
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classrooms: New Dilemmas for Teachers

J. Miller, A. Kostogriz and M. Gearon, (2009), Clevedon: Multilingual Matters

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Contemporary education presents new challenges to teachers, policy makers, curriculum designers and pedagogues alike as growing cultural, linguistic and racial differences increase in schools. For anyone involved in education with an interest in cultural diversity and language teaching and learning in the classroom, this book provides a thought provoking overview of current discourses and debates on the roles of language and language teaching.

The research presented in this volume focuses on language teaching from social, ideological and linguistic perspectives. The aim of the book is to explore and contribute to the debate on the changing role of language in multilingual and multicultural contexts globally, to explore the power dilemmas educationalists face between home and dominant language and their influence on pedagogical issues. Finally, it aims to address and problematise ways in which research can impact on policy, curriculum and language teacher education courses.

Edited by Miller, Kostogriz and Gearon, the book is divided into three parts: Pedagogy in Diverse Classrooms, Language Policy and Curriculum, and Language Research in Diverse Contexts. Each section presents contributions by international scholars. These outline to the reader the wide range of globally current debates, in Canada, US, Australia, among other countries.

Pedagogy in Diverse Classrooms. This section considers the diverse nature of increasing multicultural and multilingual classrooms and the impact on students and teachers' identities as learners and as socially integrated individuals. Lasagabaster opens the section by providing a thought provoking overview of multilingual education in the Spanish and Basque region and students and teachers' attitude towards language learning. As the number of students learning modern foreign languages in the UK are dropping, the chapter presents an interesting analysis of teachers and immigrant students' attitudes towards languages and the value they place on them.

As a bilingual teacher who trained in the UK to teach English in the mainstream, Miller's chapter on in-training teachers' experience with EAL was particularly poignant to me. Miller, in her chapter, adds to the debate by looking at teacher training courses and teachers' increasingly diverse backgrounds exploring issues of identity and integration among a group of Australian teachers for whom English is an additional language.

The rest of this section looks at various models of EAL language teaching programmes for immigrant and refugee students in Australia questioning their validity in the eyes of the learners and their specific needs as opposed to political and pedagogical discourses dominating language teaching. Hammond focuses on content-based language teaching programmes for students with EAL in Australia as part of a teacher-researcher collaboration and the importance of intellectual challenge as well as explicit and systematic teaching of language; an approach popular in many UK schools.

Dooley explores the mismatch between the parental expectations in African families and the conceptions of education among Australian educators. Whereas Windle concludes this section with a parallel study between French and Australian secondary schools exploring what teachers believe to be the bilingual linguistic deficit in immigrant students of first or second generation in their language acquisition.

Language Policy and Curriculum. Lo Blanco, Costley and Leung and Kostogriz move the focus to the dialogism of interdependence and power of English language teaching policies and curriculum implementations. Lo Blanco explores how economic and cultural discourses shape the politics of language education. He suggests a 'critical worldmindedness' approach to language policies and one which provides a "cross-curricular perspective on multilingualism". Lo Blanco argues that foreign and second language teaching discourses promote European languages as tools to enhance multicultural understanding, However reality in the classroom shows learners' detachment from these languages since they only consider them for their economic value, an issue that many language teachers – including teachers of EAL – will have encountered. Lo Blanco proposes a focus on a 'critical worldmindedness' teaching approach which promotes a cultural critical approach to identity and culture that goes beyond acceptance of the target language. As our classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse linguistically as well as culturally, Lo Blanco's

approach encourages curriculum planners to represent these and stimulate true language awareness and multilingualism.

In his chapter, Kostogriz continues the debate into Australian teaching standards and curriculum and urges the reader to consider adopting a more open attitude to other varieties of English in language pedagogical practices through transculturation. Kostogriz argues transculturation allows students to acquire a more ethical and open to the 'otherness' approach to language teaching; however, he recognizes that teachers can only achieve this and support new meaning-making if they are prepared to push against current language policies.

Costley and Leung present their ethnographic study on the dialogism of English language policies in the mainstream curriculum and the reality of meeting the needs of increasingly multilingual classrooms. They highlight how student support programmes through withdrawal may better meet individual needs of EAL learners but actually emphasize differences between students and call for a review of a pedagogical policy that insist in mainstreaming thus denying that ethnicity, linguistic and socioeconomic factors may have an impact on students' academic success. Similarly, Coyle calls for a much needed development in content based language teaching pedagogies in order to equip this approach to the demands of a more multicultural society.

The last chapter in this section, by Margaret Gearon, brings the focus back to curriculum content and the lack of intercultural awareness and competence and a failing of teacher training courses to provide teachers with the needed skills to engage increasingly multicultural and multilingual classrooms.

Research Directions in Diverse Contexts.

Creese, Bhatt and Martin's chapter opens this section on research in multilingual spaces by describing research identity as part of a team-ethnography project across a number of interlocking case-studies in complementary schools in the UK. The chapter provides an interesting and original focus on the advantages and issues around researcher-researched relationships as part of a team of researchers. The two cases presented here explore how researchers assume multiple, sometimes potentially contradictory, identities when negotiating researcher relationships in complementary schools.

Dagenais, Moore and Sebatier explore multiple researcher identity within part of an international

teacher-researcher collaboration project in Canada and the contradictions and constraints brought to light by the study between policy, curriculum and innovation in approaches to multilingualism in the classroom.

The following two chapters which conclude this section of the book explore attitudes and perspectives on the languages and literacies of multilingual students. Many teachers would find that students attitudes and personal motivation can have strong bearings on their success in language acquisition and would be able to relate with Dufva, Salo, Smythe and Toohey's findings. They argue that classrooms encompass varying beliefs about languages and that both teachers and students can increase learners' language awareness by making these multiple conceptualizations explicit. They also argue that students are involved in rich multilingual practices and constantly negotiate identities and create new knowledge/meaning between home and dominant cultures/languages.

A must for anybody who is embarking on research in multilingualism in education - this book is an ideal and thought provoking overview of current debates in pedagogy, policy and practice in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms.

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