On the move - Learning with youth refugees in secondary school classrooms

Professor Saskia Van Viegen

Bio statement:

Dr. Van Viegen is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics at York University. She earned a PhD in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning from OISE/ University of Toronto, and has seventeen years of experience as an English language instructor and program administrator. Her main research interest is language in education, particularly bilingualism, multilingualism and development of academic literacies. Her current projects explore language assessment in K-12 education, resources for learning in multilingual university settings, and language and literacy of youth refugees in secondary education. Publications from her recent work appear in several edited books and journals, including Canadian Modern Language Review, Language Assessment Quarterly, TESL Canada Journal, European Journal of Teacher Education, and TESOL Quarterly, and she is co-editing a book on plurilingual pedagogies for the Springer Educational Linguistics series.

The lecture is also streamed via Zoom (https://zoom.us/j/888271023)
Meeting ID: 888 271 023
Summary of the Talk

This talk engages with findings from case study (Duff, 2012; Denos et al., 2009) research conducted with youth from refugee backgrounds and their teachers at a secondary school in Ontario, Canada, as part of a larger multi-site project examining these students’ language and literacy experiences. Youth refugees, defined here as adolescents 12-21 years old, who have been displaced from their country of origin, face significant challenges relating to resettlement and social and educational integration, particularly since these students often have limited and/or interrupted formal schooling. Recognizing these complex learning needs, the present study examines how teachers build on students’ resources and competences in the context of English medium instruction. Drawing on theoretical perspectives that position multilingualism as the norm (ie. Canagarajah, 2011; Cummins, 2017; Garcia & Wei, 2014), the study highlights students’ translanguaging practices. Using a collaborative approach, participating teachers and youth worked as co-researchers, generating data from a variety of qualitative, multimodal methods, including: surveys; formal and informal interviews; field work and pedagogical documentation of student learning. Analysis of these data demonstrate the positive contributions that students’ home languages and translanguaging practices can bring to education for youth refugees: scaffolding new learning; promoting metalinguistic awareness; developing biliteracy; and valorizing students’ cultural and linguistic identities (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015; Creese & Blackledge, 2015; Garcia, 2011; Little, Leung & Van Avermaet, 2013). Importantly, these data underscore how youth enact strategies for self-determination and self-representation, asserting human dignity above the economic, social, and political inequities of displacement that affect their life circumstances.

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