

Managing Diversity in Education

Languages, Policies,
Pedagogies

Edited by
David Little, Constant Leung
and Piet Van Avermaet

NEW PERSPECTIVES
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ON
LANGUAGE & EDUCATION
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Managing Diversity in Education

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

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Piet Van Avermaet**

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Contents

Contributors	xi
Introduction	xvii
Part 1	
1 Language and Identity in Multilingual Schools: Constructing Evidence-based Instructional Policies	3
<i>Jim Cummins</i>	
Introduction	4
Patterns of Immigrant Student Achievement	7
Intersections Among Socioeconomic Status, Societal Power Relations and Identity Negotiation	9
A Framework for Implementing Evidence-based Pedagogy in Diverse School Contexts	17
Interpretations of Evidence-based Policies in Two International Contexts	19
Conclusion	23
2 English as an Additional Language: Symbolic Policy and Local Practices	27
<i>Tracey Costley and Constant Leung</i>	
The Teaching of EAL	28
Policy in Practice	30
Practice as a Reflection of Policy (or not)	39
3 Germany after the ‘PISA Shock’: Revisiting National, European and Multicultural Values in Curriculum and Policy Discourses	43
<i>Daniel Faas</i>	
Introduction	44

	Methodology	46
	Cultural Autonomy, Integration and Diversity in Baden-Württemberg	47
	Conclusions	53
4	Teaching English to Immigrant Students in Irish Post-primary Schools	57
	<i>Rachael Fionda</i>	
	Introduction	58
	Hegemony and ‘Gaps’	59
	Official Policy	60
	Academic Language and Learner Autonomy	61
	Teachers, Provision and Pedagogy	61
	Phase 1 of My Investigation	62
	Phase 2 of My Investigation	63
	Discussion	68
	Conclusion	70
5	Inclusion or Invasion? How Irish Post-primary Teachers View Newcomer Students in the Mainstream Classroom	73
	<i>Fiona Kearney</i>	
	Introduction: Sample and Methodology	74
	Key Survey Findings on Teachers’ Attitudes to Newcomers’ Inclusion in Mainstream	75
	Dismantling Teacher Resistance to Inclusion: The Case for In-service Provision	80
	Conclusion: The 21st Century School – Gatekeeper of Elitism or Trailblazer for Inclusion?	82
	Appendix A: Questionnaire	86
	Appendix B: Interview Schedule	94
6	The Linguistic Challenges of Immigration: The Irish Higher Education Sector’s Response	97
	<i>Brid Ní Chonail</i>	
	Overview	98
	Background and Rationale of the Study	98
	The Promotion of Equality in the Higher Education Sector	99
	Methodology	99
	Results	101
	Conclusion	107

Part 2

7	Investigating the Development of Immigrant Pupils' English L2 Oral Skills in Irish Primary Schools	111
	<i>Bronagh Čatibušić</i>	
	Introduction	112
	The Need for Empirical Research	115
	Data Collection and Methods of Analysis	115
	Results	117
	Conclusion	126
	Appendix	128
8	Investigating the Linguistic Skills of Migrant Students in the German Vocational Education System	132
	<i>Patrick Grommes</i>	
	Introduction	132
	Educational Factors	133
	Linguistic Factors	135
	Empirical Findings	139
	Discussion	142
	Conclusion	144
9	A Corpus-based Analysis of the Lexical Demands that Irish Post-primary Subject Textbooks Make on Immigrant Students	147
	<i>Stergiani Kostopoulou</i>	
	The Rationale for a Corpus Linguistic Analysis of Irish Post-primary Subject Textbooks	148
	Subject-specific Corpora and Methodology	149
	The Most Frequent Lexical Words in the Six Corpora and their Collocates	151
	The Most Frequent 4-word Clusters in the Six Corpora and their Semantic and Functional Associations	159
	Conclusion	163
10	Assessing the Impact of English Language Support Programme Materials on Post-primary Language Support and Mainstream Subject Classrooms in Ireland	167
	<i>Zachary Lyons</i>	
	Introduction	168
	ELSP Research in Post-primary Schools	168
	Developing the ELSP Language Support Materials	169
	Impact Study	172

