

Academic event report

Towards curriculum diversification in the training of English language teachers in Argentina

Sponsored by the British Council Argentina, the three-day seminar ‘Towards curriculum diversification of English teaching at higher education in Argentina’ was held at



Universidad Nacional de La Plata from February 26 to 28, 2020. With more than 100 attendees from different educational institutions and provinces in Argentina and Mexico, the seminar focused on the potential contribution of language teaching to educational processes and the development of individuals, and also to the promotion of intercultural citizenship education. One plenary session, three in-person presentations, two local expert panels, and five expert screencasts approached intercultural education and curriculum diversification from different perspectives.

The opening session was in charge of professor Melina Porto and of the coordinator of the non-governmental organization ‘La Máquina de los Sueños’, Graciela Cavalieri. They shared some insights gained from the service-learning experience ‘Linking languages, cultures, and university students volunteering community work’, which took place during 2017-2018. The project connected English language learning in higher education and the community as volunteer students and teachers from Universidad Nacional de La Plata planned, designed and carried out workshops using multicultural literature in English for underserved children aged 8-12 in the local NGO located on the outskirts of La Plata. In the second morning session, Professor Anthony Liddicoat, from University of Warwick, presented ‘Planning for intercultural language teaching and learning in schools. His presentation focused on the need for a methodology that addresses the importance of teaching languages from an intercultural perspective. The underlying principle of this approach is based on the view that language and culture are intrinsically linked (Liddicoat, 2013), that being language proficient necessarily means understanding cultural differences and its implications, and that creating awareness about self and others may prevent cultural

misunderstandings from happening. In his view, since students cannot learn intercultural competence by themselves, teachers should consider that students study languages to communicate within a cultural context, which may differ from the learners' assumptions. This is why, from this perspective, language and culture teaching must be taught together from the beginning of the learning process.

In the afternoon session we were invited to watch a video presentation featuring Bernardette Holmes, director of *Speak to the Future*. In her lecture, 'Speaking to a global future: the role of languages and cultural agility in developing successful individuals, healthy economies and equitable societies,' she shared insights on the pivotal role languages play in the global market. From her point of view, while speaking English as the lingua franca to the knowledge economy, global research, international diplomacy and business will be of benefit to young people. It will not be enough to meet the requirements of the current labour force (Holmes, 2016). Thinking of the skills "global-born" generations will need, the expert reminds educational policy makers and societies that these young people are already part of a hipper-connected and diverse world. Holmes proposed to create language learning opportunities to equip young people with the competences they will need to face the highly skilled multilingual team recruitment.

The morning session of the second day opened with Professor Michael Byram (University of Durham), who delivered a video presentation on *Teaching for Intercultural and Democratic Citizenship: the Role of Language Teaching*. His presentation was organised under four main questions: the first was "Why democratic citizenship?" The second question made reference to the concept of intercultural citizenship, the third to the role of Foreign language Education, and finally he addressed ethical issues for teachers: the content of language teaching, the active role of the language teacher, language teacher identity and community action. The second speaker of the morning session was Leticia Yulita (University of East Anglia), who delivered an in-person presentation about *Language Pedagogy: Transitioning into Intercultural Citizenship Education in the University Sector*. This plenary explored what curriculum decolonization involved and reflected upon internationalization and internationalism, identity and critical cultural awareness. In the afternoon Professor Adrian Holliday (Canterbury Christ Church University) presented a video session, *DeCentring the relationship between learning language and learning culture*, where he focused on defining some concepts and ideas such as *global competence*, blocks and threads, the essentialist statement, hybridity, Third Space, interculturality and cultural formation, and cultural trajectories.

