Connecting languages: the use of the *portfolio* as a means of exploring and

overcoming frontiers within the curriculum

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ABSTRACT:

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. Developing a plurilingual and intercultural competence in the classroom becomes a challenge for teacher's practice and for teacher's professional development.

This paper describes the work within a project for professional development of a group of in service teachers, by analysing how, in their discourse, language teachers value the different languages in the curriculum and the integrated development of a plurilingual an intercultural competence. A *portfolio-oriented language learning and teaching* approach is believed to be an appropriate tool to work with.

TITEL:

Sprachen verbinden: *Portfolios* als Utensil für Forschung und Überwindung der Grenzen innerhalb des nationalen Curriculum

AUSZUG:

Die Europäische Sprachenpolitik legt grossen Wert auf die linguistische Vielfalt. Eine der Prioritäten ist dernach, 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.

Somit stellt sich im Fremdsprachenunterricht eine neue Herausforderung für die Unterrichtspraxis und Weiterentwicklung der Lehrer: mit den Schülern plurilinguale und interkulturelle Kompetenzen zu bearbeiten.

In diesem Vortrag soll die Zusammenarbeit mit einer Lehrer-Gruppe im Rahmen einer beruflichen Weiterbildung beschrieben werden. Es wird analysiert, auf welche Weise sich im Lehrer-Diskurs Meinungen über die verschiedenen Sprachen des Curriculums und über die integrierte Entwicklung der genannten Kompetenzen verdeutlichen. Ein *portfolio-orientiertes Sprachlernen und Unterrichten* wird aus dieser Sicht als geeignetes Arbeitsutensil eingeschätzt.

TITRE

Vers une intégration des langues: l'utilisation du *portfolio* en tant que moyen d'exploitation et de dépassement des frontières du curriculum scolaire

RÉSUMÉE

La politique linguistique européenne souligne l'importance de la diversité linguistique et encourage à apprendre plusieurs langues, en défendant que plus nous maîtrisons des langues, plus nous contribuons à la préservation linguistique et culturelle. Développer une compétence plurilingue et interculturelle à l'école devient un défi éducatif.

Cet article décrit un projet sur le développement professionnel d'un groupe d'enseignants en situation de formation continue, projet conçu autour de la notion de portfolio. Il s'agit d'analyser ici comment les

professeurs en formation valorisent, dans leur discours, les différentes langues du curriculum scolaire, ainsi que le programme de formation auquel ils ont participé.

TÍTULO:

Interrelación de lenguas: el uso del portafolio como medio de examinar y superar fronteras dentro del plan de estudios.

RESUMEN:

La política lingüística europea defiende la importancia de la diversidad lingüística y anima a aprender varios idiomas, en la convicción de que cuantos más idiomas sabemos, mejor podemos entendernos y preservar nuestros idiomas. Desarrollar una capacidad plurilingüe e intercultural en la escuela se convierte en un desafío para la práctica y para el desarrollo profesional del profesor. Este texto describe el trabajo llevado a cabo dentro de un proyecto para el desarrollo profesional de un grupo de profesores en un instituto, analizando cómo, en su discurso, valoran los diversos idiomas en el plan de estudios y el desarrollo integrado de una competencia plurilingüe e intercultural. Se trata de analizar aquí de qué manera los profesores en situación de formación, en el discurso que elaboran, valoran los diferentes idiomas, presentes en el currículo, así como el programa de formación en que han participado.

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INTRODUCTION

The on going research aims at pointing out the potentials 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 for curriculum construction as far as language education is concerned, within the Portuguese educational system.

The Portfolio is understood as an organized collection of school-work produced by the student throughout a period of time. This document provides a widened and detailed vision of the different components of the cognitive, metacognitive and affective development. It also reflects the identity of each pupil, each teacher, in each context, as constructors of their life long learning processes.

The research, which is going to be described, is rooted on a study conducted in the classroom of German as a foreign language in the 12th grade (17-18 years old), third learning level, during the school year 2000/2001.

Pupils' learning activities were framed within a personalized curriculum management strategy. That is to say that curricular work was developed according to pupils' tastes, interests and needs, always respecting the guidelines of the national curriculum. In doing so, the pupils were personally committed to their own learning. The knowledge of each pupil's personal traits and of their integration in the group provided the organisation and monitoring of the strategies, which were carried out in the classroom.