Some Findings	177
Concluding Remarks	182
Appendix	185
Part 3	
11 From English Language Support to Plurilingual Awareness	189
<i>Déirdre Kirwan</i>	
Introduction	190
Issues in English Language Support	190
Plurilingual Awareness	191
Conclusion	202
12 Language Diversity in Education: Evolving from Multilingual Education to Functional Multilingual Learning	204
<i>Sven Sierens and Piet Van Avermaet</i>	
Introduction	205
Monolingual versus Multilingual Education	205
Dealing with Linguistic Diversity at School, Strategy 1: A Constructive Language Policy	213
Responding to Linguistic Diversity at School, Strategy 2: Language Awareness Raising	215
Exploiting Linguistic Diversity at School, Strategy 3: Functional Multilingual Learning	217
To Conclude	219
13 Exploring the Use of Migrant Languages to Support Learning in Mainstream Classrooms in France	223
<i>Nathalie Auger</i>	
General Policies, Specific Pedagogy and Impact on Migrant Languages	224
The Use of Migrant Languages: An Experiment	228
Conclusion: Further Steps	240
14 Linguistic Third Spaces in Education: Teachers' Translanguaging across the Bilingual Continuum	243
<i>Nelson Flores and Ofelia García</i>	
The Origins of National/Colonial Language Ideologies	244
Critique of Nation State/Colonial Language Ideologies	245

Creating Linguistic Third Spaces at Pan American International High School	246
Conclusion	255
15 From ‘Monolingual’ Multilingual Classrooms to ‘Multilingual’ Multilingual Classrooms: Managing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in the Nepali Educational System	257
<i>Shelley K. Taylor</i>	
Challenges in Introducing L1-based MLE	258
When ‘More’ is <i>Less</i> , not <i>More</i> , and the Management of Linguistic Diversity in Education	259
The Lure of ‘Goddess English’	260
Introducing L1-based MLE into Nepal to Manage CLD in Education	261
Managing CLD in the Pilot Project	262
Quality Control in ‘Multilingual’ Multilingual Classrooms	264
Ruling Passions	267
Discussion and Conclusion	268
16 The Ecology of Mobile Phone Use in Wesbank, South Africa	273
<i>Fie Velghe and Jan Blommaert</i>	
Introduction	274
The Conditions for Mobile Phone Usage in Wesbank	277
Discussion and Conclusion	285
Author Index	291
Subject Index	298

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Introduction

David Little, Constant Leung and
Piet Van Avermaet

Diversity comes in many forms – cultural, social, ethnic and linguistic – and poses a challenge to all educational systems. Some authorities, schools and teachers look upon it as a problem, an obstacle to the achievement of national educational goals, whereas for others it offers new opportunities. The primary objective of educational systems is to help children and adolescents to develop the competences – knowledge, skills and attitudes – that they need if they are to function successfully in society. Competences are also acquired outside school, of course, at home, from friends, on the street, by belonging to youth clubs and so on; but out-of-school environments vary enormously, and one of the emancipatory functions of educational systems is to compensate for this variation. Yet the results of several consecutive PISA studies (Programme for International Student Assessment) carried out by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) lay bare the relative lack of success in responding to the diversity of school-going populations.

This book originated in the language strand of *New Migrations, New Challenges*, an international conference held at Trinity College Dublin in the summer of 2010. The conference was organised by the Trinity Immigration Initiative, a network of five loosely linked research projects: National Policy Impacts; Migrant Careers and Aspirations; Migrant Networks; Children, Youth and Community Relations; and the English Language Support Programme. Most contributions to the language strand of the conference reflected on aspects of the educational response to the unprecedented levels of immigration Ireland had experienced since the mid-1990s: policy and practice at primary, post-primary and tertiary levels. Historically, Ireland has been a country of emigration rather than immigration; and although significant numbers of migrants came from new EU member states, especially Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, overall the migrant population was

extremely diverse. As the international contributions to the conference showed, however, Ireland's emerging educational experience was strikingly similar to that of other countries. This is further confirmed by the additional international contributions to the book, from Canada, France, The Netherlands, Germany and the United States.

