Language Policy in Classrooms and Schools

Kate Menken and Ofelia García

Abstract

Schools are crucial sites for the implementation of language policies. After gaining recognition within the broader field of language policy in the 1980s, language education policy has grown swiftly. While earlier work in language policy focused on the resolution of language "problems" in colonial and post-colonial nation building efforts, typically by analyzing official top-down documents aimed at deliberate language change, in the 1990s–2000s researchers increasingly adopted a critical perspective with an interest in ensuring that language education policies do not create or perpetuate social inequities. This critical focus was followed by the current focus on educator agency, in which research methods informed by anthropology have been favored as scholars increasingly conduct ethnographic research inside schools. This has resulted in greater attention to the human dimensions of policies as living and dynamic and acknowledgment that educators are at the epicenter of language policy processes, as they are called upon to interpret policies and implement them within their classrooms. We describe how understandings of the dynamic and fluid language practices of bilinguals coming from the new body of translanguaging research hold great promise for shaping the next wave of language education policy research. After overviewing current challenges, we conclude by offering a set of questions for future research.

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T.L. McCarty, S. May (eds.), *Language Policy and Political Issues in Education*, Encyclopedia of Language and Education, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-02344-1_17

Keywords
Language education policy • Language-in-education planning • Educational language policy • Translanguaging

Contents

Introduction: Early Developments ... 212
Major Contributions ... 213
Critical Focus in Language Policy Research ... 213
Focus on Educator Agency and Ethnographic Work ... 215
Work in Progress: Poststructuralism, Neoliberal Globalization, and Language Education Policy ... 217
Problems and Difficulties ... 219
Future Directions ... 221
Cross-References ... 222
Related Articles in the Encyclopedia of Language and Education ... 222
References ... 223

Introduction: Early Developments

In this section, we introduce early developments in language education policy. While by no means new as an activity, language policies in classrooms and schools have only been formally examined by scholars since the 1980s (Kaplan and Baldauf 1997; Ricento and Hornberger 1996). Einar Haugen (1959) introduced "language planning" into the literature in 1959 (though he maintains that it was actually Uriel Weinreich who first used the term in a lecture). The early work in language planning and policy was concerned primarily with issues of nation building and modernization in colonial and postcolonial contexts and finding solutions to the perceived "problems" of multilingualism. Thus, from the very beginning, multilingualism was at the center of language policy work. The early work concerned itself with policies that were typically official top-down documents aimed at deliberate language change, such as changes in the status of the language, as well as changes to the corpus, or language, itself. (As we will discuss in the sections that follow, this focus on language problems and planned language change from a top-down perspective is critiqued by more recent research in the field). At the time, for instance, Rubin and Jernudd (1971) defined language planning as "*deliberate* language change. . .focused on problem-solving" (p. xvi). Likewise, Fishman (1974) stated, "the term language planning refers to the organized pursuit of language problems, typically at the national level" (p. 97).

Recognizing that schools serve as a primary vehicle for language planning and policy implementation, Fishman (1972) suggested that language planning and policy in education had been a concern since the field's beginnings and that the challenges of educating linguistically diverse students were what galvanized interest in language planning from the start. Likewise, Haugen (1983) acknowledged education as a primary reason for the field's development. Spolsky (1977, 1978) was one of the earliest scholars to begin theorizing what he termed "language education policy."

Chris Kennedy later edited what may be the earliest entire book on the topic, *Language Planning and Language Education*, published in 1983. As Kennedy (1983) states: "[n]owhere is this planning more crucial than in education, universally recognized as a powerful instrument of change" (p. i).

Building on this work, Robert Cooper acknowledged the power of schooling in language planning theory, and in 1989 added what he termed *acquisition planning* to Haugen's (1972) status and corpus planning framework, offering acquisition planning as a third key goal of language planning and policy efforts. Acquisition planning can be thought of as efforts to increase the number of speakers of a language, expand speakers' knowledge of a language, or influence the distribution of languages by offering greater opportunities and incentives for language learning, typically through formal language education. As Cooper (1989) notes, language teaching is an object of policymaking. Hornberger (1994, 1996) later built on this theoretical work by weaving together acquisition planning and Haugen's (1972) four-dimensional matrix. Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) likewise built on Cooper (1989), offering the term *language-in-education planning*. As they write:

> Of these, language-in-education planning, or what Cooper (1989) has called "acquisition planning," is often seen as the most potent resource for bringing about language change... [L]anguage in education planning is a key implementation procedure for language policy and planning. (p. 122)

Growing recognition of education within the field paved the way for many later studies on language policies in classrooms and schools as a central component of language planning and policy.

