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BOOK REVIEW (NON-REFEREED)

Plurilingualism in teaching and Learning: Complexities across contexts

Edited by Julie Choi and Sue Ollerhead

Routledge, New York, 2018, 244 pages

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This new edited volume brings together a range of chapters reflecting on teaching and learning experiences across Australian and international contexts where multiple languages are used for learning and language and content. The editors point out in the Preface that ‘trendy and new terms’ proliferate the language education space (p. xiv) and so the term ‘plurilingualism’ may cause some confusion in the first instance with the more common ‘multilingualism’. The issue the editors identify with multilingualism is the tendency to merely describe what languages people have (see Makoni and Pennycook 2007). In the Australian context, the casual use of ‘multilingualism’ – and its twin ‘multiculturalism’ – is often shorthand for assimilationist mindset and policy implementation (Eisenchlas, Schalley and Guillemin 2015). This leads to what Blackledge and Creese (2010) called ‘separate bilingualism’, as the state benevolently gives ‘permission’ for communities to use their languages, but ‘over there’, not in places where it counts. Plurilingualism, then, is a term whose time has come as a way to think about the lived experience of those working with more than one language.

The book draws upon the distinction between multilingualism and the newer term ‘plurilingualism’ (Moore 2006; Piccardo 2013) to recognise the ways in which individuals use an integrated repertoire of languages in particular contexts. Rather than languages operating in strict diglossic relationships, heteroglossia means that all languages may provide the linguistic resources needed in any one situation. Various situations are explored throughout this volume. All contributors have attended to the framework for taking a plurilingual stance, set out in the Introduction, defining what a teacher might believe about learners and do in the classroom.

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Of these, one belief – ‘All of a student’s language knowledge is part of their single plurilingual repertoire, and languages are not siloed in their mind’ (p. 5) – is at the heart of all the classroom examples from the contributors, as each writer illustrates how students and teachers move in and out of languages, translanguaging, to realise educative, communicative, social and personal goals.

The book is divided into four parts, generally to cater for a number of audiences or interests in language. The first part concerns reflections on language policy, opening with the preeminent writer in this field, Joseph Lo Bianco. This chapter reviews the state of language policy in Australia which contextualises the other Australian studies throughout the book. The second section is concerned with how students use their plurilingual resources, both in and out of school, before part three takes up studies of teachers’ perspectives. The final section looks at higher education contexts. The studies take the reader through Australian and international experiences, into languages being used with English and – in the case of Timor Leste – without English. Particularly interesting was the chapter by Rebecca Hetherington, charting the policies around Indigenous languages for schooling in Australia and the words of those who have lived through these changes: it is easy to think that issues of dominant/majority language in instruction is in someone else’s country rather than in Australia’s own backyard.

The audience for this book is wide. I have already set the reading of chapter ‘Translingual innovation within contact zones: lessons from Australia and South African schools’ (Ollerhead, Prinsloo and Krause) for my university students within a TESOL Master program to examine possible strategies for language-learning classrooms and will use examples of classroom translanguaging practice in ‘Mother-tongue-based multilingual education in the Philippines: perceptions, problems and possibilities’ (Cruz and Mahboob) for the same group as excellent models for similar classroom interpretation required in an assessment task. Many of the pedagogical examples throughout the book will be used with my largely-monolingual pre-service teaching students to illustrate how they might provide space for plurilingual practice in their future classrooms, in the hope of developing, as the final chapter suggests, ‘a translingual mindset’ (Andrews, Fay and White). Practitioners in various contexts – school, tertiary and language – will find examples of practices that could be translated into their own classroom use, as the editors have made good on their aim to ‘propose strategies that can be adopted by teachers’ (p. 10).

A real strength of the book is that these practices are grounded in the articulation of a theoretical framework of what it means to live with languages, and to help all who work in this area ‘to think more deeply, rigorously and critically’ (p. 10) about what they do and the effect it might have on learners. This makes this volume a valuable addition to work in the area of language education and how we might view ourselves as a plurilingual society.

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