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Chapter 1

The Challenges of Diversity in Language Education

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A successful multilingualism policy can strengthen life chances of citizens: it may increase their employability, facilitate access to services and rights and contribute to solidarity through enhanced intercultural dialogue and social cohesion. Approached in this spirit, linguistic diversity can become a precious asset, increasingly so in today's globalised world. (European Commission, 2008: 3)

One of the most critical realities of contemporary education in a globalised world is the growing cultural, racial and linguistic diversity in schools and the problems involved in educating large numbers of students who do not speak the dominant language as their home or heritage language. The impact of this diversity is felt in many education-related fields, including policy, curriculum, pedagogy, teacher education, teachers' work and language education research. The range of diversity poses an extraordinary challenge for language teachers in countries such as Australia, Canada, the UK and many European Union countries, where students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds must engage with mainstream curriculum in a new language, frequently the dominant language. Programmes to support such students to cope with the demands of the set curriculum in the mainstream are limited and varied, and provide the focus of some chapters of this book. In addition, teachers of compulsory foreign language courses must also cater for the same heterogeneous student population, as well as adapting to the emergence of content-based language teaching.

In these complex cultural-linguistic circumstances, there is a need to re-evaluate language teaching practices and curriculum in a way that is more responsive to difference. Krapp, for instance, points out that language education, if it is to be effective and democratic, requires a
shift in what and how students in multicultural countries are taught. She states:

We are still teaching standard national languages according to a 19th century modern view of language as a structural system with rules of grammatical and lexical usage and rules of pragmatics reified to fit the image of a stereotyped Other. The 21st century is all about meaning, relations, creativity, subjectivity, historicity and the inter-as in interdisciplinary and intercultural... We should conceive of what we do in ways that are more appropriate to the demands of a global, decentred, multilingual and multicultural world, more suited to our uncertain and unpredictable times. (Kramsch, 2008: 405)

Pedagogically, this highlights a tension around the role of language education in servicing the global economy and, more importantly, in mediating the everyday life of young people in multicultural conditions. This mixture of the global, the national and the local presents an increasing need to take into account multiple languages and hybrid literacies that young people use and develop for effective functioning within and across social and cultural borders (Kostogriz, 2005).

In language education research, bilingualism, multilingualism and plurilingualism are core concerns and often contested as educational values and goals. Clearly, students need to be competent in their first language use, and also in the dominant language of their country or region, which allows access to academic success, social power, further education and work. Many require proficiency in additional languages for school curricula and in day-to-day communication in their personal or later work-related lives. While this range of language competences may be recognised and even valued in some parts of the world, this is frequently not the case in predominantly English-speaking countries such as Australia, the UK, the USA and Canada. The European Community, by contrast, is highly conscious of the need for citizens to develop multilingual competence and has developed a language policy that recognises the value of multilingualism. The European Commission's (2008) statement declares, 'Multilingual citizens are better equipped to take advantage of the educational opportunities created by an integrated Europe', while its 'Action plan on language learning and linguistic diversity' specifies the scope of strategies to build multilingual competence.

Researchers have long demonstrated the additional political, economic, social, intellectual and communicative advantages of multilingualism, yet even in European Union policy statements there is little
recognition of just how challenging diverse classrooms can be, not to mention the multiple contextual caveats that need to be attached to language planning, language learning and teaching objectives. In the USA, Commins and Miramontes (2005) problematise and deconstruct some of the myths and key arguments in the ongoing debate about linguistic diversity and teaching, and, in particular, issues around language policy, bilingualism, English literacy, equity and pragmatism.

It is not surprising that the issue of a socially just and democratic language education, one that is responsive to cultural and linguistic diversity in our classrooms, has been gradually disappearing from the discourses of educational policy making (Kostogriz, 2007). The neo-liberalisation of education in some countries, with its emphasis on the self-regulation of educational markets through privatisation, competition and ‘customer’ choice and the de-professionalisation of teachers through accountability and performativity mechanisms, has led to a convenient oversimplification of the cultural-linguistic complexity of schooling. Educators’ confusion about how to teach students who often do not share their cultural values and linguistic backgrounds is just one consequence of this simplification.

