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Teacher education – visions from/in Europe

Ce texte propose une vision nouvelle de la formation des enseignants de langues en Europe, qui tient certes compte des enjeux économiques, mais aussi identitaires et citoyens de l'apprentissage des langues. Afin d'exprimer clairement son opposition aux conceptions "utilitaristes", centrées de manière trop réductrice sur les fameux "skills", l'auteur préfère parler de "teacher education" plutôt que de "teacher training".

Dans cette perspective nouvelle, la formation des enseignants implique notamment de rompre avec les conceptions fondées sur le mythe du "native-speaker" et de poser le plurilinguisme – autrement dit la compétence dynamique de l'individu à vivre dans un environnement plurilingue – comme finalité prioritaire de l'apprentissage des langues; elle suppose également de développer la compétence interculturelle des apprenants et de mettre l'accent sur des valeurs liées à l'apprentissage des langues, telles la citoyenneté, la démocratie et l'ouverture.

Cette "teacher education" doit ainsi préparer les enseignants à la fois d'un point de vue expérientiel et d'un point de vue analytique / théorique. Elle doit être dispensée dans des établissements de niveau universitaire et non plus dans des écoles purement professionnelles, à finalités immédiatement pratiques. C'est ainsi qu'on pourra réaliser une véritable formation d'"enseignants européens de langues" plutôt que d'enseignants de langues européennes! (Réd.)

Teacher education

As language teachers know, words are important. In the title of this article I have deliberately referred to *teacher education*, which in English can be distinguished from *teacher training*. The reason for this choice of words is related to a similar emphasis I prefer when talking about teaching-and-learning (for which in English we do not have an appropriate word but in German would be referred to as *Didaktik*). For in the teaching-and-learning of modern/foreign languages (*langues vivantes*) in schools and beyond, I wish to emphasise that language teachers should engage in *language education* and not simply the *training* of language skills.

Unfortunately, language teachers have been caught in a drift towards the emphasis on skills and training which is part of the drift towards making education the servant of the economy. For, in the late 20th century, politicians in developed, post-industrial societies realised that, to promote more economic development, it was not enough to invest in better machines. It was necessary to invest in 'human capital', in human beings and their skills. Schools and other education institutions were therefore seen as places where skills, including language skills, can be developed. Education/*Bildung* as something valuable in itself was, at best, only a second priority.

Yet in the European context, both in the Europe of the 15/25 EU countries and in the Europe of the 45 countries of the Council of Europe, language education has another significant role for individuals and for societies as a whole. This is evident in the White Paper of the EU, published in 1995

and called, in English, *Towards the Learning Society*. Here there are several purposes for language education.

- first, economic opportunity: Proficiency in several Community (i.e. EU) languages has become a precondition if citizens of the European Union are to benefit from the occupational and personal opportunities open to them in the border-free single market. This language proficiency must be backed up by the ability to adapt to working and living environments characterised by different cultures.
- second, a sense of belonging and identity: Languages are also the key to knowing other people. Proficiency in languages helps to build up the feeling of being European with all its cultural wealth and diversity and of understanding between the citizens of Europe.
- third, educational progress for the individual: Learning languages also has another important effect: experience shows that when undertaken from a very early age, it is an important factor in doing well at school. Contact with another language is not only compatible with becoming proficient in one's mother tongue, it also makes it easier. (...)

All this is then summed up by linking identity, citizenship and learning:

Multilingualism is part and parcel of both European identity/citizenship and the learning society.

(European Commission, 1995: 67)

So it is the notion of proficiency in languages which is linked to and implicitly seen as in a causal relationship with a sense of being European, with

European identity, which in turn seems to be synonymous with citizenship. If it is accepted that language teaching has educational purposes beyond language training, then it is evident that language teachers themselves need much more than just a training in skills which can be observed in their behaviour. They need more than just the behavioural competences which have become dominant in the definition of teaching, dominant in the English education system, which is probably the worst and most extreme case of teacher *training* in Europe, but which may be imitated, unfortunately, elsewhere.

What teachers need is an education which helps them to understand their role, the significance of their work for individuals and societies, as suggested in the EU White Paper. They also need more than this. They need, as I shall point out below, an education which enables them to become involved in educational values, in moral

and political education and in the promotion of democracy.

