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Access Details: [subscription number 778384760]

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



European Journal of Teacher Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title-content=t713421837>

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To cite this Article: , 'Connecting languages: the use of the portfolio as a means of exploring and overcoming frontiers within the curriculum', European Journal of Teacher Education, 30:2, 195 - 213

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/02619760701274001

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02619760701274001>

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Connecting languages: the use of the *portfolio* as a means of exploring and overcoming frontiers within the curriculum

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The Linguistic European Policy stresses the importance of linguistic diversity and encourages students to learn several languages, believing that the more languages we know, the better we can understand each other and preserve our languages. To preserve diversity and to value all the languages (either included in the curriculum or not) is a first step to develop a plurilingual and intercultural competence in the classroom as a means of overcoming frontiers between languages and between people. A second step is to work with teachers and to value what they know by helping them to find new and innovative answers to meet these professional challenges. Thus, this paper describes the work within a project for professional development of a group of in-service language teachers. The teacher education programme suggests a *portfolio-oriented language learning and teaching approach* that promotes plurilingualism. We will analyse the teachers' starting point and their willingness to work within an innovative and challenging approach. The analysed data include a questionnaire prior to the starting of the programme and three written reflections at the end of the programme concerning professional development, new concepts, teaching approach and working habits. The conclusions indicate that the teachers were not familiar with either the concept of plurilingualism or the *portfolio-oriented language learning and teaching approach*. Nevertheless, they clearly show their willingness to try a new approach in their teaching practice.

La politique linguistique européenne défend l'importance de la diversité linguistique et encourage l'apprentissage de diverses langues, en croyant que la maîtrise de plusieurs langues augmente la capacité de comprendre les autres et de préserver nos propres langues. Préserver et valoriser toutes les langues (présentes, ou pas, dans le curriculum scolaire) est le début du développement de la compétence plurilingue et interculturelle. Ceci constitue un moyen de dépasser les barrières entre des langues et des peuples différents. Un deuxième pas est le travail avec les enseignants, en valorisant leurs connaissances et en les aidant à découvrir de nouvelles réponses, capables de faire face aux défis de la gestion de la diversité. Cet article décrit le travail mené au sein d'un programme de formation continue destiné à un groupe d'enseignants de langues. Ce programme de formation se construit autour d'une approche plurilingue où le portfolio est le concept-clé. Le texte présente l'analyse du point de départ des enseignants, en

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explicitant leurs prédispositions à travailler d'une autre façon. Les données analysées incluent les réponses à un questionnaire antérieur au programme de formation et trois réflexions écrites à la fin de ce même programme à propos du développement professionnel (nouveaux concepts, nouvelle approche, nouvelles habitudes). Les résultats montrent que les enseignants n'étaient familiarisés ni avec le concept de plurilinguisme ni avec l'utilisation du portfolio. Toutefois, les enseignants révèlent le désir d'essayer une nouvelle approche dans leurs pratiques d'enseignement.

La política lingüística europea defiende la importancia de la diversidad lingüística y alienta a aprender varios idiomas, en la convicción de que cuantos más idiomas sabemos, mejor podemos entendernos y preservar nuestros idiomas. Preservar y valorar todas las lenguas (estén o no presentes en el currículum) es un primer paso para desarrollar una capacidad plurilingüe e intercultural en clase, que se convierte en un medio de superar las barreras entre idiomas y entre pueblos. Un segundo paso es trabajar con profesores, valorando lo que saben y ayudándolos a descubrir nuevas e innovadoras respuestas para su desarrollo profesional en momentos de cambios. Este escrito describe el trabajo llevado a cabo en el marco de un proyecto para el desarrollo profesional de un grupo de profesores en un instituto, a partir de un programa de formación sobre enseñanza y aprendizaje de idiomas basado en el portfolio. Analizaremos el punto de partida de su camino y la predisposición para trabajar un abordaje innovador y desafiante del currículum. Los datos analizados incluyen las respuestas a un cuestionario anterior al programa de formación y tres reflexiones escritas en el término de ese programa, sobre desarrollo profesional, nuevos conceptos y hábitos de trabajo. Las conclusiones indican que los profesores no estaban familiarizados ni con el concepto de plurilingüismo ni con la enseñanza y aprendizaje de idiomas basado en el portfolio. Sin embargo, evidencian predisposición para intentar nuevos abordajes en sus practicas profesionales.