Major Contributions

Critical Focus in Language Policy Research

The field of language education policy has greatly evolved since the 1980s. Departing from the earlier language problems focus, research in the 1990s and early 2000s was informed by critical theory and centered on ways that language policies can either create or perpetuate social inequities (e.g., Corson 1999; Tollefson 1991). This is because language policies are often imposed in schools that privilege the dominant or national language, strengthening the prestige afforded to those who speak the language of instruction (not coincidentally, the language of instruction is typically that spoken by the elite), and in the process marginalizing speakers of minoritized languages. Language policies have long-term consequences in schools, as they can lead to language loss and shift over time, prevent speakers of minoritized languages from learning when teaching and curricula are in a language they do not know, and limit students' future opportunities.

This critical research promoted a language ecology perspective, wherein each language is viewed as a natural resource worth preserving, and a great deal of

scholarly attention was paid to ensuring that school language policies do not contribute to language loss or disparities because of language (Corson 1999; Phillipson 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000; Tollefson 1991). Researchers in this era showed how certain languages dominate others and how this domination is typically related to power dynamics between groups of people (Phillipson 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). David Corson (1999) explains this movement, which he termed "critical language planning," in the following passage:

> When school language policies are put into action, they are linked with power and with social justice in a range of ways. Whenever schools set out to plan their response to the language problems they face, matters of language variety, race, culture, and class always affect the planning process, and an effective language policy process will always look critically at the impact of these and other aspects of human diversity. (p. 6)

Likewise, James Tollefson (1991) argued that early research promoted a "positivist" paradigm in education, denying the political nature of language teaching and research. In writing about the role of language as a gatekeeper for education, employment, and economic advancement, he stated:

> [W]hile modern social and economic systems require certain kinds of language competence, they simultaneously create conditions which ensure that vast numbers of people will be unable to acquire that competence. A central mechanism by which this process occurs is language policy. (p. 7)

Naming language policy as culpable for social inequities in his groundbreaking work, Tollefson (1991) argued that teaching and research instead must problematize linguistic and social hegemony, seeing language as a mechanism for control by a dominant elite.

Seminal theoretical and empirical studies document how some schools have contributed to language loss while others have contributed to language maintenance, revitalization, and/or reversing language shift. For instance, examples of school policies resulting in language loss include the imposition of English-only policies in US public schools (Crawford 2000; Wiley and Lukes 1996) and in Ireland (Ó Riagáin 1997), policies mandating instruction in English and Afrikaans at the expense of Indigenous languages in apartheid South Africa (Alexander 1999; Heugh 1999), and the shift to Hebrew monolingualism as part of the Zionist ideology over a 50-year period leading up to the establishment of the State of Israel (Spolsky and Shohamy 1999). By contrast, research on language maintenance and reversing language shift in schooling included documented efforts to revitalize Indigenous languages such as Navajo and Hawaiian in the USA (McCarty 2003), Quechua in Peru (Hornberger 1988), and Māori in New Zealand (Bishop 2003), as well as minoritized languages such as Euskera (Basque) in Spain (Cenoz 2001) and Welsh in Wales (Baker and Jones 2000).

Out of this period came a growing interest in supporting schools in their development of policies that would sustain and deepen students' home language practices. In 1999, David Corson published *Language Policy in Schools: A Resource for*

Teachers and Administrators, which was intended as a guide for educational practitioners to develop their own school language policies and outlined the procedures for them to do so. His framework for what he terms "critical policymaking" offers the following four stages with the processes for each stage: (1) Identifying the real problem(s), (2) Trial policies: The views of stakeholders, (3) Testing policies against the views of participants, and (4) Policy implementation and evaluations. Building on Corson's (1999) work, Freeman's (2004) book, *Building on Community Bilingualism*, draws upon her ethnographic research and experiences in school language policy development, and offers a practical framework for schools and school districts to use to develop language policies that promote bilingualism.

