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Intercultural education and teaching a language as second/foreign language

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Abstract

This paper focuses, at first, on models of multicultural education. More specifically, intercultural education is the most appropriate model as it is based on mutual recognition and respect among different cultures. In this context, many students are pushed to learn a new language besides their mother language. It is important to distinguish the mother language (L1) from second (L2) and foreign (FL) language and to find the factors that influence their acquisition or learning. In such way teachers will be prepared to deal effectively in the classrooms with non-native speaker students and to organize the learning process in order to help them to face any difficulty.

Keywords: Models of multicultural education; Intercultural education; Mother Language; Second language; Foreign language

1. Introduction

The interest in the present research is a result from cultural reality of society. It is fact that there is a continuous increasing flow of migratory which create the need for an effective education of foreign students, who are now an integral part of our society. Their smooth integration into education system is an obligation of the State and concerns all actors that are involved in the educational process. In this new reality, the teachers is necessary to be prepared to deal effectively in the classrooms with non-native speaker students. For this purpose, after all, it is important not only to acquire the appropriate knowledge to deal with students who possess different cultural background but adopt those attitudes and beliefs that promote multiculturalism in education (Pohan, Ward, Kouzekanani, & Boatright, 2009).

2. Models of multicultural education - Intercultural education

The intense social and political problems of the last decades led to the increase of population movements. The integration of immigrants and of minorities in the education system was dealt with in a variety of ways by the different states depending on the multicultural approach adopted each time. More specifically, were applied the following multicultural education models (Govaris, 2011; Georgoyiannis, 2004)

- The assimilative model: This model appears in 1960 and its basic principle was that the various ethnic immigrant groups should not retain their nationality and racial characteristics, but they should fully accept the cultural standards of host country, so that they are absorbed in society. At school there is a monolingual and monocultural approach and the educational programs are based on the promotion of tradition of the host country (Neuner, 2012; Phillips, 2011). However, this assimilation led to school failure as students are cut off from each element of their cultural and linguistic identity (Govaris, 2011).
- The model of integration: The basic principle of this model is the respect for cultural differences concerning matters of religion, customs, traditions, etc. with the condition that they do not hinder the cultural principles of

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the dominant society. There is not change in educational policy and the concept of equal opportunities presupposes the conformity of minority groups to the dominant culture with the aim of creating a culturally homogeneous society (Markou, 1996). To facilitate immigrants in school and in society are designed and implemented programs which emphasize on the culture and history of host country with the rationale that this facilitates their integration (Nicolaou, 2011). The mother language has no place and everything is adapted to the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the dominant group (Phillips, 2011).

- The multicultural model: This model developed during the 1970s when appeared mobilizations of minority groups against discriminations. The basic principle of this model is that the cohesion of society is ensured only through the recognition of cultural particularities of all immigrant groups and the formation of a social framework that will allow the coexistence of all cultures (Georgoyiannis, 2004). Achieving this goal is an ongoing process which requires interventions in educational programs, as well as in the attitudes and beliefs of students and teachers (Banks & Banks, 2019). In this way school programs are based on mother language and national culture. Radical critics consider that the multicultural model focuses only on the cultural level and overlooks the real causes of discriminations against immigrants' groups (Neuner, 2012).
- The anti-racist model: At school according to the anti-racist model in order to face the school failure of students from minority and the discriminations of racial groups must be made radical changes concerning the programs studies, school textbooks, school life, etc. Many supporters of multicultural model target this model with the argument that in this context, the school risks becoming a field of competition between each political and social forces (Phillips, 2011).
- The intercultural model. It appears in the 1980s in Europe and it is the dominant until nowadays. It is based on mutual recognition, cooperation and interaction of different ethnic groups and aims to create societies which will be characterized by mutual respect and mutual acceptance (Georgoyiannis, 2004). It promises to create citizens that will be able to adapt and understand the new multicultural reality (Damanakis, 2002).

Intercultural education aims to change the school and society, so that all students regardless of cultural identity have equal opportunities and express themselves freely (Markou, 1997). Basic principle in intercultural education is the dialogue and the exchange of experiences between students with different cultural backgrounds who coexist in the local society (Damanakis, 2002). Thus, students appreciate the culture of other ethnicities and "different" does not function as factor of social exclusion and inequality, but favors mutual understanding and acceptance (Banks & Banks, 2019).

3. Mother or first language (C1), second language (C2), foreign language, bilingualism: definitions and clarification of concepts

It is a fact that in the multicultural societies of the modern era, many people are pushed to learn a new language besides their mother language. It is necessary to distinguish the terms mother or first language (L1), second language (L2) and foreign language (FL), as they present differences in the acquisition and learning process.