The book is divided into three parts that deal in turn with policy and its implications, pedagogical practice, and responses to the challenge of diversity that go beyond – in some cases a long way beyond – the language of schooling.

Part 1

The relationship between education and national development in a knowledge-based economy motivated the OECD to initiate PISA. This has highlighted the extent of immigrant students' underachievement in many affluent countries and also the considerable variability across countries in the extent to which these students succeed academically. The first chapter, by Jim Cummins, analyses the ways in which Canada and the United States have incorporated the PISA data and other research findings into their educational policy. In both countries little consideration has been given to the role of societal power relations and their manifestation in patterns of teacher–student identity negotiation. Policy-makers have also largely ignored research related to the role of immigrant students' first language as both a cognitive tool and a reflection of their identity, and the importance of reading engagement as a major factor determining reading achievement. The chapter outlines an empirically based theoretical framework that explicitly addresses the roles of literacy engagement and identity negotiation as determinants of student achievement.

Chapter 2, by Tracey Costley and Constant Leung, considers how policy is used to manage diversity in state-funded education in England, and how it shapes and informs local schooling practices. The authors are particularly concerned with English as Additional Language (EAL) students, and the professional and institutional processes through which policy is rendered 'on site' by teachers in local schools. The chapter traces policy dispositions and social values regarding the teaching of EAL, and draws on ethnographic data to provide an account of the ways in which a London primary school conceptualised and organised EAL provision. Costley and Leung explore the ways in which the learners' needs were construed by the school and how the views of the staff were translated into curriculum arrangements and classroom pedagogy. In the final part of the chapter they suggest that a pedagogic

and curricular vacuum has been engendered by a 'symbolic policy' on EAL, and argue that the symbolic nature of policy allows a school community to engage in curriculum and teaching practices that are commensurate with educational segregation on the basis of students' language and cultural backgrounds.

Since the 'PISA shock' in 2001, Germany has embarked on a contentious debate that has led, among other things, to the evaluation of student competences and educational progress. In Chapter 3 Daniel Faas draws on interviews with seven educational policy-makers to discuss the challenges and transformations that followed the 'PISA shock' and presents their views on how to balance cultural diversity and social cohesion in 'post-PISA' Germany. The interview material is triangulated with curriculum documents for History, Geography and Citizenship. Faas's study found that importance is attached to national, European and multicultural values and to making interculturalism a 'lived reality' in the classroom. But as regards cultural autonomy, there was disagreement between ministry officials on the one hand and curriculum planners and educational evaluators on the other. The chapter reveals that despite the efforts at educational reform that followed PISA, Germany still has some way to go if it is to close the gap between ethnic majority and migrant minority students, especially those from Turkish communities. Many of the questions raised in this chapter are also raised in debates elsewhere in Europe.

Chapter 4, by Rachael Fionda, presents findings from a small-scale empirical exploration of the English language support provided for EAL students in Irish post-primary schools. Working within the framework of the Trinity Immigration Initiative's English Language Support Programme, Fionda began by analysing the provision of funding for English language support. A preliminary survey of ten schools then revealed that many of them struggled to devise programmes apt to develop students' English language proficiency and give them access to curriculum content. Finally, the provision of English language support in three of the ten schools was studied longitudinally through the school year 2008–2009. Informed by a broadly Gramscian perspective, Fionda's research supports the view that education systems reproduce dominant cultural ideology and in doing so maintain the disadvantage of minority cultural groups. A key argument concerns the 'gap' between the knowledge presented by the school system and the knowledge and experience that marginalised students bring to school.

The scale and speed of inward migration to Ireland have had a major impact on the working lives of teachers. In Chapter 5, Fiona Kearney presents the findings of a study that used a questionnaire survey and semi-structured follow-up interviews to investigate the attitudes of Irish post-primary