Focus on Educator Agency and Ethnographic Work

Cooper's (1989) contribution of language acquisition planning to the field opened spaces for researchers to move beyond official policies such as those initiated by government (e.g., in the creation of a national language), to encompass "bottom-up" activities such as the decision for instruction to be solely in Hawaiian language at the Pa'ia school in Maui as a result of community pressure (Warner 1999). Tollefson (1991) characterizes earlier approaches to language policy research as neoclassical (referring to the period in which research focused on solving language problems) and distinguishes those from critical ones (where attention was paid in research to power dynamics and social inequities). Ricento and Hornberger (1996) take this a step further theoretically and argue that neither approach fully captured the complexities of the policy process.

> [N]one offers a model that can predict the consequences of a particular policy or show a clear cause/effect relationship between particular policy types or configurations and observed (often undesirable, from the perspective of critical theorists) outcomes. (p. 408)

Moreover, they highlight how implementation had been overlooked in the literature and offer a metaphor depicting language planning and policy in schooling as a multilayered "onion." Legislation and political processes were placed at the outer layers of their onion, with states, supranational agencies, institutions, and educators, respectively, moving into the heart of the onion. They thereby emphasized the agency of individuals across national, institutional, and interpersonal levels in language policy implementation, and positioned educators at the core demarcating them as essential – albeit often overlooked – in language policy (Ricento and Hornberger 1996).

From research in the field that paid attention to bottom-up policy, Shohamy (2006) drew the important distinction between "overt" and "covert"/"hidden"/"de facto" language policies. Her book views language policy broadly, moving beyond statements about policy to examine different mechanisms that create de facto language policies and practices (p. 2). Language education policy is depicted in her book as one such mechanism; accordingly, she writes about language education

policy as “the mechanism used to create de facto language practices in educational institutions” (p. 76).

Menken and García (2010) describe this current research, which accepts de facto policy as an educational reality and is attentive to the critical role of educators in policy making, as:

> . . .[A] newer wave of language education policy research that refocuses our attentions from governments to local school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members—the so-called bottom of the educational policy structure—and which views language policies as far more multidimensional than written policy statements. (p. 3)

In their edited volume about educators as language policymakers, with chapters about language policies in schools and classrooms around the world, Menken and García argue that the role of educators in policy implementation has been “undertheorized” (p. 251). They draw a distinction between Kaplan and Baldauf’s (1997) language-in-education policy and language education policy and write that while the former “is concerned with decisions only about languages and their uses in school, language education policy refers to decisions made in schools beyond those made explicitly about language itself” (Menken and García 2010, p. 254). Hélot and Ó Laoire (2011) put forth “language policy for the multilingual classroom” and likewise offer international cases, which together detail efforts taken on by educators, communities, and states to embrace multilingualism as an accepted norm in schools. Johnson (2013) instead prefers “educational language policy” over “language education policy” in order to describe the “official and unofficial policies that are created across multiple layers and institutional contexts (from national organizations to classrooms) that impact language use in classrooms and schools” (p. 54).

Taking this a step further, Menken and García (2010) write about language education policies in the plural in their book, seeing them as living and dynamic rather than two-dimensional, due to the individuals involved in their development and implementation as well as the fact that they are often numerous and competing in education, especially as policies are negotiated, interpreted, and ultimately implemented by educators in schools and classrooms. Others who have focused on agency and the human element in language policy include Canagarajah (2005), Hornberger and Johnson (2007), and Ramanathan (2005). Along these lines, McCarty (2011) describes language policy not as a disembodied “thing,” but rather as “a situated sociocultural process – the complex of practices, ideologies, attitudes, and formal and informal mechanisms that influence people’s language choices in profound and pervasive everyday ways” (p. xii). Going further, Davis (2014) talks about “engaged language policy” as “situated action — collaboratively designing and doing social welfare equity” (p. 83), political activism that then brings meaning to language policy and planning endeavors.

The recent paradigm shift in language policy research with its current interest in human agency and “lived” policies has been accompanied by methodological shifts. Early language planning and policy work was national in scope and typically involved empirical observation or historical analyses of policy texts, in which

"language policy was viewed as something linguists *did* rather than what linguists *studied*" (Johnson 2013, p. 124), whereas more recent approaches include the ethnography of language policy (Johnson 2009; McCarty 2011) and discourse analysis (Martín-Rojo 2010). Informed by educational research trends as a whole, language education policy researchers in recent years have relied heavily on anthropological, qualitative approaches such as ethnography in researching how language policies are lived in schools. This critical ethnographic research, Tollefson (2013) says, has "the potential for individuals and groups to resist, undermine, and alter the trajectory of language policies adopted for the benefit of powerful groups" (p. 27).