Initially, the acquisition of mother or first language (C1) is considered a self-evident and natural achievement as it does not need much effort or systematic teaching (Pinker, 2000). It is the language one acquires as a child in the environment where he grew up (Varlocosta & Triantafyllidou, 2013; Baker, 2007). The mother language has speed of acquisition, as all native speakers master its basic structures in the first five to six years of their age (Ortega, 2014). Also, it is characterized by a uniformity in the stages of its conquest independently from the target language (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016). Every native speaker has language ability which is a subconscious innate knowledge of the elements of mother language and the ways in which they are combined. According to Noam Chomsky's theory of universal grammar, every human being is born with an innate mechanism that makes the acquisition of his native language grammar possible. This innate mechanism is activated through environmental linguistic stimuli received by the individual (Cook & Newson, 2014; Doughty & Long, 2008). The mother language precedes the other language chronologically and is the dominant language of the speaker (Jessner & Cenoz, 2007).

A second language (L2) is defined as any language that be obtained or be learned by the person during his childhood, adolescent, or adult life after the acquisition of mother language (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016; Ortega, 2014). It involves learning of languages both in the "naturalistic environment" and in organized teaching structures, such as classrooms (Gass, 2013; Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012). Sometimes there is confusion between the terms second language and foreign language. The second language is the official and socially dominant language in one community. It is the common language of communication between the members of a community as they use another mother tongue. The acquisition of second language is necessary for work, education and smooth integration into society. Usually, it is acquired by refugees, immigrants and other minority groups who speak another language as native tongue.

On the contrary, the foreign language is not a basic and common language of one community and is learned primarily in an organized classroom environment. The purpose of learning is not immediate and necessary, but has to do with future one's travel purposes, cross-cultural communication occasions, academic acquisition qualifications etc. The learning of a foreign language is not necessary in order to cover basic living needs (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016). However, it is worth noting here that a foreign language is a subcategory of second language. Of course, the goals and way of learning between L2 and foreign language are different.

Bilingualism is defined as knowledge and use of two different language codes by a person, who is called "bilingual" (Hoffman, 2014; Galantomos, 2012; Baker, 2011; Damanakis & Skourtou, 2001). Depending on the age of acquisition of each language, we distinguish different types of bilingualism (Skourtou, 2011). When a person is exposed to primary language data of two languages from the birth, it is a simultaneous bilingualism, i.e. a simultaneous acquisition of L1 and L2. However, when the learning of L2 happens in preadolescence/childhood we talk about early sequential bilingualism, while when the learning of L2 takes place in or after adolescence it is for late sequential bilingualism (Varlocosta & Triantafyllidou, 2003). It is worth to note that in present research all cases belong to the sequential bilingualism.

4. Learning a second/foreign language

Between mastering the mother tongue and learning a second one language there are several similarities and differences. Starting from the similarities it is important to mention the Critical Period Hypothesis of Lenneberg (1967) (Harley & Wang, 2014; Singleton & Muñoz, 2011). According to this, every man has some tools for the acquisition of his mother language, which are determined by biological factors and limit the time that somebody has at his disposal to master a language. This period is ending in adolescence. Through research it was proven that the same mechanism it is also activated during the process of learning a second language. The acquisition, therefore, of the mother tongue and the learning of second language is more effective before the end of the critical period, as the brain has plasticity and many functions have not yet been identified. Moreover, at first stages of learning a L2 and during the acquisition of the L1 is observed the silent period. The speakers, in other words, are slow to produce speech and are limited to use some memorized phrases. Of course, many times the speakers of a L2 often produce from the former days some incomplete structures. In general, the acquisition of mother tongue is a universal and natural process, while learning a L2 follows the acquisition of the mother tongue language (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016; Ortega, 2014; Varlocosta & Triantafyllidou, 2013).

Another difference is that in the case of learning a second language many elements of the mother tongue are presented. They are subconsciously conveyed by the speaker's linguistic habits, structures and types of his native language, regardless of whether the two languages are structurally identical. It is also important that in learning a L2 there is variation in performance and to the degree of success of each individual. This is due to various parameters which affect the learning process (Dörnyei, 2006). According to Brown, the factors these can be summarized in the following questions: who, what, how, when, where and why (Varlocosta & Triantafyllidou, 2013).

