

PLURILINGUAL AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

Introduction to a special issue of L1-Educational studies in Language and literature

MIKE BYRAM, MIKE FLEMING* & IRENE PIEPER**

*University of Durham, School of Education (UK)

**University of Hildesheim , Institut für deutsche Sprache und Literatur (Germany)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Council of Europe is probably best known among language teachers for its work on foreign language education. The *Common European Framework of Reference* (2001) (CEFR) has had worldwide influence and impact (Byram and Parmenter 2012). In the last decade however, the focus has changed from producing a systematic basis for foreign language education through the CEFR and the definitions of levels of attainment in many languages, to the development of a holistic vision of language education in an intercultural context. This can be seen most graphically in a multicoloured 'platform of resources and references for plurilingualism and intercultural education' (www.coe.int/lang).

The documents which are placed on this platform provide an explanation of the values and actions of the Council of Europe which underpin this new vision of plurilingual and intercultural education. They link the work of language teachers of all kinds to the fundamental values of the Council of Europe: human rights, democracy and the rule of law. From this, it is clear that the purposes of language education are to ensure that learners of all kinds and in all learning situations, whether in formal or informal education, have the potential for living a life as full citizens in democratic societies.

The Council of Europe's holistic vision recognises that individuals have repertoires of languages and ranges of intercultural experience which need to be supported and developed in education systems. This is crucial from the moment children enter into schooling, when they may meet a completely new language and a completely new way of thinking and behaving, a new cultural experience. However, education systems tend to create divisions in the language curriculum which reflect society's definitions of a language and of the languages which exist within its borders and such separations of languages may not reflect the plurilingual repertoire which is part of children's way of life.

The separation is also present in the platform of resources, because the platform is for the use of educationists: teachers, policymakers, curriculum developers, materials writers and others. The purpose of the platform is nonetheless to overcome the separations and divisions so that educationists and the education system respond to the plurilingualism and intercultural repertoire and experience of all learners.

The initial separation identifies 'regional, minority and migration languages' as one grouping. A second category refers to the 'languages of schooling', which are usually official or national languages used in schools as media of instruction and also learnt as subjects in their own right. The distinction between 'language as a subject' and 'language in other subjects' is an important one because the significance of language as a means of learning other subjects – natural sciences, mathematics, history, geography and so on – is not properly recognised in most educa-

tion systems. The final group of languages is that for which the Council of Europe has worked for many years: foreign language education.

The importance of developing a holistic vision of language education was the topic of a symposium held in Hildesheim/Germany in June 2011 and this became the basis for our decision to invite articles from presenters in the symposium, and others worldwide, which would in particular address 'regional, minority and migration languages' and 'languages of schooling', but would also reflect the Council of Europe's ultimate purpose to ensure that all language and intercultural education is seen by teachers in the way it is experienced by learners, i.e. as an integrated and rich experience.

2. 'PLURILINGUAL AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION'

A holistic vision of language education demands a renewal of terminology since older terminology such as 'bilingualism' or 'multicultural education', is loaded with implicit separations and barriers. The two crucial concepts have therefore been defined as follows:

Plurilingual competence: capacity to successively acquire and use different competences in different languages, at different levels of proficiency and for different functions. The central purpose of plurilingual education is to develop this competence.

Intercultural competence: combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours which allow a speaker, to varying degrees, to recognise, understand, interpret and accept other ways of living and thinking beyond his or her home culture. This competence is the basis of understanding among people, and is not limited to language ability (see Cavalli et al., 2009, p. 8).

Plurilingual and Intercultural Education (PIE) is the term which envelopes the whole phenomenon of language teaching and learning. It includes support for all the languages learners bring with them as they enter formal or informal education – the languages and varieties of the home and family, and of the street and society in which they live; the languages of instruction deemed necessary by education authorities, often related to the creation and reinforcement of national identities; the languages which are labelled 'foreign languages' because they are the official languages of other states even though they may be widely spoken within the society. Education systems should support all learners' languages even if this does not necessarily mean that all can be formally taught; recognition of learners' plurilingualism, as opposed to ignoring it or even suppressing it, is a significant contribution to learners' self esteem and understanding.

Curricula are needed which overcome current separations and respond to the plurilingual repertoires and experiences of learners, curricula which reduce or eliminate the separations evident for example in school timetables. This cannot be achieved instantly and the Council of Europe provides a document which envisages

steps and stages in the evolution of curricula (Beacco et al. 2010) and describes the possible mechanisms to design a curriculum for PIE.