Perhaps the one certainty in contemporary languages education is that mass movements of peoples due to global economies, conflict and sociopolitical instability, and the resulting impact of large numbers of immigrants, refugees and children of guest workers’ in schools have changed the face of language teaching and, by implication, language teacher education around the world. Kramsch (2008) draws attention to the urgent need to shift how we think about and do language teaching, and the kinds of courses we offer to future language teachers. This also requires research into and reflection about how best to address languages education, whether first, second and foreign languages, in order to meet the needs and interests of these students, their families and their school context/s.

Our thinking about this book began three years ago with the project of exploring how language teacher educators might engage with the changes in classrooms such as those outlined above. At that time, we asked ourselves the question of how to address the needs of pre- and in-service teachers who must face the reality of multiple languages, voices and cultures in their classrooms. We noted Kramsch’s statement that:

Linguistic and cultural pluralism is more than the mere coexistence of various languages. It is primarily about the transcultural circulation of values across borders, the negotiation of identities, the
inversions, even inventions of meaning, often concealed by a common illusion of effective communication.... The teacher trainers of tomorrow will need to be increasingly plurilingual and pluricultural. (Kramsch, 2008: 390)

The context of linguistic and cultural diversity is, therefore, a given that underlies the research presented in this book, which has several aims. These include:

- to continue the debate on the roles of language and power in rapidly changing multilingual and multicultural communities within various nations;
- to address ways in which this debate can inform policy, curriculum and language teacher education courses;
- to contribute to understandings of the tensions between home language/s and the dominant language of schooling, and to propose some ways these are being addressed;
- to present teacher and learner perspectives on mainstream participation for students who are still acquiring the dominant language of schooling;
- to problematise language pedagogy using a range of sociocultural theoretical perspectives that pay due attention to social, institutional and political contexts.

As we engaged with scholars and their work in several countries with highly diverse populations, including Canada, the UK, Australia, Spain and Finland, the book evolved beyond the scope of teacher education to incorporate policy and language planning, language curricula and innovative pedagogies, language and multimodal literacies, teachers' work, changing theoretical conceptions of language learning and use in transcultural contexts, and indeed the types of research best suited to explore these complexities. All the chapters address one or more of these areas, and the ensemble opens up to the reader a number of dilemmas and problematic issues surrounding language teaching and learning in highly diverse contemporary contexts.

**Challenges in Globalised Language Education**

This book focuses strongly on research oriented to language teaching and learning in multilingual and multicultural classrooms and societies. The first challenge we wish to raise regards the equity of educational provision for extremely diverse groups of students. It is uncontroversial to say that many of the culturally and linguistically diverse students that
are the focus of the research in this book are also socially, economically and politically marginalised. Costley and Leung (this volume) draw attention to the entrenched disadvantage of many immigrant and refugee students, as well as to the hiatus between policy rhetoric and educational practice. When students arrive with limited or interrupted schooling, settlement, integration and academic success become even greater challenges (Brown et al., 2006). In the UK, and Australia for example, the gap between state claims and aims for multicultural education and the actual conditions in state-funded schools is vast and ever increasing. In Australia, this is accentuated by the severe underfunding of government schools, which are overwhelmingly attended by the students referred to above. The dramatic increase in numbers of these students is also a factor. Lasagabaster (this volume) highlights the tenfold increase in such students in the past decade in Spain, while Hammond (this volume) provides the important insight that in some inner city schools in Australia, ethnically and linguistically diverse students form 90% of the student body. It is a useful reminder that groups often labelled as 'minority' are, in fact, the overwhelming majority in some schools – a heterogeneous majority, but a critical one.

