School principals as makers of school language policy

ABSTRACT: Recent ethnographic research (Johnson, 2013) has pointed to the number of levels at which language policy is being made in schools and in education in general. This research identified a number of agents with separate agendas for and influence on school language policy. These agents included parents, school board members, government agencies (e.g. supervisors), intermediary agents, teachers and principals. It is the principals who have the greatest influence in their own institutions, although they clearly depend on the other agents. A question that is often asked is to what extent these policies are based on actual knowledge of language learning, multilingualism, language testing, and other fields that have been extensively researched and studied. What information is handy to principals when they are faced with dilemmas about second language learning for immigrant children; or first language development, second language learning and acquisition of literacy for Aboriginal children; or dyslexia? Most decisions are driven by intuition rather than by knowledge of research and practice. This presentation will describe a unique training program that has been carried out over the past five years to enable principals to become proficient and knowledgeable in multiple dimensions of language policies in schools. It aims to
(a) familiarise principals with research findings so they can make informed decisions; and
(b) to enable principals to appreciate language learning difficulties, rights and challenges, so they can build their policies on realistic goals and knowledge of multilingualism.

They acquire intimate understanding of the immigration experience via a number of multilingualism activities, topics and interviews with close friends who have undertaken it. In addition, they conduct tasks of documenting the linguistic landscape to develop awareness of the diversity of society and the significance of that diversity. The program has enhanced awareness and provided principals with the tools for creating 'ideal' language policy in their schools.

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LECTURE DETAILS:

20th August 2014
4.30-6.00pm
Sir Hans Heysen Building Level 3, Room HH408
City West Campus
University of South Australia

To register your attendance at this free event, please respond to MEC by 15 August 2014 via email: decdmec@sa.gov.au or phone: 8226 1191