Events

Series of Talks on Multilingual Education by Dr Mahendra K. Mishra at EFL University, Hyderabad

The School of English Language Education, EFL University, Hyderabad conducted a series of talks on Multilingualism, one of the most relevant issues in present teaching-learning scenario in India. Conducted on 13 and 14 October, the talks revolved around themes like Multilingual Education, and relationship of culture and society with classroom and curriculum. It also included a story telling session. The whole event concentrated upon looking at learners’ mother tongue, culture and background as useful resources and the talks discussed the possible ways of using those resources fruitfully in the second language classroom. The main objective of the talks was to bring in field experience to the classroom. Dr Mahendra K. Mishra, an eminent educationist with empirical research experiences in Multilingual Education, was the chief resource person for all the sessions. About seventy participants including faculty, students and researchers participated in it.

There were two sessions on the first day of the series. The pre-lunch session, chaired and introduced by Prof. Paul Gunasekhar, Dean, School of English Language Education witnessed an illuminating and informative presentation by Dr Mishra. The theme of the presentation was “Multilingual Education: An Experiment”, which showcased empirical evidences on the present teaching-learning difficulties in multilingual contexts. Dr Mishra shared his explorations and experiences on cultural and linguistic diversities in Odisha. Apart from showcasing the teaching-learning problems of marginalized contexts, the talk discussed the possible solutions and initiatives taken by government of Odisha. In fact, the initiatives in Multilingual Education in
Odisha were co-ordinated by Dr Mishra and he was prompt enough to share his experiences in implementing models of Multilingual Education. Of course the talk primarily revolved around the discussion of a need for Multilingual Education in Odisha, but it was nonetheless related to national and global contexts.

The praise-worthy part of the series was that it talked of solutions. How best can the social life, culture and home language of learners be used was well presented in the second talk “Social Construction of Curriculum,” by Dr Mishra. The discussion cited some pre-conceived notions like state-wide prescribed uniform textbook are final, school is only place where we get knowledge, and learners’ home language and culture interfere in second language learning. It was discussed how culture and background of the learners can be used as resources in language teaching. It discussed contextual teaching and introduced weekly lesson plans basing contextual issues related to marginalized learners. The discussion focused on the need of social intervention in teaching and learning of marginalized learners. Talking about the multilingual classroom, Dr Mishra pointed out problematic situations where the learners do not know the book language and the teachers do not know the language of the learners. Finally, it was stated that it is not justified to take curricular decisions at power centers or at state level, rather it should involve the community members of societies and the practitioner like teachers and learners.

Both the talks on the first day advocated for the use of learners’ mother tongue, background and forms of culture in second language learning. Discussants for these talks were by Prof. Chanchala Naik and Dr Anand Mahanand who related the theme with second language research beautifully.

Next day, on 14 October, it was nicely demonstrated how fruitful it is to use the learners’ culture and language in classroom. This day witnessed a workshop with an objective to experience how the cultural contexts of the learners can be used to make the learning interesting. As part of the workshop, a story telling session was organized. The participants were divided into five groups. Each group was told a story by a story teller. Each group listened to the story, discussed it and wrote the story on their own. Each group also had to draw picture based in their stories. These stories and pictures then were presented to Dr Mishra who conducted the session. Later he discussed the new features added in the student version of the stories and pictures. It was discussed how new elements are infused when there is a re-writing of a story. It was the
argument of Dr Mishra that marginalised learners do not take part in the second language classroom because of anxiety growing out of cultural and linguistic alienation in the classroom. However, they can be attracted and involved in the classroom activities through contextualizing learning e.g. through story telling activities. The workshop demonstrated how the learners’ participation and creativity can be encouraged by bringing their culture and contexts into the classroom.

Finally, the speaker encouraged the audience for research on this area and oriented the scholars with the approaches of conducting this kind of research studies. He also emphasized on the need for teacher education and change of teachers’ attitude towards learners’ culture and language for a better situation where we can expect to mainstream the marginalized. As a whole, the series of talks reflected Dr Mishra’s empirical exposure and experiences which were made available to the research fraternity of EFL-University, Hyderabad. The talks were well appreciated by the participants and would hopefully open up new vistas for future research and deliberations.

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