

Nurturing Democratic Global Citizens: Exploring Plurilingualism and the Plurilingual and Intercultural Education

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Abstract

This article sheds light on the notion of plurilingualism, one of key pillars of language policy proposed by Council of Europe and it offers some further explorations on ways to practicing it in school and classroom context. By studying plurilingualism and the plurilingual and intercultural education, the author concludes this review with some practical suggestions for nurturing democratic global citizens.

Keywords: Plurilingualism, Plurilingual and Intercultural Education, CEFR

1. Introduction

In an era marked by heightened mobility and dynamic change, contemporary global societies are undergoing a notable paradigm shift, resulting in intricate and fluid structure [1]. This societal transition is concomitant with a diverse array of languages and cultures coalescing within these contexts. Given the emergent prevalence of the plurality of languages and cultures, there arises a compelling need to revisit the concept of plurilingualism. This reevaluation necessitates a comprehensive inquiry into the ways in which an educational approach embracing both plurilingualism and interculturalism plays a pivotal role in nurturing democratic global citizens.

1.1 The Notion of Plurilingualism

Plurilingualism is a rich and intricate notion, particularly in the context of language education. To better comprehend plurilingualism, it's prudent to begin by exploring how the concept is presented in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) and the corresponding research. This foundational step can pave the way for a clearer understanding.

The inception of the plurilingualism concept can be traced back to the second iteration of the CEFR which was subsequently expounded upon in a study associated with the CEFR (Coste, Moore, & Zarate, [2,3]. Notably, in the official publication of the CEFR (2001), plurilingualism was distinctly delineated from multilingualism for the first time. While multilingualism refers to "the knowledge of a number of languages, or the co-existence of different languages in a given society" plurilingualism, by adopting the Latin prefix "pluri-", advocates for a more intricate, dynamic framework [4]. In other words, plurilingualism refers

to "the dynamic and developing linguistic repertoire of an individual user/ learner" which encompasses the capability to actively employ multiple languages and perceives languages from the vantage point of both speakers and learners.

Plurilingualism has been defined as the recognition of "the existence of a complex or even composite competence [in language usage] on which the social actor may draw" [3]. Consequently, it (plurilingualism) "challenges the assumption of complete and balanced competence in [discrete] languages" and "highlights interculturality and the social nature of communicative competence" [5]. Moreover, in alignment with the CEFR, plurilingualism is presented as "an uneven and changing competence" and is characterized as an evolving and dynamic proficiency that may manifest in an uneven manner at the individual level. Individuals who engage with languages as speakers and learners possess plurilingual competence, signifying their capacity to effectively deploy a diverse range of linguistic and cultural tools in order to fulfill communication requirements and engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds and settings. This process not only involves utilizing the existing linguistic repertoire but also enhancing it through interaction and engagement.

According to Piccardo, Germain-Rutherford, and Lawrence (2021), adopting a plurilingual perspective validates the authentic language usage of individuals who are not typically categorized as "native speakers." Rather than perceiving those who use non-standard language varieties as having deficiencies, this fresh approach contends that individuals who diverge from imposed and abstract language norms are not exhibiting abnormalities. To present this perspective more positively, individuals who

exhibit diverse and integrated language usage demonstrate a highly advanced set of language skills that extend far beyond a narrow proficiency with imposed (often artificial) standards. In this light, plurilingualism suggests that diverse language usage serves as a form of resistance against these norms, which frequently serve to reinforce (and even contribute to the creation of) unequal power dynamics [6].

Plurilingualism signifies the appreciation and advancement of a diverse range of languages and cultures, while also nurturing genuine curiosity in all linguistic and cultural aspects. It involves recognizing language rights as integral to human rights and advocating for the mutual regard and comprehension that stem from this perspective. Hence, both plurilingualism and interculturality hold vital importance in the context of democratic societies [7].

