

Nelson Mandela University – Learning and Teaching Week

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Abstract

Puo ya gae e Tlotla Motho: Multilingual Engaged pedagogies and Decolonial Possibilities at Sol Plaatje University

Abstract

Language is deeply connected to identity, confidence, belonging and the ability to participate meaningfully in educational spaces. Yet within South African higher education, English continues to dominate teaching and learning despite the country officially recognising twelve languages. This linguistic hierarchy often marginalises African languages and creates barriers to student engagement, participation and academic success among linguistically diverse students. Drawing on the context of sociology modules at a post-apartheid university, this paper explores how multilingual pedagogies can contribute to more inclusive and participatory learning environments. Using decolonial theory, African-centred approaches and bell hooks' (1994) concept of engaged pedagogy, the paper argues that multilingual teaching is not merely a communication issue but a matter of reimagining power, epistemic access and social justice. Hooks compellingly emphasises the importance of classrooms where students are recognised as active participants and knowledge producers rather than passive recipients of information. Within this framework, multilingual pedagogies can strengthen student agency by validating students' linguistic identities and encouraging fuller participation in academic spaces. I reflect on the opportunities and constraints of implementing multilingual teaching within a new university context and argue that student success cannot be separated from questions of language, belonging and participation. Finally, the paper demonstrates that multilingual teaching offers important possibilities for advancing decolonial educational futures grounded in inclusion, student agency and epistemic justice in South African higher education.

