

EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP: THEORY AND TEACHING PRACTICE

Session 7: Implementing Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) in language teaching in secondary education

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Introduction

Language as subject is considered an integral component of all school curricula, since it develops the students' competences in different forms of communication (writing, speaking, listening, reading), skills which were considered aims of education since antiquity. Language is also considered as a vital instrument for the development of thinking, identity and personal growth (Beacco et.al. 2016: 19-20). In secondary education today, the students are expected to comprehend and produce more complex messages, including multimodal or digital texts. Moreover, they are expected to critically approach these messages, to reflect on the identities produced by linguistic choices, to learn how to specify the texts' aims and means and how to produce texts in a variety of genres.

Therefore, it is considered a subject that is suitable for promoting Education for Democratic Culture and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) skills, values, attitudes and critical knowledge. This paper aims to focus on the teaching practices and methods which allow language teaching in secondary education to incorporate these elements and promote the development of literacy. Initially, a short overview of the developments in language teaching will be presented, followed by the impact of different teaching paradigms on the students' literacy competences. Then, teaching practices that cultivate EDC/HRE elements will be examined, focusing on certain case-studies.

The aims of language teaching

This paper focuses on language teaching, where the language of schooling is taught as a subject, such as German in Germany, Danish in Denmark etc. (sometimes termed

as L1 education). In the past this was termed as mother-tongue education. Nevertheless, in today's multicultural societies, as was the case for linguistic minorities in the past, the language of schooling is not the mother tongue for many students in classrooms across the world. This presents a challenge for schools, which adopt a variety of strategies to address the issue.

Subject language in mother tongue is a concept closely connected to the nation. In the 19th century the emerging nations aimed to consolidate their identity and homogeneity through education. In many countries a certain linguistic variety was promoted as the national language and the language of education at the expense of dialects and minority languages (Green and Erixon 2020b: 262-267) The language questions in numerous countries highlight these crises in identity and language. Greece is the most characteristic case, where the language of the state (including education) was a variety close to ancient Greek (rather than the vernacular) until 1974. Thus, subject language aimed at standardization of the language of education and to identity formation, since the speakers of the national language were expected to adopt national identity, especially in the case of linguistic minorities (Yildiz 2012: 1-29).

In present-day globalized societies, the aims of language education have changed. Students are expected to become aware of language variety and to accept the plurality of all languages (difference between written and oral language, how language changes over time, how language is used in social contexts for different aims) (Štěpánek 2020: 192-194). Students should learn how to use linguistic varieties competently, i.e. in the relevant social and cultural contexts (Fleming 2010: 5-6, 8). Plurilingualism and interculturalism are also aims of contemporary language teaching. Language education also aims to provide to students access to the knowledge society, to enable them to build new knowledge and reflect on it, through enriching their language repertoires and skills (Beacco et.al. 2020: 23). Moreover, they should be able to discern the ambiguity and nuances of language and the ways that language can be used to hide rather than tell, i.e. propaganda. In short, students



are expected to acquire literacy, i.e. the ability to adapt to communicative situations and to the lingual practices, values and beliefs of certain social and cultural groups. Due to its social character, literacy is connected to power structures and context (Gee 2008: 43-45). Critical literacy is based on the concept of discourses, developed by the poststructuralist Michel Foucault. According to Foucault, power structures shape discursive and institutional frameworks, which define language and every type of discourse. It is these structures that define the subject; the subject does not express itself through language, it is rather shaped by language and the discursive frameworks (Foucault 1984). Thus, any discourse includes ideological concepts, viewpoints, privileged views and stereotypes embedded in the text. Critical literacy aims to highlight these power structures and the partiality of the context where each speaker is situated, so that he becomes aware of the partiality of his perceptions and worldviews, which are shaped by the discursive and institutional frameworks. This awareness aims to motivate the students to question their own perspectives and to acquire a critical perspective on the discourses and institutions that shape them. This is the first step towards conscious choices and actions on a personal and political level (Andreotti 2014: 29).

The impact of the teaching paradigms

Based on the developments in language teaching, research has outlined four different teaching paradigms, i.e. systems of values, learning theories, prescriptions, and objectives (Green and Erixon 2020b: 275-279):

- **The 'literary-grammatical'**. This paradigm was developed during the 19th century at the period of nation-building, following the model of classical languages teaching (Štěpánek 2020: 184). It was based on grammar teaching, emphasis on written language and a prescriptive approach to language. The aim of this paradigm was to shape a citizen that adopted the language and values of the nation (Elf, Bulfin and Koutsogiannis, 2020: 228), through homogenisation.



- **The ‘developmental’.** This ‘child-centred’ paradigm was developed during the early 20th century within the Reform Pedagogy methodology. It aimed to help the student reach personal growth through reading and encouraged students’ activity, based on their preexisting linguistic knowledge. Literary discourse served as a model for personal expression and writing.
- **The ‘communicative’.** It was developed in the 1960/70s and it was influenced by the pragmatic-communicative shift of linguistics. It places emphasis on *parole* rather than *langue*, (i.e. language production rather than structure) and places student linguistic activities within a communicative functional framework, which would help meaning-production. Linguistic varieties and authentic texts were gradually introduced in language teaching. (Štěpánek 2020: 182-183). Ideologically it is connected with the rise of counterculture.
- **The ‘utilitarian’** was developed during the 1980s. It considered language as an instrument and communication as transactional. It focused on skills which would allow the student to function successfully in the working environment. Although it employed authentic everyday written and oral texts, it focused on grammar and normative language and was oriented to testing. This paradigm was ideologically connected to neoliberalism (Green and Erixon 2020b: 278,).