1.2 Further Explorations of Plurilingualism

Following the release of the CEFR in 2001, accompanied by translations into approximately 40 languages, an active endorsement of plurilingualism as an educational policy was advocated. Taking a look at the aims of the Council of Europe, a supra-national body which focused on cultural co-operation, Plurilingualism can be interpreted as the idea that everyone has the right to cultivate communication skills in various languages throughout their life based on their personal requirements, and the plurilingual competence is closely linked to democratic citizenship as the ability of individuals to be plurilingual enhances their capacity to engage in democratic and social activities within societies characterized by multiple languages. When it comes to the ways to make plurilingualism into reality, a significant turning point marked in 2007 with the publication of a language policy guide for plurilingual education alongside the initial provisional edition of the reference framework designed to underpin these diverse approaches (CARAP/ FREPA: Candelier et al., 2013)[4] should be paid attention to [8].

1.3 Plurilingual and Intercultural Education: Beacco & Byram (2007)

Beacco & Byram stated that the notion of plurilingual and intercultural education has been meticulously formulated by the Council of Europe's Language Policy Unit, evolving since the latter part of the 1990s [8]. It serves as a fundamental framework designed to underpin an educational approach that embraces both cultural and linguistic diversity within societies characterized by a discernible surge in mobility, multiplicity, and intricacy. In response to these challenges, the plurilingual and intercultural education has twofold objectives. Firstly, it plays a role in enabling the acquisition of linguistic and intercultural competencies. This aligns with the core objectives of education systems in industrial and post-industrial nations, where the imperative lies in assimilating young individuals into the societal framework of the nation-state in which they originate. This entails imparting knowledge about their own society, instructing them on appropriate conduct and behavior within it, and fostering an emotional connection to it [9]. This scope encompasses the instruction of various languages, encompassing languages of instruction, foreign languages, regional or minority languages,

as well as classical languages. By adopting the plurilingual and intercultural education, these objectives are tailored according to the unique needs of learners, the languages involved, and the contextual nuances.

Secondly, the plurilingual and intercultural education advances personal growth, enabling individuals to realize their maximum capabilities. Once again, this alignment corresponds with the primary objectives of educational systems summarized by Byram [9]. Especially prominent in post-industrial societies, where a significant emphasis is placed on highlighting the concept of "human capital" which is particularly prominent in post-industrial societies [10]. This concept underscores the notion that individuals serve as the driving force behind economic advancement and societal well-being. Emerging in the latter half of the 20th century, the idea of human capital encapsulates this perspective. Its envisioned benefits extend not only to individuals but also encompass the prosperity of the state and the broader population [9]. The plurilingual and intercultural education plays a vital role in cultivating a sense of respect and inclusivity for the myriad languages and cultures existing within a multilingual and multicultural society. Additionally, it involves promoting individuals' understanding of their own capabilities and growth prospects. This secondary objective further enriches the comprehensive personal development nurtured within the context of this educational paradigm.

In the realm of its practical application, the concept of plurilingual and intercultural education gains prominence as a response to the escalating diversity within societies. Beacco & Byram emphasize that its significance is inherently tied to the fundamental right of every individual to access education [8]. They further distinguish between two distinct forms of acquisition. The first focuses on 'the acquisition of competencies,' while the second pertains to 'the acquisition of language-related competences, students' academic achievements, and the promotion of equity in educational opportunities.' The latter form of acquisition, which encompasses the development of language-related proficiencies, knowledge, mindsets, and perspectives, serves a multifaceted purpose. It goes beyond the acquisition of mere language skills; it plays a pivotal role in constructing both personal and collective cultural identities. Moreover, it nurtures identities that are not only aware and complex but also open to the influences of diverse perspectives.

Recognizing the transformative role of language education, it's important to underscore its contribution to the cultivation of intercultural skills. Language instruction not only equips individuals with practical abilities necessary for effective communication across various societal contexts and linguistic boundaries but also plays a pivotal role in shaping learners on both individual and communal levels.

1.4 The FREPA descriptors: Candelier et al. (2013)

Though Beacco & Byram take a holistic approach to the implementation of the plurilingual and intercultural education and emphasize the important role that language education can play in it, the way in which language education is operationalized

in the classroom and how these plurilingual and intercultural competences are understood and referred to is not sufficiently addressed [8]. This pioneering vision, which emphasizes the importance of plurality of languages and cultures in language education, urgently needs to be guided by a new paradigm for language education.

