Book review

Multilingual Higher Education. Beyond English Medium Orientations.

by Christa van der Walt

As universities teach more of their courses in English, concern about the place of other languages is growing. Christa van der Walt's *Multilingual Higher Education: Beyond English Medium Orientations* offers a constructive angle: rather than treating other languages as a problem to be managed, it shows how they can support learning.

Van der Walt teaches at Stellenbosch University in South Africa, and the book, published by Multilingual Matters in 2013, draws on that multilingual setting. It is not a handbook for EMI as such. It is a scholarly study of language in higher education, built on the idea that all universities are multilingual to some extent, whatever their official language policy.

The book has five chapters: it starts with what makes higher education special, moves through linguistic diversity and multiliteracies, and then turns to classroom practice, before concluding that universities need to move from a monolingual mindset to a multilingual one.

Although it is more than a decade old, the book has become more relevant as EMI has grown, because it asks questions that many EMI lecturers now face: what do we do with the other languages our students bring into the room, and how can they be tapped as a resource?

Chapter 4 is where the book becomes most useful for lecturers. Its starting point is that decisions about language cannot be left to institutional policy alone. Van der Walt points out that "micro-policy decisions" rest with lecturers (2013, p.129). In other words, it is the person in front of the class who has to decide what happens when a student switches language, asks a question in another tongue, or cannot find the English word.

The chapter offers scenarios in which lecturers can create space for other languages without abandoning English as the medium of instruction. One proposal is to let students discuss and summarise material in different languages as preparation for a monolingual presentation, assignment or test. Another is to build biliteracy by using more than one language in, for example, tutorials and assignments. These ideas are linked to strategies found in the literature. In translanguaging, students move flexibly between their languages to make sense of the content. In preview-view-review, they get an overview of a topic in one language, work through the main material in another, and then return to the first language to consolidate what they have learned.

There is a catch, however. How far such practices are possible depends heavily on the lecturers' own language abilities. A lecturer who shares a language with the students can join the discussion and assess the work. One who does not may find it harder to follow what is happening, let alone to evaluate it.

Multilingual Higher Education is an interesting read for anyone concerned with language policy in universities. It makes a persuasive case that other languages belong in the English-medium classroom, and that lecturers, not only institutions, make the decisions that count. What it is not is a toolkit for teaching: the examples in chapter 4 are starting points, not ready-made lesson plans. EMI lecturers who want practical ideas are best served by reading selectively: chapter 4 for classroom examples, and chapters 1 and 5 for the wider argument. More broadly, the book is recommended for those who want to understand why multilingualism matters in higher education.

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