Die Europäische Sprachenpolitik legt grossen Wert auf die linguistische Vielfalt. Eine der Prioritäten ist demnach, Schüler zum Erlernen mehrerer Fremdsprachen zu motivieren. Diese Idee basiert auf der Grundlage, dass das Erlernen mehrerer Sprachen nicht nur eine bessere Verständigung zwischen Kulturen ermöglicht, sondern auch die eigene Sprache und Kultur erhält. Die linguistische Vielfalt zu erhalten und grossen Wert auf alle Sprachen zu legen (im Lehrplan beinhaltet oder nicht) stellt einen ersten Schritt dar, eine mehrsprachige und interkulturelle Kompetenz im Klassenzimmer zu entwickeln, zur Überwindung von Grenzen zwischen Sprachen und Leuten. Ein zweiter Schritt ist die Arbeit mit Lehrern, in der deren Vorkenntnisse wichtig genommen werden und ihnen damit geholfen werden soll, neue Antworten für die entsprechenden beruflichen Herausforderungen auszuarbeiten. In diesem Vortrag soll die Zusammenarbeit mit einer Lehrerguppe im Rahmen einer beruflichen Weiterbildung beschrieben werden. Das Lehrerausbildungsprogramm schlägt ein *portfolio-orientiertes Sprachlernen und Unterrichten* vor, das Sprachenvielfalt fördert. Es soll analysiert werden, aus welchen Ausgangspunkten die Lehrer kommen und welche Bereitschaft sie zu einer innovativen Unterrichtspraxis zeigen. Die analysierten Daten, ein Fragebogen vor Programmbeginn und drei schriftliche Reflexionen am Ende des Programms, beziehen sich auf professionelle Entwicklung neuer Konzepte, Unterrichtspraxis und Arbeitsmitte. Die Schlussfolgerungen zeigen, dass die Lehrer weder mit dem Konzept der Mehrsprachigkeit noch mit dem *portfolio-orientierten Sprachlernen und Unterrichten* vertraut waren. Andererseits deuten sie auf eine Bereitwilligkeit von Seiten der Lehrer, eine neue Herangehensweise ihre Unterrichtspraxis zu erproben.

Introduction

Language education involves both language acquisition and concern for the respect of cultural diversity and intercultural competence. These aspects have become

prominent educational goals in the European Community. In fact, the Linguistic European Policy stresses the importance of linguistic diversity and encourages people to learn several languages, in the belief that the more languages we know, the better we can understand each other and preserve our languages. This implies working with the teachers in teacher education programmes, empowering them in this process and enabling them to influence their students to learn more languages.

This study is part of a larger research project which aims at identifying the potential and the constraints of the implementation of the work with language portfolios as a pedagogical tool in a Portuguese secondary school and how it can contribute to curriculum construction as far as language education is concerned, within the Portuguese educational system. The present paper analyses the teachers' starting point and their willingness to work with language portfolios as a pedagogical tool that promotes a plurilingual language education.

Five in-service teachers attended the education programme. We will analyse (through a questionnaire) how they value the different languages in the curriculum and the integrated development of a plurilingual and intercultural competence using the portfolio as a pedagogical tool, before the programme started.

The education programme started by identifying ideas about language education which are taken for granted and was designed to analyse and question them. In doing so each teacher became aware of his/her knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996), enhancing thus a self-questioning of individual practice and of the concepts that inform it.

This project was preceded by a previous study conducted in the teaching of German as a foreign language in the 12th grade (17–18 years old), third learning level, during the school year 2000–2001, which highlighted the importance of the language portfolio as relevant pedagogical tool for curricular innovation (Gonçalves, 2002). A portfolio (as a pedagogical tool for language learning) is defined as an organised collection of school-work produced by the learner throughout a period of time.

The paper is organised in five sections. Section 1 presents what we call a *portfolio-oriented language learning and teaching approach*, highlighting the connection between the *portfolio* as a tool and how its use can promote the development of a plurilingual and intercultural competence. Section 2 describes the in-service Teacher Education Programme and introduces the participating teachers. Section 3 discusses the data from the questionnaire where the starting points of the teachers are identified. In other words, we identify the working platform to start the education programme. Section 4 analyses the data from three written reflections at the end of the Education Programme concerning its relevance, the worked concepts and the teachers' willingness to go on in the project. Finally, we draw some conclusions on the work carried out.

Portfolio-oriented language learning and teaching approach

The Portuguese educational system has known, in the last decade, several curricular changes, mainly in terms of a new perspective of the concept of *curriculum*. This

implies a new attitude as far as curricular management is concerned and highlights the need for coherent and articulated language learning—as the literature on language didactics has been pointing out with regard to mother tongue and foreign language learning for more than two decades (Roulet, 1980; Ringbom, 1987).

