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Language Teaching in Multilingual Contexts

Ensino de Línguas em Contextos Multilíngues

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Multilingualism and multiculturalism are present in many parts of the world today. We cannot deny that we live in societies that are constantly drawing on and using multiple languages. As language teachers and scholars of language education, we know that the presence of multilingualism challenges a traditional view of language education – one language learned before another as first and additional (second or foreign) languages. Language teaching in multilingual contexts, the theme of this special issue, may take a diversity of forms and apply to a variety of ideas. This introduction highlights some of these forms and ideas.

When we read the phrase "language teaching," we may think of the questions, Which language? What is language? How is this particular language being taught? Who are the students being taught? Who is the teacher? What are the relationships between teacher and students? What is the language focus? What skills are being taught? Where is the language taught, in the classroom or in other contexts? If the particular language is English, the language focus of most of the articles in this special issue, we may ask, what variety of English is taught? At the same time, when we read the phrase "in multilingual contexts," we may ask, What are these multilingual contexts? What languages make these contexts multilingual? What languages are represented in these contexts and why? What does it mean to say that a context is multilingual? What historical and political aspects of this context are we talking about? Why have we chosen the word *multilingual* instead of *bilingual*? What are the consequences of this word choice? These are all questions that the articles in this special issue consider.

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1. Language Teaching

A language in language teaching may be presented as an object of teaching and one or more skills may be the focus of attention (e.g. listening, writing). In classrooms, language practices raise power issues which often remain unexplored by language teachers and learners (Pennycook, 2001), as Pessoa (this issue) argues and explores. A language teacher presents important aspects of the language under study but also approaches language as a mediating tool for communication. Language, then, is not exclusively an object of teaching but a means of communication and interaction. Language use, then, becomes an important topic of consideration, especially because language is used along other modalities in the classroom. For example, as Branco (this issue) highlights, multimodal activities involving images, colors, and other non-verbal elements can aid in the learning of languages and students learn language in interaction by examining these multimodal elements in contexts of use.

When people use any language to interact with each other and for other purposes, their language changes based on the contexts of situation in which they engage and for what purpose the language is being used (HALLIDAY & MATTHIESSEN, 2004). The choices made by language users respond to the contexts of use. As language users, independent of what specific language to which we are referring, we understand this. However, do we understand these differences as language teachers? Take English as an example. In English teaching materials and pedagogical resources, there seems to be an abstract notion of Standard English as the model for language teaching and learning without a clear understanding about what one's selection means. There may be a strong reason for selecting one variety over another for pedagogical purposes. But several questions regarding this choice remain. Questions about what language to teach in what context are complex as is understanding what patterns and models of language are chosen and why. The article by Schmitz (this issue) tackles some of these questions.

2. Multilingual Contexts

Research in second language acquisition has increasingly focused on multilingual contexts thus "acknowledging that SLA nowadays should be seen as the acquisition of multilingual and multicultural competencies, even if the object of instruction is one standard linguistic system" (KRAMSCH, 2012, p. 108). At the 2012 American Association for Applied Linguistics annual conference, this was referred to by Stephen May as a "multilingual turn in

SLA" and Lourdes Ortega explored what kind of research would be needed to support a multilingual outlook on SLA research (KRAMSCH, 2012).

Multilingualism represents a challenging issue for current schooling contexts. For example, the professional preparation of language teachers generally emerges from education as a language teaching professional in one language only. Even in contexts where we prepare teachers of two languages, as in Brazil, for example, in universities that provide a dual licensure in Portuguese and another language, a teacher candidate may identify more as being a teacher of one language than another. There may be a "multilingual turn" in teacher education, as we consider a potential professional identity shift from a one-language teacher to a vision of multilingualism that represents many languages in contact by border territories, as is the case of the Brazil-Uruguay border language learning experiences discussed by Antunes, Dornelles, and Irala (this issue), within bilingual schools representing Indigenous languages in Brazil, as discussed by Neto (this issue), or in classroom contexts where there may be over 50 languages represented in one individual school, as was the case of my teaching context in the United States (DE OLIVEIRA, 2013).

Multilingual contexts, therefore, refer to contexts where more than one language is used in or out-of-school settings. We chose the word *multilingual* in this issue as opposed to *bilingual* because even within a "bilingual" school there may be more than two languages or language varieties represented. The choice to use *multilingual*, then, reflects the notion of multitude and goes beyond a focus on two languages to reflect the importance of a diversity of languages and language varieties. All of the articles in this issue also reflect this choice. Even though the majority of the articles focus on the teaching of English, not all of them do. The article by Neto focuses on the case of Apyãwa Tapirapé Indian Tribe in central Brazil, focusing on a bilingual school where Tapirapé and Portuguese languages are used. The article by Antunes, Dornelles, and Irala focuses on the literacy activities carried out in Portuguese and Spanish outside the school context by students and their relatives in the so-called "twin cities" of Aceguá/Aceguá, situated on the Brazilian-Uruguayan border. Even though their focus is on activities in Portuguese and Spanish, the authors state that this community uses, in addition to Portuguese and Spanish, Uruguayan Portuguese as well as Arabic and German, which are used by immigrants and their descendants.

