ways you've explored this question?

I'd love to hear from you.....

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# Alphabet taught to kids nowadays



Multiple literacies: Theoretical frameworks...

# Multiple Literacies:

- **New Literacy Studies** (Literacy is about the ability to continually adapt to new technologies; Paul Gee, 1996)
- **Multimodality** (How various modes of print, language, image, gesture, fashion, etc, construct and create meaning; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001)
- **Multiliteracies** (practices of literacy; many different literacy practices underlying communication; New London Group, Cope and Kalantzis, 2000) (Simpson and Walsh, 2010, p. 25-6)

## Multiliteracies approach: “Literacy” as social practice

- Literacy is a social practice ...which includes all the learnt practices that people need to belong to a community
- Participation in communities of practice (learning, sharing, understanding) is practiced by all people

*“Literacy is essentially social, and it is located in the interaction between people”*

(Barton and Hamilton 1998 p3)



# Literacy practices in Australia



- Access to excellent libraries
- Book clubs
- Museums and Art Galleries
- Community book launches
- Arts and writing festivals
- Adult & further education



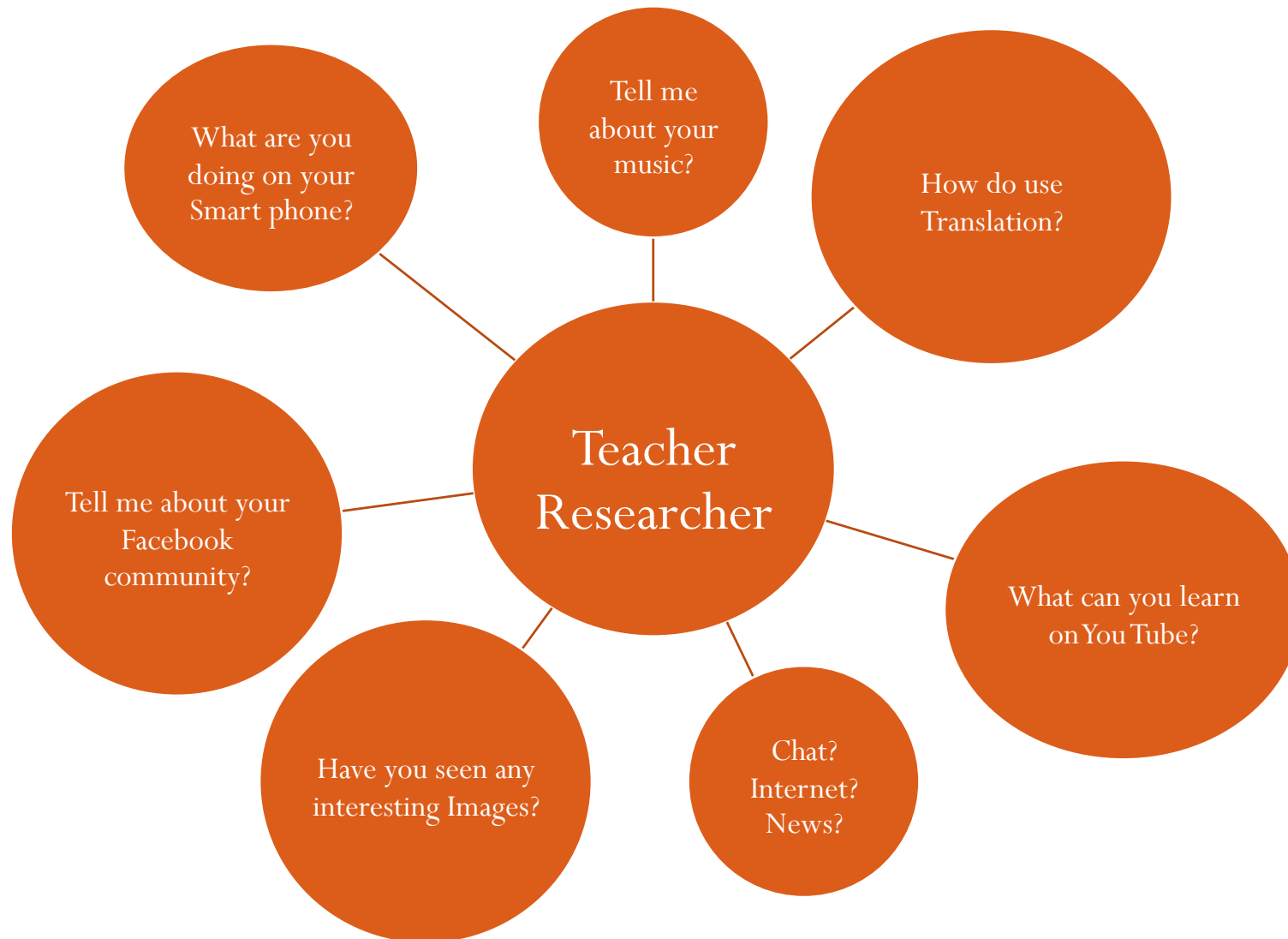
Literacy practices can be made explicit through excursions, reading for pleasure, book writing activities