Taking into account that the learning of a language is a complex process, the instruments of curricular implementation must respect and reflect this complexity. The use of portfolios emphasises and clarifies the complexity of the learning process and, at the same time, considers the learner at its centre, he/she being also responsible for it (Sá-Chaves, 2000; Klenowski, 2002; Kohonen, 2002).

Portfolios are used in a wide range of areas for very different purposes, but our concerns are their very specific use in the domain of language teaching and learning. In general, a language portfolio can be defined as a systematic and purposeful collection of learner language related work that shows progress over time and respects instructional objectives. A language portfolio can contain very different types of documents: learning logs, written texts, drawings, learners' reflections and audio or video tapes, teacher, learner and also parents' comments on the progress made by the learner (Gonçalves, 2002; Kohonen, 2002).

Besides the Common European Framework (CEF), the Council of Europe created the European language portfolio (ELP). It is a document in which individuals' linguistic knowledge and competences are identified, described and certified. Its general purpose is to deepen mutual understanding among citizens in Europe, to respect the diversity of cultures and ways of life. Its main objective is to promote a plurilingual and intercultural competence. It is divided into 3 parts:

1. the language passport which provides an overview of the individual's proficiency in different languages at a given point of time;
2. the language biography which facilitates the student's involvement in planning, reflecting upon and assessing his/her learning process and progress;
3. the dossier which offers the student the opportunity to select materials to document and illustrate achievements or experiences recorded in the language passport or biography (Principles, 2000 in Kohonen, 2002).

Some projects were conducted in Europe to implement the ELP in schools. One of them, for example, is the Finnish pilot project. During this study the pedagogical potential and significance of the Council of Europe's language portfolio emerged as one of the most significant gains. In fact, the concept of portfolio-oriented language learning was constructed after about a year's project work:

We needed this concept to refer to the negotiated teaching-learning process whereby the students gradually took increasing charge of their learning, within the pedagogical learning space and guidance provided by the teacher. (Kohonen, 2004, p. 4)

Thus, the Council of Europe's ELP seems to be an important pedagogical tool because it offers a wide range of possibilities for promoting language learning in terms of both the *learning processes* and the *learning outcomes* (Kohonen, 2004). However, to successfully introduce this tool in the daily routine of learners and

teachers is hard work, which needs support and integration in the national language curricula.

The integration of the ELP with the national/local language curricula is crucial for any wide-scale and sustained use of the ELP in language classes. If the work assignments and self-assessment of language skills are only done as extra-curricular work, outside the curriculum-based contents, the workload soon becomes impossible for the students to do. The work also needs to be done regularly; otherwise students get out of touch and lose their interest in it. Similarly, the teachers lose interest in the ELP if the work is done outside their curriculum-based teaching time and resources. (Kohonen, 2004, p. 3)

Therefore, to work with a model of portfolio that matches both the aspects of the Council of Europe's ELP and the national Portuguese curricular requirements is a challenge for teacher's practice and for teacher's professional development, which the current investigation embraced.

In a *portfolio-oriented language learning and teaching approach* the portfolio is considered the axis of all curricular planning and subsequent work done in class. The introduction of the portfolio is relevant in three basic aspects. The first one refers to the contextualization of the learning process, that is, a wider linking of the language learning to the situation where it is developed. The second refers to the diversification of the learning strategies and daily classroom activities, which can meet the different learning styles and personal skills. Finally, and due to the longitudinal nature of the portfolio, it can register the difficulties and the progress experienced by the learners. The use of the portfolio can combine both the national institutional curricular requirements and also the student's learning process, allowing a personal, continuous and holistic education. The portfolio is thus simultaneously a student's and teacher's tool (Gonçalves, 2002).

The concept of *portfolio-oriented language learning and teaching* (a personalized management of the curriculum) is thus the organizing base of curricular work. We consider that this approach also discloses the possibility of developing a plurilingual and intercultural competence (Coste *et al.*, 1997) in the classroom, where frontiers between languages tend to merge.

It is important to note that the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, 2001), identified plurilingualism and interculturalism as educational goals. In this context a plurilingual competence emerged, which involved a complex, multiple language competence that was activated in intercultural contexts of communication.

Learning a language is assumed as an asset that motivates the learning of other languages. It is a process based on the socio-cultural competence and on the development of an intercultural competence, which values the intertwining of all linguistic and communicative resources of the learner. The focus of attention changes and that means we no longer strive for a 'native-like' linguistic competence, rather a plurilingual and intercultural competence, which entails an element of personal growth of the learner as a human being (Kohonen, 2004).

