

Bill Green and Per-Olof Erixon: Rethinking L1 Education in a Global Era: Understanding the (Post) National L1 Subjects in New and Difficult Times

(Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2020, 285p)

Despite the histories and longevity of different languages worldwide, each language enjoys the status of L1 within the educational system, the societal preference, the language policy of the nation, the human landscape and social stratification, and more. Even nations with more than one official language (L1) will prefer one language over the other, especially in education and specifically within the school system. This preference allows many pupils to benefit from learning the language(s) they use most in their life across social spaces such as their home, their school, their leisure space. Scholars state that L1 education has great advantages for learners because “L1 can be used as a tool for thought.” (Manara, 2007: 146), and it is how learners translate what they hear and read into other languages (Vygotsky, 1986).

Green and Erixon’s book focuses on aspects of the L1 national standard in language education policy. It gathers the work of 14 scholars and researchers from 10 countries addressing Danish, English, German, Norwegian, Portuguese in Brazil, and Swedish as the L1 taught in schools. The book seeks to showcase the educational backgrounds and practices concerning L1 from a comparative-historical and transnational perspective. The book is organized thematically into four interwoven threads: educationalization, globalization, pluriculturalism, and technologization. The chapters address the unique aspects of L1 as a school subject, such as language and literacy, literature, media, and digital technology, the relations between curriculum and didactic practices, reading and writing, the importance of history, identity and nation, the centrality of Bildung; and even topics pertaining to geography and environment in relation to culture and climate change.

The introduction, entitled ‘Rethinking L1 Education in a Global Era: The Subject in Focus’ by the editors of the volume Bill Green and Per-Olof Erixon, lays out the thematic structure of the book and explains the four fundamental notions in L1 education (globalization, pluriculturalism, technocultural change, and educationalization) used as a ground base for the book. The first thematic notion, globalization, is defined as the process by which nations and regional economies, societies, and cultures integrate through globalized trade, communication, and ideologically driven political hegemonies and powers. The second thematic notion discussed in the volume is pluriculturalism which has posed significant challenges for locals, migrants, and diasporic populations within and across the countries. The third thematic notion concerns the technocultural changes or, as the authors call it, “technologization,” which relates to the changing technologies, their associated

cultures, and the cultural politics around them, establishing inner and outer circles of participation and entitlement within society. The last thematic notion is that of “educationalization” concerning the accessibility of education to the masses as a historical means of resolving perceived social, moral, economic, and political problems. The authors make a strong statement regarding L1 language policy and conclude the chapter by stating: “Nations and national languages might well be inventions of modernity and caught up in a fading dream of social homogeneity. But when migrations, population displacements, and other influences from outside challenge the dream of a homogeneous society, with its supposed ‘one language/one culture,’ the feeling of a failed state might easily arise.” (p.12)

Part one consists of four chapters that deal with the historical, theoretical, and cultural themes. The first chapter by Bill Green and Ellen Krogh, entitled ‘*Curriculum Inquiry, Didaktik Studies and L1 Education: Framing and Informing the L1 Subjects*,’ discusses the interchangeable potentials between Anglo-Saxon curriculum inquiry and European Didaktik studies, underlying different educational practices. It presents an overview of the debate between curriculum inquiry and the Didaktik studies followed by a discussion of the challenges and implications that this debate presents for (re)thinking about L1 education and the L1 subjects. Among the challenges and implications in such debate is the concept of what is pedagogy, didactics, and disciplinary didactics as pivotal issues in these two educational perspectives, as well as the concept of knowledge and content that must be imparted in L1 schooling environments.