After that, ten local experts from different parts of Argentina were invited to share their insights about ways in which the curriculum could be diversified. The two panels integrated by Dr. Silvana Barboni from Universidad Nacional de La Plata who presented *Genesis for curriculum creation*, Cristina Mayol M.A., representing Universidad Nacional de Misiones and Federación Argentina de Asociaciones de Profesores de Inglés, shared her

vision on *The Ways FAAPI contributes to the Diversification of Curriculum at Teacher Education*, Lic. Estela Braun from Universidad Nacional de La Pampa presented *Social Justice in Teacher Education's Practicum*, Lic. Eugenia Carrión Cantón on behalf of Universidad Nacional de Tierra del Fuego AeIAS, Instituto Provincial de Educación Superior *Paulo Freire* and Ministerio de Educación, Cultura Ciencia y Tecnología de TDF AeIAS referred to *Social Justice as Part of the Curriculum at Teacher Education Level in TDF AeIAS*, Prof. Adriana Boffi from Universidad Nacional de La Plata focused on *CELU Spanish as a Foreign Language Exams as a Way of Diversifying Curriculum*. Griselda Beacon, M.A., from Buenos Aires city shared her presentation *A Small Narrative, a Yell in Silence*, Dr. Fabiana Sacchi on behalf of Universidad Nacional de Río Cuarto presented *A Research on Second Language Workshop and A Socio community Experience at Primary Level as Forms of Diversifying Curriculum at Teacher Education*, Susana Company M.A., from Universidad Católica de Salta, shared *Identity and Multiculturalism in English Speaking Discourse*, Lic. Ana María Gentile representing Universidad Nacional de La Plata shared *The place of French at University Level* and Prof. Ingrid Blank from Instituto de Formación Docente *Simón Bolívar* and Ministerio de Educación de Córdoba referred to *Challenges at Teacher Education Level in Córdoba*.

Opening the third day morning session, Ofelia García and Ricardo Otheguy lectured on 'Translanguaging'. They presented and reflected on a case study and then interacted with the attendees, shared experiences, and replied to the audience's questions. While García replied from a pedagogical perspective, Otheguy supported the approach from Linguistics. They insisted on the importance of providing students with opportunities to make use of their full repertoire without being penalised if they are using their home language together with the language they are learning. The afternoon session opened with a video presentation by Professor Henry Kuchah Kuchah (University of Leeds) entitled *Towards an enhancement approach to language teacher education in challenging contexts*. He analysed two research projects about context appropriate language pedagogy in different settings in the Global South, focusing on research processes which attempt to develop a bottom up enhancement approach to teacher education. To close this three-day seminar, Dr. Darío Banegas (Strathclyde University) hosted a video session as a local expert where he shared his views of curriculum diversification at Teacher Education in Chubut, Argentina.

Since the ultimate goal of this seminar was to encourage the collaborative creation of a federal action plan to develop a curriculum that addresses these aspects, participants were invited to contribute in the after-seminar tasks. After each session, group discussions were facilitated to allow attendees to exchange their opinions about challenges such as curriculum diversification, social justice, gender, intercultural citizenship, and their concerns regarding ways of deconstructing the curriculum in Teacher Education. Many colleagues agreed that it is necessary to work more extensively mainly in three areas: Practicum, Academic Literacy and Applied Linguistics, which they think should be made into the core of Teacher

Education curriculum. Colleagues also reflected upon the inclusion of volunteering and community involvement projects in these Programmes, and on the need to research into Translanguaging and English as a Lingua Franca. We consider this was an invaluable opportunity to network and plan future possible actions.

The discussions held in this seminar cemented the idea that English teaching at higher education implies much more than providing opportunities for language learning for students to become teachers of English and aroused the interest of local and international experts, teacher educators, and students who were given an opportunity to participate, share and deepen their knowledge of the matter, as well as making their voices heard. Exceeding the linguistic boundaries, this seminar was a real celebration of Teacher Education Programmes as well as an opportunity to share, to learn and to reflect upon teaching practices which incorporate local cultures and develop intercultural and citizenship awareness. Additionally, the final goal of teachers working on a federal project under Dr. Porto's supervision provides teachers a framework in order to collaborate and think of a more inclusive proposal for language teaching in higher education.

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