Plurilingualism further referred to the ability to use both competence in the mother tongue and knowledge and skills learned in foreign languages, for the

learning and the use of other languages (CEFR, 2001; Kohonen, 2002). This competence can be identified with

the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a social agent has proficiency, on varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures: [t]his is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the user may draw. (Council of Europe, 1998, p. 95)

We can say ‘plurilingual competence is thus the capacity to expand language and cultural competence in a purposeful way in intercultural interaction, producing a more skilled language learner and user’ (Kohonen, 2002, p.80). In order to elucidate the complexity of this competence, as a means of better understanding its activation, four dimensions have been identified: social-affective; linguistic and communicative repertoires management; learning repertoires management and interaction management (Andrade *et al.*, 2001; Santos & Andrade, 2005).

A *portfolio-oriented language learning and teaching* approach values both the linguistic background of each learner and any kind of learning. We believe it promotes autonomy and a growing responsibility for self-learning and this pedagogical tool can be used for promoting plurilingualism as well. Working with it is to work out the four dimensions of the plurilingual competence:

The social-affective dimension is related mainly to attitudes and pre-dispositions towards the Other, towards languages, cultures and intercultural communication. Encouraging learners to include in their portfolios reflections on the language work done in class is a possible way to help them relate to other languages and to other cultures;

The linguistic and communicative repertoires management refers to the individual’s ability to make use of all his linguistic and communicative history, and knowledge (knowledge about languages and their characteristics, their cultures and communicative situations). These repertoires are valued and taken in account for the learning of the target language(s), as each portfolio is a unique and a personal tool;

The learning repertoires management is related to the learner’s ability to learn with the different communicative situations he/she gets involved with. By using the portfolio learners have to manage their own repertoires to solve the different learning tasks, which increase learners’ responsibility and autonomy for their own learning;

Interaction has to do with the interactive processes characteristic of the language situations, such as interpreting, translation or codeswitching. The portfolio allows learners to include all the social and linguistics contacts they have not only in school context but also outside it and all of them may be taken into account in the language learning process.

To sum up, the portfolio as a pedagogical tool can be used to value and promote diversity and plurilingualism, because it is a real and authentic place where learners can freely express their identity and their previous learning, and it is the task of the teacher to raise awareness towards a more plurilingual and intercultural education.

Moreover, as this tool can encompass any kind of learning, this feature can be explored to help learners articulate learning of each school subject in a big whole that makes sense for him/her. It can thus be a tool to foster curricular integration.

Having these considerations in mind and questioning if teachers are prepared for such a challenge we constructed the Education Programme, which is going to be presented in the next section.

Teacher education research project/education programme

The research project in which the Education Programme is included has two leading questions: what do language teachers think about language education; and how can teacher education programmes be constructed within the school in order to help teachers (re)construct their professional knowledge towards a more diversified and plurilingual approach?

In order to answer these questions, we organised the education programme entitled *Working with the portfolio, developing the plurilingual competence*. It was attended by a group of five in-service teachers of a Portuguese secondary school. Within the scope of language diversity and competence development, this programme aims to promote the subject knowledge and pedagogic updating in the specific educative context and thus contributing to the resolution of the problems of the daily practice, so as to promote the implementation of new curriculum management strategies, namely the *portfolio-oriented language learning and teaching approach*.

What interested us most was not what the teachers did, but mainly what they knew and what informed their knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001). This knowing could be identified with what Connelly and Clandinin (1988) describe as ‘personal practical knowledge’ and that includes a wide range of tacit knowledge.

Therefore, the first phase of the education programme identified ideas about language education which are taken for granted, which were analysed and questioned during the first working sessions. In doing so each teacher became aware of his/her knowledge landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996), enhancing thus a self-questioning of individual practice and of the concepts that inform it. Only after this questioning were the conditions created to work and understand the concepts of *portfolio* and of *plurilingual and intercultural competence*. The second phase was conducted in the school year 2005–2006. It concerned the monitoring of teacher’s practice by observing some classes.

In Portugal teacher education has been lately a matter of analysis and discussion. This education programme offers a new model of teacher education providing an opportunity for professional development within the working context, combining theoretical sessions with teachers with monitored classes. According to the Portuguese Report on the Pisa results of 2003, in Portugal the rate of monitored classes is 5% while the OECD rate is, on average 61% (ME, 2004). Therefore, this project could be considered as a mechanism that, intertwining theory and practice, would allow the evaluation of the individual abilities, enhancing collaborative work between teachers.

Thus we hope to make our way towards a reflexive school (Alarcão, 2001, 2003), stimulating and harnessing the value of groups that learn from practice (Andrade & Araújo e Sá, 2001) in the sense of an analytic teacher education, which prepares the teachers for a 'deliberative transposition of knowledge', that means, 'a practical mobilization of knowledge in unexpected situations' (Nóvoa, 2004, p. 4).

Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics of the five teachers involved in the education programme. They are all women between 30 and 38 years old. Only one teacher has fewer than 10 years of teaching. Four teach German and English, the fifth teaches English and French. They all say they know 4 to 6 different languages, Portuguese, English, German, French, Spanish and Italian. Though three of their families have experienced emigration, there is one who does not consider her family either bilingual or plurilingual.

Table 2 shows the organization of the first phase of the Teacher Education Programme. It was organised in ten group sessions of two hours and a half each. All the sessions took place in the school where the involved teachers worked. Borrowing from Kohonen (2004) the concept of bridging tasks, teachers had assignments between the sessions that involved professional reading and reflection on topics discussed. We called them *visiting harbours*, because these tasks were supposed to make the teachers stop at a certain point of their learning, reflect, compare with their practice and then recall this learning in the following sessions. The work was planned to take at least the same amount of hours (25). Teachers then organised their work in a portfolio.

We now look at the data. The analysed data for this paper, as described in Table 3, included a questionnaire (Appendix), answered before the start of the programme, and three reflections written in sessions 7, 8 and 10, respectively. We called these reflections *arriving harbours* because the working sessions were coming to an end, so was this phase of learning. These data convey to us teachers' dispositions at the end of the first phase of the education programme, evaluating, thus, the impact of the work done. In the second phase we will be able to follow the way these dispositions evolve and develop.

Portfolio and plurilingual competence: a working platform ...

Having a plurilingual group, this working platform seemed a good start for revealing clearer identities, intertwining personal biography with the professional development states. Plurilinguals, as a group think in more flexible and divergent ways than monolinguals, they innovate more, create more new knowledge and dreams (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002). Furthermore, as Ellis (2004) argues a 'rich background in language learning must provide a stronger knowledge base for the formation of personal beliefs and practices than a less rich one' (p. 105).

Recognizing the strong link between teachers' identity and their practice (Freeman, 2002; Ellis, 2004), it was necessary to know the participating teachers and their concepts and personal beliefs on language teaching and learning before starting the education programme. So, as already stated, teachers answered a

Table 1. Teachers' characterization

Teachers	Sex	Age	Family monolingual, bilingual, plurilingual	Self monolingual, bilingual, plurilingual	Years of Service	Language taught at school	Language Knowledge Reception & Production skills	Language Knowledge Reception skills only
Célia	F	30	B	P	4	English German	Portuguese, French English, German	Spanish, Italian
Eugénia	F	37	M	P	14	English German	Portuguese, English French, German	Spanish
Eunice	F	34	M	P	10	English German	Portuguese, Italian English, German	
Isabel	F	38	M (2 people B)	P	14	English French	Portuguese, French English	Spanish
Zélia	F	38	M	P	18	English German	Portuguese, German English, Spanish	

Table 2. Teacher education programme: 1st phase

Working with the portfolio, developing the plurilingual competence		
S.	Date	Summary of the activities
1	27/01/2005	Construction of professional and linguistic biography with examples from the European language portfolio and experiences' exchange.
2	23/02/2005	Reading, analysis and discussion on plurilingual biographies. Discussion about: 'What's a language educator?'
3	08/03/2005	Discussion and selection of 10 principles that foster a plurilingual approach.
4	13/04/2005	Analysis of the section in the ELP dedicated to learning strategies. Quiz on the methodological principles adopted by each teacher.
5	21/04/2005	Presentation and discussion on classroom practices of awareness and transfer.
6	03/05/2005	Analysis of national language syllabuses and of CEF.
7	19/05/2005	Preparation for the planning of a teaching unit.
8	02/06/2005	Concept clarification: portfolio and plurilingual and intercultural competence. Beginning of a unit plan construction.
9	09/06/2005	Unit plan conclusion.
10	14/06/2005	Presentation of the unit plans and evaluation. Reflection on the future work.

Table 3. Collected data for this paper

Date	Instrument	Type of data	Treatment
Oct/Nov 2004	Questionnaire (Quest)	Factual/short answers	Content analysis
19/05/05 (7 th Ses.)	Arriving harbour 1: impressions... (AH1)	Written reflection	
02/06/05 (8 th Ses.)	Arriving harbour 2: clarifications...(AH2)	Written reflection	
14/06/05 (10 th Ses.)	Arriving harbour 3: projections... (AH3)	Written reflection	

questionnaire (Appendix) about themselves and their integration in school as we recognise that the teaching culture is not only linked to the biography but also to the working context (Durand, Ria & Flavier, 2002). This way, the tasks could be designed accordingly in order to work the concepts and broaden teachers' professional knowledge.

