

Forbidden or frowned upon? : Multilingual interactional practices in French reception classrooms.

While multilingualism in education is acknowledged in some European countries, like the United-Kingdom (e.g. Creese and Martin, 2003), multilingualism in the French educational system seems to conflict with France's longstanding monolingual ideology (Hélot and Young, 2006). This study focuses on a highly multilingual educational setting in France, that of reception classrooms. Reception classrooms are designed for newly-arrived children who ought to learn French as an additional language in order to be able to attend mainstream education (M.E.N., 2007). Considering France's monolingual ideology, the present paper aims to investigate whether multilingual classroom interactions are forbidden at the level of the educational policy or frowned upon at the level of teachers' representations. Two questions will thus be addressed: (1) what status do official texts give to the languages of newly-arrived children? (2) What does the discourse of reception class teachers reveal about their representations of multilingual interactional practices? For the purpose at hand, I will conduct (1) a textual analysis of the French educational policy for newly-arrived non-French speaking children, and (2) a discourse analysis of a focus group with reception class teachers, audio-recorded in winter 2008. Findings will be considered in the perspective of a wider and ongoing research project I am conducting on France's withdrawal policy as a type of educational provision for immigrant children.

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