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Critical Language and Culture Pedagogy

‘Awareness of and fighting against oppression, power differentials and any form of discrimination – if taken seriously, these objectives could turn language and intercultural education into a more political achievement.’

Fred Dervin

AARHUS UNIVERSITETSFORLAG

SPROGforum

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*All articles are published in full text in Danish
(except for Rosén's, which is in Swedish)*

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Foreword

“...a language education focused upon training in language skills, without a critical component, would seem to be failing in its responsibility to learners” Norman Fairclough writes in his introduction to the book *Critical Language Awareness* (1992:6). With *Critical language and culture pedagogy* the theme for this number, Sprogforum introduces critical approaches to the teaching of language and culture that have been taken from a Danish, Nordic and international context.

Critical language and culture pedagogy builds on a tradition that goes back to the 1970s, with the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire as its perhaps most important inspirator. On the basis of alphabetisation programmes in South America, Freire formulated the concept of *conscientização* about the close connection between language, awareness and social change: ‘So saying a true word means changing the world’ is a famous quotation from *De undertryktes p dagogik* (Freire 1973:62). Another important source of inspiration was critical theory, where the German sociologist Oskar Negt, with a background in the education programmes of the labour movement, made the connection between language and the formation of experience the focal point of societal orientation and action (Negt 1975). Both made a strong impact on Danish reform pedagogy and left a lasting mark, especially on project pedagogy, which acquired a strong position compared to other countries. As we can see in this number, project pedagogy is still an important resource for critical language and culture teaching.

Since the 1970s, critical language and culture pedagogy has become more complex. Today there are a number of different critical culture and language *pedagogies* that make use of various theoretical approaches – including *Cultural Studies*, *queer theory* about gender and sexuality and *empowerment theory* which readers will meet in this number – with issues and themes that are oriented towards different participant groups and their perspectives on linguistic and cultural learning. Even so, despite all the differences, there are certain common themes and perspectives.

Firstly, there is the basic question of the *right and guaranteed access* of children, young people and adults to learning language – mother tongue and second language as well as foreign language. With the reform of the Danish Folkeskole, foreign languages have acquired a stronger position in basic education – particularly English. The situation is quite different with regard to Danish as a second language – it is offered as a subject, but primarily to adult immigrants and only sporadically included in educational programmes for young people. Teaching in minority mother tongues is virtually non-existent. When bilingual children, young people and adults are marginalised, a reference being made to their lack of skills in Danish, it has serious consequences for the individual. Explanatory reasons are often sought in their linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds rather than focusing on the education system, which not only limits their Danish-language competences but also multilingual competences in the numerous languages that are demonstrably spoken in present-day Denmark. A critical language and culture pedagogy must therefore be sensitive towards structural inequalities in the education system and promote access to learning language to all. This also applies to pupils with learning difficulties – as exemplified in Anne Marie Nielsen's article in this number.

In a critical language-pedagogical practice, *critical language awareness* is a key teaching goal. The obligation towards the pupils referred to by Fairclough in the introductory quotation derives from the fact that social power is increasingly being exercised via subtle language practices – often hidden from the participants themselves – in the media, the workplace and teaching. Several articles in this number provide examples of how minorities via the exercising of language power are positioned as marginalised groups that do not have a voice in the teaching, irrespective of whether it is a question of ethnic (Michael Svendsen Pedersen, Jenny Rosén) or sexual minorities (Fred Dervin). Critical language awareness is therefore a necessary prerequisite to understand what is happening, and to open people's eyes to alternative language practices and forms of teaching.

Just as central an aim is *critical cultural awareness*, which Michael Byram has formulated as a necessary aspect of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). This means that intercultural competence cannot be reduced to being able to 'get along', as it is often called, in a foreign culture. Critical cultural awareness has to do with becoming aware of one's *own* ideological attitudes and thereby becoming able to become involved in others who hold different

attitudes – *savoir s'engager*. This aspect is today at least as central as at the end of the 1990s, when ICC established itself as a learning goal in Danish language and culture teaching. Several articles in this number, with practical examples, show how one can work with critical cultural awareness, e.g. in the Folkeskole in a teaching sequence on 'global celebrities' (Lone Krogsgaard Svarstad) or at the upper secondary level in an interdisciplinary project on the Arab Spring (Sine Wrang Thomsen and Lisbeth Verstraete-Hansen).

