Australian Spanish-speaking background secondary school students and the construction and reconstruction of their cultural identity: a "wog" experience

David Alejandro Plaza-Coral

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AUSTRALIAN SPANISH-SPEAKING BACKGROUND SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS AND THE CONSTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF THEIR CULTURAL IDENTITY: A "WOG" EXPERIENCE

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

DAVID ALEJANDRO PLAZA-CORAL
M.Ed. (Brazil), B.A. in Philosophy (Chile)

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

1998
DECLARATION

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degree.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Signed

............... 

David Alejandro Plaza-Coral
DEDICATION

To Erica, my wife, whose constant support and encouragement has always been present in the almost four years we have spent in Australia. She stoically left behind her work, relatives and friends in Brazil to accompany me on my academic journey.

I owe her a debt of gratitude for her love, patience and devotion.

In this time she bravely and determinedly faced the English language and now can communicate almost without accent, making in that way her stay away from home a less painful experience. Now she speaks three languages: Portuguese, Spanish and English.

Because of her wonderful personality she made a lot of friends from all around the world. "You will be missed" have been the words they said when they saw us off.
I would like to express my profound thanks and gratitude to my supervisors Dr. Janice Wright and Dr. Christine Fox who, during the process and writing of this study were, in addition to being persistent and careful critics, a constant source of motivation and encouragement. Their copious and wise advice, and enthusiasm to discuss prolonged and intently many aspects of this project, were invaluable and much welcome. These things, combined with their limitless kindness and enormous consideration, helped to make the writing of this thesis a labour of satisfaction.

I thank the faculty librarian Keith Gaymer for helping me to get some of the statistical data.

I also wish to thank all the children, parents, teachers and staff from the schools where I carried out this study. I really appreciate their collaboration and willingness to participate in this study.
ABSTRACT

There are significant numbers of Spanish-speaking background students in Australian secondary schools, but as a linguistic cohort their experiences have generally been underrepresented in educational research. This study was undertaken to explore the ways in which one group of secondary school Spanish-speaking background students from three different countries negotiated their cultural identity in classrooms, at school and at home.

In any nation where the majority of its inhabitants has a migrant history, there are socio-economic, political, cultural and educational issues that specifically affect immigrants and the children of immigrants. This study deals with concepts of cultural identity and their relationships to education, immigration, language, multiculturalism and racism. Much of the literature does not speak for the subordinated "other" in society, particularly when looking within a multicultural society, as opposed to say, oppressed people in "other" countries. The literature tends to be about the relationships from the dominant society's viewpoints, or about the minority group's material gains and failures, and there is little in the literature which explains the richness of culture and identity of the "other" when seen from within that group.

This qualitative, multiple case study of twenty two students has allowed the participants the opportunity to tell their own stories about their lives and about their school experiences. The conceptual framework of the present study can be defined as an attempt to investigate the formation of identity in the context of those places where it is likely to be formed; that is to say the family, the school and the spaces in between.
The study was designed to be carried out in two phases. First, the students and their parents were interviewed about their experiences as immigrants or children of immigrants in Australia. Second, the students were observed when participating in Science, Mathematics and English lessons, so that critical incidents and interactions could be recorded. These data were checked with the students, and where possible their teachers were also interviewed either before or after the classes. The data were analysed to throw light upon those factors which both at home and at school appeared to play a crucial part in helping the students to define themselves in terms of their own subjectivities and their possible futures, as well as in relation to their family members, their peers, and other significant people in their lives.

