

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECTION “MULTILINGUAL AND PLURILINGUAL EDUCATION AND LEARNING”

In mehrsprachigen Lernkontexten und Institutionen, in denen ein Grossteil der Lernenden (werdend) plurilingual ist, sind Überlegungen zur Einbindung und Verwertung von Sprachen wichtiger denn je. Mehrsprachigkeitsdidaktische Ansätze, die auf den Erwerb und die Erweiterung plurilingualer Kompetenzen abzielen, bergen viel Potential für eine Aufwertung und Verstetigung von Mehrsprachigkeit im (vor)schulischen Kontext. Die hier dargestellten Projekte enthalten eine Fülle an Sichtweisen auf Mehrsprachigkeit und plurilinguales Lernen, die einerseits das breite Spektrum gegenwärtiger Ansätze aufzeigt, gleichzeitig auf empirische wie didaktische Desiderate hinweist.

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In multilingual school settings, where a large proportion of the student population is *emergent*¹ plurilingual, a decided empirical and pedagogical focus on multiple language learning and language use is more important than ever. Plurilingualism pedagogy, which allows for an opening for coordinated language curricula, brokers great promise for languages education in the context of a changing school demographic. At the same time, it requires changes on the levels of policy, learning and teaching materials, and teacher training, as it does not subscribe to traditional concepts of language learning.

Traditionally, foreign language (FL) education and research has been conducted from one of two viewpoints, and these approaches are still recognizable in a wide variety of learning materials and teacher perceptions. The first approach, traceable to the pedagogy of Latin in early higher schools, assumes that a FL builds upon knowledge gained in the L1 (assumed concordant with the school language) using a contrastive approach with a combination of grammar lessons

and translations into the school language. Its continued strength in various aspects of FL school curricula – including the assumption that many errors are traceable to L1 sources – shows how robust this approach remains, despite decades of research questioning its validity. The second approach, conversely, tends to equate FL learning with L1 acquisition. Here, the FL is taught monolingually, without recurrence to other languages. Its effects are recognisable in language policies based on the time-on-task hypothesis, especially for language teaching for students whose home language is not the school language. Both approaches neglect over 50 years of plurilingualism research by negating the potential usefulness of much of the linguistic knowledge and learning experiences that students bring with them to the FL classroom.

Plurilingualism research and pedagogy, in contrast, attempts to consider both the complete linguistic repertoire of language learners and their language learning experiences. As such, it is not an entirely new phenomenon (consider Wilhelm von Humboldt's (1801/1802) reflections

¹ I use *emergent* here in the sense of *arising as a natural or logical consequence*.

on language learning), but its reception in broader contexts of education, going beyond a focus on contrasting *the* L1 and *the* L2, is still relatively unusual, and mostly involves short- or medium-term projects in isolated situations. Its gaining strength may be attributed to its manifold benefits (cf. Marx, 2006), including diverse cognitive and learning advantages, possibilities for economizing FL learning, motivation and FL interest, or its potential for validating (all) languages – especially those with a lower societal status (Krumm, 2008). While each point has special merit, in the school context, where curricular and time constraints play a major role, consolidating learning is of special interest.

Thus, plurilingual approaches tend to strive for improving, consolidating, and/or accelerating the process of FL learning, especially in the early stages, and for increasing learners' interest in language. To this end, Neuner *et al.* (2009) introduced guidelines for teaching languages in the context of multilingualism:

1. reflection of language learning, involving a focus on interlingual comparisons and plurilingual learning strategies,
2. thematic and textual embeddedness of language structures, involving considering individual language structures within their broader communicative context,
3. early development of receptive competencies in new FLs, relying on knowledge of other (related) languages, and
4. acceleration of the learning process to allow for increased learning efficiency.

Switzerland, as a multilingual country with a strong history of supporting and maintaining language diversity, is often perceived as a successful example of multilingual education policies. Its comparatively solid focus on plurilingualism is reflected in the twelve projects portrayed in this issue of *Babylonia*, which cover a wide range of pedagogical and empirical issues necessary to investigate possible advantages and caveats of plurilingual education. Some projects maintain a primarily pedagogical focus, others primarily empirical, whilst some combine both aspects by developing specific curricula for courses and investigating their effectiveness according to various aspects in intervention studies.

Primarily pedagogical projects invoke both previously learned languages and

learning experiences with a special emphasis on the first guideline, above. Language comparisons thus play a major role, such as utilizing the one L2 (English) when teaching the L3 (French) (Bleichenbacher, Hunkeler & Schallhart: *Mehrsprachigkeitsdidaktik als Chance*), or multiple languages (German, English, Italian and French) when teaching a new FL (Wesselmann: *Latein auf neuen Wegen*). Three projects take a more holistic approach by encompassing different languages. *Sprachenübergreifender Unterricht* (Manno) coordinates three hours of multilingualism class each week for an entire semester, while two multilingual theatre projects embed texts in curricular FLs within a communicative context (*Sprachen im KOchtopf*, Caspani & Todisco and *MELT*, Kutzelmann). Finally, the *Melifa* project (Bürki, Rehfeld & Schnitzer) specifically addresses support for development of family language literacy amongst preschool children.

