

Recommendations on school development. Implications for the further development

Final report on Intellectual Output 5 in the Erasmus+-project Plur>E 'Towards a plurilingual whole school policy in European schools'

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1. Introduction:

Multilingualism is fundamental in the education for peace. Pupils become aware of their complex linguistic and cultural biography and perceive themselves as part of a larger transcultural community and take responsibility through the encounter with different languages and cultures. It provides a wider understanding of other cultures and encourages a better understanding of others and oneself. From a linguistic perspective, multilingualism enables better cognitive access in order to further language acquisition by comparing and connecting structures and vocabulary across languages, facing new realities and developing new styles of thinking. It aims at autonomous lifelong-learning and applying knowledge to new situations.

Schools should be places where students recognise all the opportunities that languages provide on a personal and a professional level. New initiatives need to be adopted in order to deconstruct the idea of language as merely a subject to get into university or to simply obtain a good grade. An environment has to be created that respects and values students' languages and backgrounds, that questions traditional hierarchies of languages (good-bad/useful-not useful) and that promotes the learning of languages present in a given school. It is necessary to take the language focus away from classroom-based activities to get students more interested in the language as a means of communication and a further learning tool. Herewith striving to improve students' motivation to learn a language for intrinsic reasons rather than extrinsic reasons. Therefore, the more languages that are used in and out of the language classroom, the greater the respect the students will have for them as they become more immersed in them.

Of course, schools have to provide resources in staff, time and finances, a supportive management that encourages cross-curricular work where possible, motivated teachers with language skills and sufficient modern IT facilities. The following initiatives have proven highly effective in promoting multilingualism.

2. Multilingual structures in school:

CLIL-teaching and cross-curricular teaching across all educational sections is a very effective way of language-learning as the focus is not primarily on the languages but on the skills that are being taught. The CLIL-section should be part of the school program as an autonomous section. The methodology and characteristics that distinguish it as well as goals should be officially set.

School curricula of the languages taught should be connected by a plurilingual curriculum policy. This should attempt to connect and associate the different languages including various multilingual teaching modules. The methodology of general comparative language didactics on linguistic categories such as vocabulary, grammar, the transfer of strategies and skills from one language to others (listening, reading, speaking, writing, learning skills) should be used.

However, schools should also revise the concept of CLIL-classes and provide CLIL-classes about topics that interest students instead of curricular topics: multilingual projects within short modular courses – so they are manageable for teachers and students. These should be fun for the students and allow real-life to be integrated into the classroom (Qi Gong sessions, pottery workshops, science and sports classes, working on students „topics“, such as soccer, video games, international music and films, Online games and apps, skype interaction and videos; etc.).

Furthermore, schools should promote optional foreign language lessons according to the students' own interests and arrange additional courses in order to overcome the deficiencies of the school's education.

The use of technology and online resources has to be increased. This is what students enjoy most. They should work on apps, movies, cartoons, food shows, music, sport shows, etc. Encouraging students to engage with languages online promotes self-directed and lifelong-learning. Therefore, schools should set up specific rooms and equipment for multimedia and online-activities for all classes.

Cooperation across group and class boundaries

Communication with peers is the key to foreign language learning. Students are enthusiastic about engaging with other students. They really want to talk to and see other students abroad. They are keen to make videos, share photos, comment about their school, everyday life, interests etc. and are eager to get personal responses. This can be realised by using online communication platforms, like Skype, Facebook, Twitter; etc.

Students should be given the opportunity to talk about their language and heritage for instance at a World Culture Day. They need the encouragement from their peers to give them the approval that there is interest in the school. Consequently, the students from other countries come up with ideas, become enthusiastic and get involved in the project and are proud of their own culture.

Surrounding the students with the languages taught in the school reinforces what they know and help them learn words or phrases in another language. It also raises the profile of languages in the school as they are visible all the time, even when not during a language lesson, such as multilingual school signage for classrooms, bathrooms, offices, communal areas, exit signs; popular proverbs in different languages selected by students are placed in communal areas in the school; fun facts in different languages are selected and displayed on the notice screens across the school every week; on a plurilingual forum on the school's website students write blogs and respond in whatever language they want to.

Here is a list of further multilingual activities across school boundaries that a school could promote:

- exchange projects with students from other countries
- online partnerships with schools abroad
- work placements abroad
- promotion of international language certificates
- participation in rhetorical, writing and interregional language competitions

- teacher exchange and training programs – this needs to be funded and time allocated to teachers to partake in courses, such as PluriPro¹ (CLIL and language courses for teachers on European level).

Teachers' cooperation and multilingual activities inside the classroom

There are many ways that multilingualism can be integrated into everyday teaching. There is no need to focus solely on big projects. Teachers should shift their perspectives and plan their lessons according to plurilingual and pluricultural principles. This can be done in all subjects, but it requires closer cooperation between teachers, not only language teachers, exchanging new multilingual strategies, competences and methods. Traditional teaching approaches have to be revised and adapted; multilingual knowledge, didactic interventions and tools should also be expanded. Clear communication structures are necessary. It is important, however, that teachers are willing to cooperate and that there is a positive climate of respect and esteem in the school.

- The best way to promote plurilingualism is to accept and include all the languages that the students in the class speak.
- The more code-switching that occurs, the more confident students and teachers become in using more than one language in class.
- Difficult questions can be discussed in other languages that the students know better, e.g. in German or English in the case of French/Spanish/Italian classes. Using a foreign language to explain another foreign language helps students make sense of grammar points that are not obvious in the mother language.
- Common topics across all languages should be identified, for instance a common grammar terminology for use in all language classes, text competence strategies etc.
- Multilingual courses should start with students' former experience and feedback on multilingual situations, such as work placements abroad. Using this, the course can be prepared for future students for both the target language in the country or region of their work placement and for multilingual situations and challenges. That is how to get the students involved in the teaching process.
- Working on questions in several foreign languages without giving the translations of the questions encourages students to decipher the meaning of the questions using their understanding of all foreign languages together. This problem-solving

¹ <http://www.bildung.suedtirol.it/uber-uns/eu-service-stelle/eu-projekte/pluripro/>

approach has proved to be very successful: the feedback of the students is very positive.

- Teachers can cooperate when planning the lessons. In the classroom each teacher can contribute with their specific knowledge of languages and other competencies.

Cooperation with parents

Parents are experts in many sectors and they can contribute to the promotion of trans-cultural discourse and multilingualism. It is important to get in touch with parents and talk to them. The value of plurilingual education must be shown to them. Therefore it is important to do motivational work and to emphasise the advantages of plurilingualism in the personal, educational and professional life. Parents have to be encouraged to promote their heritage languages (including also the school environment) and to expose their children to languages at home through films, TV, online games, music and forums. Parents could be encouraged to participate in plurilingual projects focusing on intercultural aspects, via workshops or presentations, language cafés etc.