How are processes of globalized insertion of multilingual repertoires politicized and experienced in educational spaces?

Reinhilde Pulinx, Piet Van Avermaet
Centre for Diversity and Learning, Linguistics Department, Ghent University, Belgium

In Flanders, as in many other European countries, home languages are recognized as an element of identity building and cultural integrity, but policy measures and practices demonstrate clear monolingual approaches to language in education.

Regardless mission statements in school policy documents aimed at encouraging dialogue, fighting against prejudice and facilitating a critical and creative integration of all pupils into a multicultural society, a deficiency paradigm of teaching and learning – based on monolingual ideologies – has been constructed. This had led to policy measures focusing on standard language learning and language testing, sometimes as a condition for participation in education. Pupils’ linguistic capital is by no means activated as a didactical resource for learning. These policy measures are influenced by the consecutive PISA surveys and the conditionality of language proficiency in the current integration discourses and policies in Flanders.

The dynamic interaction between monolingual ideologies, a deficiency paradigm of teaching and learning and current -national and international- integration discourses and policies, impacts monolingual school policies.

In this contribution we will argue that these dynamics not only impact teachers’ perceptions and beliefs, but also their inter-subjective relations, particularly teacher-pupil-relations. This affects, in turn, pupils’ beliefs, their self esteem, classroom involvement and motivation for learning. Unwillingly, these mutually reinforcing mechanisms contribute to processes of social reproduction in education. The perceptions and beliefs teachers hold on language proficiency and home language often interact with more general perceptions and beliefs they have regarding migrant pupils (e.g. parental involvement, academic and future expectations, motivation).

This paper is based on an analysis of recent national language policy decisions, outlined in the 2011 policy brief on language policy in Flemish education and and newly collected quantitative and qualitative data in secondary schools in urban regions in Flanders regarding school policies and teachers’ perceptions, beliefs and practices.

Keywords: Secondary education, Language ideologies and policies, Teachers’ perceptions.