Looking through the teachers’ “other languages” use/preference: a study of the monolingual mindset in MLE classrooms in Andhra Pradesh, India

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Given the interdependence of literacies across languages (Cummins, 1981), multilingual classroom spaces are potential sites for synergistic combinations of multilingual/multimodal forms of information processing and learning. However, pedagogies for bi/multilinguals assume “linguistic separation” as the default condition and demand that learners develop separate literacies in the languages of the school and transit early to the coveted language (English). Therefore practices that operationalize the “linguistic separation” are advocated which, instead of building the learner’s multilingual repertoire, assume a pseudo-linguistic neutrality. Accordingly, learners are expected to process and perform “monolingually” in the school. Consequently the classroom space, we contend, presents two conflicting realities: (1) curricular policies and practices treat each language as fixed entities with impermeable boundaries. (2) contradicting this ideology, learner populations bring diverse languageing practices.

Given that teachers are the agents of implementation, they can either conform to the mandated practices or choose inclusive alternatives that will build on learners’ plurilingual capabilities. In any case, teachers need to negotiate their belief about the efficacy of the “other languages” in their classroom space. However, there is little research on how teachers perceive “other languages” in the MLE classroom space. In 2015, 276 MLE teachers (language and content) from five districts of Andhra Pradesh (India) responded to a survey about their “other languages” use/non-use in the classroom. Consecutively, 40 teachers were interviewed to understand the reasoning behind their “other languages” use/non-use. The findings of the study and their implications for educational program design, teacher education (language and content) and inservice programs are discussed.