

All Teachers Are Language Teachers!

On language promoting teaching strategies in the multilingual classroom.

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In recent years, teachers in schools across Europe have come to realize that their students are no longer likely to be a monolingual group of youngsters who all have the language of instruction as their mother tongue. Increasingly, in today's classrooms, we find a student body that is linguistically heterogeneous. Those who have the school language as their second or additional language are not necessarily at comparable levels of proficiency in that language, making the classroom an even more linguistically complex environment. These youngsters have a variety of first languages, and they have mastered the more formal aspects of the language of instruction to various degrees. Students are expected to learn not only the curriculum content but also the school/majority language, preferably to the point of being able to continue to a post-secondary education. It is also desirable that minority children develop their first language to an adult proficiency level to enhance their bilingual development. In some schools, however, it happens that newly arrived students are placed directly in the main-stream classroom, without even having been given any bridging second-language instruction to prepare them for learning in a language that is a new medium of instruction for them. No teaching in their first language is available to them either. Learning of any kind is in peril if the language used in the classroom is incomprehensible to the learner.

In schools across Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the U.S., this is a familiar situation. Decades, even centuries, of immigration from all over the world made it the norm rather than the exception, at least in some areas of these countries. Strategies to deal with this reality have evolved over time, some more and some less effective, some focussing solely on developing skills in English as a second language and some involving instruction also in the students' first languages. In recent years, publication of the results of a large-scale longitudinal study by Tomas and Collier (2002) in the U.S. brought to international attention the beneficial effects on second-language students of receiving instruction in their mother tongues as well as in the majority language. Other, less ambitious, studies in countries such as Canada (e.g. by Cummins, Bialystok) and - in Europe - Sweden (e.g. by Hill, Tuomela), the Netherlands (e.g. by Gorter, Extra) and Germany (e.g. by Gogolin, Fürstenau) have come to the same conclusions, i.e. that the opportunity to keep learning in their first language while developing skills in the new school language is beneficial not only to the bilingual development of the students, including higher second language proficiency levels, but also to learning in general. Improvement was observed in factual subject matter learning, math skills development, and learning other languages that were part of the school curriculum.

However, despite all these beneficial effects, resources to be invested in school programmes aimed in particular at minority/immigrant students can these days be scarce. In the European context, this is often not a priority among the politicians that ultimately control the public purse. After the bleak economic times in this part of the world during the 1990's, investing in students of minority language backgrounds has been greatly reduced in areas like the

Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands, where cut-backs to second language teaching as well as mother tongue instruction have been an on-going reality over the past decade. This has in turn had an impact on other European countries that have more recently found themselves to be home to linguistically diverse school populations. This educational situation has to be dealt with, but how best to do it and be able to afford it, without disregarding needs such as health care and public housing, is a question asked not least by the governments of nations that only recently have become multilingual societies.

Statistics show that in today's Europe around 10% of the population is of immigrant background. These (im)migrant groups come primarily from countries outside Europe and these days arrive in countries that saw their own people leave as refugees just a few decades ago. Political dissidents fled, for example, Spain under General Franco and Greece under the military junta, but today these very countries often become the point of entry for non-European refugees. Italy and Portugal "exported" large numbers of migrant workers to countries in northern Europe in the mid-1900's but nowadays receive many desperate people that wash up on their shores from poor countries in Africa. EU legislation in most cases prevents these people from moving on to other European countries than the one that they reached first. As a result, southern Europe has seen a sudden rise in the number of refugees that they have to process, some of whom will stay on as immigrants.

In the schools of Europe, on the average approximately 15% of the students have another mother tongue than the language of instruction. The higher rate among students than among the population at large has to do with the fact that not all second-language students have arrived as immigrants. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, linguistic minorities have emerged in many Eastern European countries. These are not immigrant communities but are either regional minority groups that were suppressed by the Soviet Russian regime, or national majorities that were linguistically oppressed as part of the Soviet empire, whose common language was Russian. The latter case can be exemplified by the Baltic countries, where today Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian respectively are the official languages of the corresponding countries, where they have always been spoken by the majority in every-day informal contexts. However, they were prohibited as mediums of instruction in the public school systems, where all teaching took place in Russian, until the collapse of the Soviet Union. They have now regained status as the official languages of both education and administration, while the Russians who immigrated to the Baltic countries during the Soviet years, these days find themselves being the linguistic minority that has to adapt and learn the majority language.