The critical pedagogical tradition contained the idea of common, solidary *action* for which the pedagogy was to prepare the way. This perspective is more complex in the societal and political reality that present-day pupils and students have to relate to. Action has admittedly returned to the pedagogical agenda, but now often understood as individual competence to act in relation to given demands and possibilities. For a critical language and culture pedagogy, the action perspective is connected to resisting marginalisation and deprivation of control, and – equally important – to the formation of communities that open up new horizons and possibilities for action. Just what communities and possibilities for action are in the hands of the participants and teachers depends on their local conditions. In this number, the action perspective is included in most of the contributions, from the upper secondary class that makes use of its proficiencies in French when in a dialogue with young Arabs to course participants who are learning Danish as a second language and are trying to make contact with their Danish neighbour – and the latter group can experience this as a great challenge.

In one of the contributions, action is the focal point. Maya Bram Sommer from Grænseforeningen (The Border Association), an organisation that seeks to promote knowledge about the Danish minority in Southern Schleswig, writes about a group of young people with a national and ethnic minority background who involve themselves in a one-year project that seeks to shift the borders of our conception of what we perceive as Danish. At the same time, these young people show how involvement and consciousness-raising are a cohesive learning process – perhaps the most important characteristic of a critical language and culture pedagogy practice.

Have an enjoyable read!
The editors

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ECML: Collaboration and resource bank for language teaching

[ECML – sprogpædagogisk samarbejde og ressourcebank]

Abstract

The article gives a presentation of the Danish ECML Contact Point of ECML, the European Center for Modern Languages, situated at Aarhus University. With a modest staff of one project manager and a part-time student assistant the Contact Point aims to help Danish language teachers at all levels with information relevant to ECML's working area, which is language pedagogy in a broad sense. A systematic access to teaching materials in the field of language pedagogy is in progress. On the homepage ecml.dk links to relevant projects and bibliographic resources, such as the INFODOK, are provided. ECML's mission is to increase networking and knowledge of ongoing activities and resources related to the development of language pedagogy. A European project programme and numerous workshops as well as a national annual conference support this mission. Also the European Language Day on 26 September is supported by the ECML Contact Point.

The Contact Point is financed by a consortium of twelve university colleges and universities, and by the Ministries of Education resp. Higher Education and Science.

Critical potentials within language pedagogy practice

[Kritiske potentialer i sprogpædagogisk praksis]

Abstract

Since the 1970s the predominant agenda within language teaching has been a communicative one based on a notion of language learning as a cognitive process. In recent years, however, a social turn has taken place within language pedagogy, including a view of language as a social practice and the learner as a social being. This has led to critical language pedagogies aiming at empowering learners to negotiate identities and social positioning within social hierarchies and power relations. The article gives two examples of critical potentials within pedagogical practice: One from the teaching of Danish as a second language, where learners' everyday experiences of marginalisation and their ambitions could be included in the communicative activities; the other from the teaching of German as a foreign language at a Danish upper secondary school, where a fairly static view of culture could be transformed into a more dynamic one. Finally the article presents a list of points for reflecting on how to give language teaching a critical perspective.

Queering language and intercultural education?

[*Queering af sprog- og kulturundervisningen?*
Inspiration fra studier af køn og seksualitet]

Abstract

The ‘intercultural speaker’ in language and intercultural education has been given her agency back. The influence of e.g. critical social theory, postcolonial theory, and critical race studies has contributed to this major change. Yet queer theories have rarely been called to the rescue in the field. This often leads to gender, sex and sexualities being ignored. My article examines the ‘monosexualising tendencies’ of language and intercultural education and the somewhat uncomfortable and ‘vertiginous’ sentiments that language educators and researchers feel about introducing the idea of queerness. The article thus problematises the potential use of queer theories from a critical perspective, i.e. beyond *just* sexuality and gender. The intersectionality of fluid identities in language and intercultural education is thus explored.

Cultural Studies and critical discourse analysis in Class 8

[Cultural Studies og kritisk diskursanalyse i 8. klasse]

Abstract

The article presents an exploration of a Cultural Studies and Critical Cultural Pedagogy approach to intercultural competence in lower secondary English classes in Denmark. The presentation is based on the second intervention in a participatory action research project in connection with my doctoral thesis in the school year 2013-2014. The approach is based on Cultural Studies and knowledge of social categories and representation, and how these can be taught and discussed in class through an intersectional lens. An intersectional lens allows for the conceptualisation of categories to be multiplicative and dynamic, and power is foregrounded. Critical discourse analysis is used as a tool in class to analyse a dispute on Facebook between Miley Cyrus and Sinead O'Connor. Students work with active construction, making connections, engaging in social interaction and reflection and taking responsibility.