The second chapter in this part, entitled ‘From Grammar to Socio-Interactionism: L1 Schooling in Brazil’ by Luciene Simões and Rildo Cosson, focuses on L1 education in Brazil. The authors evaluated the development and historical account of teaching L1 in Brazil. The authors depict three paradigms (literary-grammatical, communicative, and utilitarian paradigm) historically characterizing Western countries, and analyze them in the Brazilian context. Their analysis demonstrates how these concepts evolved from a Latin-Jesuitic heritage to a contemporary multiliteracies education highlighting the historical process that led to the construction of Portuguese Language and Literature as a school subject. They conclude that this historical process has rendered a simultaneous and unbalanced presence of the three paradigms in contemporary representations of Portuguese teaching in Brazil, resulting in contradictions and challenges in the educational policies, official curricula, and teaching material with which teachers have to cope.

The third chapter, ‘English Teaching as L1 Education and the Ambivalent Project of National Schooling: Subject English in Comparative-Historical Perspective’, by Jory Brass and Bill Green, is a comparative-historical transnational study of the emergence of English teaching in Australia and the United States - two countries of

different standings within the ‘English Empire.’ In these chapters, the authors trace different historical trajectories of nation-building in which the English language and literature was pivotal and attributed it to the differences in hidden histories of race, religion, and nationalism in place of English in (post-) imperial times as a propelling force in the shaping of L1 education.

The final chapter of the first part is Sigmund Ongstad’s work entitled ‘Curricular L1 Disciplinarity: Between Norwegianness and Internationality’. This study examines how disciplinarity shifts over time in the Norwegian L1 curricula. It compares the descriptions of aims and content in seven curricula chronologically from elements within the L1 subject and disciplinarity as affected by internal and external L1 forces of discipline versus politics. They argue that while disciplinary forces were strong in the first 50’s political forces have had more impact since - a change accounted for by the impact of international policies, as politics has taken control of curricula as an educational genre, while L1 disciplinarity has had to adjust to a strongly homogenized design. They conclude that these forces that led to the changes have resulted in the curricular L1 disciplinarity moving from ‘Norwegianness’ towards internationality.

The second part of the book deals with teaching the L1 subjects. Irene Pieper’s chapter ‘L1 Education and the Place of Literature’ deals with literature education in the curriculum. The author presented challenges of today’s literature education, taking her German-speaking context studies to discuss the tension between the determination of teachers to support reading experiences related to the paradigm of ‘personal growth,’ and aims closer to disciplinary knowledge. She concludes the chapter with some reflections on current challenges in the literature classroom.

Chapter two of this section deals with, ‘The Marginalization of Literature in Swedish L1: A Victim of Socio-Political Forces and Paradigmatic Changes’, by Per-Olof Erixon and Maria Löfgren. The chapter presents the investigation of an intervention program to promote fiction reading in primary and secondary schools in Swedish (L1). Motivated by the decline in PISA results of reading ability in general and the notable downplaying of literature, with fiction marginalized in the reading program in favor of non-fiction, and the prioritizing of other school subjects, such as natural sciences, reading promotion programs sprouted. The authors provide an account and answers to issues concerning the impact of these priorities on the developments of L1 education in Sweden and emphasize the role of literature and how the Swedish National Agency perceives literature in education.

The third chapter in this section, authored by Ellen Krogh and entitled ‘*Bildung and Literacy in Subject Danish: Changing L1 Education*,’ reports on a case study of L1 Danish language as a subject in the light of Bildung and literacy. This study argues for the relevance of the dyadic construction of the subject as an interpretative

and meaning-making Bildung project connected to notions of perspective and voice. The author ties the case study results to the broader discussion on the role of literacy next to language and literature in Nordic and broader international L1 curricula - suggesting that the conceptualization of Bildung for the subject of Danish language for the advancement of specific L1 disciplinary-didactic aims of students' literacy development.

The fourth chapter in this section by Stanislav Štěpáník, entitled 'Between Grammar and Communication: Teaching L1 in the Czech Republic and England' explores the main aims of teaching L1, specifically grammar or knowledge about language, in the era of globalisation, swift technological development and altering communication patterns. The author compares the paths of grammar-based teaching of Czech (in some European countries) vis-à-vis the skilled-based teaching of English (in Anglosaxon countries). This comparison is made from a historical perspective showing that grammar-based systems are looking for functionality and communicatively-oriented solutions, and the skills-based systems have implemented more grammar teaching - a trend that is typical worldwide.

