

A plurilingual portfolio project for school and research in Luxembourg

Marie-Anne Hansen-Pauly

Despite the generalised multilingual competences of the Luxembourg population, languages as school subjects are organised as separate, monolingual disciplines. When in 2006, a team of lecturers/ researchers in the teacher education department of the University of Luxembourg decided to start a project aiming at a collaborative approach to the teaching of French, German and English in a Luxembourg secondary school, they were interested in exploring commonalities and differences in methodology. All the participants (researchers and school teachers) are fluent in those three languages, in addition to their native language, Luxembourgish. Indeed, they all took their degrees in the country whose national language they teach (school or university level). The initial idea was to consider together means of implementing the aims of the Common European framework for languages. There was awareness of specific teaching styles for each school language, but one did not foresee the huge differences in teacher beliefs about language learning and the diversity of underlying theories that each language research community would refer to.

So in many ways it was not the many languages themselves that caused the complexity of issues involved but rather epistemological differences as well as diverse working methods. The challenge was to use that diversity as a source of enrichment for learning and research: reflection and exchange came to be seen as key elements for the development of new practices. The introduction of a portfolio, developed in relative autonomy by lycée students with contributions from different languages, thus became an artefact of mediation working as an interface between learning, teaching and research. The term “plurilingual” was chosen as the portfolio affords communication between many of the actors involved as well as representing the individual student’s communication in several languages.

In this paper I wish to present 3 phases all marked by a strongly dialogical approach between partners, the initial phase of project negotiation, the actual implementation and the last phase involving a common research report. Right from the start it was evident that even at a time of seeming agreement on action-oriented language learning, such key terminology as “competence” or “task-based learning” does not always have satisfying equivalents in German or French. This was an opportunity for researcher to negotiate the meaning of words and to compare pedagogical practice. For the theoretical framework, participation in the very international research unit LCMI (Language, Culture, Media, Identity) at the University of Luxembourg was crucial as it provided contact with worldwide scholarship on multilingualism. Some of the consulted literature for the final report and research text is in French, the majority however is socio-cultural theory by scholars writing in English. For a Luxembourg readership, a multilingual text is acceptable, but for an international circulation, this will not do. Oral presentations have been done in different languages, according to the audience.

It is clear that research and teaching require the definition of a new or third space for cultural and language practices, already symbolically represented by the portfolio. Indeed, used in combination with each other and outside their national borders, the paradigms of the great French, German and Anglo-Saxon language and academic cultures cannot but appear modified and in constant evolution. Nor is there any reason for not adding further languages, especially the first languages of learners, teachers and researchers, such as Luxembourgish and Portuguese, or other foreign languages. For such an enlarged research area a systemic approach seems essential.

Brief Biographical Statement

Marie-Anne Hansen-Pauly is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Luxembourg. She has an M.A. in Comparative Literature from the University of Alberta, Canada. At present she teaches in a postgraduate study course for secondary teachers. Her particular interests are in the areas of multilingual education, of CLIL (she coordinated a European project called CLIL across Contexts: A scaffolding framework for teacher education). Recently she organized a multilingual international conference on Literature and Young Adults.