Critical cultural awareness in the subject French: An account of a French-Arab development project at upper secondary school

[Critical cultural awareness i franskfaget. En beretning om et fransk/arabisk udviklingsprojekt i gymnasiet]

Abstract

This article discusses the concept of ‘critical pedagogy’ with reference to an interdisciplinary course offered in Danish upper secondary school. The course combined French (L3) and social studies and included a study trip to Tunisia. The article sets out to examine the way the idea of critical pedagogy has been addressed in foreign language pedagogy and then moves on to a presentation of the interdisciplinary course, which dealt with democracy movements in two French-speaking Arab countries. The article illustrates how the use of social media as well as the study trip made it visible to the students that French language offers an entrance to the Arab world. At the same time, they became aware of the multiple meanings of certain concepts (e.g. the term “*liberté*”) within the Francophone world. The article concludes that situations questioning the link between the French language and the different cultural settings where it is used, seem very appropriate to promote both critical cultural awareness among students and a more general reflection on the multicultural orientation of French studies.

La « conscience culturelle critique » dans les cours de français au lycée général : Un projet de développement sur le français dans le monde arabe

Cet article présente la notion de « pédagogie critique » à la lumière d'un enseignement interdisciplinaire dispensé au cours de français (L3) au lycée danois. Le cours combinait le français (L3) et les sciences sociales et comprenait un voyage d'études en Tunisie.

Examinant d'abord la façon dont l'idée d'une pédagogie critique s'est exprimée dans la didactique des langues étrangères, l'article présente ensuite le cours interdisciplinaire sur les mouvements démocratiques dans deux pays arabes francophones. L'article met en évidence comment, à travers l'utilisation des médias sociaux et le voyage d'études, les élèves ont acquis l'expérience que la langue française pouvait leur ouvrir la porte vers le monde arabe. En même temps, ils ont pris conscience de la polysémie de certaines notions (p.ex. le terme « liberté ») à l'intérieur de l'espace francophone. L'article conclut que les situations qui interrogent le lien entre la langue française et les différents ensembles culturels où elle est utilisée semblent très appropriées pour stimuler non seulement une réflexion critique chez les élèves, mais aussi une réflexion plus générale sur la dimension pluriculturelle de l'enseignement du français.

“Here you see a very arrig hankat”: On dyslectic students’ use of images and code-switching in the teaching of English

[“Here you see a very arrig hankat”. Om dyslektiske efterskoleelevers brug af billeder og kodeskift i engelskundervisningen]

Abstract

This article studies aspects that have to be taken into consideration when planning foreign and second language teaching for young dyslectic learners. It gives some examples of how these aspects can be incorporated in teaching materials for that group of learners.

The article describes a small-scale research project that the writer has carried out with 14 learners at an ‘Efterskole’ (continuation school) in Denmark (about 16 years of age). The learners were all dyslectics. The primary objective of the study was to investigate what influence the repetition of a narrative task had on the fluency and complexity of the learners’ interlanguage. The learners worked in pairs on a tale: Each pair was told to prepare to tell the tale and to find pictures or photos from the Internet that could illustrate the tale. This helped them overcome their problems with remembering the story due to their limited capacity of short-term memory, a consequence of dyslexia.

The capacity of the young dyslectic learners’ short-term memory is one of the aspects that has to be considered in language teaching. There is, however, very little teaching material specially designed for young dyslectic learners.

Intercultural borderlands: identity work in the programme Swedish for immigrants

[I det interkulturella gränslandet – identitetsskapande inom undervisningen i Svenska för invandrare (SFI)]

Abstract

Since the 1970s, UNESCO has promoted Intercultural competence as an educational goal. The article studies intercultural learning in the programme Swedish for immigrants (SFI), with a specific focus on identity work. The SFI programme targets adult newcomers to Sweden and focuses on the teaching Swedish. Moreover, the stated aim is for the students to develop their intercultural competence by reflecting on cultural experiences and comparing them with phenomena in Swedish society. Drawing upon empirical data from an ethnographic study at a learning centre for SFI, the study illuminates identity work in the classrooms. Taking post-structural theory as its point of departure it emphasises that language learning is not only about learning skills but about learning a social practice that develops the participants' identities in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. Findings show how culture is perceived as an object to learn about rather than a dynamic process in which the participants take part and create meaning. Learning about Swedish culture in this way, the students are positioned as outsiders looking into the centre and, in the position of the Other, they are excluded instead of being included.

