

Preparing Foreign Language Teachers for Multilingual Classrooms: From a Didactic to a Social Role

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Abstract: In the light on the new recent mobility - driven by ongoing and forced migration, resulting from political instability, and economic and social problems, many social efforts have been made in order to integrate these new arrivals and therefore ensure a social cohesion. Educationally, many conferences and seminars were held in order to help teachers promote a good learning atmosphere among the new arrival of learners who bring multiple languages and mobile experiences into the classroom. As far as language teaching is concerned, language teachers have been given a noble and a social, but huge, responsibility to help solving social problems. However, the question that may impose itself today is that do foreign language teachers take sufficient training programmes to meet the new needs and fulfill such roles? What teaching training programmes are being undertaken by foreign language teachers? It is argued that teachers' roles have always been *didactical* – instructor, facilitator, integrator, designer, etc. However, based on the new responsibilities assigned to language teachers, their teaching training programmes should be reconsidered. Our main goal in this work is to stress the need for practical teaching training that suits the multilingual classrooms, in which the foreign language teacher does not act only as an instructor, but also as a social assistant whose responsibility is to help solving the social problems.

Keywords: People Mobility and Migration, Multilingualism, Multilingual Classroom, Tolerance and Social Cohesion, Foreign Languages Teaching, Pre-service Training, Teachers' Role.

INTRODUCTION

With the current people mobility resulting from forced migration for different reasons, many conferences and seminars have been held in order to maintain social cohesion and promote tolerance and mutual understanding through education, especially in the multilingual classrooms. As far as the teaching of foreign languages is concerned, foreign languages teachers should carry a noble - but a huge - responsibility to help solving the social problems. To achieve this noble goal, a number of guidelines, books, textbooks, CD-ROMs and the like were produced, and many teaching training programmes were done in order to help foreign language teachers to be aware of the new requirements.

There is no doubt that much has been done in terms of teaching guidelines and hand books to assist teachers in their teaching process. These guidelines consist of a set of culture topics, and activities and techniques on how to promote intercultural communication in multilingual classrooms. But is it suffices?

Who is going to activate these techniques and make them successful? Teachers in multilingual

classrooms usually confront different students with different cultural backgrounds and different learning needs, bearing in mind that some of them are new arrivals, who have inevitably endured high levels of trauma, psychological distress, and acculturative needs as they travel through and settle in new places.

Therefore, what may meet the needs of some learners may not necessarily meet others. In this manner, any teaching method and activities described in the guidelines are going to be affected “not only by who the teacher is, but also by whom the students are, and the teacher's expectations of appropriate social roles” [1]. When it comes to practice, everything depends on the teacher own understanding, style and level of experience. The teacher then decides upon a particular teaching method when analysing the internal and external factors, which undoubtedly influence his/her teaching. These require taking into account the type of the learners he/she deals with.

However, when today it is expected from the foreign language teachers to play a social role in order to contribute in solving the social problems in the multilingual societies, the question that imposes itself then is:

- Do the foreign languages teachers are well prepared for this new noble role?
- Do they have sufficient training programme that extend their *didactic* role to the *social* one?

As teachers' role is apparently affected by changes in social contexts, this urgently makes us think of the importance of pre-service teaching training programmes that consider the multilingual classrooms phenomenon and focus on the social role of teachers as social cohesion '*maintainers*'

Recongnising the Role of Pre-service Teaching Training

There is no doubt that the number of conferences and seminars have been held aimed to embrace and integrate the waves of migrants who usually endure psychological pain - resulting from civil war and political and economic instability.

However, as far as the teaching of foreign languages is concerned, there are some obstacles should be overcome. Apart from the didactical issues such as the culture topics to teach, lack of consistent methods, and lack of time that can be replaced by the teaching sources, there is the lack of teaching training programme that may lead these efforts to be peripheral in both materials and classroom instruction.

The new theories and recommendations advocate preparing teachers for learners who bring multiple languages and mobile experiences into the classroom. However, teachers were not adequately prepared, impregnated, or even consulted. Conceptually and practically, foreign language teachers are not usually expected to play such a social role.