We will now analyse, in the questionnaire, how the participating teachers value the different languages in the curriculum and the integrated development of a plurilingual and intercultural competence using the portfolio as a pedagogical tool, before the programme started. The focus will be on professional development, teaching practice and concepts of language, language learning and teaching. The analysis is organised into two parts: professional development; and portfolio, languages and the plurilingual competence.

Teacher education: teacher's perceptions

Teachers' opinions on past teacher education programmes underline the positive results in personal and professional domains, but they have a clear perception that they need programmes which have a direct link to classroom practices, in order to explore in a deeper way the teaching and learning processes and consequently achieve better learning results,

It would be great to participate in teacher education programmes in the most neglected areas, such as teaching vocabulary, learning from the mistakes or how to make the classes more profitable. (Quest. Célia, Oct–Nov 2004) (our translation)

Although they acknowledge this lack of specific subject-related professional education they also state that each individual should choose his/her own professional development programmes.

It seems to us that this individual choice of programmes for professional development hampers a subject-related professional education because the offer must be of a wide range to meet the majority of individual inclinations and tastes of teachers,

I would ask teachers to state their thematic preferences so as to include them in future education programmes. (Quest. Eugénia, Oct–Nov 2004) (our translation)

Here, the secondary school could have an important role of satisfying not only individual needs, but rather context-based needs. The school where they work is seen both as a place responsible for promoting programmes of professional development and as having an inadequate response to the identified needs. As one teacher puts it,

The school should promote teacher education programmes that will lead to a more worthwhile teaching and learning process. (Quest. Eugénia, Oct–Nov 2004) (our translation)

According to the data, we can identify a gap where the proposed education programme clearly fits. It is an answer to the subject-related needs and also a means of clarifying the ambiguities about the role of the school.

After knowing what teachers think of teacher education programmes for professional development in general, we shall now look at language education in their practice.

Portfolio, languages and the plurilingual competence: teacher's perceptions

As far as teaching practices are concerned, this group of teachers does not identify either what they know or what they do best or worst, though they show a clear and unanimous awareness that there is a lack in collaborative work and a lack in the work with the language itself as a curricular issue. This matches the identified needs when talking about teacher education,

As far as my department is concerned, I would like the teachers teaching the same level to organize themselves in pedagogical teams so as to prepare lessons in a more complete way. (Quest. Isabel, Oct–Nov 2004) (our translation)

Teachers state they need to vary their teaching, do different things, share work but cannot identify either positive or negative aspects of their practice

As far as my working habits are concerned, I think I should vary materials a little more and I think it would be great to work more collaboratively with the other teachers of the department. (Quest. Célia, Oct–Nov 2004) (our translation)

These data seem to indicate that practice assessment is very diffuse and underestimated. Along with this lack of self-evaluation there is also no tradition related to reflection on practice.

When it comes to methodologies, these teachers underline mainly external aspects of the learning process such as the lack of spaces to work together at school and the huge number of pupils in classes.

Their teaching practices focus on the traditional language teaching competences, according to a communicative approach, fostering a utilitarian use of language and bearing in mind the model of the native speaker. They value the diversification of materials; however they don't analyse the learners' results by using those materials. They also mention a wide range of materials and sources, yet they do not include the CEF and only one mentions the portfolio as an assessment instrument,

The teacher should promote, as often as possible, real communicating situations (almost simulations) so as to develop the learners' communication competencies. (Quest. Isabel, Oct–Nov 2004) (our translation)

Whereas there is a sense that something is lacking, and though the needs (language work) are identified, as well as the means to do it (collaborative work), what prevents these teachers from improving? We consider that the concepts and representations of these teachers have to be made clear and questioned. That is why the programme starts with a reflection on the self as educator and goes on to question the teachers' tacit knowledge in order to promote awareness of it. It is important to mention that when asked about the changes they would like to introduce in the curriculum, one of the five teachers did not answer, and the rest only referred to aspects which are

external to their sphere of intervention and do not directly depend on their action as language educators,

Maybe syllabus reduction, so as to develop a more integral and stress-free study of the different topics. (Quest. Eugénia, Oct–Nov 2004) (our translation)

Along with the mother tongue the English language is seen as an important asset, as it conveys power to its users.

