

KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS

Multilingual Education in Luxembourg

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Luxembourg is a very small country in between France, Germany and Belgium, and this geographical situation in between French- and German-speaking territories has shaped the history of our country. When the state was created in 1839, the then Grand Duchy of Luxembourg lost parts of its French-speaking population, so the new state was monolingual, with the population speaking Moselle-Franconian, a German dialect.

Yet, in 1839, Luxembourg decided to maintain a very, I think, an original, language system, in which French and German were no longer specific to a geographic territory, but to a functional territory one may say. French was the written language of the eminent and German was the written language of the common people. Luxembourgish gradually grew to become the language of identity of the small Luxembourg society.

Today Luxembourg has so-to-say two official languages, French and German, as well as one national language – Luxembourgish. So a Luxembourg resident can choose one of the three languages for official communication with the administration, and the administration is obliged to respond in the same language.

Official, tax, laws, court decisions are in French, however, police or bailiff reports are written in German. A native Luxembourgish family, speaks Luxembourgish at home, reads a newspaper in German, normally watches TV in Luxembourgish or German – some do it in French. They order their meal in restaurants in French, and they receive official communication in German and French.

Then, like in all other European countries, English is becoming increasingly important: music, internet, online tapes foster the interest of young people to learn English, and at the same time, the technological innovations promote the Luxembourgish language.

For a long time Luxembourgish was only used orally, and now, in SMS and e-mails Luxembourgish is written more and more. Obviously, it is the more

informal communication, so we are allowed to write Luxembourgish, with many grammatical faults, spelling faults.

So, in fact, the average Luxembourgish person is truly plurilingual in the sense that he or she uses different languages in parallel. Language switching is considered normal. In the same sentence, you use words from different languages, and you are understood. And that is the case for a resident whose mother tongue is Luxembourgish.

Now the situation becomes more complicated if you take a closer look at how the population is made up: 43% of the population are non-Luxembourgish. They are mostly European citizens, among which the Portuguese community is the majority, and, of course, all these newcomers continue to speak their mother tongue, and they get along by talking **one** of the other official languages of the country.

So on top of the Luxembourg traditional trilingual nature – Luxembourgish, German, French – is added the plurilingualism of the individuals that form the Luxembourg society. As a result, in the streets of Luxembourg, you can hear all the languages spoken, and if you walk through the capital, there is no language dominance.

So you might tell me this is great – yeah, but it's terrible for someone visiting Luxembourg, and what is certainly a rich pool for foreign language researchers, remains a baffling problem for schools. And we have to deal with a certain complexity at school, and that is what makes my job so, I would say, exciting.

Since the first legislation on primary education, which dates back to 1843, the teaching of languages remains a politically debated issue. For each school reform, this subject provokes the most heated discussions in Luxembourg.

Our school system, education system, has pre-primary school compulsive for all children at four, primary school starts for children at six, and, at the age of twelve, the pupils are oriented towards one of three tracks in secondary school. So far nothing very original, except that we use three languages at school, Luxembourgish, German and French.

Their use varies according to the profession of the student in the school system, but whatever track of orientation, every child in order to succeed, needs to master a relatively high level of the three languages. One of the missions of pre-school is to teach Luxembourgish to the many immigrant children.

At primary school the children are taught in German. German becomes the formal language of instruction in primary school, whereas Luxembourgish is used for the informal communication. Learning to read and write in German certainly implies for the children the learning of a new language, but the closeness to the Luxembourgish language makes it relatively easy for the child whose mother tongue is Luxembourgish. This transition is, in fact, considered as a necessity, a transition from a basically oral language to one that is written and indispensable for learning.

From the second year of primary school onwards, French is introduced and gradually gains more importance, to the point of becoming the main language of instruction in upper secondary school, so in this way, every child learns first mathematics, history or any other subject in German, and then, after that, has to switch to French as the language of instruction. So mastering French and German becomes a condition for succeeding in school, and then, in addition to studying Luxembourgish, German and French, English is introduced as a foreign language in the second year in secondary school.