It was found that these students move in and out of two different worlds, the one maintained mainly by their parents at home and the other of the wider society, mirrored in the school. It was also found that the complexities, puzzles and potential conflicts of the spaces in between these worlds were individually constructed, yet at the same time driven by the specific context in which the students found themselves — a context encompassing a particular political/ideological era (which favours certain, sometimes negative, attitudes towards notions of difference), the family's economic and educational background, the expectations of the parents, and the students' own age, experience, hopes and desires. Unlike their parents who appear caught in a cultural bubble, possibly because of their perceived deficiencies in the English language, the students are much freer to construct different, multi-faceted identities, while generally appreciating their place in the family's heritage.
RESUMEN

Números significativos de estudiantes que tienen como origen lingüístico la lengua española estudian en escuelas secundarias australianas, sin embargo como grupo lingüístico sus experiencias han estado generalmente mal representadas en la investigación educacional. Este estudio fue llevado acabo para explorar las formas en que un grupo de estudiantes secundarios de origen lingüístico español de tres diferentes países negociaban su identidad cultural en la sala de clases, en la escuela y en el hogar.

En cualquier nación donde la mayoría de sus habitantes tiene una historia de inmigrante, hay problemas socio-económicos, políticos, culturales y educacionales que específicamente afectan a los inmigrantes y a los hijos de inmigrantes. Este estudio tiene que ver con conceptos de identidad cultural y sus relaciones con educación, inmigración, lenguaje, multiculturalismo y racismo. La mayoría de la literatura no habla por el subordinado "otro" en la sociedad, particularmente cuando se trata dentro de una sociedad multicultural, en oposición digamos, a la gente oprimida en "otros" países. La literatura tiende a ser acerca de las relaciones desde puntos de vista de la sociedad dominante, o acerca del grupo minoritario y sus ganos materiales y sus fracasos, y hay poco en la literatura que explique la riqueza de cultura y identidad del "otro" cuando es visto desde dentro de ese grupo.

Este estudio cualitativo de casos múltiples de veinte y dos estudiantes ha permitido que los participantes tengan la oportunidad de contar sus propias historias acerca de sus vidas y acerca de sus experiencias en la escuela. El marco conceptual del presente estudio puede ser definido como un intento para investigar la formación de la identidad en el contexto de aquellos...
lugares donde es más probable que se forme, es decir la familia, la escuela y los espacios intermedios.

El estudio fue diseñado para ser llevado a cabo en dos fases. Primero, los estudiantes y sus padres fueron entrevistados acerca de sus experiencias como inmigrantes o hijos de inmigrantes en Australia. Segundo, los estudiantes fueron observados cuando participaban en las clases de ciencia, matemáticas e inglés, para así poder grabar las interacciones y los incidentes críticos. Esta información fue analizada para iluminar aquellos factores que tanto en casa como el la escuela parecen jugar una parte crucial en ayudar a los estudiantes a definirse a sí mismos en términos de su propia subjetividad y sus posibles futuros, así como también en relación con sus familia, sus compañeros, y otras personas significativas en la vida de ellos.

Se encontró que estos estudiantes se mueven dentro y fuera de dos mundos diferentes, el mantenido principalmente por sus padres y el otro el de la sociedad en general, que se refleja en la escuela. Se encontró también que las complejidades, los enigmas y conflictos potenciales de los espacios intermedios de estos mundos eran individualmente construidos, sin embargo al mismo tiempo derivados del contexto específico en el cual los estudiantes se encontraban a sí mismos — un contexto que acompaña una era particular, política/ideológica (que favorece ciertas, a veces negativas actitudes hacia aquellas nociones de diferencia), el transfondo económico y educacional de la familia, las expectativas de los padres y la edad, experiencia, esperanzas y deseos de los propios estudiantes. Diferente de sus padres que parecen atrapados en una burbuja cultural, posiblemente debido a sus percibidas deficiencias en la lengua inglesa, los estudiantes son mucho más libres para construir identidades diferentes y multifacéticas, al mismo tiempo que aprecian su lugar en la herencia familiar.
ABBREVIATIONS

ALP  Australian Labour Party
CMEP  Child Migrant Education Program
DEET  Department of Employment, Education and Training
DEETYA  Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
DELE  Diploma de Español como Lengua Extranjera (Certificate of Spanish as a Foreign Language)
DIEA  Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs
EAPS  Ethnic Affairs Policy Statement
ESL  English as a Second Language
HSC  Higher School Certificate
LBOTE  Language Background other than English
LOTE  Language Other Than English
MERCOSUR  Free Trade Market among Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay
NAATI  National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters
NACCME  National Advisory and Co-ordinating Committee on Multicultural Education
NAFTA  North American Free Trade Agreement
NESB  Non-English speaking background
NSW  New South Wales
SAE  Standard Australian English
SC  School Certificate
TAFE  Tertiary and Further Education