Such an education is to be found in universities rather than what, in English, used to be called ‘teacher *training* colleges’. It is therefore appropriate that, as has been happening in many European countries in the last twenty years or so, teachers should be educated in universities. The incorporation of teacher training colleges, of ‘Pädagogische Hochschulen’, of ‘écoles normales’ and similar institutions into universities is a widespread phenomenon throughout Europe. This is to be welcomed, even though we must always be aware of the danger of university education itself being turned back into training, as has happened in English universities.

Teachers of European languages or European teachers of languages?

A university education for language

teachers is important wherever languages are taught, but there are some additional questions which are specific to the European context. These can be made clear in the distinction between the traditional teacher of European languages and a new vision of the European teacher of languages. The tradition created since the birth of modern language teaching in the 1870s, is that a language teacher should be a native or near-native speaker of one or perhaps two European languages. Such a person should be a model for their learners, should offer the ideal to be imitated. Learners should try to be like native speakers – who were not clearly defined – and should try to have the same grammatical, semantic and phonetic ‘mastery’ of the languages. Such an approach is still evident in the EU White Paper which calls for a mastery of three EU languages, one’s own and two others. There are many problems in this ‘native-speaker approach’. For example, though it may be possible, with much time and effort, to imitate the native speaker in grammatical mastery, it is not possible to do so in ‘mastery’ of cultural competence. And it is not desirable or ethical for teachers to encourage their learners to give up their own culture and identity to imitate a native speaker of another culture. Even the imitation of a native speaker pronunciation is for some learners a threat to their identity. The native-speaker approach to one or two foreign languages, with a training in native-speaker skills, is not a satisfactory vision of language education in Europe.

An alternative vision is the European teacher of languages. Such teachers would be able to help their learners to become ‘plurilingual’. Plurilingualism is defined in the Council of Europe’s *Common European Framework* as follows:

the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social agent, has



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proficiency of varying degrees, in several languages, and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw. (Council of Europe, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. 2001 p.168)

Plurilingualism is thus dynamic. At one point in a person's life they may have competences of different kinds and different levels in languages A, B, and C. At a later point, their level in language A might be higher but they no longer use language C at all and have in the meantime acquired quite quickly some competence in D because it is related to language C, and they have developed an ability to build up their competence through their awareness of languages and how to learn them. A European teacher of languages is someone who helps learners to acquire the ability to do this and become plurilingual.

A second characteristic of the European teacher of languages is that, unlike the teacher of European languages, they are concerned not only with European languages. They include teachers who specialise in languages that are not widely spoken in Europe. In the past, this included, for example, Arabic but today Arabic is a European language in the sense that it is widely spoken in many European countries. It is important that European Arabic should be learnt by other Europeans, but it is also important that they continue to learn Arabic as spoken beyond Europe. Furthermore there are languages which are not widely spoken in Europe and these must also be the focus of teachers' and learners' attention, such as Japanese, Khmer, Swahili.

Such languages open learners' eyes to the world beyond Europe and this is related to the third characteristic of the European teacher of languages: the ability to promote in their learners an intercultural competence which

takes them out of their familiar world of European societies. Such teachers include in their educational aims the development of learners' ability to understand other cultural perspectives - as language teachers have always done - and also to critically analyse their own culture as others see it. They need to see Europe from a non-European perspective, from that of the refugee and asylum-seeker, or the economic migrant eager to share European wealth, or even from that of those who reject European values and attack European societies.

Such teachers will of course find themselves not only teaching/training their learners' language skills but also educating them about the values they believe in without question, and in the questions that might challenge those values. European teachers of languages are engaged therefore in political values, in the education for democratic citizenship which is fundamental to European traditions, but at the same time making their learners aware of other ways of living, other values and other modes of behaviour. Such a vision of the language teacher in Europe is implicit in many recent documents from the Council of Europe. It is realised in practice by making some teachers already, even though they try may not have a precise name for it, and even though they may be relying on their professional intuitions and personal convictions, rather than the education for teaching they received in their professional lives. Such teachers are however probably a minority, and teacher education should be conceived in such a way that more and more teachers are able to be European teachers of languages.

Education for European teachers of languages

What would be an appropriate education for such European teachers of

languages? This can be approached from three complementary points of view: teacher education to enhance plurilingualism; teacher education which focuses on intercultural competence; teacher education which prepares teachers to engage with education in values and democratic citizenship. Each of these would require detailed discussion and planning but here I shall only suggest some of the questions which need to be taken into consideration.