The Luxembourgish people are very proud of the multilingual tradition of our country. In the language profile drawn up by the Council of Europe in 2005, experts testify that Luxembourg represents an example of a “successful and ambitious language policy”.

Many students in Luxembourg graduate from secondary school with remarkable skills in several languages. Graduates from Luxembourg are able to pursue higher education in French, German and English-speaking countries, which offers, of course, wide opportunities.

But this multilingual education is taxing for all students, even for Luxembourgish pupils. Acquiring skills in the three languages does not come without its fair share of trouble. In fact, all students have to go through a trilingual education, not only an elite group of students as is the case in most other bilingual schools that I know of.

44% of the students in Luxembourgish schools do not have Luxembourgish as their mother tongue. This number is rising: in 2010, 58% of the children entering pre-primary school do not speak Luxembourgish. These children cannot transfer their knowledge of Luxembourgish to German, and they therefore struggle to attain the required levels in the languages and this leads to many failures at school, especially when this is combined with a socially

disadvantaged background. So we are aware in Luxembourg of the high rate of grade repeaters and that of early school leavers.

The Luxembourg school is, in many respects, a school of segregation, in which children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds may succeed, but with much difficulty. In respect to the performance of 15-year-olds measured in the PISA study, Luxembourg hardly reaches the average of OECD economies, not only for reading but also for mathematics and science. There must be explanations, but all of them challenge our traditional education system.

With regard to mathematics and science, we claim that students spend much more time in learning languages and that it is difficult to find available time to develop skills in other, just as important, subjects. But with regard to reading skills, we find it difficult to explain. Is there something lacking in our education system? Is it because students are not tested in their mother tongue? Or should we settle for the fact that plurilingual students perform less well than monolingual ones?

We are trying to improve things – mainly in the field of language teaching. Because the singularity of the Luxembourg system is its multilingualism for all students, we focus on the question of language teaching. Following the report I mentioned before, of the Council of Europe, we drew up a 66-step action plan to readjust the teaching of languages, a plan that we are currently implementing.

The different actions can be grouped into three areas: defining objectives, adapting the mode of assessment and mobilising teachers.

The objectives: A certain amount of people from Luxembourg, from Luxembourgish schools, teach in all three or even four languages, if you add English, a level, which is close to that of a native speaker. These are exceptional students, but to our stakeholders, to people of education, they implicitly represent a model to imitate. Trilingualism is spontaneously understood, in our country, as mastering three languages perfectly. However, this image is not realistic. Besides a few exceptions we want to preserve, normally the mastering of these languages is uneven and it does not correspond to a real need, not all jobs require identical skills in all languages.

Today this seems obvious to me, but we needed the external view of the Council of Europe to raise our awareness, and following their recommendations, we are now specifying learning objectives for different

languages based on the Common European Framework of reference for the languages, we are defining standards of oral, written skills as well as for reading and listening skills. These standards also serve as a basis for student orientation towards different vocational or learning trends.

So a student opting for administrative work must acquire written competencies in several languages whereas someone who aims for a technical training needs to be proficient in at least one language.

Then the assessment system: in parallel, we are in the process of adjusting the assessment methodology. Traditionally, our assessment system is based on the appreciation of written skills. To some extent I could say that the way of teaching modern languages in Luxembourg was like that for teaching dead languages, which is not very motivating for students. The requirement today to take into consideration the first three areas – writing, reading listening – and reducing the value attributed to writing and it offers some encouragement to those students who have a good understanding of the language but who are not perfect in grammar and spelling.

We are also focussing on the difference between formative assessment which measures the ongoing progress of the student during the cycle, as opposed to the end of cycle assessment, which certifies for each student the level attained by the student at the end of the cycle.

And now I come to what is most difficult and you might easily guess what it is – it's the challenge to convince the teachers to accept this challenge and to apply it in the classroom. I must admit that this battle is not yet won, but I notice some positive change in many schools.