Palmer and Snodgrass-Rangel (2011) use ethnographic interviews with bilingual teachers at six US elementary schools to examine how policy and context shape teacher decision making, as teachers negotiate top-down high-stakes testing and accountability policies. As is often the case in the USA and other contexts where there is no official language education policy in place, education policies intended for all students become de facto language policies in classrooms (as examined by Menken 2008). Palmer and Snodgrass-Rangel (2011) found that teachers are under pressure to limit their curricula in favor of test preparation, but tempered these pressures with efforts to incorporate authentic language teaching based on what they believed to be best for their students (p. 623). The researchers' use of ethnographic methods here offers deeper understandings of sense-making and policy negotiation by language teachers in schools.

Chimbutane (2011) combines ethnographic methods with discourse analysis in his study of language policy in Mozambique, focusing on bilingual education in two primary schools. In the absence of explicit language education policy, Chimbutane maintains the current de facto policy in Mozambique is multilingual, favoring instruction in local languages, with 16 languages offered as initial media of instruction. Chimbutane (2011) found that in the two schools examined bilingual education helped strengthen the local languages (Changana and Chope), affirming student identity and fostering ethnolinguistic pride, while also aiding in the transition to Portuguese medium instruction. At the same time, he found postcolonial language ideologies linger in favor of Portuguese over the local languages.

Work in Progress: Poststructuralism, Neoliberal Globalization, and Language Education Policy

The critical position of many language education policy scholars today, together with the ethnographic work that has accompanied it, has made visible the complexity of language and semiotic practices that students and teachers perform in the classroom, and the ways in which these are often restricted. This critical ethnographic work has galvanized a theoretical shift towards poststructuralist positions in which the very construct of "language" has been questioned, and the consequences of economic neoliberalism for education foregrounded.

In the past, and despite the critical emphasis of much language education policy work, the focus had been the maintenance, shift, or revitalization of language as an

autonomous object or linguistic system. In a theoretically influential book, Makoni and Pennycook (2007) focused on how languages and metalanguages had been invented as part of colonial and nationalistic projects. Pennycook (2006) points out that language has to be seen "as contingent, shifting, and produced in particular, rather than having some prior ontological status" (p. 63). In recent sociolinguistic work, "language" has begun to be epistemologically repositioned as a sociopolitical construct linked to processes of domination of a neoliberal globalized economy. That is, language has been stripped of its privileged status as an ontological entity (Heller 2007). Sociolinguists now refer to mobile "repertoires" (Blommaert 2010) that speakers use in creative ways to make meaning. Scholars have started to ask themselves what language education policy would look like if we no longer posited the existence of separate languages and to probe the sociopolitical and socioeconomic consequences of such a shift. As Pennycook (2006) asks: "If the languages that language policy claims to deal with cannot themselves claim ontological status, what then is language policy concerned with?" (p. 67). Petrovic (2015) replies to this by offering what he calls a "post-liberal approach to language policy in education" (p. 17), appealing to the pedagogical and political value of heteroglossic language practices in which various voices interact and compete.

Current language education policy research is attentive to the impact of a neoliberal economy that focuses on privatization as a way to enhance profit-making, thus reinforcing socioeconomic inequality and benefitting the dominant class. In the case of US schools, for example, recent language education policies narrowly focus on what is constructed as "academic language," ensuring the failure of language-minoritized students and blaming public schools for their lack of success. School language practices have become increasingly regimented through the adoption of Common Core State Standards and assessments that reify these, thereby codifying language correctness and effectively sorting students, since not all groups have the same control over the production of what is constructed as "academic English." Pérez-Milans (2015) suggests that (socio)linguistic ethnography can constitute a suitable theoretical and methodological approach to resist language education policy that oppresses minoritized speakers "since it avoids bounded representations of stable communities/identities and carries a strong orientation to the discovery of the local, uncertain, unpredictable and changeable positioning of the participants in interaction" (p. 103).