To address this gap, some research projects initiated under the auspices of the relevant departments of the Council of Europe are worth noticing. Among them, a representative project titled ALC (Across Languages and Cultures), and the subsequent FREPA descriptors are worth citing. As a crucial component of the second medium-term program of the ECML (European Centre for Modern Languages), the overarching goal of the ALC project was to drive a significant shift in the language education paradigm, aiming to embody "the development of a global view of language education which would include the teaching and learning of ALL languages, in order to profit from their potential for synergy." In essence, the ALC project sought to transcend traditional language education boundaries by emphasizing the importance of all languages, not just a select few [11]. It recognized the valuable contributions that each language can make, both in terms of their unique characteristics and the collective benefits derived from fostering a diverse linguistic environment. This effort was aligned with the broader mission of the ECML to promote effective language teaching and learning across Europe.

By adopting the perspective that an individual possesses a "plurilingual and pluricultural competence covering the entire spectrum of languages available to them" the emphasis is placed on nurturing the extensive linguistic and cultural proficiencies that an individual can possess [4]. In terms of managing this plurilingual competence, it involves treating the various language varieties within an individual's repertoire as interconnected components. Instead of isolating each linguistic variety, they are seen as integral elements of a unified competence available to the individual within a social context [8]. This viewpoint emphasizes the interconnectedness of languages and the potential for synergy between them within the individual's linguistic and cultural toolkit.

When it comes to language learning and teaching practice, the concept of "pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures" which encompasses educational methodologies that incorporate instructional and learning activities centered around multiple varieties of languages or cultures is adopted. In other words, these approaches involve teaching and learning practices that engage with more than one linguistic or cultural aspect simultaneously [11].

The significance of pluralistic approaches in fostering the development of "plurilingual and pluricultural competence" in individuals cannot be overstated. In essence, Candelier et al. assert that for plurilingual competence to align with the description outlined by Council of Europe instruments, and to truly give substance to the principle of synergy it advocates, learners must be guided to independently cultivate a repertoire of knowledge

(savoirs), attitudes (savoir-être), and skills (savoir-faire) [11]. These components are vital for learners in constructing, expanding, and deepening their own plurilingual competence. They further elaborated it with two key dimensions. The first one is "Trans-Linguistic" and "Trans-Cultural Competence". Learners should acquire knowledge and insights that transcend specific languages or cultures. This "trans" dimension entails grasping overarching linguistic and cultural concepts that apply universally, irrespective of a particular language or culture. The second is "Inter-Linguistic" and "Inter-Cultural Competence": Learners should leverage the abilities acquired in relation to one language or culture to facilitate easier engagement with another language or culture. This "inter" dimension emphasizes the transferability of skills and aptitudes between languages and cultures, enabling learners to navigate and access new linguistic and cultural domains more effectively.

In essence, Candelier et al. advocate for a comprehensive approach that goes beyond isolated language or culture-specific learning. Pluralistic approaches encourage learners to develop a versatile set of competences that span different languages and cultures, contributing to a more holistic and interconnected plurilingual and pluricultural competence [11]. This approach aligns with the Council of Europe's emphasis on synergy and the broader goal of fostering effective and culturally aware communication. It's evident that developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes like these is possible only within a classroom environment that embraces multiple languages, cultures, and their interconnectedness. In other words, this occurs in a setting that follows the principles of "pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures," where learners engage with diverse languages and cultures, explore their connections, and establish relationships between them.

1.5 Suggestion for Some Practice to Foster Democratic Global Citizens:

Plurilingualism values and capitalizes on plurality, viewing inherent diversities in a more integrated and comprehensive manner. Central to plurilingualism is the ability to flexibly draw upon a comprehensive, interconnected, and uneven repertoire of languages. The concept of plurilingualism recognizes the existence of partial competencies, where aptitudes in one language or dialect may significantly differ in nature from those in another. This framework underscores the aptitude to proficiently engage at a certain level in particular activities or domains of application, while simultaneously demonstrating a distinct proficiency level in other areas. By embracing this fluid and ever-evolving perspective, plurilingualism opens the door to a broader spectrum of possibilities, rendering it immensely valuable as a foundational element that paves the way for ongoing advancement [12].