The mother tongue is the most important language because it is our identity, the first reference point and the transmitter of our culture. (Quest. Eugénia, Oct–Nov 2004)

The teachers recognise that learning a language involves the widening of personal horizons, the possibility of communicating and contacting other people, other cultures and the possibility of sharing experiences that lead to a better understanding of the world. However, only one mentions the importance of linguistic diversity and the narrow choice offered by the Portuguese curriculum (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002). We should keep in mind Hazel Henderson's words, the 'cultural DNA that can help us create sustainable economies in healthy ecosystems on this the only planet we have' (in Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002, p. 14). And it is our job as educators to draw our learners' attention to these important facts.

The teachers also mention the benefits of the Portuguese curricular design where the learning of two foreign languages is compulsory, but they don't go any further than assuming it as a learning strategy to other domains or to the learning of other languages, as they identify learning strategies that can be re-used, though still in a very narrow spectrum.

If we refer back to the four dimensions of the plurilingual competence we can disclose some signs of the presence of the linguistic and communicative repertoires management and learning repertoires management, though not operational and mostly related to a utilitarian use of the foreign language. The teachers also mention the dimension of interaction management, yet in a bilingual perspective referring to a separated mastery of linguistic codes.

Starting from different points, as each teacher is unique, they seem willing to learn. The needs, the wishes, the beliefs we found in the questionnaire are the seeds we intended to water with the proposed education programme so that they can blossom according to the uniqueness of each teacher.

Education programme: a first glance ... highlights

After the first six sessions of the education programme, we asked the teachers to write short reflections, which we called *arriving harbours*. These reflections are the basis for a first exploratory analysis of the impact of the programme in the reconstruction of the educational theory of teachers.

As first impressions the teachers point out that the construction of their biography highlights the aspect of the plurilinguism among themselves,

As positive impressions I must highlight some texts read such as 'multilingual lives'. The class conducted by Judite [teacher who has presented her work with her students

on plurilingual competence] was very interesting because of her work with the pupils. I find it interesting to see the learning processes in the acquisition of a new language when we make use of the other languages from our linguistic luggage. (AP1 Célia) (our translation)

They value reflection and awareness in three main aspects that are related to the concepts discussed, the processes of teaching and learning and also the need for reflecting on them. Individual reflection, group debate and collaborative work are recognised as instruments of professional questioning and development. The amount of work and consequent tiredness and lack of time and also the fact that reflection on teaching practice is not a common habit, emerge as constraints.

I feel all activities made me conscious of subject-matters/concepts that deserve reflection, however, we as professionals, for some reason do not dedicate time to them. (AH1 Eugénia) (our translation)

and

The dialogue and discussions/analysis of each session promote self-reflection and have helped me to question my performance as an English teacher and have also enriched my (our) pedagogical thinking. (AH1 Isabel) (our translation)

It is interesting to acknowledge that each teacher highlights what is most relevant for herself and directly relates it to her professional and personal biography, for example the teacher with an emigration experience clearly values the reflection on *multilingual lives*, whereas the teacher, worried about the education of the English speakers, stresses the importance of questioning her teaching practice of that language.

As far as the concept of portfolio is concerned, teachers revealed an integrated perspective of both the ELP and the portfolio as an evaluation instrument. However, one of the teachers still felt the need to distinguish the difference between the ELP, an official document, and the portfolio as a pedagogical tool used for the daily learning of the English language, (AH2, 2 June) as a personal tool of each students' learning process.

All of them underline the fact that it is a personal document that belongs to the learner and that it is a means of documenting/showing and self-evaluating the learning process. It further encompasses not only the learners' but also the teachers' reflections as far as the learning outcomes are concerned. It is also important to mention that one of the teachers mentioned the important role of the teacher in the process of monitoring and evaluating student's learning according not only to the school rules and national curriculum directions, but also to the European language policy guidelines,

Comments on the learning process will be based on the fundamental competencies to be acquired which should be defined not only by the department and the school/nation but also by Europe. (AH2 Zélia, 2 June) (our translation)

This group of teachers seems to understand the portfolio in three ways:

- they point out the differences between something which is familiar and ELP, something still distant, belonging to other sphere of the educational context;

- they develop an integrated vision of the concept and stress its main features— process-oriented, reflection on work done and certification of competencies;
- their integrated vision values all its features but integrates it, not only in the national curriculum, but also in a wider context of Europe and beyond its frontiers.

It seems to us that these teachers are prepared for a portfolio-based learning and teaching approach, even though we cannot be sure that these ideas have really been absorbed and imprinted in their professional repertoire.

As far as the plurilingual and intercultural competence is concerned, they all refer to the cross-communication between different languages and cultures where each individual makes use of the linguistic and cultural repertoires. In order to better understand this cross communication we identify three types:

1. cross-communication only among the languages the individual knows;
2. cross-communication among several different languages and cultures, either known or unknown;
3. cross-communication among languages and cultures unknown to the individual.