One way these more fluid local practices resist linguistic regimes imposed by schools has been to take up a *translanguaging* theoretical lens (García 2009; García and Li Wei 2014). In language education policy terms, translanguaging refers to how agents (including students, educators, and communities) leverage and sustain the fluid language practices of multilingual communities in ways that can lead to more engagement with learning, as well as greater social equality and justice for all. Translanguaging education policies do not focus on maintaining nationalistic understandings of separate languages. Nor do they privilege "balanced" bilingualism, wherein an individual's languages are regarded in isolation and a speaker can only be considered a "legitimate" bilingual if they perform as two monolinguals in one (Grosjean 1989). Instead, translanguaging policies focus on assisting speakers to

sustain their diverse language practices so that they can endure the hegemony of dominant languages typically imposed in schools. The difference between maintenance and sustainability is subtle, but important. Translanguaging education policies are not concerned with maintaining, or even revitalizing languages as static systems separate from the social, human context in which they operate. Instead, they offer speakers agency to perform their language practices in functional interrelationships with those of their multiple communities of practice in order to benefit their own communities.

The City University of New York–New York State Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals (CUNY-NYSIEB), a project in which we serve as co-principal investigators, is one example of how traditional top-down language policies in schools with emergent bilinguals (whether monolingual or bilingual) are being transformed. Translanguaging policies in these schools leverage the complex repertoires of emergent bilinguals, offering assistance to language-minoritized *speakers,* not to languages as ontological entities per se. Such assistance focuses not just on sustaining the communities' own language and cultural practices and leveraging them to develop others and other ways of knowing, but providing them, as Kathryn Davis says, with the "tools and opportunities for taking up agency" (Davis 2009, p. 2004). While assisting schools in their efforts to serve emergent bilinguals in practical ways, translanguaging is a stance that is, as Flores (2014) argues, a political act that is "part of a larger political struggle of linguistic self-determination for language-minoritized populations" (n.p.).

Many other scholars are working today with translingual practices that go beyond traditional understandings of language, thus extending the field by rethinking both the language education policies and the linguistic outcomes that scholars and practitioners advocate. Canagarajah (2011), for example, talks about *codemeshing* in referring to the shuttle between repertoires, especially in writing, for rhetorical effectiveness. Yet in most classrooms, implicit or explicit language education policies continue to dictate narrow definitions of "appropriate language" for education, invalidating and marginalizing the complex language practices of diverse speakers. In response, we suggest below that this body of translanguaging research will inform the next wave of language education policy scholarship and educational practices.

Problems and Difficulties

A great challenge of language policies in classrooms and schools is that often those who are most affected by the language policies being imposed – students, especially minoritized ones, and their teachers – are negotiating macro policies that were developed outside of their context without their input. Families and communities are rarely considered in language policy research or policy development. Likewise, the role of students in language policy making is typically not addressed in research or practice, making them solely policy subjects rather than active participants in the policy process.

While research about the role of educators in language policy has increased in recent years, their expertise is rarely leveraged in the creation and adoption of explicit and de facto language policies. Within schools, particularly in contexts where there is no official language education policy, education reforms intended for all students assume the role of de facto language policies. These policies are typically adopted without consideration for language-minoritized students, resulting in de facto language policies that undermine the education of such students, including bilingual education efforts. For instance, general education policies in the USA have been emphasizing high-stakes testing in English, and a well-documented byproduct of this has been English-only instruction and the marginalization of languages other than English in schools (McCarty 2003; Menken 2008; Menken and Solorza 2014; Wiley and Wright 2004). In China, task-based teaching was a curriculum reform adopted for all areas including English language teaching, but because teachers were not involved in policy development, there was limited guidance and no accountability for policy implementation, so teachers were ultimately left to adopt the reform or not according to their interpretation of its meaning in instruction (Zhang and Hu 2010). In Israel, mandates regarding how much instructional time should be devoted to the three official national languages – Hebrew, Arabic, and English – have resulted in the marginalization of Arabic and the privileging of Hebrew and English, in spite of official, national language policy promoting these languages equally (Shohamy 2006). Curricula and materials are often adopted in schools with bilingual education programs that are not available in the languages of instruction, thereby undermining school language policies (as is the case in Mozambique per Chimbutane 2011; and in the US per Menken 2008). In many cases, policies are created by officials who have limited understandings about language education and language learning (Menken and Solorza 2014).

