2017 Post-Graduate Education Research Conference

Multilingualism and Education:
Challenges and Prospects in the Mauritian Context

19th April 2017 | 2nd Floor, MIE Tower

PROGRAMME

Time	Details	Venue
09:00	Registration	
09:15	Welcome Address	
	Dr. Om Nath Varma, MIE Director	
09:20	Conference Opening / Keynote	
	Dr. Mark Price, University of Brighton	
09:30	Presenter #1	
	Mrs. Shalini Jagambal Ramasawmy	
09:55	Presenter #2	
	Mrs. Chaya Surajbali-Bissoonauth	2nd Floor,
10:20	**Tea**	MIE Tower
10:35	Presenter #3	
	Ms. Evelyn Kee Mew	
11:00	Presenter #4	
	Ms. Joann Davenia Permall	
11:25	Presenter #5	
	Mrs. Prya Baumy	
11:50	Presentation Rejoinder	
	Dr. Hyleen Mariaye	
12:00	**Lunch**	
12:30	Poster Presentations	Room 2
13:45	Round Table Discussions	Rooms 3 & 4

Researching multilingualism:
The implications of methodological choices

Author - Shalini Jagambal RAMASAWMY

Abstract

The qualitative turn in research has brought to the fore the fact that methodological choices are grounded in ontological and epistemological positions. Consequently, the approach a researcher adopts to research, together with the conceptual tools and data production instruments used are fundamental, as they determine both the perspectives endorsed in the study and its outcomes. Largely dominated by positivism, the field of sociolinguistics has a long history of adopting a structuralist approach that focuses on describing language as a system. Research has been conducted from an etic approach that has denied the importance of the context, while in actuality, *languaging* is a situated practice. As a result, these underlying assumptions in the field of sociolinguistics has given way to a conceptualisation of multilingualism based on a monoglossic ideology.

Following the social turn in the field, research is now gradually contributing in deconstructing notions such as *language* and *diglossia*, thereby restoring and positively shaping the representation that multilinguals have of their identity, and their communicative as well as cognitive potential. There is, therefore, an increasing need for sociolinguistic research to be carried out from a bottom-up approach, with the aim of observing and documenting actual everyday language practices. Linguistic ethnography is one such methodology. By "tying ethnography down" and "opening linguistics up" (Rampton et al., 2004: 4), linguistic ethnography enables the exploration of language as rooted in human activities. Essentially it allows us to "… see how language practices are connected to the very real conditions of people's lives…" (Heller, 2008: 250).

This presentation intends to challenge the longstanding analytical tools which have served to assign meaning to the language and multilingual phenomena in mainstream sociolinguistics, with a special focus on Mauritius, and examine the potential linguistic ethnography offers in developing an understanding of "language use as contextually embedded" (Blackledge and Creese, 2010: 31).

Reflections on my identity as a researcher

Author - Chaya SURAJBALI-BISSOONAUTH

Abstract

Recent years have seen considerable changes in the field of comparative and international education (Doiron & Asselin, 2015). Interest in comparative research has increased from researchers across the social sciences and humanities (Giddens, 2002), from policy-makers and from practitioners worldwide. It is increasingly recognised that undertaking qualitative research in contexts other than one's own country can imply challenges for researchers (Doiron & Asselin, 2015).   Still, there is limited research on the issue of positionality in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) as a concept and my argument is that this is a complex topic that calls for further exploration.

In this paper, I draw from my reflections on the processes of undertaking my Professional Doctorate in Education fieldwork in two SIDS and focus on researcher positionality in data collection in SIDS. Linda McDowell believes in the need for researchers to recognise and take account of their position as well as those of the research participants and to acknowledge these in their research practice.   What emerges from the reflections relate to researcher positionality in relation to culture, power relationships and identities.