Summing up, the plurilingual and intercultural competence is, in the words of a teacher,

Competence that allows the learner to make himself/herself understood and communicate in languages/cultures which he/she doesn't know using mechanisms he/she has from other known languages and cultures, establishing common parallels. (AH2 Zélia, 2 June) (our translation)

Having a narrower or a broader range, these views overcome a segmented vision of language learning, therefore promoting plurilinguism and interculturalism.

Thinking of the following school year, the teachers seem willing to put a plurilingual and intercultural teaching approach into practice. Once again they refer to the fact that they have become aware of the importance of the portfolio and of the plurilingual and intercultural competence, the latter being a really new concept. The teachers recognise they have never worked with this competence and express their wish to do so,

In the future I'll try to develop this competence in a conscious way. I must say that this is a task that requires teamwork and the sharing of knowledge and experiences. (AH3 Eugénia, 14 June) (our translation)

They consider a *portfolio-centred learning and teaching* approach as a twofold challenge: involving the agents and the work itself. It is a challenge because neither learners nor their parents are familiarised with portfolio-oriented learning and teaching practices that try to overcome the barriers between languages, using all the linguistic knowledge for the learning of the target language.

It is also a challenge because there is a need for a real collaborative work among teachers due to a lack of materials, as the regular course books do not offer adequate proposals and also it is necessary to integrate this work within the school context and simultaneously within the national curriculum requirements.

Though with different levels of motivation, all the teachers expressed their intention of continuing in the project.

Conclusion

Considering the fact that the Portuguese culture is traditionally a monolingual culture and that this may hinder the development of a plurilingual competence, this exploratory study seems to point to a change in beliefs and a willingness to change classroom practice in order to work within the *portfolio-centred learning and teaching* approach so as to develop a plurilingual and intercultural competence, though these concepts still need further work in order to become mature professional beliefs,

I feel highly motivated to do something different but I am also prepared for the frustration of sometimes wanting and not being able. (AH3 Eunice, 14 June) (our translation)

and

(...) as far as the articulation between both aspects (portfolio and plurilingual competence) is concerned I still feel insecure and need some time to cement what has been discussed in these sessions. (AH3 Isabel, 14 June) (our translation)

Anyway, practice changes cannot be taken for granted if there seems to have occurred a change in beliefs (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002) and, as there is an increasing complexity in the nature of teaching, the second part of this teacher education programme requires a corresponding sophistication in models of both teaching and of teacher professional growth so as to adapt the monitoring work to each of the teachers. As Clarke and Hollingsworth advise: 'professional development programmes should be deliberately designed to offer participants the opportunity to enact change in a variety of forms and change sequences consistent with individual inclinations' (2002, p.962). In doing so we intend to explore the possibility of creating a group of professionals who work collaboratively by supplying not only the intellectual, social and material resources for teacher learning but also by encouraging and preparing materials for innovations in practice.

We still have hard work ahead towards the acceptance that the educational curriculum is not limited to school and does not end with it. Plurilingual and intercultural competence may begin before school and proceed parallel to it (Council of Europe, 1998). The use of the portfolio may play an important role as a means of exploring and overcoming frontiers within the curriculum as it allows teachers to take into account and recognise a plurilingual and intercultural profile which includes the ability to cope with several languages or cultures and manage such repertoire.

Portfolio-centred learning and teaching approach can be considered a holistic approach that considers the learner the centre of the learning process. Yet, we cannot forget that it is a long-term and demanding process. As one of the teachers reminds us,

(...) I also think we have to establish small steps to take one at a time, as the teacher's work is evermore demanding, exhausting and underpaid. (AH3 Zélia, 14 June) (our translation)

The language educator is thus a comprehension professional, a bridge-builder between individuals, languages and cultures. The language teacher is the

comprehension individual (Larrosa & Skliar, 2001), someone who is devoted to facilitating the understanding of other individuals, someone who connects languages using the means at his/her disposal as, in this case, the portfolio.

Notes

1. PhD-project funded by the Portuguese Ministry of Education and by F.C.T. (Foundation for Science and Technology) Programme POCI 2010, currently being developed at LALE (Open Laboratory for Foreign Language Learning), Department of Didactics and Educative Technology, University of Aveiro.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

portfolio and curriculum construction for language education

Dear Colleague

This questionnaire intends to characterise the language teachers of our school. Choose a name for your identification. You should memorize it for further steps of the current research.

The collected data will allow an adequate construction of a teacher education programme in the scope of a PhD thesis. Please answer as rigorously as possible.

Thanks for your cooperation.

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