A different culture pedagogy: The Cultural Ambassadors of the Border Association in the Danish-German border region

[En anderledes kulturpædagogik. Grænseforeningens
Kultur mødeambassadører]

Abstract

This article takes its point of departure in a national dialogue corps in Denmark, the Cultural Ambassadors, which since 2009 has offered dialogue meetings about identity, nationality and citizenship, especially in schools and centres of education. The purpose of this article is to explain how the Cultural Ambassadors, by using practices of involvement, personal narratives and dialogue, stand for a different type of pedagogy than the more traditional one. The corps consists of young multiculturals – a total of 15 backgrounds are represented (for instance Somali, Chilean and Tamil), including young people from the national minorities in the Danish-German border region (the Danish minority in Southern Schleswig/Germany and the German minority in Southern Jutland/Denmark). The article describes how the Cultural Ambassadors challenge the dominating discourse about national identity by illustrating and creating dialogue about hyphenated identities, which is especially prevalent in the border region, which has moved from conflict to peaceful coexistence. The article reports on our method and the Cultural Ambassadors' own benefit. Finally, it concludes that the Cultural Ambassadors stand for a different and particularly interesting pedagogy, because the dialogue meetings are based on living personal narratives by non-professional young people, and on an involving dialogue where no one has a monopoly on the truth.

Eine alternative Pädagogik – die Botschafter der Kulturen des dänischen Grenzvereins

Dieser Artikel beschreibt das in ganz Dänemark anwesende Korps der Botschafter der Kulturen, das seit 2009 Dialogveranstaltungen über Identität, Nationalität und Mitbürgerschaft an Ausbildungsinstitutionen anbietet. Das Ziel des Artikels ist es darzulegen, wie die Botschafter der Kulturen anhand von Übungen, persönlichen Erzählungen und Dialog eine Alternative zur traditionellen Pädagogik darstellen. Das Korps besteht aus jungen Leuten mit mehrkulturellen Hintergründen – insgesamt 15 verschiedenen (z.B. somalischen, chilenischen und tamilischen), darunter auch junge Angehörige der nationalen Minderheiten im deutsch-dänischen Grenzgebiet (der dänischen Minderheit in Südschleswig/Deutschland und der deutschen Minderheit in Nordschleswig/Dänemark). Der Artikel beschreibt, wie die Botschafter der Kulturen den herrschenden Diskurs über nationale Identität herausfordern, indem sie Bindestrichs-Identitäten illustrieren und diskutieren, die besonders im deutsch-dänischen Grenzgebiet weit verbreitet sind, wo man sich vom Konflikt zum friedlichen Miteinander bewegt hat. Im Artikel wird unsere Methode erklärt und berichtet welchen Eigennutzen die Botschafter haben. Abschließend wird das Argument vorgetragen, dass die Botschafter der Kulturen eine alternative und besonders interessante Pädagogik repräsentieren, da die Dialogveranstaltungen auf lebenden persönlichen Erzählungen der nicht-professionellen jungen Leute und auf miteinbeziehendem Dialog aufbauen, in dem die Wahrheit kein Patent kennt.

The same or completely different? Teacher and student perspectives on the subject English in lower and upper secondary school

[Det samme eller helt forskelligt? Lærer- og elevperspektiver på grundskole- og gymnasieengelsk]

Abstract

This article is based on preliminary conclusions from a Danish Ministry of Education research project on the transition from lower to upper secondary school (different institutions) in the subjects Danish, Maths and English in the school year 2013-2014. The aim of the project was to create insights into and understanding of what knowledge and experiences students bring with them from lower to upper secondary school and how teachers can build on that knowledge and those experiences in upper secondary school. The conclusions are ambiguous; although curricula at the two levels open up for progression in the transition from one level to the other, students experience this progression very differently. One explanation is the span and variation in the teaching of English in lower secondary school – and to a certain extent in upper secondary school as well. The study shows that the teachers' knowledge of content and form in the subject English in the two school systems is limited, and thus teachers expect the students to bring qualifications to the classroom that they might not have attained.

An English course for fishermen

[Engelskkursus for fiskere]

Abstract

This article deals with the challenges of teaching English as a foreign language to a group of powerful people – with little linguistic background. The target group was the board of the Danish Association of Fishermen, 12 men from the 12 sections of the Association. They wanted to learn more English in order to negotiate quotas etc. in Brussels, London and other places where English is the lingua franca. Their knowledge of English varied considerably – 3 or 4 were quite good, but wanted more negotiating skills at a high level. The rest were at a very basic level, as regards both grammar and vocabulary. It was a challenge to find suitable material that had to comprise both academic reports and quite simple texts. Despite the obvious motivation, the differences were too great to teach all twelve as one group. The fact that learning a language demanded both effort and time came as a surprise, and homework was an unknown quantity, so despite much good humour the linguistically weaker participants were too shy to speak in the big group. Even so, the better half became aware of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and the role language plays in how the media portray them. Which had an impact not only on their English but also on their Danish skills.