The empirical projects turn to multiple languages as well, but consider these through different aspects. Two projects are especially concerned with individual language use and motivation. *Schulischer Mehrsprachenerwerb am Übergang* (Manno, Egli Cuenat, Le Pape Racine & Brühwiler) investigates the degree to which such aspects as text length and structure in production and text comprehension are interrelated in the L1 German and the FLs English and French, while *Représentations des langues* (Waltermann) turns to teachers' attitudes towards FLs taught in Swiss schools. It compares perceptions of German, English and Italian and questions how these perceptions might affect language learning in a school setting.

Further pedagogical projects aim to improve language learning and/or language awareness whilst gathering empirical data on the success of the programmes. Of these, four are especially concerned with the uptake of multilingual materials in the language classroom, either by language teachers or by students. *First experiences with a multilingual approach* (Schwab) questions how teachers react to multilingual learning materials and what is necessary for their success. Similarly, *Mehrsprachigkeitsdidaktik als Chance* (Bleichenbacher *et al.*), mentioned above, considers teachers' views on interlingual activities drawing on the first FL when teaching the second. The projects *Fremdsprachen lehren und lernen in der Schule* (Peyer, Barras, Kofler & Nadig) and

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Ilots de plurilinguisme en classe d'histoire (Lambelet & Mauron) encompass the perspective of the students involved and investigate how they react to and assess multilingual language materials. Finally, *SOFT* (Arcidiacono & Jenny) introduces two new languages, German and English, simultaneously using communicative activities to preschool speakers of other family languages.

All projects shed light on present trends and issues in plurilingualism didactics and research in educational settings. One issue involves the perspective taken. Projects may approach plurilingualism from a tertiary language (TL) teaching (“aide-de-camp”) position, in which one or more languages provides support in learning a second or later FL, while others take a more holistic approach. Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages. Since TL projects, for example, usually involve only one (language) class, they can be implemented comparatively easily for extended periods. Holistic approaches tend to be more short-term, as, due to the increased necessity for coordination between different teachers and classes, they involve a disproportionately higher degree of planning, consultation and reflection. However, as the projects in this volume show, TL-based programmes often have major caveats. FL teachers may be sceptical of (mis)using classroom time with other languages or may feel uncertain about how to teach with multilingual materials. As well, students’ attitudes may interfere with learning, and their learning motivation tends to be higher for some languages such as English than for others. When opportunities such as professional learning communities are not integrated, teachers may categorically reject plurilingualism principles. Holistic plurilingual learning environments often manage to avoid such implementation difficulties for a number of reasons. First, they tend to originate from small groups of teacher-researchers who have a high interest in plurilingualism (and thus in project success). Second, they represent a novel teaching form and thus usually do not take place within traditional FL classes, but rather are allotted special slots within the school curriculum. Third, due to their novelty, they tend to be even more carefully coordinated, involve more teaching personnel and are more closely evaluated. And finally, whilst projects

based on TL pedagogy are implemented amongst all students, more holistic plurilingual projects are often reserved for a select group of students with more language experience.

A further issue involves the age groups and the languages most commonly focused upon. Most of the projects detailed here tend to focus on schoolchildren in grades five to seven, although a few projects look to preschool or to older children, and on the school FLs English and French, although Italian, Latin, Greek, Portuguese and further family languages also come into play. Although the concentration on a specific age group (at the advent of the second FL) and specific languages (those represented in the curriculum) is due to curricular structures, it is worth examining possibilities for extending plurilingualism pedagogy beyond such constraints. Specifically, a concentration on typical FLs at school may cause us to question whether “plurilingualism pedagogy” is, indeed, an open or a closed-language system within educational institutions.

The projects reported in this volume are testimony to the wide-reaching changes regarding plurilingualism pedagogy in the past decades and to efforts to enhance plurilingual learning across school subjects and languages. As such, they also explicate the need for further research in the field. First, the uptake of such approaches (1) by authors of language learning materials, (2) by different types of teachers and (3) by different types of students must be considered more closely in order to determine how plurilingualism can be effectively anchored in school settings. Second, organisational and supportive structures necessary for successful implementation are still unclear and require investigation. Third, there is little information on languages not typically taught as FLs in schools. And, finally, continuous instead of temporary (short-term, project-based) programmes should be examined for their potential in supporting enduring plurilingual development. Further consideration of these aspects and their implementation in classroom and research settings will help to consolidate plurilingualism pedagogy as a key element of educational programmes and as a possibility for supporting students’ emergent plurilingual competencies.

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