

2018 ECSPM SYMPOSIUM

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PARADIGM SHIFT IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION TO DEVELOP MULTILITERATE AND PLURILINGUAL AGENCIES

Symposium conclusions

- 1. It is essential to change the dominant paradigm in language education and literacy development in European schools¹ because language, discourse and text have changed /are changing, ways of communicating have changed/are changing, what it means to be socially and academically literate has changed/is changing.**

In the past, becoming fully proficient in a language meant having become social subjects of the discursive practices of the language one was learning -- operating fully in accordance with the formal rules of the target language and fulfilling functions and predefined social roles. Emphasis was on learning single languages as though they were stable structural, semantic and pragmatic systems. This is still so today.

Today's societies are in need of entrepreneurial social agents,² prepared for high-speed change in social norms and practices in people's roles and ways of social participation, but also change in language and ways of using it. Language itself is changing at an accelerated pace today encoding the changes in society and this change is inscribed in language, discourse and texts. Changes brought about by technology in this digital age, for example, are encoded in the new types of texts and textual forms. For example, LinkedIn has replaced business cards and resués; blogs operate alongside newspaper opinion column; the encyclopedia has been replaced by Wikipedia; broadcast TV is slowly being replaced by interactive TV and You Tube; digital texts are definitely replacing manuscripts; radio apps replacing broadcast radio, Flickr replacing picture books and Instagram replacing photo albums, email messages replacing memos and letters, and much more. But the use of these textual forms are themselves bringing about linguistic change.

In the past, communities, identities, processes and practices were key concepts linked to the role of language in the construction of social identities, social relations. In today's societies, which are part of an interconnected world due to globalisation, people experience a sense of community, identity and loyalties away from autonomous structures in spaces –such as, for example, digitally created spaces– where linguistic and discursive variation are central to new

¹ We agree to a great extent with the proposal submitted to the European Commission by a group of experts invited to offer their insights to the Unit of "Schools and educators; multilingualism" of the DG EAC. Their text is entitled RETHINKING LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS. The experts proposal is that in order to address today's societal, economic and technological changes, EU member states need to *rethink literacy, rethink multilingualism* and also to rethink the term 'mother tongue'. The full document may be accessed from: https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/rethinking-language-report_en.pdf.

² Individuals negotiating subject positions and identity/ies so as to constitute themselves agents. Agency is understood here as the discursive constitution of a particular individual as *having presence* (rather than absence), as *author* of his/her own multiple meanings (and desires), having *a sense of self that can go beyond the given meaning* in any one discourse, and forge something new, through a combination of discourses, words, concepts and practices.

forms of social organization. Languages as bounded systems, identities in stable social positions, and communities as uniform social formations are superseded by mobility and multiplicity. Social actors today are required to take an active role in the flows and transformations, to be entrepreneurial, innovative risk-takers contributing further to world interconnectedness and to the new economy and to the new forms of democratic citizenry largely created by information and computer technologies.

School classrooms, communities and societies are increasingly multilingual because of the migration flows that have accelerated in speed and scale in recent years, impacting on the continent of Europe (and not only).

Language and more generally literacy education needs to cater to these social changes so that students become multiliterate life-long learners, able to communicate effectively in multilingual settings, by

- *learning additional (to their L1) languages; i.e. languages which are important in their personal and social life and schooling; languages important in their communities for their relations with others, for their own intellectual growth and development, as well as for higher studies, employment and mobility.*
- *developing plurilingual competence(s).*

These new demands require (a) new types of school curricula that take into serious consideration the role of language across the curriculum, and (b) whole-school language policies.

2. It is essential to use commonly understood terms agreeing on the notions that these terms refer to.

MULTILITERACY

Being multiliterate means being able to deal with linguistic and discursive diversity, as well as with multimodal forms of linguistic expression and representation. It also means having developed abilities and skills to function as a meaning maker using of multiple modes of communication, languages, and multiple forms of language.

MULTILINGUALISM

We accept the definition put forth by the Council of Europe (as articulated by the experts responsible for the CEFR and the CEFR Companion) referring to an individual's knowledge of a number of languages (having different degrees of competences) or the co-existence of different languages in a given society. The Council of Europe distinguishes multilingualism from plurilingualism and defines the latter as below. We adopt this definition also.

PLURILINGUALISM

Plurilingual competence refers to one's ability to switch from one language or dialect to another, express oneself in one language and understand the other, call upon the knowledge of a number of languages to make sense of a text, recognise words from a common background in a new guise, perform cross-language and interlanguage mediation by bringing the whole of his/her linguistic equipment or repertoire into play, experiment with alternative forms of expression in different languages or dialects, and exploiting different modes of communication (visual, verbal, acoustic, etc.).

There is need to generate new pedagogies and tools for teaching, learning and assessment for the development of learners' multiliteracies and plurilingual competences.

- 3. Teachers and teachers-to-be (language teachers but also teachers of all school subjects and school directors) need to be systematically trained so as to decisively move away from their monoglossic mindsets – their monoglossic habitus – and their monolingual ideologies.**

There is strong research evidence that teachers are struggling to cope with and manage teaching in their multilingual environments because they have not been trained to do so but also because they are trapped in their monoglossic mindsets/habitus and their monolingual ideologies.

There is need for the development of new teacher education programmes at universities and other institutions that offer language and other subject teachers initial and in-service training and education along the lines described presently and incentives for offering them.