Luxembourg's education system is lucky to have teachers with very high linguistic skills. Every secondary school teacher had to obtain his or her degree in an English, German or French university. Teachers with a high competency in languages are, of course, a prerequisite for multilingual education. This *conditio sine qua non* does not only have advantages, because their training reinforces the teachers in a representation of the use and teaching of the language as a mother tongue. I believe that many teachers do not receive a sufficiently specialised training in language teaching and learning, which means that they are often not aware of the difficulties that arise from learning the school languages from a different mother tongue.

I have to add, that despite our long tradition of multilingual education, but because of the highly specialised teachers in German, French or English, we do not have in Luxembourg an integrated pedagogy for languages. Each language is treated independently from the others, which does not make it possible to resort to all the different forms of support which are specific to multilingual teaching, for example the use of paraphrases, of reformulation in another language, so the transfer of competence, knowledge and strategies from one language to another is not assured in our schools.

I believe that to make multilingual teaching and learning more efficient, teachers have to be made aware of the challenges of language learning for children, who are not taught in their mother tongue at school. And even more: they have to understand that children or young people who learned a language, maybe in the streets or even in a socially disadvantaged family, do not reach, without help, the level of academic language which is necessary to succeed in the education system.

And then, of course, teachers in school need to develop common reflection and set out a coherent strategy. They need to share their common vision that they can each of them apply to their subject. What holds true for language teachers also holds true for teachers of other subjects. They must have their students, of course, understand the concept of the different subjects, but also teach their students how to handle and use technical terms, and how to express themselves clearly in all the subjects.

In our schools all the teachers irrespective of their specialisation, are – or should be – language teachers. They all have to reinforce with students a language that enables the communication of complicated ideas.

I believe that the skills that are required by a teacher working in Luxembourg's plurilingual environment are the very ones needed by all teachers facing a class of children from a wide range of backgrounds and being taught in a language that they not understand or have difficulties to understand.

I suppose you noticed that I can describe fairly well the education system in Luxembourg. And I can also develop the vision of the teachers we need – how they should be and should act. But I admit that I am not good, or not good enough, in making this vision real. I have the small hope, that the result of your work at the Comenius project will provide some elements of how to improve the training of teachers, how to develop the methodology they need, how to provide the materials

that they can use in the classroom to improve teaching and learning. I wish that Europe can help me and many others in our European countries to improve the quality of schooling, because this is my aim. All the effort in my job is to make sure, or to give a chance to all the children in our schools to succeed in school so that they have a good start in life.

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today.

European Core Curriculum for Mainstreamed Second Language Teacher Education

**Professor Hans-Joachim Roth and
Dr Joana Duarte, University of Cologne**

Professor Hans-Joachim Roth

Thank you very much for inviting us to this wonderful conference. It's very good for us to speak with colleagues from NALDIC and we want to talk about some issues that we have been working on in the Comenius Project over the last two years. We want to talk about the project, we want to talk about the curriculum as the product of our consortium, beginning with a short view on the process of the project - that will be done by Joana Duarte. Then I will present some theoretical frame of our work and some competencies as examples. We cannot present the whole programme here today, but you can view it on our website: <http://www.eucim-te.eu/>

Dr Joana Duarte

I am going to talk to you about how our project started, why it started and how it worked.

I will begin with the 'long' and the 'short' story of our project. The short story is connected to the project itself, and the long story is connected to the situation of pupils and students with a migration background in educational systems across Europe. Some of the issues that I will mention here today were touched on by Madame Delvaux in her talk about the situation in Luxembourg, and I think that that some of those issues are also in the UK system, and also in the German system, the Portuguese system, increasingly across Europe in general.

Our project started approximately two years ago and is about to finish, so we're about to 'disseminate and exploit', as the European Union jargon goes, the results. Our consortium is made up of 27 members from nine partner institutions in eight member states (Bulgaria, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden; and the UK). The philosophy behind the formation of the consortium was that it should open up new co-operative forms in educational institutions and throughout the whole