The implemented teaching approach facilitated significant learning, thus conducting the pupils in the discovery and construction of their personal identity, contributing as well to their whole development, both as a pupil and a person.

One of the findings of this study is related to the importance of the curricular strategies where the use of the Language Portfolio emerged as the most relevant pedagogical tool. Therefore, bearing in mind both these findings and the Linguistic European Policy the current research project was created.

Language education involves both the language acquisition and the concern for the respect for 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 the 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. This implies working with the teachers in teacher education programmes, empowering them in this process and thus becoming able of influencing their students to learn more languages.

1. PORTFOLIO: A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL

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*, which implies a new attitude as far as curricular management is concerned, highlighting the need of a coherent and articulated connection between learning and evaluating processes as the literature on language didactics has been pointing out for more than two decades (Ringbom, 1987; Roulet, 1980 about mother tongue and foreign language learning).

Taking into account that the reality is complex, the instruments of curricular implementation must respect and reflect this complexity. Therefore, the use of Portfolios offer an authentic model of evaluation as an alternative to the standardised language tests, and at the same time contemplates the singular and unique nature of each individual educative process (Kohonen, 1999; Klenowski, 2002; Sá-Chaves, 2000). Though portfolios are used in a wide range of areas for very different purposes, our concern is its 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 student language related work that shows progress over time and respects instructional objectives. A language

Portfolio can contain very different types of documents: written texts, drawings, learning logs, students' reflections and audio or video tapes, with teacher, student and also parents' comments on the progress made by the student (Gonçalves, 2002; Kohonen, 2002).

In the approach described above as a personalized curriculum management strategy, the portfolio was considered the axis of all curricular planning and subsequent work done in class. The introduction of the portfolio was relevant in three basic aspects. The first one refers to the contextualization of the evaluation, that is, a wider linking of the evaluation to the situation where learning was developed. The second refers to the diversification of the evaluation instruments, being these the result of the daily classroom activities. Finally, and due to the longitudinal nature of the portfolio, it registered the difficulties and the progress experienced by the pupils. The Portfolio as a pedagogical tool proves to offer the possibility of a true continuous evaluation (Gonçalves, 2002).

Therefore a model of Portfolio was born. It combined both the national institutional curricular evaluation requirements and also the student's learning process, allowing a personal, continuous and holistic assessment. The Portfolio was thus simultaneously a student's and teacher's tool.

2001 was the European Year of Languages. To celebrate this event and to fulfil the objectives of the European Language Policy, the Common European Framework (CEF) was published. Its aim is to set a common basis for the creation of language curricula, curricular orientations, examinations, syllabuses and everything that has to do with language teaching and learning. Thus, the European Common Framework of Reference refers plurilingualism and interculturalism as educational goals. In this context a Plurilingual Competence emerges, which involves a complex, multiple language competence that is activated in intercultural contexts of communication. This concept further refers to the ability to use the competence in the mother tongue and knowledge and skills learned in foreign languages for both the learning and the use of other languages (CEF, 2001; Kohonen, 2002).

The development of a plurilingual and intercultural competence may lead to the emergency of a linguistic conscience, a form of awareness, and of metacognitive strategies that allow the social actor to have conscience and to control his spontaneous ways of task management and particularly of his linguistic dimension (CEF, 2001).

Along with the 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. It is also a way of promoting a plurilingual and intercultural competence. It is divided into 3 parts:

1. The Language Passport provides an overview of the individual's proficiency in different languages at a given point of time. It is evaluated according to the skills and the levels of proficiency described in the CEF. It is also used to record formal qualifications, language competences and significant language and also intercultural experiences. It includes information on partial and specific competence (e.g. only spoken language skills, or specific content areas). It allows for self-assessment, teacher assessment and assessment by educational institutions and examination boards;

2. The Language Biography: facilitates the student's involvement in planning, reflecting upon and assessing his/her learning process and progress. It encourages the learner to state what he/she can do in each language and to include information on linguistic and cultural experiences gained in and outside formal educational contexts;

3. The Dossier 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. Among them, it is important to refer to the conclusions of the Finnish pilot project that emphasises the pedagogical potential and significance of the Council of Europe's Language Portfolio, as pointed out in the model of Portfolio described above and that gave origin to the current investigation. In Finland 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 2004:4)."

Having realised the importance of the Council of Europe's ELP 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), and taking my experience into account with a model of Portfolio that matched both some aspects of the Council of Europe's ELP and the national curricular requirements, the seed of the current investigation was identified.