There are three related issues in highly diverse schools. These are complex integrated issues, but are primarily social, ideological and linguistic in focus, respectively. First, successful social integration, inclusion and cohesion depend largely on academic success. Rutter (2006) argues in the UK context that a primary indicator of successful integration is successful academic outcomes, and that unsuccessful groups remain as labour in society's worst and most low paid jobs. But, as second language researchers, we must also ask, what is the role and the importance of proficiency in the dominant language in these outcomes? One problem is that there is relatively little detailed empirical research that examines the efficacy of practices in relation to students' language proficiency, school participation or transitions through school (Anderson et al., 2004; Rutter, 2006; McBrien, 2005). Likewise, there is little detailed research that examines the conditions that enable schools to develop these practices in holistic ways. The need for hard-edged research that both measures and responds to the literacy needs of diverse students remains as urgent as ever. As Labov argued in his keynote address at the AAAL Conference in 2007, the failure of schools to teach disadvantaged children to read was the most serious social problem of the USA. The majority of these disadvantaged students, both in the USA and elsewhere, are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
A second challenge is basically ideological, and concerns the neglect of difference and diversity as consequential, while attention is increasingly galvanised on national curricula and national standards (see Kostogriz, this volume). Kostogriz points out that as teacher performance and accountability pressures increasingly dominate policy and media campaigns, diversity and contextual complexity remain in the background. In addition, the scale of diversity and its educational ramifications are silenced in public discourse. In Australia, this is partly out of fear of alienating the population even further from government schools, and partly because thinking through the needs of highly diverse school populations and coming up with viable responses requires too much work and money. This serves to reify disadvantage for already marginalised groups. A point that should be made here is that there is always a danger of homogenising ethnically, racially, linguistically, culturally, socially and educationally diverse groups. The categories within diversity are invariably heterogeneous, with a full range of talents, competencies and difficulties. This should, however, not distract from the primary problem that a large body of evidence identifies highly diverse student groups as overrepresented in educational underachievement. It is also worth recalling Cummins’ (1997) argument that ignoring the intersections between power and pedagogy serves to reinforce coercive and exploitative structures in education.

The third challenge we wish to raise is more specifically linguistic and academic in nature. Students who speak a range of languages other than the dominant language or language of instruction must compete with native speakers of the dominant language, who are constantly improving their language proficiency, in mainstream classrooms, often with minimal or no intensive language support. Further, there is a significant difference, often poorly understood by policy makers and many teachers, between social language and the highly specific academic language required in schools. In a body of research spanning over 15 years, Collier and Thomas have addressed the problem of how long it takes language minority students in the USA to acquire the social and academic language for successful integration into the mainstream. They stress the need to look beyond the notion of ‘learning English’ to the processes involved in acquiring a second language for success at school. The language needed for academic success at school requires the use of specialised forms, genres and vocabulary, which are specific to subject areas such as maths, social science, science and so on. Collier’s model (1995), which illustrates the complexity of acquiring any additional language in school, outlines
the interdependence of academic development, language development, cognitive development and sociocultural processes.

How is this to be achieved? There is considerable research evidence that first language competence and literacy play a vital role in the acquisition of an additional language, particularly for academic purposes (Cummins, 1991; Thomas & Collier, 1997). Bilingual research provides a strong argument for first language support wherever possible. However, in highly diverse Australian classrooms, where up to ten language groups may be in one class, this becomes impossible. This is often the case in many North American and European classrooms too. Both Lasagabaster and Dooley (this volume) highlight the language demands of the mainstream, while Hammond reminds us that ‘second language’ is now a mainstream issue. In this book, research related to bilingualism is presented by Windle, and by Dagenais, Moore and Sabatier.

Specific bilingual support may prove impractical in some contexts, but this should not undermine the importance of what Cummins (2003) proposes so convincingly in his paper ‘Challenging the construction of difference as deficit: Where are identity, intellect, imagination, and power in the new regime of truth?’ For learning a new language for success at school and in society, Cummins (2000) emphasises the ‘centrality of identity negotiation’ (p. 154) and ‘identity affirmation’ (p. 268) in effective practice, while claiming these have been consistently ignored in mainstream educational research. For minority students in particular, he argues that practice must be grounded in the lives of the students. Research projects on innovative approaches to language education that reflect a strong focus on student identity are presented in this volume by Smythe and Toohey, and by Dagenais, Moore and Sabatier. The cross-over between home and school literacies, the complex clashes between dominant language and culture with heritage language and culture, youth culture and technoliteracies, illustrated by Smythe and Toohey, highlight the challenges for teachers, students and schools as something beyond learning and teaching English. They reveal a range of tensions between institutional constraints and objectives, and the multilingual, multimodal and multicultural resources that minority students bring to school. In the context of foreign language teaching, Coyle lays out the re-conceptualisation needed to integrate traditional languages studied in mainstream schools and heritage languages or community languages taught in after hours schools.

