Supporting multilingual classrooms

Teaching Unit 5

Developing whole-school policies/strategies

Creating an inclusive school environment in which all languages, including all home languages, are valued

- How can we foster positive attitudes towards language diversity among colleagues and learners?
- In which ways can reflection on one's own language biography promote professional development in respect to a plurilingual and intercultural dimension?
- How can we develop learning environments where all languages are valued and actively used for learning? What do we need to consider?
- What kind of activities and settings do we have to provide? At which level?

Exemplar classroom resource 1:

Task 1: How to implement whole school language curricula?

You can find a list of recommended factors below. Please choose the two most challenging ones in your opinion and discuss the following questions with your colleagues:

- How would you assess the situation in your own professional context?
- What would you like to change?
- What could be the next step?

A positive attitude towards all languages

A whole school language curricula project should be implemented only by individuals with a fundamentally positive attitude towards plurilingualism and all languages and language varieties. There should be no 'important' or 'unimportant' languages. Maintaining heritage languages should not impede the learning of the language of teaching. Of course, this does not mean that all languages have to be present during all activities – this may not be possible – but no languages present in a school should be automatically excluded. In the long term, all languages in a school should be included in curriculum planning.

Support by school heads and boards

Active support from school heads and boards is important. If a headmaster or headmistress likes the ideas for plurilingualism within their school and provides scope for their development, it will be easier to implement these ideas than having to do so without his or her support. In addition, there will be fewer institutional obstacles if school boards support the ideas. Under these conditions, initially small-scale initiatives can grow, before being attached permanently at a later date to other initiatives, to which ideally they would be linked.

Collegiality and teamwork

A high level of collegiality and intensive teamwork are basic conditions that are required for the successful implementation of plurilingualism and a whole school language curricula, and for the implementation of individual aspects of a whole school curricula. The occasions on which whole school language curricula activities can be introduced by one person are rare. The help of colleagues, not to mention pupils and in many cases parents, is needed.

Communication in the school community (teachers, pupils, parents)

The school community, the parent-teacher association and parents should all be informed of the concept and brought on board. Many projects have used the topic of food successfully, for example: at either the beginning or the end of a teaching unit, families have enthusiastically participated in languages cafes and buffets. When it comes to supporting language projects, the families provide huge quantities of tasty food. Clearly, eating together provides an excellent opportunity for people to eliminate prejudices and reject stereotypes. In every instance, the groups that initiated and organised this multilingual culinary experience grew together and planned other activities.

Of course, the most important goal is to inspire pupils. If they want to participate and be part of the initiative because they think it is worthwhile and fun, and feel it is something they want to do, it is easier to get their parents on board.

Teacher training to familiarise staff with the concept of a whole school language curricula

Just as I needed to familiarise myself with the whole school language curricula concept, it is helpful for interested colleagues to receive training in this area. At the very least, the entire teaching staff should be given a general introduction to the concept. While this does not mean that everyone will be on board immediately (and some colleagues will never be convinced . . .), it provides an opportunity to inspire interest among other colleagues.

Source: PlurCur website, Towards whole school language curricula - Success factors for the implementation of whole school language curricula.

Task 2: Example of whole school plurilingual approaches in Dublin (Déirdre Kirwan, Ireland)

Listen to the video and reflect on the following questions:
1. What do you find is the most remarkable in this example?
2. What kinds of activities have been successful implemented?
3. Which principles and strategies can you identify?
4. (How) could this be transferred to your school?

Source : PlurCur website – Video of good practice (4'58")
Keywords: valuing all languages, literacy, autonomous learning, teachers as learners

Possible objectives for teacher-learners

- Become familiar with whole school approaches, taking the language dimension into account in all subjects
- Develop school principles for creating learning environments, in which all languages are valued (What does matter?)
- Consider strategies towards whole school language curricula and get support for own school context

Reflective questions

- How do these resources address the initial questions?
- How do learners benefit from them?
- What other objectives could you achieve with these activities?
- How would you use these resources and adapt them for your own context?

Food for thought

MALEDIVE website - School language profile (Brigitta Busch, University of Vienna, AT)
MALEDIVE website– Language biographies – Approaches to multilingualism in education
(Brigitta Busch, University of Vienne, AT)
EOL Working Platform – Learning environments where modern languages flourish - Matrix
CARAP: pluralistic approaches

Other resources

MALEDIVE website – Learner profiles
MALEDIVE website – Many roots, many voices (Ontario, CA)
MARILLE website - Comparons nos langues , (second video, 'French example') video by Nathalie Auger showing a primary school teacher working with his learners' languages (in French with English subtitles)

References:
Multilingualism curriculum: Perceiving and managing linguistic diversity in education; H.-J. Krumm, H.-H. Reich, 2011.
The language dimension in all subjects – A handbook for curriculum development and teacher training; J.-C. Beacco, M. Fleming, F. Goullier, E. Thürmann, H. Vollmer; Council of Europe, 2015.

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