The third part of the book is devoted to trends of L1 teaching now and into the future. Chapter one in this section, entitled '*The Ongoing Techno Cultural Production of L1: Current Practices and Future Prospects*,' is authored by Nikolaj Elf, Scott Bulfin, and Dimitrios Koutsogiannis. While recognizing the central role of technology in shaping the development of an L1 subject, the authors argue that the dominant technologies of literacy often take over the technocultural nature of L1 in each historical period. The authors point out that technology is inseparable from L1 as a subject that globalization tends to frame its content, context, and justification of L1 teaching. They show, drawing from local teaching practices in Australia, Denmark, and Greece, how globally circulating discourses are not clear-cut scientific inventions but flexible resources that are recontextualized locally in different ways. They conclude with a series of questions about the ontologies and epistemologies of a technocultural rationale in L1 education.

The final chapter in this section deals with the work of Sasha Matthewman on 'Nation and Nature in L1 Education: Changing the Mission of Subject English'. Using the ecocritical research on English teaching in schools, the author offers a critical view of re-evaluations of the curriculum histories of English from opposite sides of the world: in the UK (specifically England) and Aotearoa New Zealand, on the one hand as fostering the "carbon curriculum" that results in individual achievement, competition in a growing global economy, and preparation for a digital future with an unrealistic expectation of sameness. On the other hand, the authors show that ecocriticism is resourceful for understanding English as an environmental subject that shapes collective critical responses to local and global crises, concluding

with the hidden potential in the teaching of English to understand environmental changes as a process that engages people to take responsibility, agency, and power.

The book ends with a single concluding chapter in part four, authored by the editors of the volume Bill Green and Per-Olof Erixon, relating to “*Understanding the (Post-) National L1 Subjects: Three Problematics.*” The authors address three key issues that are threaded in the volume and seem to be problematic: the idea of ‘nation’ (including nationhood and nation-building); the concept of ‘literacy’ together with the ‘language and literature’ dyad; and the problem of ‘paradigm,’ as a conceptual and methodological principle organising research in the field of L1 teaching. Notwithstanding, these issues in the context of L1 teaching in the limelight cast a doubt or require re(conceptualization) in an era of globalization, digitalisation, international curriculum and assessment reform, population mobility, English-imperialism, and multilingualism. In their conclusion, the authors raise the need to revise and reconceptualize L1 education and L1 subjects in light of the new realities and needs.

‘*Rethinking L1 Education in a Global Era: Understanding the (Post) National L1 Subjects in New and Difficult Times*’ is a clear reflection of the mainstream monolingual educational practices that prevail in most countries around the world even in an era where multilingual individuals, countries, and communities characterize the world population. This deeply rooted monolingual educational pattern seems to be justified by the need for the preservation of uniqueness and identity as grounded in culture and geographical spaces. However, it hampers global communicative trends, economy, progress, and human development globally. Historical development and how L1 subjects were rooted in the cultures of some countries, as presented throughout the book, have not dealt with the aspect of efficiency, teacher training, and centralization issues in language education policy. It seems that adherence to monolingualism is simpler to manage, measure, train for, and finance in educational systems that are public and geared to the masses. A point to be made is that the book does not seek information or contributions from a wide variety of countries spread in more parts of the different continents (such as Africa, Latin America, Asia). Since the book covers extensive knowledge of L1 education from a historical, educational, and political perspective, it is a good basal book for students of different levels, teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers to read as a springboard to critical questions that need answering in today’s linguistic reality across and within countries as well as cyberspace.

References

- Manara, C.** (2007). The use of L1 support: Teachers' and students' opinions and practices in an Indonesian context. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 4(1), 145–178.
- Vygotsky, L.** (1986). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

MERGA FEYERA WEKJIRA
University of Pannonia, Multilingualism Doctoral School
margaa30fayyoo@gmail.com