

The languages of religion/spirituality and their support of community wellbeing

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This presentation examines aspects of narratives collected for a new book "Language and Spirit: exploring languages, religion, spirituality in Australia today" (2022). These narratives illustrate the experiences of people for whom language knowledge and use are associated with a religious identity or a spirituality. Their narratives reflect the long-standing body of research which has shown the social-emotional benefits of multilingualism. We link this with the fluid and expanding definitions of well-being. The narratives provide many examples of social-emotional and spiritual wellbeing which narrators express in terms of language use, learning and maintenance. Indigenous narratives particularly focus on the role of language in mental health wellbeing, identity, development of strength in children, and reduction of racism. We examine the relevant notion of relational wellbeing (White, 2017) in this context. A community can be seen as a relational ecological model, where the interplay and interaction of different variables (history, languages, identities, roles) can generate reproduction and/or transformation. There is ongoing need to address social inclusion to combat racism in Australian society, and to acknowledge the significance of language as part of interfaith activities. In linguists' role in the development of personal Reconciliation, it is useful to consider the intertwined role of language and spirituality in supporting individual and community wellbeing.

Bios

Father Shenouda Mansour is an ordained priest of the Coptic Orthodox Church. He came to Australia from Egypt at the age of 6. His PhD investigated attitudes to identity, culture and language in a Coptic school community. He is the General Secretary of NSW Ecumenical Council, a body which strives to build good relationships, break barriers, and to build networking with churches. He has ongoing interest in identity, culture, language, religious and spiritual formation. He is the director of Coptic Orthodox Community Outreach Service, and is a regular radio program producer. He believes in being a social activist to build a better society.

Robyn Moloney is a languages educator. Following a career in school language teaching, Robyn moved to the role of a lecturer and teacher educator at Macquarie University, Sydney, for ten years. Her doctoral study, and subsequent research, investigated students' and teachers' intercultural learning through language. Her publications continue to engage with many aspects of teacher professional development and children's life within schools. As an Honorary Senior Lecturer, she works with schools to develop understanding of the intercultural capability in the curriculum and broader school environment.