David Plaza-Coral

January, 1998
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration ................................................................. ii  
Dedication ................................................................. iii  
Acknowledgement ........................................................... iv  
Abstract ................................................................. v  
Resumen ................................................................. vii  
Abreviations ............................................................... ix  
List of Tables ............................................................. xiv  
List of Appendices ........................................................ xv  

Emigrar ................................................................. 1  
To emigrate ............................................................... 1  

Chapter One: INTRODUCTION ............................................ 2  
1.1 Aims ................................................................. 2  
1.2 Rationale ............................................................. 4  
1.3 Organisation of the Study .......................................... 11  
1.4 Description of the Study ........................................... 13  
1.5 An Autobiographical Note .......................................... 15  

Migration ................................................................. 19  
La Emigración ............................................................... 19  

Chapter Two: LITERATURE REVIEW ..................................... 20  
2.1 Immigrants' Identity ................................................ 21  
2.2 Identity and Language .............................................. 30  
2.3 Identity and Multiculturalism ..................................... 33  
2.3.1 Multicultural Education ....................................... 41  
2.4 Relationship between Difference, Multiculturalism and Racism ................................................ 48  
2.5 Conclusion ............................................................ 56  

Gathering ................................................................. 58  
Reunirse ................................................................. 58  

Chapter Three: METHODOLOGY ......................................... 59  
3.1 Research Design ..................................................... 60  
3.2 Research Questions ................................................ 65  
3.3 Research Processes ................................................ 66  

David Plaza-Coral  
January, 1998
# Apendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 Research Process Stage One: Students and Parents</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2 Research Process Stage Two: School and Classroom Contexts</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Data Analysis Procedures</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Conclusion</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Refugiado</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter Four: SPANISH BACKGROUND STUDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialization</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Carlota</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Sergio</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Sisters Anabel and Marta</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Fernanda</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Braulio</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Damaso</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7 Juan</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8 Rita</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9 Conclusion</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Traídos Por La Ruleta

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brought by the Roulette</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter Five: CHILEAN BACKGROUND STUDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialization</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Gonzalo</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Violeta</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Patricia</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Sisters Ester and Helena</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Noelia</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 Berta</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7 Brothers Ivan and Luis</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8 Orlando</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.9 Quimera</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.10 Conclusion</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Los Nuevos Invasores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The new Invaders</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter Six: URUGUAYAN BACKGROUND STUDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialization</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Ursula</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Chapter Seven: CLASSROOM CHALLENGE

### 7.1 The Physical Context

### 7.2 The Teachers

### 7.3 The English, Mathematics and Science Classes

#### 7.3.1 Upper Stream Classes

- **Luis (5.7)**: 191
- **Ester (5.4)**: 197

#### 7.3.2 Intermediate Stream Classes

- **Sergio (4.2)**: 200
- **Helena (5.4)**: 202
- **Orlando (5.8)**: 205
- **Ester (5.4)**: 207
- **Marta (4.4) and Ursula (6.1)**: 208

#### 7.3.2.1 English Classes

- **Sergio (4.2)**: 200
- **Helena (5.4)**: 202
- **Orlando (5.8)**: 205
- **Ester (5.4)**: 207
- **Marta (4.4)**: 208

#### 7.3.2.2 Mathematics Classes

- **Helena (5.4)**: 212
- **Dámaso (4.6)**: 213
- **Orlando (5.8)**: 215
- **Marta (4.3)**: 216

#### 7.3.2.3 Science Classes

- **Luis (5.7)**: 218
- **Sergio (4.2)**: 219
- **Juan (4.7)**: 221
- **Dámaso (4.6)**: 222
- **Orlando (5.8)**: 223
- **Marta (4.3)**: 224