“Teachers need to ... build bridges between the student’s home and school in every way.”

Pahl and Rowsell (2005)

- Research project about Lao students’ writing showed that making connection with home culture and school improved writing confidence and output (Souryasack & Lee, 2007)
- Literacy and language teachers more likely to make links between students’ 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> languages, whereas teachers of ‘content’ subjects didn’t see making connections with heritage languages as relevant to their classroom practice (Lee & Oxelson, 2006)
- Plurilingual students’ multilingual resources provide them with heightened linguistic and metalinguistic awareness that helps them to build knowledge in context. Developing plurilingual competences in educational contexts is likely to enhance literacy acquisition skills for monolingual and plurilingual students. (Moore, 2006)

# Start a conversation



## Students' facebook communities represent important multilingual contexts for rich literacy practice

The students I surveyed use facebook to reassure and support each other, critique social injustice, translate literature, document their interests and passions, raise their facebook community's awareness about important social issues etc, etc...

They employ sophisticated metalinguistic strategies such as code and script switching, innovative use of script repertoires to express spoken language, use of image for efficient and effective communication, use of translation technology to expand repertoires and extend access to new communities of practice.

Topics for class discussion that build bridges between their facebook usage and mainstream literacy practice are multitudinous, including questions like:

How do people use facebook to reassure each other? What is important in your facebook community of practice? What are your protocols for posts and comments?

What are the relationships and representations of speech in writing eg. waaaaaaaaaaw or hhhhhhhhhhh?



This is an example of a public facebook post about a mainstream community transport issue in Melbourne.

A class activity could involve comparing text types.

Who is the audience?

What is the purpose of this writing on facebook?

What is the tone?

Why are slogans used for communication?

Why are some of the key differences between these comments and the comments you post with your friends?