Experience of carrying out narrative inquiry to understand how bi/multilinguals learn to read in a multilingual context

Author - Evelyn KEE MEW

Abstract

As the world's population is becoming more and more multicultural and multilingual due to growing globalization and migration (Martin-Jones et al., 2012), research in language and literacy development, which have historically been dominated by monolingual Eurocentric paradigms, are gradually shifting from the monolingual to the multilingual (Herdina and Jessner, 2002). Contrarily to earlier research which showed bilinguals to be deficient, "many studies in the last 25 years or so have shown that multilingualism can result in advantages" (op. cit., p. 61) and that bi/multilinguals have "multi-competence" (Cook, 1991; Jessner, 2010; Franceschini, 2011).

Key studies on literacy development have been mostly concerned with monolingual children and those learning to read in a second language with the basics already acquired in the first language. However, in a multilingual context like the Republic of Mauritius, children are often taught through the medium of a second or a third language which are inherited colonial language(s). To date, studies on multilingualism have not focused on children who are concurrently learning to read in two languages which are not always their first languages, and to which exposure varies prior to entering formal instruction, outside school and sometimes even in the classrooms. Furthermore, these studies "do not explain how young bilinguals establish the insights that enable them to become literate" (Bialystok, 2002, p. 165).

This presentation will discuss the exploration of becoming a bi/multilingual reader, namely how bi/multilinguals construct knowledge and skills in literacy in at least two languages which are not always their mother-tongue(s). The *becoming* involves a process and the moving along a path with milestones.

Investigating learners' experience of autonomy

Author - Joann Davenia PERMALL

Abstract

To be a lifelong learner implies having developed one's capacity to craft learning structures and processes in new environments on one's own and to use them to construct new knowledge and develop new skills. Achieving such a level of learner autonomy requires the development of metacognition during schooling, whereby learners become increasingly aware of who they are, how they learn best and how they can incrementally take control of their learning. Literature on strategies to develop learner autonomy is luxuriant. Yet research on how learners live through learning that requires them to take greater responsibility of their learning, especially at secondary level, is scarce. Shedding light on this aspect of learner autonomy is the focus of this presentation.

For reflective practitioners, it is important to understand how learners pave their way through the gradual shift in power implied in autonomous learning. Narrative Inquiry lends itself best for mode of inquiry given that it is the stories of the learners that provides insight of their experience. Within the context of this inquiry, diaries were designed to enable the three participants to record their experience of three specific project-based lessons which targeted autonomous learning, followed by individualised interviews.

The analysis of the narratives revealed that students' choice plays a determining role in the shaping of their autonomy. This liberating factor enables them to take decisions on the basis of who they are and what direction they want their learning to take. The findings also showed how working towards autonomy enhanced learners' sense of self-awareness, and that the realisation of one's sense of identity and an increased ownership of learning are complementary, and contribute to the development of each other.

Teachers' experiences of the interdisciplinary approach in a private international school: A case study

Author - Prya BAUMY

Abstract

Curriculum change remains a major challenge in the twenty first century. The Mauritian education system is increasingly being perceived to be inadequate to meeting today's complex and interconnected challenges in the global world, hence the need to delve into alternative curriculum programmes.

Through an exploratory case study, this research aimed at discovering how lower secondary teachers experienced the interdisciplinary approach at the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme to capture teachers' experiences at both the documentation and planning phase from an insider researcher perspective.

A series of focus groups and interviews were conducted through purposive sampling to see the evolving experiences of lower secondary teachers on three distinct dimensions: perception, motivation, and concerns. The Efficacy- Based Change Model (EBCM) was used as the theoretical framework to compare teachers' experiences.

The findings revealed that there was an evident link between the three dimensions, whereby a perception displaying a positive attitude to change resulted in a high level of motivation as opposed to a negative attitude. Additionally, external factors such as group cohesion and conformity appeared to impact on teachers' perceptions. It was concluded that exploring teachers' experiences was an initial step to create contextual awareness to allow authentic teaching and learning within the interdisciplinary approach as a potential avenue to meet today's educational purposes.

Conference Convenors

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