The new multilingual reality of many countries across Europe created a need for educational strategies to prepare teachers for linguistically diverse student groups and provide them with instructional materials that could not only be used in teacher training but also be readily adaptable for use in the multilingual classrooms. The educational contexts in much of Europe today require that teachers be equipped with tools to meet the needs of all students and to work in ways that promote both subject matter learning and language skills. In order to address these concerns, the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) launched the Language Educator Awareness (LEA) project in 2004. The ECML is a part of the Council of Europe, an organisation that is considerably larger than the European Union to date. The close to 30 countries participating in the LEA project ranged from Iceland in the north-west to Armenia in the south-east, neither of which is a member of the EU. Today, the bulk of the project work is completed and the results will be published in 2007.

Over the past two years, teacher trainers from over 25 countries have been working on creating materials and activities to raise awareness among teachers(-to-be) about the fact that – regardless of what they “officially” teach – they are all language educators as well, indirectly teaching the language of instruction. In addition, the LEA project provides language-promoting materials for pre-service and in-service training, most of which can be readily adapted for use in a variety of classrooms in the school system. Also, activities aimed at developing positive attitudes towards linguistic and cultural diversity are included in the “LEA kit”, since it is not unusual to find negative attitudes among educators towards heterogeneous school populations. This is true for both teachers and school administrators. The aim of such activities is to focus on the richness inherent in diversity instead of viewing the presence of different languages and cultures in the same classroom as a problem. The “LEA kit” of more than 30 activities will be available on a CD with an accompanying booklet, free of charge, through the ECML.

The LEA materials and activities are based on the *Common European Framework for Languages* that “emphasizes the fact that an individual person’s experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other people”. Following the objectives of the *European Language Portfolio*, the LEA materials aim to develop a language repertory, where all linguistic abilities have a place. Also, the materials promote what the Framework defined as “the favourable development of the learner’s whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture”. In other words, personal identity issues are not limited to one culture/language or another, but they become the product of multiple influences as we encounter people from other backgrounds. Their “otherness” helps us on the one hand to define our roots, on the other hand to develop our own unique personalities that may include elements of several cultural identities.

Above all, the LEA activities are intended to help the teachers create a learning environment for their students that will allow them to enhance all their linguistic abilities, both in the language of instruction and in other languages they know, be it their mother tongue or another language they have used in previous schools they have attended. This will enable students to maintain and develop languages they have already acquired or started to learn before being transposed to their current school language environment, without special instructional resources being required. Promoting all language skills also means that the students are given ample opportunities to use both written and spoken language, productively as well as receptively. Just listening and reading will only have a limited effect on language development; speaking and writing must be added for ultimate progress. And speaking involves not only giving formal presentations to the class/teacher or participating in panel debates but also talking in informal discussions involving smaller or larger groups of students.

Some of the activities in the “LEA kit” focus directly on language and culture, but others have another topic – which could be part of a school subject such as History, Geography or Social studies – as their main focus and the students are instructed to explore this topic using all four language skills in a variety of ways. This is a way to integrate subject matter learning with the development of linguistic abilities, which enables every teacher to be a language teacher. As was mentioned above, the LEA materials are primarily intended for use in teacher training, but an important aspect of several of the activities is that they can, sometimes with minor adjustments, be used in classrooms in the regular school system. Below is an example of such an activity, where the issues of gender and employment/careers are dealt with in several different activities done in smaller or larger groups, individually or as a whole class, using all

four language skills. The issues, which could be changed by a History teacher to, for example, education in medieval times, are also viewed through a cultural lens that is intended to promote intercultural communication and prevent ethnocentrism. The rationale for this is to develop positive attitudes toward cultural as well as linguistic diversity.

At the beginning is some information about the scope and purpose of the activity (please note that in European contexts, the prefix *pluri-* is used in lieu of *multi-* when dealing with individuals while the words *multilingual* and *multicultural* pertain to the social level, the environment) before going on the activity worksheets proper. The owls symbolize the various work constellations for the activities: One for individual work, two for work in pairs, three for group work, and four for whole class activities.

My Contribution to the LEA Activity Collection

Language and culture – gender and jobs.

Target audience

- Pre-service teachers
 - Primary teachers
 - Secondary teachers_
- In-service teachers
 - Primary teachers
 - Secondary teachers

Itinerary

Investigating and reflecting on the different social expectations of men and women in different cultures and on how this affects professional options.