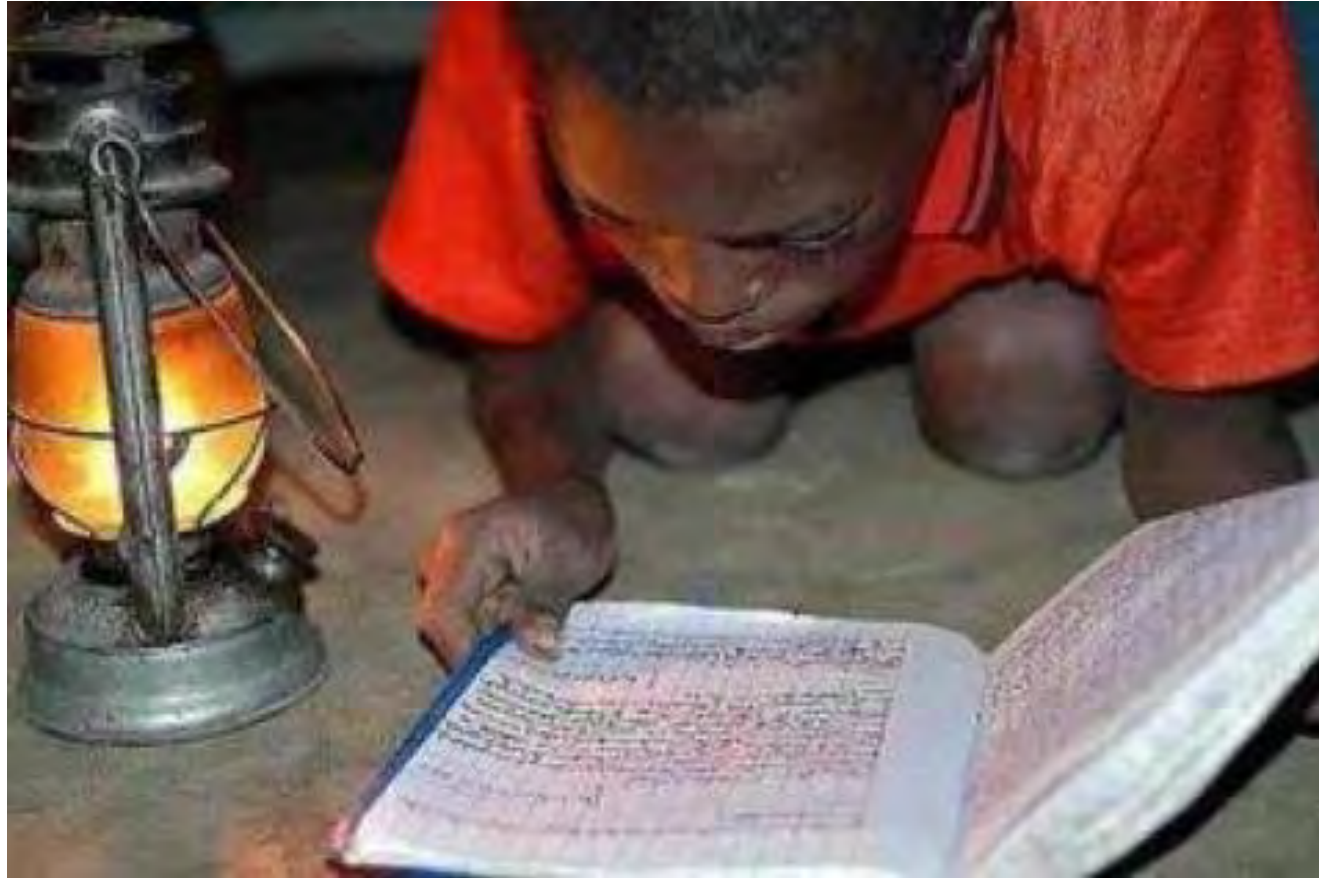
Students use translation technology to expand repertoires and extend access to new communities of practice...

لا تبحث عن الأخطاء ولكن ابحث عن العلاج. - ويليام شكسبير

Not looking for mistakes, but look out for treatment. -William Shakespeare (Translated by Bing)

Like · Comment · Share

If you been in refugee ... camp!!!



One student's post on facebook

Multimodalities: Constructing meaning through images posted on social media

# Student stories

- Afghani student: High levels of literacy in home languages, high level of secular education prior to coming to Australia. Confidence about learning is high.
- His literacy practice includes poetry writing and performance
- Connecting with his 'home' language practice to extend participation in mainstream Australian literacy practices (eg. high school and poetry communities) where presenting knowledge and developing emotional connections to literature are powerful pathways to 'ownership' of language.
  
- Oromo student: Limited access to education prior to coming to Australia. Confidence about writing is low.
- Her literacy practice includes engagement with music videos.
- Connecting with her interest in music to extend her repertoire of written genres to include 'music reviews'. Writing and talking about interests and hobbies is important for social mobility in mainstream Australia.



# Ethical considerations

Researching students' literacy practices helps teachers to appreciate and learn more about students' multilingual skills

Benefits include:

- Promotion of multilingual skills in monolingual environments
- Extending students' literacy practices to mainstream communities of practice

However, use of home language practice in the classroom is sensitive.

Respect for students' diverse opinions about language use and acquisition is paramount to this approach.

- Some students might see other languages as barrier to their acquisition of the dominant language
- Students may not want their private expression to be used in class forum
- Need to seek permission from students for public use of their work
- Students' identities need to be protected at all times

# Conclusions

- All students are engaged in multiple literacy practices in their daily lives outside the classroom.
- Students' first language and culture is a valid starting point for engaging students in English literacy
- Knowing about students' literacy practices can help teachers build emotional connections to English literacy

# Conclusions...

Create links to mainstream English literacy practices

- Research students' literacy practices,
- Make mainstream practices explicit
- Expand text types to engage students emotionally in mainstream literacy practices that empower them for life in their new language ecology
- Music and poetry, libraries and literature help people find support and help people support each other

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