The chapters in this book offer new insights into language learning and teaching in times of unprecedented diversity in schools. We know that the dilemmas implicated in this diversity are many and troubling for
schools, teachers, students and governments. We hope that the research presented here offers many ways to re-think language teacher education. Nieto (2000, 2006) argues that diversity, coupled with the emerging sociopolitical contexts of schools, means that effective teachers now need more than strong pedagogical skills. She illustrates that teachers who are successful in working with these students also display a sense of mission, empathy for their students, the capacity to critically challenge conventional approaches, flexibility and a passion for social justice.

This book, therefore, addresses a number of issues that are encountered by language educators and researchers in their respective local contexts. The significance of the book lies partly in representing how language educators respond to the consequences of globalisation. It also provides ways to think about language education in the context of nationally and regionally embedded globalisation. In other words, insights from teaching and research in local contexts have implications for understanding the impact of the great transcultural flows and linguistic pluralism of our times. We hope that the book will help readers to think about cultural and linguistic diversity in language education, and their effects on teachers and learners.

The book is organised into three parts, namely Pedagogy in Diverse Classrooms, Language Policy and Curriculum, and Language Research in Diverse Contexts. We recognise that in most chapters there is substantial overlap across these three areas, but the parts provide readers with some indication of the primary focus of each chapter. We would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions by the international scholars in this volume, who collectively provide such a rich and insightful picture of the dilemmas for language educators in linguistically and culturally diverse times. In what follows, we provide a brief outline of the individual chapters in the three sections of the book.

Part 1: Pedagogy in Diverse Classrooms

In highly diverse school populations, Miller reminds us that both students and teachers come from an extraordinary array of cultural and language backgrounds. Although a body of literature has attended to ‘difference’ in student groups, less has been written about teachers. Miller’s chapter presents a group of graduating Australian teachers for whom English is not the first language, and who, in some cases, were still grappling with issues of identity, their accents and the way they were heard, as well as their own perceived cultural gaps and strengths. They found that their lecturers and local peers were sometimes insensitive to
the linguistic and cultural challenges they faced, yet felt they had valuable knowledge and experience that remained untapped in their pre-service course. The problematic assumptions made by teacher educators in regard to international students are raised, along with broader implications for pre-service teacher education.

Lasagabaster analyses the linguistically complex situation regarding immigrant students and the challenges it creates in the Basque Autonomous Community. He examines how both teachers and students perceive multilingualism in a context where the presence of several languages in schools is the norm. The three compulsory languages of the curriculum (Basque, Spanish and English) co-exist with the languages spoken by an ever-increasing number of immigrant students. His results show that, in spite of the fact that the social value of multilingualism was perceived as high, the participants did not really attach an important personal value to it. He argues that the European Union's concept of a personal adoptive language would be a feasible way to bridge the gap between local and immigrant languages and to counter the hegemony of English.

In her chapter on an intensive English transition programme for English as an Additional Language/English as a Second Language (EAL/ESL) learners in Sydney, Hammond argues that given the widespread diversity in many urban classrooms, 'ESL is now a mainstream issue'. She draws on her own work with Pauline Gibbons on 'scaffolding', as well as on a recent body of work that stresses quality teaching and high intellectual challenge for language learners. Hammond's project with teachers used a high challenge-high support framework in which multilingual and multimodal support was offered to learners in Music and English, which formed part of their programme. A major contribution of the chapter is to define teacher qualities that engage students from diverse backgrounds, including empathy, knowledge of the students' backgrounds and a broad interest in language as an essential part of learning, awareness of the importance of cognitive demand and a repertoire of pedagogical strategies for these learners. The implication is that pedagogy in such programmes offers important insights for broader educational contexts.

