Multilingualism is often seen as a desired priority in higher education, but in practice, it typically remains either a profiling exercise referring to (a) the sum of national languages students/staff in an education context are reported to have as an L1 or (b) becomes condensed to use of a global language (more often than not English) as a lingua franca for teaching and learning. In both positions, multilingualism is understood in relation to a particular framing of language, while the linguistic capital of the multilingual speaker is left in the periphery. Starting with the former (a), ‘language’ in education is commonly associated with one particular variety, that of a national language/s of a country. The problems associated with this position are well documented; fundamentally labelling a language as ‘standard’ is a political choice coinciding with the power of dominant groups in a socioeconomic context, while the linguistic repertoire of the speakers includes a number of other varieties often seen dialects and which are excluded as inferior to the standard. Similarly turning to the second issue (b), using one language (typically a global or so-called major language) flattens down cultural differences and language diversity, rather than allowing students to use the full extent of their linguistic repertoires. This narrow framing of multilingualism has a double effect on the learner: it distances the learning process from their own linguistic capital and, by extension, makes it less relevant to them and it does not enable to apply, grow and enrich from the wealth of skills and competences that come from using all the semiotic resources of meaning. In this paper, I reflect and discuss the educational model we pilot under EUTOPIA, one European University Alliance for creating multilingual spaces focusing on empowering the user in making all their resources relevant to their learning journey. I present the model and examples of the work of one learning community on ‘Multilingualism and Diversity’ and argue on the potential of transnational collaboration for multilingual pedagogy. I close the paper with implications for education and language research.

Bio

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