The first factor (who) has to do with the speaker himself and specifically with his attitude towards C2, his personality and his social and educational background. When the speaker's attitude is positive towards L2, then it is often presented the phenomenon of additive bilingualism, where the speaker retains L1, but adds many elements of L2 in his daily communication. When the speaker is negative adjacent to the learning of L2 and the culture of this language, then it appears the phenomenon of monolingualism, where the use of L2 is very limited. Finally, often phenomena of subtractive bilingualism also appear with the replacement of L1 by the L2, when the speaker has a low regard for his mother tongue. It's worth to note that the personality of the person also plays an important role. The introvert students perform better in learning discourse, while extroverts in communicative discourse (Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001; Galantomos, 2012; Varlokosta & Triantafyllidou, 2003).

The second factor (what) relates to the nature of language. Particularly, it includes the knowledge that the person has about his native language, how to uses and how it connects it to learning L2. Knowledge of L1 determines in a large extent the individual's performance in learning L2. That's why not all L2s are of the same degree of difficulty for students of a specific C1. The historical, typological, morphological and syntactic relations between the two language systems create the appropriate conditions for positive transfer of parameters from one language system to another (Dörnyei, 2006; Gardner, 2010).

The third factor (how) relates to how a person learns a second language. First, an important role is played by the individual's innate predisposition, that is, whether the person by nature has an appeal and inclination (aptitude) to learn a L2. Some abilities that can predict a student's performance is his ability to connect sounds and meanings

(mechanical learning ability), the ability to recognize grammatical functions of words (grammar awareness) and his ability to distinguish and connect objects with each other (speech decoding capability). The ways of learning, the strategies and the teaching that will be applied influence this factor (Bella, 2011; Dörnyei, 2006; Varlocosta & Triantafyllidou, 2003).

The fourth factor (when) has to do with the age at which one comes to contact with a L2. As mentioned above based on the Hypothesis of the Critical Period learning L2 is more effective at younger ages due to biological factors. That is why even the youngest children have a higher degree of proficiency and performance in L2. However, modern research has proven that older people have an advantage in terms of their learning ability, their thinking analyticity and their maturity. Adults often show a greater speed of learning morphology and syntax than younger children (Singleton, 2001; Brown & Larson-Hall, 2012).

The fifth factor (where) is based on the learning environment, i.e. whether the learning of L2 takes place in an organized classroom context or in an environment where it is socially the dominant language (naturalistic environment). Finally, the sixth parameter (why) concerns the motivation of learning. Incentives determine the degree of effort that each person will make in order to learn a L2, but also the performance. Motivations can be integration motivations or goal achievement motivations. In particular, the person in the first case is pushed to learn a L2 in order to identify and integrate into a foreign language community, while in the second case, the person seeks to learn a second language for reasons of social advancement, career, intellectual achievement etc. (Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Gardner, 2010).

Another important difference between the process of acquiring the mother language and in the learning process of L2 is fossilization. This term describes the phenomenon in which a L2 student despite continuous exposure to language input and the practice opportunities given to him fails to acquire language ability comparable to that of a native speaker (Gass, 2013; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016). The student systematically produces incorrect formulas (repetitiveness) and remains stagnant at one point without making progress (permanence) (Han, 2003; Bella, 2011). The causes of the phenomenon of fossilization attributed both to internal factors (e.g. age, lack of cultural integration, desire to preserve the mother's cultural identity, etc.) as well as in external factors (e.g. lack of language input, incomplete feedback; etc.). Finally, it is worth noting that despite the differences mentioned between the two processes - learning L2 and acquiring L1 - there is an inseparable link between them, as well as they are interdependent and mutually influencing. In fact, according to Ortega (2014), the linguistic mistakes made in one's native language are responsible for the grade success in learning a second language.

Finally, we must highlight the productive and effective role of digital technologies in the field of education. These technologies, which include mobile devices (32–35), a variety of ICTs (36–55), AI & STEM ROBOTICS (56–60), and games (61–63), facilitate and improve educational procedures such as assessment, intervention, and instruction. In addition, the use of ICTs in conjunction with theories and models of metacognition, mindfulness, meditation, and emotional intelligence cultivation [64–90], accelerates and enhances educational practices and outcomes, particularly language learning and education domain.

5. Conclusion

To conclude we underline that the cultural reality of society is what has generated interest in the current research. The fact that there is a steadily rising migratory flow necessitates providing good instruction for international students, who are increasingly an essential component of our society. The State is required to ensure their seamless integration into the educational system, which affects all parties concerned. Teachers must be ready to cope with non-native speaker students in the classroom in this new environment. For this reason, it is crucial to embrace attitudes and ideas that support multiculturalism in education as well as the necessary understanding to cope with pupils from varied cultural backgrounds.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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