Their role have always been *didactic* – designers, facilitators, planners, etc, and consequently, as Kramsch [2] observes, they will be more inclined to focus on the teaching of grammar and vocabulary rather than dealing with unfamiliar everyday languages and cultures.

Additionally, the social role expected from them requires having sufficient knowledge about all the students and their cultural backgrounds. Therefore, teachers should have sufficient cultural knowledge about their students so as to be able to address different identities and cultures, and to reduce prejudice and stereotype and thus promote mutual understandings, and reinforce tolerance.

Yet cultural knowledge about the others is not enough. There should be constant by constant training programmes because a teacher who lacks the skills on how to present different cultures in his/her classes will liable to turn his/her classrooms into places of reinforcement of prejudice and stereotype.

Therefore, it is necessary to give more attention to the regular teaching training programmes to enable teachers play their expected role. But what type of training? The type of training should not focus only on the theoretical components and didactic issues, but it should be extended to the social and psychological role. Bearing in mind, the types of learners we are addressing are those who undergo psychological trauma and shocks resulting from civil wars, and political and social instability. Psychologically, they are in a situation that requires a special care. Socially, they come with different languages and cultures.

Let us assume the following situation

A new migrant/refugee learner joins your class but with broken heart. He has just witnessed a bloody war in his homeland where some of his closet family members were victims of this war. Of course, this child is enduring now a psychological distress and high levels of trauma. For him, nothing can prepare him for such a sense of loss. And of course the teacher does not expect from this learner high level of focus and attention in the class.

Under this situation, what can a foreign language teacher, who is train only on how to prepare their lessons, and making assessments, do? When it comes to addressing the emotional needs of their young learners, the didactic training is not helpful.

This kind of situation urgently calls for a teaching training that meets the current needs. Admittedly, some teachers have natural skills in dealing with such situations, but this should not be exclusive to a few. The question is how to help these teachers to be instructors, and social assistants alike.

The Teacher as a Social Assistant

The Teacher as a Social Assistant Training a teacher is to prepare a professional for a social function, which turns out to be very complex, indeed. As teachers, we may sometimes find ourselves in a need to play the role of a social worker in our school and community, which is not an easy task.

Let us review the social assistant as a profession and its functions.

Social work is a scientific field within human services. Its aim is to provide assistance to individuals and families and solve their social problems using multidisciplinary approaches. To operate effectively, social workers have to work closely with many other agencies and professionals: medical professionals, schools, and other social services.

Working with medical professionals, their duty is to provide medical care for clients; working with

schooling system, their duty is to identify children who are in need of help; working with psychologists, their duty is to provide psychological counseling.

Socially, social work profession helps providing social maintenances as it work closely with the community concerning itself with those who suffer from poverty and negative inequalities [3, 4]. This means that the social work profession has also a social integration duty.

Educationally, as today classrooms are multilingual, assistance from many agencies becomes urgently needed. Many schools have social workers who are employed and working within school systems providing students with mental, emotional and social assistance. But, who is very close and trustworthy to the learners? The teacher? Is not it?

The social workers employed by the school do not work regularly with the students who may consider the social worker as only a doctor. Teachers; on the other hand, work with them regularly, providing them with both educational and emotional assistance. And there are many successful stories in which a teacher has been an inspiration to their students. However, in order to play their role effectively, there must be some regular training programmes.

Some may speak in terms of funding. Such training programmes require extra budget and time. But let us detect the main goal: the social stability and cohesion, and economic flourish. Then, the reward is very promising in the future. Therefore, institutions, colleges and universities that offer foreign languages programmes should offer extra teaching/learning subjects that deal with the professional functions of social workers.

CONCLUSION

In very short, in the light of the responsibility given to the foreign languages teachers, the demand for sufficient pre-service teaching training becomes urgent, and the *didactic* role of the teacher as being an instructor, observer, and facilitator is no longer suffice. What is needed is to recognise the role of the teacher as a social assistant whose role is bridge the gap between the classroom and the society.

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