#### 7.3.3 Lower Stream Classes

#### 7.3.3.1 English Classes

- **Berta (5.6)**: 227
- **Juan (4.7) and Dámaso (4.6)**: 231
- **Patricia (5.3)**: 233
- **Fernanda (4.4)**: 236
Quimera (5.9) ........................................................................ 237

7.3.3.2 Mathematics Classes ................................................. 239
  Sergio (4.2) ........................................................................ 239
  Berta (5.6) ........................................................................ 240
  Juan (4.7) .......................................................................... 241
  Patricia (5.3) ..................................................................... 242
  Fernanda (4.4) and Ursula (6.1) ............................................. 243
  Quimera (5.9) .................................................................... 245

7.3.3.3 Science Classes .......................................................... 246
  Helena (5.4) ....................................................................... 246
  Berta (5.6) ........................................................................ 247
  Patricia (5.3) ..................................................................... 249
  Ester (5.4) ......................................................................... 249
  Fernanda (4.4) and Ursula (6.1). ............................................. 251
  Quimera (5.9) .................................................................... 252

7.4 Conclusion ..................................................................... 252

Renegada .............................................................................. 255
A Renegade Woman ................................................................. 255

Chapter Eight: DISCUSSION THEMES ........................................ 256

8.1 Cultural Bubble ............................................................... 257
8.2 Gringo versus Wog .......................................................... 263
8.3 Material Happiness ........................................................... 267
8.4 Frozen Time versus Freedom ............................................. 271
8.5 Language Dependence versus Bilingualism ......................... 275
8.6 Language Clusters and Secret Codes at School ...................... 281
8.7 Isolation versus Freedom ................................................... 286
8.8 Hopes and Aspirations ....................................................... 290
8.9 Conclusion ..................................................................... 294

Difference and Otherness ...................................................... 295
Diferencia y Otrocidad .............................................................. 295

Chapter Nine: FINAL REMARKS ............................................. 296

9.1 The Home Context ........................................................... 297
9.2 The School Context .......................................................... 299
9.3 Conclusion ..................................................................... 306

REFERENCES ........................................................................... 308

David Plaza-Coral January, 1998
TABLES

Table 3.1: Consent Letter .......................................................... 66
Table 3.2: Students Interviewed .................................................. 67
Table 3.3: Participants Interviewed ............................................ 71
Table 3.4: Students Observed .................................................... 75
Table 3.5: Spanish Background Students ..................................... 79
Table 3.6: Chilean Background Students ...................................... 79
Table 3.7: Uruguayan Background Students .................................. 79
Table 4.1: Spanish Background Families' Year of Arrival ............. 84
Table 5.1: Chilean Background Families' Year of Arrival .............. 127
Table 7.1: Classes Observed ..................................................... 182
Table 7.2: Students Distribution by Class ................................. 188
Table 7.3: Upper Stream Classes Observed .................................. 190
Table 7.4: Intermediate Stream Classes Observed ....................... 200
Table 7.5: Lower Stream Classes Observed .................................. 226
## Appendices

| Appendix 1 | Consent Letter (Spanish) | 319 |
| Appendix 2 | Consent Letter (English)  | 321 |
| Appendix 3:| Letter to the Principals  | 323 |
| Appendix 4 | Consent Letter (Negative Consent) | 324 |

David Plaza-Coral

January, 1998
Emigrar

Emigran los pájaros, las mariposas, 
también los peces, 
¿por qué no emigrar los hombres?

Los pájaros, las mariposas y los peces 
emigran estimulados por la naturaleza 
y casi siempre regresan a su lugar de origen.

Los hombres emigran 
forzados por otros hombres 
y casi nunca regresan a su natal terruño.

(Belarmino Sarna, 1992).

To Emigrate

Birds, butterflies emigrate 
fish too, 
why not people?

Birds, butterflies and fish 
emigrate stimulated by nature 
and they almost always return to their place of origin.

People emigrate 
forced by other people 
and they almost never return to their home land.

(My own translation).