In her chapter on students with interrupted education and from an African refugee background who now reside in Australia, Dooley poses some difficult questions about the responsibility for learning language and content at school. Her study gives voice to African parents, the students themselves and to their teachers as they grapple with the options available when students do not understand mainstream vocabulary, content or classroom instructions. Dooley draws attention to the
(im)possibilities for engagement in learning if the conditions for expressing incomprehension or seeking help are not in place. Contrasting the supportive environment of the intensive language school with the more confronting mainstream high school, the author shows that mainstream teacher talk often ignores the needs of students with interrupted schooling and limited literacy. Further, such students may face derision from peers if they constantly require help or ask questions. The study points to the need for increased awareness of the expectations and problems faced by these students as they struggle with school discourses and content.

Culturally and linguistically diverse students in immigrant-receiving countries are often concentrated in settings of educational disadvantage where bilingualism and cultural background can be quickly transformed into explanations of poor performance. Windle argues that it is essential for teachers, who seek to empower such students, to be able to identify the nature of the academic difficulties confronting them. This requires an appreciation both of the social contexts of students and of the operation of schooling as cultural institutions embedded in socially unequal power relations. The chapter discusses a study of migrant students in French and Australian secondary schools that are located in working-class and culturally diverse neighbourhoods. It presents extracts of student writing, as well as views from teachers and students, in order to demonstrate an apparent mismatch between perceptions of difficulty and sources of difficulty with written expression. The chapter suggests that teachers, and students themselves, often misrecognise both the source and the nature of the ‘language difficulties’ they encounter at school.

**Part 2: Language Policy and Curriculum**

Lo Bianco’s chapter opens up the section on language policy and curriculum. It addresses political dilemmas of language education and links them to the workings of two contradictory political discourses – economic and cultural. Lo Bianco argues that these discourses do not take into account the communicative and educative needs of multicultural nation-states. The economic discourse of efficiency usually reduces language learning to a set of skills that the citizens of a nation-state need to acquire in order to participate in global market economies. While this discourse puts an emphasis on English as the language of globalisation and is considered by many as a threat to local languages and identities, cultural discourses are enacted in response to the perceived
colonisation. This exposes nationalism and ethnic protectionism as movements that often engender a conservative backlash in language education with regard to differences. Lo Bianco addresses these contradictions in the politics of language education by developing an alternative concept of 'critical worldmindedness'. He presents an appealing argument for considering it as a new organising principle of curriculum and pedagogy in multicultural conditions.

Kostogriz engages further with the issues of difference, dialogical interdependence and power that Lo Bianco discusses in his chapter. His chapter situates English language and literacy education within current debates in Australia about teacher professional standards, national curriculum and their ability to respond to cultural and linguistic difference. It identifies blind spots and contradictions inherent in the curriculum frameworks and in the discourse of professional standards, emphasising the often neglected issues of professional ethics. Kostogriz re-evaluates the contribution of Derrida, Levinas and Bakhtin to English teaching and draws on their concepts of hospitality, responsibility and dialogism to provide an alternative perspective on curriculum and pedagogy. The chapter puts emphasis on dialogical ethics in pedagogical zones of contact with difference. It urges the reader to think about the possibilities of opening up English language education to the Other, making it more hospitable. Kostogriz discusses a pedagogical practice of transculturation in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. As an act of hospitality, transculturation can be a way of enabling students to understand and negotiate differences, their connectedness and meaning dynamics in dialogical encounters with the Other.

Addressing a similar set of concerns, Costley and Leung present a case study that highlights the mismatch between the English National Curriculum Policy and the specific needs of individual schools and the realities of their multilingual and multicultural classes. The English language support teacher in this study, herself from a non-English speaking background, works with groups of students in withdrawal classes to develop not only their linguistic knowledge and skills, but also a sense of responsibility towards schooling and the behaviours, values and practices expected in a UK school. The study shows that judicious use of funding, which enables minority migrant students to be withdrawn from mainstream classes in order to meet their specific needs and, hence, narrow the gaps between the likelihood of low achievement and expected outcomes, can make difference more visible.