3. Language Teaching in Multilingual Contexts: Being Linguistically Responsive

As readers read through the articles presented in this issue, they are asked to consider questions related to the education of language teachers. How can teachers be more *linguistically responsive* in multilingual contexts? A framework discussed in Lucas, de Oliveira, and Villegas (2014) describes the orientations, knowledge, and skills of linguistically responsive teachers and how this framework can be incorporated into teacher education programs in multilingual contexts. Table 1 shows the elements of a linguistically responsive framework for multilingual contexts and describes what linguistically responsive teachers should know and be able to do about language learners (LLs).

TABLE 1
Elements of a Linguistically Responsive Teaching Framework
for Multilingual Contexts

Sociolinguistic Consciousness	Understand the connection between language, culture, and identity and develop an awareness of the sociopolitical dimensions of language use and language education. Learn about, discuss, and reflect on the connections between culture and literacy development, and the policies and language "reform" efforts in their countries that affect LLs.
Value for Linguistic Diversity	Show respect for and interest in diverse students' home languages. Positive attitudes toward students' languages encourage them to engage in school learning. In second-language-learning contexts, where LLs are learning the dominant language, it is especially important for teachers to show respect for and interest in LLs' home languages and to send caring and welcoming messages about LLs' linguistic resources and what they bring to the learning environment.
Inclination to Advocate for LLs	Advocacy entails actively addressing the learning of LLs and working to improve one or more aspects of their educational experiences. Teachers need to understand the importance of advocacy in helping LLs successfully learn an additional language and know that the nature and processes for advocating for LLs differ in different local and national contexts, depending on a multitude of political and social factors. Developing teachers' knowledge about and experience with advocacy should be a key component of teacher education programs to help teachers consider how they can provide a voice for LLs and obtain resources when none are available.

Learning About LLs' Language Backgrounds, Experiences, and Proficiencies	Understand LLs' diverse language backgrounds, experiences, and proficiencies to be able to tailor their instruction and adjust curriculum to take into account LLs' resources and needs. Make it a priority to become familiar with the different language proficiency levels of LLs in their classes, with ways of differentiating instruction for students of different proficiency levels, and with home language use and experience, among other issues. They investigate LLs' potential difficulties with various aspects of language and LLs' literacy backgrounds. They can gather this information through interviews, oral or written biography (in the home language, if necessary), meetings with family members and/or community members, and visits to the learners' homes or communities.
Identifying the Language Demands of Classroom Discourse and Tasks	Knowledge about the academic language and literacy demands evident in LLs' assigned course readings (e.g., content area textbook passages) and their learning from classroom discourse (e.g., the specific linguistic forms, functions, and vocabulary). This requires skills for conducting simple linguistic analyses, which teachers may not have developed in their previous educational experiences. Teachers should also be able to identify the linguistic features and challenges of different types of assessments.
Applying Key Principles of Second Language Learning	1. Conversational language proficiency is fundamentally different from academic language proficiency. 2. LLs need comprehensible input just beyond their current level of competence. 3. Social interaction for authentic communicative purposes fosters LL learning. 4. Skills and concepts learned in the first language transfer to the second language. 5. Anxiety about performing in a second language can interfere with learning.
Scaffolding Instruction to Promote LLs' Learning	Scaffolding refers to the types of instructional support essential for LLs' learning of both academic content and English (or another language) in the school context. Scaffolding, in the form of temporary support, helps a learner carry out academic language and literacy tasks beyond his/her current capacity in the school context. This involves, for example, activating prior knowledge, using multimodal materials and various written texts, employing different collaborative learning activities, using extra-linguistic supports, supplementing and modifying written text and oral language, and providing clear and explicit instructions.

This framework draws on a substantial body of empirical and conceptual literature in identifying essential orientations, skills, and knowledge

that should be addressed in preparing teachers and provides some ideas for what to incorporate into a teacher education program in multilingual contexts. The details of the teacher education curriculum will vary from one national, institutional, and programmatic context to another in response to various factors, but this framework can serve as a useful starting point for curriculum revision—especially for the majority of teacher educators who are not specialists in the education of LLs. The principles presented in the framework are applicable to multilingual contexts when adapted and modified according to each context. The framework provides a lens for ensuring coherence and minimizing unnecessary redundancy across program courses and other components, as it offers a finite list of qualities of linguistically responsive teachers to be cultivated within a program (for more information and details, see Lucas, de Oliveira, & Villegas, 2014).

This special issue provides much for us in language education to consider. One undeniable fact is that multilingualism and multiculturalism are a reality around the world today. Societies are constantly drawing on and using multiple languages. We hope this special issue provides several ideas and information about what it means to teach and learn multiple languages in multilingual contexts.

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