The intricate elements inherent in plurilingual and intercultural education significantly contribute to the advancement of inclusivity and societal cohesion. As a result, they hold a fundamental position in equipping individuals to engage actively in democratic citizenship and assume a reinforcing role in establishing the bedrock of a knowledge- and information-

driven society. This section delves deeper into the following four ways to effectively practice plurilingualism and rationale its way to nurture democratic global citizens.

1.6 Curricular Approaches

According to Beacco and Byram tailored curricular initiatives covering multiple dimensions can effectively promote plurilingual and intercultural education. These include goals, competencies, content, evaluation procedures, pedagogical approaches, instructional resources, and teacher training priorities [8]. The following three tactics, in particular, are essential.

Curricular Alignment with Coordinates: Coordination of lessons across multiple language strands, such as foreign, regional, minority, and classical languages, as well as the language(s) of teaching, is emphasized. This synchronization promotes coherence and synergistic learning experiences, enhancing comprehension of linguistic diversity and cultural complexities.

Intercultural Competence Integration: Identifying and integrating intercultural competencies appropriate for each course of study. This entails increasing awareness of key competencies and smoothly incorporating them into the learning cycle. This type of integration provides learners with the tools they need to manage cultural challenges.

Self-awareness and Reflexivity: Encourage learners to consider the components of their plurilingual repertoire and intercultural abilities introspectively. This self-awareness includes understanding the dynamics of languages and cultures, as well as the best strategies to capitalize on personal and community language experiences.

By applying these tactics, educators lay the path for a more comprehensive and meaningful plurilingual and intercultural education. These strategies enable students to interact with people from many languages and cultures while polishing important intercultural skills for effective global citizenship.

1.7 Textbooks and Course Materials

The transition to efficient plurilingual and multicultural education demands a radical redesign of textbooks and course materials. This revamp aims to promote language diversity and cultural awareness while also preparing pupils for the intricacies of our linked world.

Content Framework Redefined: The content framework of textbooks and course materials serves as the cornerstone of plurilingual and intercultural education. Redesigning this paradigm entails seamlessly integrating multiple language and cultural viewpoints across subjects. To be specific, textbook writers and course materials developers can pay attention to two aspects, namely interwoven narratives and cultural representation. Textbooks use a method in which narratives from different languages and cultures intersect which fosters an environment in which students recognize the interconnection

of human experiences, while course materials reflect a wide range of cultures, exposing students to a rich tapestry of customs, histories, and values which promotes cross-cultural understanding and empathy.

Critical Thinking: New materials go beyond rote learning by fostering critical analysis of linguistic nuances and cultural circumstances. This method gives pupils the tools they need to handle complex intercultural relationships. To achieve this, textbooks and course materials can employ comparative exploration and make it possible to compare linguistic structures and cultural norms. Such investigation fosters a greater understanding and appreciation of both differences and similarities. In addition, deconstructing stereotypes should also be stressed and it can be realized by adding students with various backgrounds to participate in dialogues that dispel myths and promote cultural sensitivity.

Promoting Multimodal Learning: Redesigned materials leverage diverse media formats to engage students and cater to different learning styles. This multimodal approach enriches the learning experience by offering multilingual resources and visual narratives. The former requires textbooks incorporate multimedia resources showcasing authentic language usage. Audio clips, videos, and interactive exercises expose students to real-world linguistic diversity. The latter need to be solved by utilizing visuals to depict cultural practices, enhancing understanding and providing a visual representation of diverse traditions.

In essence, the redesign of textbooks and course materials serves as a cornerstone in the edifice of plurilingual and intercultural education. By infusing linguistic diversity, cultural richness, and critical thinking into learning resources, educators empower students to become global citizens who thrive in an interconnected world of languages and cultures.

1.8 The Roles of Teachers and Students:

The realization of effective plurilingual and intercultural education requires some pedagogical innovations and hinges upon the dynamic roles undertaken by both educators and students.

