The 4th International Colloquium on Languages, Cultures, Identity in Schools and Society, organized by Loyola Marymount University School of Education (Los Angeles, California), supported by the City of Soria’s Department of Culture, took place between July 4th and 6th in the historic city of Soria, located on the Duoro River, in central north Spain. It attracted academics and ESOL practitioners from around the globe. As well as from Spain, there were participants from many states in USA and other countries including: Algeria, Australia, Canada, Dubai, England, Friesland, India, Iran, Japan, Norway, Pakistan, Scotland, Ukraine and Vietnam.

Whilst acknowledging the increase in migration patterns, national and international relocations and transnationalism, the colloquium recognized the many issues which affect populations worldwide: ‘Sense of belongingness; fitting in; gains and losses; the idea of ‘home’; living between two worlds; new linguistic, educational, ethnic and cultural realities and needs.

Over the three days 72 presentations were timetabled. Sessions were mostly 25 minutes long and took place in three rooms concurrently. I attended 23 sessions as
well as presenting one myself. Most sessions were delivered in English but several were in Spanish.

The opening plenary speaker, Desmond Odugu from Lake Forest College, Illinois, spoke passionately about *Critical Turns in Multilingual Education and Social Change: Africa and Beyond*. Referring to well-respected research by Jim Cummins on dual language acquisition and Ofelia Garcia and Li Wei on translanguaging, he emphasised the psychological and cognitive benefits of linguistic diversity. However, he reported that, rather than seeing native language as a right and a resource, many educators still see native language as a ‘problem’ distracting from learning in another language. He stressed that language is woven into everything we do and societies define themselves in different ways. He acknowledged the danger and dilemma of colonial administrations in Africa and elsewhere, which aimed to ‘civilise and ‘develop’ the lands and people they discovered with the ‘European model’; the promotion of European languages; the shift from elitist to mass education leading to economic growth, enlightenment and social reform; gender issues and native Africans regarding their languages as unworthy for schooling. However, his recent observations of the creative and innovative use of native languages, for example on public signage, TV and radio, show that people do not want to abandon them.

The closing plenary speaker, Jesús Sanz from Convivencia Civica Catalana, emphasized *The Importance of Mother Tongue in Education: The Case of Catalonia*. He began by stating that politics have a great influence on student achievement and highlighted Catalonia as a case study. 55% of the students are Spanish speakers and 31% speak Catalan but the compulsory immersion program ensures that all students are taught in Catalan. When analysing the results of both Spanish national (EGD) and international (PISA) educational evaluations, he found that the failure rate of Spanish students was twice that of Catalan speakers whilst that of migrant students was three times higher than Catalanian students. Additionally, he discovered that Spanish students have a poor sense of belonging as there is a low level of integration in schools.

Several of the shorter presentations also focused on the political influences on which second languages are taught. Olga Misechko traced the history of language teaching in the Ukraine where the orientation of the Ukrainian leadership influences
the use of language. In the 1970s, Ukrainian was undermined in education having been ridiculed as a ‘peasant’ language by its former Russian rulers and Russian was taught to erase national differences. Recently Ukrainian has been used as a defence in the Donetz region where people want to be identified as Ukrainian and a decision was made to use the Latin script rather than Cyrillic as it is easier to read and use socially. Pallavi Pallavi showed that, although Delhi receives the highest number of migrants in India, teaching and learning in government schools is guided by monolingual ideologies and separatist pedagogies which force students and teachers to ‘pretend’ to be monolingual rather than making positive use of natural translanguaging practices. Ana Sánchez-Muñoz spoke of the overt racism that is affecting the Latino population in U.S. in the Trump Administration. Stereotypically, linguistic diversity is seen as a threat - students are told to ‘speak American’ or ‘English is the official language in USA’ – or the language of ‘uneducated’ immigrants. The danger is that home language gets lost in three generations but Ana found that the anti-diversity policy is making Latinos speak Spanish more regularly as a tool for defence, just as Olga had found in the Ukraine.

From another angle, Jelle Krol examined how four authors, writing after World War I, used their minority languages (Breton, Friesian, Gaelic and Welsh), which historically had been ignored or regarded as ‘backward’, to offer possible solutions for politics that had failed before.

The benefits of translanguaging featured in many presentations. Margarita Zisselsburger used translanguaging pedagogy to teach writing in a Maryland primary school, allowing students to use all their linguistic repertoire to understand their world. She advised teachers to plan strategically starting with books to model how the use of different languages can add humour and feelings. Amy Clark working with emergent bilingual children ‘at risk’ of academic failure, also used translanguaging pedagogy which drew on their full linguistic repertoires, cultural experiences and cognitive capacities to improve comprehension when discussing books. Kristin Hillier working with international undergraduates in universities recognized that the monolingual bias of English as the lingua franca in academia was a constraint on achievement even at this stage of education. Rather than regarding the use of languages other than English (LOTE) as cheating, she allowed her students to be translingual in social situations to support and expand their understanding. Cao Thi Quyঞ nh Loan from Vietnam found that the moderate use of translanguaging in L1 for 15 weeks had been effective in assisting students’ acquisition of Russian.