The collection of papers in this edition of the journal were based on the symposium on plurilingual and intercultural education held at the Hildesheim conference in 2011 supplemented by other invited papers. They address various aspects of the topic including the teaching of plurilingual and intercultural education (Santos et al, Pinho and Moreira) the issue of regional and minority languages (Le Cordeur, Lin, Pfeifer and Schmidt, Rosemberg et al.), language as subject (Kam and Yan, Amado and Borzone) and language in other subjects (Linneweber-Lammerskitten, Qian and Xiong).

The paper by Santos, Araújo e Sá and Simões focuses on the educational partners who came together to develop a joint project on intercultural education in Primary Schools. The research examined the constructs of interculturality held by the participants and how these evolved as a result of developing the project. In the interviews before the project there was a tendency for the project team to take a static conception of culture, expressing views that were more akin to notions of multiculturalism. However interviews conducted after the project revealed more subtle conceptions that showed a more refined understanding of the concept of intercultural education. The paper by Pinho and Moreira examines how teachers of English as a second language in Portugal see their role in relation to plurilingual education and intercultural communication. In particular it focuses on how the teachers see the aims of English teaching in their own primary school context, and the constraints and difficulties they face in pursuing those aims. The paper emphasises the importance of context, and stresses the need for teachers to familiarise themselves with the rationale, the principles and the aims of plurilingual intercultural education not just in a generalised way but in specific relation to their own professional development and their work contexts.

The issue of supporting regional and minority languages clearly presents a challenge around the world. The paper by Le Cordeur brings an interesting perspective from South Africa where the drive to learn English is often pursued at the expense of the indigenous languages. The paper presents a strong educational argument that schooling in the mother tongue is important for the early development of literacy and numeracy skills. The suggested solution is a language policy formulated on mother-tongue-based bilingual education. It is argued that this approach would promote mother-tongue education, particularly through the medium of indigenous languages as well as provide access to an international language such as English. The discussion by Lin highlights the complexity and local contextual challenges when seeking to implement a policy of intercultural and plurilingual education. Through a case study based on the Hakka community in Taiwan it challenges the assumption that learning a second or foreign language can be expected to provide equal benefits to students from various cultural backgrounds. It highlights the emerging inequality arising from the enforcement of a mother-tongue education policy in Taiwan. Pfeifer and Schmidt describe an empirical research project which

used drawings by primary school children in Germany to examine their conception of, and attitudes to, different languages, including their view of cultural and linguistic diversity. This analysis was conducted with a theoretical framework based on the concept of 'heritage language' which is shown to be complex and problematic. The study highlights the positive attitudes of the pupils as well as the shortcomings of some of their conceptions. An examination of an intercultural and plurilingual teaching project is presented by Rosemberg, Ojea and Alam. Here they describe a project which developed curriculum materials specifically for use by Qom communities in Argentina. These materials in Qom and Spanish were designed to support the children's literacy development by drawing on the language and culture familiar to them but also seeking to extend their knowledge and understanding. The 'ethnographic reading books' were made possible by the intercultural and collaborative work between community members, teachers, and the research team (see also the article by Amado and Borzone).

Two of the contributions explore the challenges and possible solutions teaching of language as subject when the students are from diverse backgrounds. The paper by Tse and Hui examines the teaching of non Chinese speaking students in schools in Hong Kong. It provides background on the challenges facing schools with increasing numbers of immigrant students and makes comparisons with the situation in European countries. The empirical study of four schools reports on a number of intervention strategies and on the progress made in the schools in providing for students for whom the language of schooling is not their first language. The paper by Amado and Borzone is again situated in rural communities in Argentina and describes an intercultural literacy programme based in these schools. The project developed reading books for the children which were designed to build bridges between the children's home culture and school learning. The project was designed to meet the difficulties such children have in learning to read and write, using the broad range of knowledge and abilities they have acquired at home. The development of the books was based on systematic empirical research related to their own culture.

The often neglected issue of language in other subjects is addressed by Linneweber-Lammerskitten who demonstrates that linguistic, plurilingual and intercultural competences are central to mathematics, even though the subject is sometimes wrongly conceived in narrow, functional terms. In planning the mathematics curriculum and lessons, the mathematical competences, capacities, skills and attitudes that are used in real-life situations in problem-solving tasks need to be linked to social, linguistic and communicative components. The paper by Qian and Xiong reports on a study which focused on a group of adolescent English Language learners who are classed as 'late arrivals' having come to Canada from China after the age of 15. The study looked at the teenagers' experiences in three different 'social spaces'. The participants viewed English Literature classes as a social space of 'others' where they were more likely to keep silent. In contrast, ESL classes and content subject classes were considered more as their own social space

where they were more active participants. The paper explores the implications of these findings for the ESL curriculum.

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