These issues raise a number of questions. One question pertains to how those most affected can inform the adoption of educational policies that would support minoritized languages and language learning. Little is known about how to increase the voices of students, families, and communities, and teachers in policy development and adoption, for instance, through advocacy, or how to open spaces for their voices in political arenas when policies are often politically dictated. Like testing policy, curricula and materials generate de facto language policies in schools, and they have received very little attention in research or practice; moreover, the full range of mechanisms in schools that create de facto language education policies is unknown.

Teachers and school administrators, though now increasingly recognized in research within the field as language policy makers in their own right, usually receive no preparation or guidance on how to negotiate and manage top-down educational policies in ways that support the education of minoritized students. Language teachers are often those within school buildings who hold the most expertise about language learning, and their input is needed to shape policy implementation in ways that support bilingual students; however, they are often excluded from important decision making, particularly in schools where leadership is not collaborative and where school leaders themselves do not have this knowledge base.

School structures as identified in much language education policy work typically continue to be based on hard boundaries between languages, with languages strictly separated by class, teacher, period, or day of the week (Cenoz and Gorter 2011). For example, language education policy in the context of bilingual/multilingual education has focused on the ways in which one language or the other is used as medium of instruction, without considering the complex linguistic and semiotic repertoire of students.

A challenge in shedding the ontological nature of language for language education policy is that educational systems serve precisely the interests of nation-states and their elites. Taking up a poststructuralist perspective of language education policy puts us at odds with what many schools do. The challenge then is to enable students to leverage their complex linguistic and semiotic repertoire to show what they know and can do and to develop their political conscientization vis-à-vis language, as they both resist and appropriate the language practices legitimized in schools.

An even more important challenge in taking up translanguaging education policies is that because we have not only constructed "language," but rather "national languages" have constituted us as social beings, we lack the ability to clearly communicate (through language) the linguistic and semiotic complexities of the diverse repertoires of speakers and their communities of practice. In other words, it is difficult to talk about language education policy without the concept of national languages that is now understood as socially constructed. That is why in this chapter we have emphasized translanguaging education policy, focusing on the language practices of speakers, and especially multilingual speakers, which do not fall squarely among those legitimized in dictionaries, grammar books, school textbooks, and assessments. We see this as the next frontier in language education policy research and practice.

Future Directions

The areas noted above lead to the following questions to be addressed in future research studies:

- How can language policy actors at every layer of educational systems not only be heard but serve as leaders in policy adoption and implementation, to ensure policies support students with different linguistic practices and educational programs that buttress their education?
- How can all key stakeholders, particularly families and communities, teachers, and students lead policy development and adoption?
- How can the expertise of teachers and other educational practitioners be leveraged and heard more effectively in policy development and adoption?
- What is the entire range of mechanisms in education that result in de facto language policies and practices in schools?
- In what ways are curricula, available materials, and assessments acting as de facto language policies in schools?

- How can teachers and educators be better prepared to negotiate competing policy pressures in ways that make sense for their students, and especially speakers of minoritized languages?
- To what extent do language educational policies validate or invalidate the actual language practices of bilingual students?
- What does a translanguaging education policy imply? What are the challenges and possibilities of implementing such a policy in traditional educational spaces?

In late modernity, educational institutions have been transformed by globalization, transnational migration, new technologies, and a neoliberal economy. The language education policy field has responded to this transformation by emphasizing its social criticality and focusing on the local and speakers themselves through ethnographic work. Recently, language education policy scholars have also started to question a concept that had been central in the field – that of language as an autonomous and static system comprised of extractable fractions that form its corpus. The notion (and practice) of translanguaging reorients the field towards a humanizing language education policy perspective that can not only empower language-minoritized students, their families and their teachers, but also makes evident how ideologies of language construct the sociopolitical frameworks that perpetuate domination and exclusion of these students from civil society.

Cross-References

► Language Education and Multilingualism
► Language Planning in Education
► Language Policy in Education: Practices, Ideology, and Management

Related Articles in the Encyclopedia of Language and Education

Angel Lin: Translanguaging in Bilingual Education. In Volume: Bilingual and Multilingual Education

Angela Creese: Linguistic Ethnography. In Volume: Research Methods in Language and Education

Bernard Spolsky: Investigating Language Education Policy. In Volume: Research Methods in Language and Education

Jasone Cenoz: Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Tool in Multilingual Education. In Volume: Language Awareness and Multilingualism

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