The concept of plurilingualism is dynamic and suggests that learners have to be responsible for their learning choices and for the methods of learning they use throughout their lives. The first priority in teacher education should therefore be to ensure that teachers themselves become plurilingual. They may wish to pursue the native-speaker approach for themselves as specialist language professionals in one or two languages. At the same time they need to understand the experience of having different language competences at different levels at different points in life-long learning. Teacher education needs to be both experiential, encouraging teachers to become plurilingual themselves, and analytical, providing the means of understanding and developing plurilingualism in their learners. 'Analysis' presupposes theoretical understanding of plurilingual language acquisition. 'Development' implies new approaches to teaching methods, to creating an awareness of languages and language learning in learners. These are one set of aims for teacher education.

The second priority is to enable language teachers to promote intercultural competence in their learners. If, as suggested earlier, language education is to contribute to education/*Bildung* and not only to an investment in human capital language skills in the workforce, intercultural competence is a crucial factor. Intercultural competence, as the ability to decentre, to

take new perspectives, to be willing to interact with people of other European and non-European cultures, is a fundamental characteristic of education. Teacher education should provide, again, both experiential and analytical understanding of intercultural competence. Teachers need to experience intercultural interactions with people of quite different perspectives, and they need to be taught how to analyse their own and other people's cultural assumptions. On the basis of this, they can then acquire methods of teaching intercultural competence in their learners, and such methods will include both personal experience for their learners, and the ability to analyse that experience, whether inside the classroom or beyond.

The third priority is that teacher education should include preparation for educating learners about values in societies – those familiar to them and those which are quite different. In the European context, this is closely related to education for democratic citizenship, and this is the most innovative and radical element of a vision of teacher education in Europe. For language teachers, especially in recent decades, have become more focused on skills which are, apparently, without specific values, or “value-free”. This is particularly the case where language learning has become separated from the teaching of literature because the teaching of literature has the potential to challenge learners not only aesthetically but also morally. However, even where language teachers are educated in the teaching of literature, it is an open question whether they are also helped to develop a systematic and principled approach to education in values, to educating learners' feelings and deeper emotions. This is as important as education about values and morals and needs to be seen in the wider context of education for democracy.

Education for teacher educators?

The demands on teacher educators which are implied in this vision and these priorities are clearly very high. We should not under-estimate the needs of teacher educators themselves. As suggested earlier, the incorporation of teacher education into university education is a crucial development. It emphasises the intellectual and emotional demands and levels of engagement with learners in all teaching, including language teaching. It emphasises that the education of language teachers is not just a training in competences.

The education of language teachers themselves is equally demanding, intellectually and emotionally, for those who teach them at university. Unfortunately, there is no well-developed vision of education for university teachers, whatever their discipline. In the discipline of education, as in others, it is assumed that they should be good scholars and researchers: scholars who analyse and develop particular (language) educational philosophies, and researchers who investigate and improve the processes of teaching and learning. This is a necessary but not sufficient basis for those who educate European teachers of languages. For teacher educators themselves need to consider and experience that education in values and democratic citizenship which they want their student teachers to pursue. They need to be able to deal with the many dilemmas that education in values and democratic citizenship raises for all teachers.

Teacher educators and teachers need to consider, for example:

- when there are discussions of moral and political issues, what role does the teacher take - neutral chair or involved individual?
- how do teachers cope with the affective demands of mediating between conflicting views, and not just transmitting and training lan-

guage skills?

- what criteria does the teacher use for deciding on topics, as some may be too sensitive or even taboo in some circumstances and societies?
 - how do teacher educators prepare teachers for this kind of teaching?
 - should we try to assess this aspect of learners' intercultural competence?
- and so on.

Conclusion

It will be clear that a vision of the European teacher of languages is one which will not be easily or quickly realised. Whatever the details – and much debate on details still remains – it is a vision which makes great demands and suggests radical changes. Above all it is a vision which defines language learning as a significant educational experience, whenever and wherever it takes place. It implies a major educational role for teachers, who should ensure that language learning is not reduced to investing in language skills, but is a rich and deep process taking learners into their own visions of Europe and the world beyond.

References

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