Some presentations featured the identities of students. Debra McDermott de Ramos spoke on L2 learner motivation in the UAE where, government policy expects university students to study English for 18 months. Many students fear the loss of their Arabic language but successful L2 learners see the rewards of making an effort and realize that with English they can promote the UAE, build the nation, help and teach people and adapt their identities dynamically.
Other presentations explored English language teacher identity (ELTI). Sumera Umrani researching in postcolonial Pakistan found that ELTI is an integral part of a teacher’s professional development because English is the medium of instruction at university and a compulsory subject for 4 semesters. However, some students have become critical learners of English, asking whether they are learning English at the risk of their own identities because language is a carrier of culture and ideology and has an impact on academic and professional aspects of their lives. Lisa Winstead spoke passionately about how many Latino teachers had been told, when they were children, not to use their native language in the classroom because it was not valuable for learning. This made them ashamed of their roots and identity, which resulted in language loss and trauma. However, as teachers they can now use Spanish to help students to transition between home and school because of their own early experiences.

Some presentations focused on teacher training. Maite Sánchez suggested that the theory of translanguaging should be included in teacher training. She stressed the need to plan its use strategically and suggested several strategies for developing more sophisticated language such as: multilingual word walls, instructions in different languages and pairing students with the same home language to develop thinking skills and discussion. Lottie Baker examined the attitudes of mainstream teachers on the graduate certification program in U.S. to English Language Learners (ELs). The traditional solution is to withdraw ELs from the mainstream classes to work with specialist teachers but in recent years the inclusion model is more common. Most teachers will have some ELs in their classrooms yet there is no national requirement for CPD or training. Mainstream teachers often feel unprepared and say, ‘it’s not my job’. Lottie went on to describe an online graduate certificate in TESOL program to meet the needs of mainstream teachers. Danielle Freitas working in Canada investigated whether plurilingualism is effectively incorporated in TESOL programs there. She found that teachers were trained to follow Harmer’s English only approach to teaching where L1 was regarded as a hindrance and not allowed in the classroom if learners were to speak like a native speaker. She suggested that the idea of ‘standard language’ should now be rejected in the multilayered, plurilingual real world. Marion Milton working in Australia, where 1 in 4 students use English as an additional language (EAL), examined how a mainstream teacher could recognize and develop an EAL learner. She found that many teachers have not had sufficient training (one lecture) in recognizing the learning needs of EAL learners. She outlined some of the challenges faced by EAL learners such as: content words in different subject areas, function words, paragraphing, writing in different genres … and offered advice to enable teachers to support EAL learning for example: teaching with an awareness of the language used as well as the content; repeated practice; recognizing structure; keeping up the cognitive challenge and giving clues.
Four presentations actually demonstrated the effectiveness of some of the recommended EAL strategies in the classroom. Alan Crawford, reporting on education in Kazakhstan and Guatemala, found that students could read and write English well but couldn’t function orally unless the instructor spoke slowly. He described the ‘Natural Approach’, one of the most successful approaches in second language acquisition since it was developed in 1977 by TD Terrell. Students learn a second language in the same way that native language children do, supported by the use of colourful conversational posters, each with a theme, and lots of repetition.

Taryn U’Haile working in kindergarten in an American school showed how collaborative learning was effective in developing reading and writing in science for ELLs who had interrupted or delayed formal education in both L1 and L2. Jorge Alberto Ramirez, Jacob Roth explained how he had transformed the curriculum in his San Diego based school by teaching language through the lens of identity. Only 15 minutes is spent on grammar, form and function each day, which leaves time for cognitive challenges, collaborative learning, experiential learning, identification of confusions and plenty of dialogue for action, reflection and creation of a student’s own thinking and knowledge.

My own presentation, Using Identity Texts to Boost the Confidence and Attainment of EAL Learners, drew extensively on my experience of nurturing the EAL skills of Muslim girls in an English secondary school context. The presentation demonstrated tried and tested approaches to creative writing using the core principles of the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC), of which I am an executive committee member, the first of which is to use the girls' identities and prior knowledge to gain confidence, raise self-esteem and accelerate their English acquisition, ultimately improving their overall attainment level.

As a native English speaker, I found the whole experience inspirational. Many presenters were not native English speakers themselves, yet they were able to share their research and teaching in an engaging way. I valued the opportunity to network with like-minded colleagues and learn from their experiences and knowledge. The conference, set in such a beautiful, historic and essentially Spanish area along with the additional cultural excursion to Medinaceli, made me keen to explore the area and learn much more about the real identity of Spain and its people and perhaps
return for more next year.

End of the conference – Francisco Ramos, Colloquium Director, thanking the student helpers

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