Each paradigm is connected with different teaching practices and different student identities and promotes different types of literacy. Some approaches are more text- and content-oriented and more based in the teacher as the source of knowledge, while others are more student-oriented and hence the teacher becomes the facilitator of the student activities. These paradigms coexist in teaching practice (Green and Erixon 2020b: 277). Certain teaching practices promote EDC/HRE skills, values, attitudes and critical knowledge more than others. In the following section these practices will be explored.

How to include EDC/HRE goals in language teaching

The teaching paradigm more suitable for the promotion of EDC/HRE goals is the communicative one, where the context of meaningful communicative situations,

enables the students to learn how to adapt to different social contexts and develop their linguistic repertoire and intercultural competence.

Topic and context selection is very important in this case. According to the teaching model that typically dominates in classrooms, the teacher sets the agenda and presents the texts for reading and defines the student activities. Thus, 'students' sanctioned opportunities for engaging or acting are delimited by the teachers' framing of the ways of acting' (Elf, Bulfin and Koutsogiannis, 2020: 228). Students should be encouraged to sometimes set the agenda in the language classes, within the limits allowed by national curricula. This can happen through the existence of rubrics in language classes, that could be the focus of the class periodically (e.g., once a week, once a month, at the beginning of each lesson): current news, teenagers' corner in the classroom's bulletin board, which could set the agenda periodically, book/film/game reviews, one word as an expression of current state of mind. The topic selection and agenda setting motivate the students, thus projecting a much more active student identity, where they have agency in classroom operation. Thus the teacher script, (i.e. approach according to the curriculum) and the student script (i.e. knowledge and non-typical literacies acquired outside school environment and sociocultural practices) are linked (Gutierrez & Tejeda 1999). This is especially important for students from immigrant or minority background, who are distance from literacies and linguistic practices and varieties that are used in education.

Most importantly, this promotes democratic values in practice, since students propose certain topics and texts, debate on their choices by presenting their rationale and decide. Moreover, by choosing their own topics and reading material, students promote their self-efficacy and take responsibility for their choices, along with the confidence that they can achieve the goals they collectively set (Boatright & Allman 2018).

In the case when text or topics chosen considered unfit by the teacher for any reason, the students can learn to question textual choices in form and content. (Boatright &



Allman 2018), provided that the teacher does not reject their choice but guides them to reflect critically on the text's characteristics. Is the text appropriate for its communicative instance? What is the author's aim and means to achieve it? Does it achieve the aim? If it is inappropriate, what changes could improve it? What is the ideological function of the text?

Teaching organizing is also very important in promoting EDC/HRE goals. Working in groups allows the students to develop their communicative and adaptability skills. Groups of four is a preferred number. The teacher becomes a facilitator. A set of questions can function as a scaffolding to facilitate the group work. Working in groups may seem slower in terms of progress regarding the content, but this happens because the students acquire these cooperation skills. Students need guidance on how to work in groups, resolve their differences, include all members of the group, adopt different roles, but these skills are valued EDC/HRE goals.

Teaching practices

In the following section, some teaching practices that promote EDC/HRE competences will be shortly presented.

- At a time when the social media define identities, perceptions of reality, politics and popular culture, it is necessary to promote media and social media literacies. Student can explore social media as genre types who define their content. They can critically explore the types of identities are projected on the social media, the stereotypes that are shaped. Thus, literacy practices that are acquired outside school and are strong learning patterns can be used to promote school literacy practices. (Gee 2004: 106-107).
- Similarly, media critical literacies are crucial at a time of post-truth. Researching how news is written, distributed and shaped by the different media, distinction between news and comment, exploring what is told and what is silenced is crucial knowledge that denaturalizes the news representations of the world



(Politis et.al. 2016). Producing their own news outlet (be it newspaper, newsreel, *reportage*) promotes media literacy and multimodal literacies.

- Networking and distributed knowledge are characteristic of affinity spaces (Gee 2004: 75-81), which can be adopted through the use of social media to promote authentic communication practices and motivate school learning. Group learning can be promoted by the use of networking tools and collective writing tools.
- To promote intercultural competence and language awareness, some activities can be introduced, such as mapping linguistic experiences, presenting words and phrases from other languages, syntactical and morphologic elements in other languages, symbols, letters and signs in various languages. This exploration of linguistic variety promotes respect for other languages and a positive attitude towards multilingualism and multiculturalism.
- Debates motivate students and promote their critical thinking along with their competence to be conscious of the legitimacy of different value systems and opinions. Argumentation can be prepared in groups and rules of conduct should be agreed in advance and followed. This also promotes democratic values and teaches the students that disagreement is expected and accepted, as long as we can use logical reasoning to back our opinions and views. The teacher functions as a moderator, but can also function as ‘the devil’s advocate’, indicating that he does not necessarily adopt the views he presents.
- The agenda set by the students may lead to controversial issues. The classroom is a space where controversial issues should be discussed openly, enabling the students to deal with them in a respectful manner and to listen to other people’s points of view. This prepares the students to engage in democratic dialogue and to resolve differences and deal with controversies in a non-violent manner. This presupposes a democratic climate in the classroom, where student feel free to express their opinion, based on evidence, even if they disagree with the teacher or their peers. It also presupposes that the teacher is able to manage a



heated discussion, by employing a number of teaching techniques. (Papamichael et.al. 2015: 16-25).

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