By adopting the plurilingual perspective, they are all language users who employ all their linguistic and plurilingual repertoire and activate their competences to cooperate and complete tasks. These roles, revisited and reinvigorated, play a pivotal role in creating a rich learning environment that fosters linguistic diversity and cross-cultural understanding.

For educators, they should take the role of facilitators and are tasked with encouraging students to be multilingual and interculturally competent. Besides, they need to set the example for intercultural understanding by showing respect, tolerance, and an appreciation for different viewpoints. To achieve these, it calls for ongoing professional development which focus on providing teachings with the pedagogical tools and strategies, and guiding them the effective ways to encourage their students

to interact thoughtfully with various cultures by modeling these values for them.

Students, too, are active agents in the plurilingual and intercultural education process. Their engagement goes beyond language acquisition, embracing intercultural competences and self-reflection. They should take on the role of curious explorers, delving into the complexities of languages and cultures. By actively seeking opportunities to engage in cross-cultural interactions, their horizons can be broadened and perspectives can be enriched. In school or classroom reality, students can be assigned with the roles of cultural ambassadors to share their own linguistic and cultural experience with peers in a proud way. This interaction not only enhances cultural awareness but also fosters a sense of unity within diverse communities. In return, students' meta-cognition can be developed. This introspection enhances their ability to navigate intricate cross-cultural scenarios effectively.

By reinforcing these roles, both educators and students contribute to a vibrant plurilingual and intercultural education landscape. Their collaborative efforts lay the foundation for an inclusive society that thrives on linguistic diversity and mutual understanding.

1.9 Joint Efforts for An Integrated Learning Community:

The empowerment of plurilingual and intercultural education transcends the classroom, uniting communities, societies, and nations in a shared endeavor to foster understanding, tolerance, and global harmony. Through collaborative efforts spanning different levels, a collective commitment to linguistic diversity and intercultural competence emerges.

The community can play an essential role in enhancing the plurilingual and intercultural education. By reflecting local values, languages, and traditions, communities act as the cornerstone of plurilingual and intercultural education. Community involvement builds a solid foundation for holistic learning. For example, community can help in protecting its local heritage, ensuring that local languages and cultures play a crucial part in education and identity. Besides, it can initiate some cultural exchange with the aim to expose students to various viewpoints and foster a sense of community across national and cultural boundaries.

Societies can also play essential role in enhancing the plurilingual and intercultural education. For example, the inclusion of linguistic and cultural diversity in mainstream curricula can be encouraged by societal support for inclusive education policies. Moreover, interdisciplinary learning experiences that prioritize cultural awareness and cross-cultural competence can be fostered by collaboration between educational institutions and societal stakeholders as well.

Not just limited to community and society, the nation or state level can take some measures too. By Integration of the plurilingual and intercultural perspectives into the curriculum, students can be cultivated to be both culturally rooted citizens

and global ambassadors. In turn, the diversity of its languages and cultures can be well preserved and a diverse and vibrant sense of national identity can be formed.

Through alignment at the community, societal, and national levels, plurilingual and intercultural education evolves into a transformative force that bridges divides, fosters collaboration, and prepares individuals to engage harmoniously on the global stage. This unified commitment empowers learners to embrace their roles as contributors to a diverse and interconnected world.

2. Conclusion:

In a society characterized by multilingualism and cultural diversity, the role of plurilingual competence becomes indispensable in realizing the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship, spanning across cultural, social, economic, and public realms. In the meanwhile, it recognizes the formation of one's plurilingual and pluricultural identity, which is a critical idea in today's contentious society. Hence, it is of great significance for us to revisit the notion of plurilingualism and seek ways to practice it with joint efforts. Plurilingualism empowers individuals to engage with the world in a holistic manner and acknowledges lifelong learning. The acquisition of one or more languages, coupled with an appreciation for diversity and an understanding of linguistic nuances, equips individuals with essential attributes for effective engagement as conscientious community members. Gradually, the possession of plurilingual competence can be emerged as a fundamental imperative in enabling individuals to actively partake in democratic and societal endeavors. By combining linguistic proficiency with intercultural understanding and democratic values, plurilingual individuals are better positioned to navigate the complexities of modern society, promote intercultural harmony, and actively participate as informed global citizens in democratic processes.

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