Abstract:

The personal and social awareness of oneself (and others!) as a product of cultural expectations regarding the individual, which are reflected in the scopes and options available to him/her in terms of gender and related career/professional choices, is the main focus of the activity. The set contains 6 worksheets. The activity can be done with all six as thematic project or finished anywhere after the first two, preferably with a whole-class discussion or by sharing written products to round it off. Worksheets 3-5 can also be lifted out and used on their own as a 'media watch project' on any given topic.

Rationale

Pluricultural competence is being enhanced through this activity and, depending on the participants' individual language repertoires, plurilingual skills can be employed in the selection of materials to be used in the activity. The classroom becomes an environment of

multicultural focus and contents. Awareness of and reflection about diversity are core elements of the activity. The participants will experience – and challenge? - their own ethnicity (and prejudices...) in the comparison of practices across different cultures.

Personal and social dimensions

Developing awareness of cultural expectations and encouraging flexibility about their influence on individual career choices, as well as realizing and questioning what is taken for granted or seen as normal in various social contexts.

Professional dimensions

The professional dimensions are developed in that different learning/work formats are practiced in this activity with an explicit aim to strive for a communicative learning environment with all four language skills being involved in the activity. These formats can then serve as models for classroom activities with pupils in school. All teacher trainees – pre-service or in-service – will be able to apply some aspect of the interactive models used in this activity to their own teaching, regardless of where in the school system they are/will be teaching, as long as the pupils have developed a basic level of literacy. (Adaptations of some of the models can even be used with pupils who are still learning how to read and write.) This activity model offers generative flexibility in the sense that it can be modified to include a great variety of cultures to be investigated and in that it can be applied to contexts other than “jobs”, such as sports, art, education, family responsibilities.

Worksheet 1

Timing : 45’ – 60’

Materials required: Writing paper and pen(cil)s, a flip chart or white-/blackboard(s) and markers.

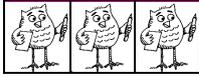
Exploring preconceived ideas.



Begin with 15 minutes of individual exploratory writing about what is a typically male and typically female job/profession in

- a) my own culture,
- b) another European culture that I (think I) am familiar with, and

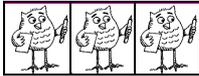
- c) a non-European culture that either I am interested in or has a sizeable immigrant community in my country.



In 4-6 groups of 4-6 persons, listen to each other's written accounts in the following way:

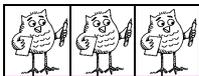
- First everyone in the group reads about a) and the group compare/discuss what jobs were selected.
- Then everybody reads about b) and the comparison here also involves the cultures selected.
- Finally read about and compare c), in the same way as with b).

[This should take 20-30 minutes.]



Next, as a group, decide on

- a) one 'predominantly female' and one 'predominantly male' job from their own/the majority culture,
- b) one male and one female job in the other European culture that most of the group members/more than one group member had written about (if all have chosen different cultures, a discussion or a draw will decide which culture the group will use), and
- c) one male and one female job in one of the non-European cultures (same selection procedure as for other European) that the group members have brought up in their writings. [This should take max. 10 minutes.]



Finally, write this selection as six points on a flip chart page or other large piece of paper (or possibly on sections of a writing board). The papers are then stuck/pinned to the walls around the classroom. [This will take around 5 minutes.]

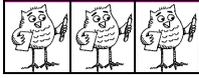
Worksheet 2

Timing: 40' – 60' (depending on the number of groups)

No materials required.

(Cont. on next page)

Discussing stereotypes.



Form 4-6 'jig-saw' groups (=new groups with one person, or possibly two, from each of the original groups) and stand in front of the six-point lists, one group in front of each paper.



The person representing the group that wrote the list where the group is standing

- a) comments on the group activity that led to the selection and
 - a) answers questions from the others in this group.
 - b) After 10 minutes, the activity is interrupted and the groups rotate to the next poster.
 - c) The person representing the group responsible for this list comments and answers questions.
 - d) The same process is repeated until every group has spent time in front of each poster.

Worksheet 3

Timing: Flexible (see description), but at least 60'

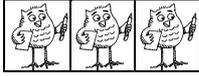
Materials required: Newspapers and/or a computer with Internet connection, a sheet of bristol board or construction paper, or simply a large piece of sturdy paper.

Media watch.



First, carry out an individual media survey.

- a) Read newspapers provided by the instructor or
- b) look in the daily press for the next week or couple of days.
- c) Check articles, news stories, columns, letters to the editor, want ads and commercial advertising to see if the gender stereotypes identified in the group discussions can be found.
- d) If possible, investigate newspapers from the other cultures represented too. (The Internet is useful resource to access news media from other countries.)
- e) Relevant newspaper items are cut out / printed up (Internet sources).



