

Title

Spaces for multilingual education: Language orientations in the national curricula of Sweden and Finland

Abstract

Multilingualism is visible and officially recognised in Sweden and Finland. Both have education systems promoting equity and equality, articulated in the motto “one school for all”. However, recent societal and political changes linked to increased immigration have created new challenges in efforts to support linguistic diversity. Our study aims at clarifying the conceptual frameworks of multilingual education in the two contexts through an analysis of their compulsory school curricula, using Ruiz’s (1984) framework of three language orientations of language planning: language as problem, resource or right. Questions emerging from the language-as-problem orientation include how and for whom languages are considered problems, which hierarchies may be in place, and what challenges are created for minority speakers. The language-as-right orientation focuses on the right to both avoid discrimination for language use and to use one’s own language to access democracy. Finally, language-as-resource offers a more positive view on multilingualism, one in which linguistic diversity is both valued and supported as part of a pluralistic society. The material investigated includes the Swedish Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the recreation centre (2015) and the Finnish National comprehensive school curriculum (2014), as well as some supporting documents from each country. The two curricula differ in their orientations of language as problem, resource or right. Both stress the rights of minority language speakers through mother tongue support. Finland, however, has an explicit emphasis on the value and place of multilingualism in the classroom, while in Sweden, a language hierarchy is evident and a monolingual norm is prevalent. Given the common focus on providing education for all and also given Sweden’s long history of provision of mother tongue support and Swedish as a second language instruction, the different spaces for multilingual education revealed in the curricula are somewhat surprising. In our presentation, we will examine and compare examples from our analysis of the orientations and discuss how these spaces created are key to our possibilities as educators to promote linguistic diversity and social justice in the schools of today’s global societies.

Ruiz, R. (1984). Orientations in Language Planning. *NABE Journal*, 8(2), 15–34.

Presenters

BethAnne Paulsrud (Centre for Research on Bilingualism, Stockholm University) and Harriet Zilliacus (Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Helsinki, Finland) are postdoctoral research fellows in the project MINTED (Multilingual and Intercultural Education in Sweden and Finland), a three-year collaboration between Stockholm University and the University of Helsinki.