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Rosemary Wildsmith
University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
wildsmithr@ukzn.ac.za

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BAAL/CUP Seminar 2011

Multilingualism in education

Department of Modern Languages, University of Southampton, UK, 20–21 May 2011

1. Goals

The aim of this seminar was to promote dialogue between two research areas addressing educational multilingualism: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and community languages. In bringing together these two strands of research, the seminar

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explored and fostered potential methodological and theoretical synergies. As organisers we invited abstracts which addressed innovative research in areas related to the conference theme, especially contributions which explored ways of linking school and community-based language learning. We aimed to create an atmosphere of stimulating discussion and debate in a convivial, intellectual environment. The programme included a variety of formats that would encourage discussion.

2. Summary of activities and their content

The seminar started with two excellent keynote presentations on the core areas, CLIL and community-based language learning. In her talk 'Multilingualism and European educational language policy: A critical account of CLIL', Ute Smit (University of Vienna) discussed the CLIL movement against the background of Spolsky's (2004) model of language policy, which proposes three levels of social action:

- LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT, which in this case means EU policy statements and their national implementations, which provide the political motivation and legal umbrella,
- LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES, which subsume established beliefs as well as developing perceptions on using more than one language for learning purposes and the (dis)advantages of doing so for the learning process and outcome and, finally,
- LANGUAGE PRACTICES, in this case, the diversity of CLIL practices.

Dr Smit's presentation on the diversity of CLIL language practices enabled a critical assessment of the relevance of CLIL for European multilingualism at the individual and societal level.

The second keynote address, by Charmian Kenner and Mahera Ruby (Goldsmiths, University of London), presented findings from a two-year research project on bilingual learning, in which partnerships were set up between mainstream and complementary school teachers under the heading 'Developing multilingual learning across the curriculum through partnership between complementary and mainstream schools'. The study was led by Goldsmiths and funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Investigating language learning in a Vygotskyan framework, this study addresses the potential benefits of linking knowledge and understanding built up in different areas of these children's education, that is, in mainstream and in complementary schooling. Kenner and Mahera presented clear arguments in favour of a comprehensive approach to the REINFORCEMENT and EXPANSION of learning, a HOLISTIC UNDERSTANDING of concepts, and an increase in AGENCY on the part of children and their families as well as teachers.

Four more research-based presentations on diverse aspects of both CLIL and community language activities completed Friday's programme, and encouraged lively discussions, bringing together different research foci.

On Saturday, the programme continued with a focus on bringing together the practitioner and researcher sides of multilingual education, so it was highly beneficial that many local community language teachers attended, took part in the discussions and shared

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their experiences. Jim Anderson (Goldsmiths, University of London) gave an insightful presentation on 'Finding a voice: Arts-based creativity in the community languages classroom' and clearly struck a chord with many of the practitioners present. Kate Borthwick and Ali Dickens (University of Southampton) went on to talk about 'The Community Café project: Working with community-based language teachers to create Open Educational Resources', a collaborative project addressing the scarcity of up-to-date online materials for community language teaching. Interestingly, this project also showed the benefits of creating a virtual community for language teachers, including the professional self-image of the teachers involved. Astrid Gouwy presented another local initiative, the Hampshire Young Interpreters Scheme, which won a CILT European Award for Languages in 2010. In this project, the multilingual resources of school children are developed by providing some basic training for bi- or multilingual students to become mentors and translators, giving them new skills and making use of the existing pool of languages in Hampshire schools.

Apart from presentations, the seminar provided the opportunity for attendees to take part in one of three workshops, led by Charmian Kenner (Goldsmiths, University of London), Pamela Mackenzie (International Network for Development UK/India, Secunderabad, India) and Kate Borthwick (University of Southampton) to develop links and investigate potential synergies between smaller groups. Additionally, a session in a fully equipped Smart Classroom was devoted to sharing and presenting online resources and pedagogical materials of value to both researchers and practitioners in multilingual education.

At the end of this full programme, there was enough time for a final discussion, addressing future perspectives in multilingualism in education, which sparked interesting ideas about how to build bridges between practice and research and between the diverse research paradigms and practice realities.

3. Feedback

The seminar was very well received by the participants who, in our feedback interviews, were especially enthusiastic about five aspects of the event. Firstly, they appreciated it as an opportunity for bringing together people from different backgrounds. Secondly, participants enjoyed learning more about the initiatives and innovative schemes developed by community partners locally in Southampton and Hampshire: one commented that there are '. . .obviously a lot of exciting projects going on in Hampshire, one of which [the Community Café] was a collaboration between the university and the community. I thought this was particularly interesting'.

A third point mentioned by the participants was the presence of international scholars and perspectives from Europe, which offered new and useful input, particularly in relation to CLIL, to the benefit of UK teacher education in various areas. Fourthly, we seem to have achieved our aim of helping to bridge disciplinary boundaries as well as bringing together people working in different settings. Finally, synergies between existing conceptual models were discovered and explored; these are often treated as disconnected and attached to different institutional educational environments, although teaching and learning practices

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are quite similar. As one participant noted, 'I think we did [find] a lot of links between CLIL [and] things [that] . . . are not initially thought of as CLIL'.

Overall, we feel this event was a great success, enhancing international academic exchange and fostering relationships between academia and local communities.

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Dr Gabriele Budach
g.budach@soton.ac.uk

Dr Julia Hüttner
J.Huettner@soton.ac.uk
University of Southampton

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