Raising the need to re-think and re-conceptualise the teaching of languages for the 21st century, especially in supposed monolingual
anglophone countries such as the UK, Coyle argues the need for making language curriculum and pedagogical practices more responsive to the multicultural composition of society. This requires a change in the public perception of difference, in particular in representing linguistic diversity as an asset rather than a liability. The chapter outlines the concept of the borderless classroom as a way forward in languages teaching and learning in the post-method era. Languages in 21st century societies and economies, as Coyle argues, need to be taught as means for both learning and communication. This will enable language learners to participate in knowledge production and also to value languages as a part of the knowledge base for life-long learning. Such recognition of language learning would require language educators to move away from a focus on using a modified version of Savignon's (2004) concept of communicative language teaching, to an approach that favours language in use, such as that required in the Content Learning in Languages approach. It would also include the development of both cultural and intercultural awareness.

Gearon re-focuses the discussion of curriculum, professional ethics and practice in previous chapters, to language teacher preparation. She addresses the extent to which existing teacher education courses preparing novice teachers of languages other than English enable their graduates to cope with the scenarios and dilemmas they may face in multilingual and multicultural classrooms in Australia. Her chapter illustrates the lack of content specifically concerned with concepts of intercultural awareness and competence. It also points to the non-recognition of the diversity of languages and cultures among school students who may be learning yet another language and culture other than English, regardless of the one they use outside of school in their own ethnolinguistic communities.

**Part 3: Research Directions in Diverse Contexts**

Creese, Bhatt and Martin explore the research processes of a multilingual research team working in the multilingual sites of complementary schools in the UK. They describe two aspects of researcher-identity negotiation, the first focusing on relationships with research participants, and the second on researcher identity within a nine-member research team. They report on how researchers use their linguistic, social and cultural resources to negotiate access and build relationships with participants in the research process and with one another in the research team. In disclosing divergent researcher perspectives, they hope to
produce a healthier, more contested and contradictory ethnography, which captures the complexities of research in linguistically and culturally diverse schools.

Dagenais, Moore and Sabatier open up a range of dilemmas and tensions in their chapter on a teacher-researcher collaboration in Canada. Their interview data with two teachers, drawn from a much larger interinstitutional project, honour the teachers as ‘knowers’, yet elegantly present the complexity of such collaboration in schools. Teachers have different levels of investment in projects, as well as many non-negotiable institutional constraints; researchers draw on research and theory that may well be challenged by classroom realities; the project becomes professional development for all concerned. The authors also highlight contradictions between policy rhetoric that privileges multiculturalism, and official languages policy that excludes the overt linguistic capital of vast numbers of children from diverse language backgrounds. Their project led to a deep consideration of what counts as knowledge in multilingual schools, as well as the potentially transforming multiple roles available to those who embark on teacher-researcher collaboration.

In their chapter on foreign language education in Finland, Dufva and Salo draw theoretically on the work of the Bakhtin Circle and contemporary authors who have discussed dialogism in relation to language learning and teaching research. The chapter focuses on the everyday conceptualisations of language. It suggests that different, open-ended ways of studying the experienced aspects of the language learning process are important research tools. The authors argue that tasks and activities that elicit learners’ beliefs are important also as pedagogical tools. They briefly survey research on beliefs about languages and discuss the diversity of students’ perspectives on and attitudes to foreign languages. The chapter points out that every classroom is a multivoiced ensemble where different notions of language exist. It argues that it is highly probable that both learners and teachers do not have one single conceptualisation, but several. Making these conceptualisations audible or visible by such means as drawings or photographs - creates an opportunity for increasing the learners’ language awareness, thereby making language learning more meaningful.

Smythe and Toohey, in their chapter, make a compelling case for re-thinking how migrant and refugee children engage with literacies. The New Literacy Studies and a sociocultural perspective on learning inform the research project presented in the chapter. It focuses, in particular, on culturally and semiotically rich practices that these students participate in, and are socialised to, outside school. It is argued that migrant and
refugee children are immersed in culturally and linguistically rich communal environments where they learn how to navigate and negotiate multiple ways of meaning- and identity-making. Their everyday literacy events represent a sophisticated set of practices that can be understood, as Smythe and Toohey illustrate, as a mixture of school literacy and home literacies, dominant culture/language and ‘heritage’ cultures/languages, youth culture and technoliteracies. As such, the authors are careful not to essentialise the urban community itself, for this is not a community of sameness. The photo-project described in this chapter reveals the work of multiple identities and funds of knowledge in becoming literate.

References