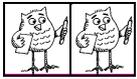
Bring the clippings to the original groups (=activity 1-groups), and put together a collage poster, one for each group. Attach the poster beside the group's six-point 'jobs/cultures' list.

Worksheet 4

Timing: 30' -40'

Materials required: Writing paper and pen(cil)s.

Responding and challenging.



Form pairs including one person from two different original groups.

Study a collage that is created by a group neither one has been part of.

[This should take max. 5 minutes.]

Discuss these newspaper clippings and choose one clipping per person to respond to in writing (=the next step), preferably one text (news story or article/column) and one piece of advertising (commercial or job ad). [This should take 5 - 10 minutes.]



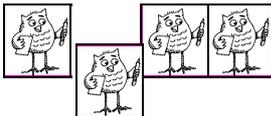
Write an individual response that challenges the stereotypical job/gender role that is reflected in the selected newspaper clipping. [Write for 20 - 30 minutes.]

Worksheet 5

Timing: 50-60 minutes (or more, if a panel debate is included)

Materials required: A box (or the like), writing paper and pen(cil)s.

Draw and debate!

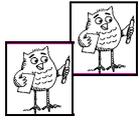


Fold the written responses and put them in a box.

[This will take max. 5 minutes.]



Draw one paper from the box and try to find the collage clipping that it responds to and read it. [This should take approximately 15 minutes.]



Next, get back into pairs (as in worksheet 4) and

- a) choose one of the two responses drawn,
- b) jointly create a written dialogue where one person defends the traditional view and the other one challenges it.

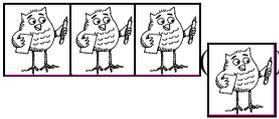
Who wins the argument is anybody's guess!

[This will take 20 – 30 minutes.]



The dialogues are then collected by the instructor and a few selected dialogues are performed in front of the whole group.

[This part takes at least 15 minutes.]



An optional panel (or class) debate may then follow,

Worksheet 6

Timing: From at least 60' up to a few days (Hard to say... se description!)

Materials required: Interviewee(s), writing paper and pen(cil)s, photo copier and stapler.

Interviewing and reporting.

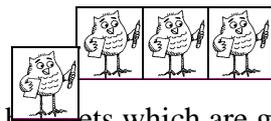
Option A:



Using questions from the dialogues, go out into the community and interview a member from one of the ethnic groups represented in the poster selections about how s/he regards gender stereotyping and professional career opportunities in her/his culture/country of origin.



Write a summary of the interview, with personal reflections and comments, which is given to the instructor.



The instructor copies the interview reports and puts them together as booklets which are given to and read by all the participants (which can in turn generate written responses....). [This work can be completed over a couple of days.]

In some locations it may be difficult for the participants to find suitable interviewees themselves. Then, instead of sending the participants out to interview individuals in the community, the model below can be used.

Option B:

The instructor brings in guests from some of the cultures that have been investigated in the project.

The participants can then take turns asking them questions as follows:

- a)  in groups - one guest per group – and then share the information in ‘jigsaw groups’ (=see worksheet 2), or

- b)  in class with the guests as a "panel of experts". The participants then write down their own reflections and comment on how their own gender/job and culture assumptions have been affected.

[Option B will take around 60 minutes.]

If no representatives of other cultures can be interviewed, the following model can be used instead.

Option C:

Persons with non-stereotypical jobs in the majority culture can be used as substitutes, e.g. male nurses/preschool teachers or female construction workers/fire fighters. They can be

- a)  interviewed individually by the participants outside the classroom or

- b)  invited to the classroom by the instructor for group interviews or a panel discussion (as in Option B). The writing task that follows will then focus on how each persons’ views on jobs and gender have been influenced.

[Option C should take around 60 minutes]

*Of course, these guests can be invited to the classroom for a panel discussion **in addition to** the participants going out into the community to interview persons from other cultures. The individual writing will then include both cultural and gender stereotypes that may have been challenged by these experiences. **That will be the best of both worlds!***

Finally, to conclude my paper about the background to and the activities of the LEA project, I hope that those who try the above example from the “LEA kit” will find it useful and inspiring. For additional LEA activities, that will become available through the ECML in early 2007, consult the web site www.ecml.at for current information and the latest updates.

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