> "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 work load 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: 3).

The implementation of the ELP in the Portuguese Schools combined with the concept of portfolio-oriented language teaching is a challenge that emerges for teacher's practice and for teacher's professional development.

The concept of *portfolio-oriented language learning and teaching* (a personalized management of the curriculum) discloses the possibility of developing a plurilingual and intercultural competence (Coste et al., 1987) in the classroom, where frontiers between languages tend to merge. 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: This 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: 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: 80).

In order to decompose the complexity of this competence, as a means of better understanding its activation, four dimensions have been identified:

- A: social-affective, related mainly to attitudes and pre-dispositions towards the Other, towards languages, cultures and intercultural communication;

- B: linguistic and communicative repertoires management, that has to do with the individual's ability to make use of all his linguistic and communicative history, knowledge, where different languages and cultures acquire different functions, status and roles, in order to successfully take part in a certain communicative situation;

- C: learning repertoires management, which is related to the subject's ability to learn with the different communicative situations he gets involved into;

- D: interaction management, which has to do with the interactive processes characteristic of the situations of contact with languages, such as interpreting, translation or codeswitching (Andrade et al., 2001; Santos& Andrade, 2005).

Analysing this competence is to analyse a linguistic-communicative process where multiple resources are activated and shape the way in which each individual relates with Otherness.

2. TEACHER EDUCATION RESEARCH PROJECT / EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The research project[1] has three leading questions: 1. How can the personalized use of the Portfolio contribute to the construction of a Language Education Curriculum? 2. How can the shared reflection on the personalized management of the curriculum contribute to the construction of professional knowledge as far as the possibilities of development of the Plurilingual and Intercultural competence are concerned? 3. How can collaborative cultures in the school be constructed?

In order to answer these questions it is necessary to accomplish the following objectives:

- To understand how a *portfolio-oriented language learning and teaching* can contribute for the professional development of the language teachers;

- To identify collaborative processes and professional practices which allow the curriculum construction within a new language education;

- To identify constraints and facilitating factors for the professional development of the language teachers;

- To produce knowledge on how language teachers can contribute for the educative change towards a reflexive learning school.

To fulfil these objectives, the education programme *working with the portfolio, developing the plurilingual competence* for in-service teachers was designed. It aims not only at promoting the scientific and pedagogic updating in a specific educative context, but also at contributing for the resolution of the problems of the daily practice, as far as the implementation of new learning and evaluation strategies are concerned, under the scope of language diversity and competence development.

What interests us most in the forefront is not what the teachers do, but mainly what they know and what informs their knowledge (Cochran-Smith; Lytle, 2001). This knowing can be identified with what

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Conelly 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 wants to enlighten tacit knowledge, analyse it and turn it into conscientious knowledge in order to question it and then work on it. In doing so each teacher becomes aware of his/her knowledge landscape (Conelly; Clandinin, 1996), enhancing thus a self-questioning of individual practice and of the concepts that inform it. Only after this questioning are the conditions are created to work and understand the concepts of Portfolio and of Plurilingual and Intercultural Competence.

In the second phase we will be able to follow the effects of the first phase by monitoring teacher's practice and by observing some classes. This phase will be conducted in the school year 2005/2006.

In Portugal the existing model of teacher education has been lately a matter of analysis and discussion. The designed education programme offers a different model of teacher education that means an opportunity for professional development within the working context, combining both working sessions among teachers with monitored classes. According to the Pisa Report 2003, in Portugal the rate of monitored classes is 5% while the OCDE rate is, on average 61% (ME, 2004). Therefore, this project could be considered as a mechanism that, intertwining theory and practice would allow the valuation of the individual abilities, enhancing and harnessing collaborative work. Moreover, this education programme follows its effects in the classroom practice, which, has already said, is not a common place in Portugal.

Thus we hope to make our way into a reflexive school (Alarcão, 2001, 2003), stimulating and harnessing the value of clusters of learning and practice (Andrade and Araújo e Sá, 2001). This programme shapes what Nóvoa assumes as an analytic teacher education, which according to this author, prepares the teachers for a "deliberative transposition of knowledge", that means, "a practical mobilization of knowledge in unexpected situations" (2004: 4).

Table 1 shows the organization of the first phase of the designed Teacher Education Programme.

It was organised in ten group sessions of two hours and a half each. Borrowing from Kohonen (2004) the concept of bridging tasks, teachers had assignments between the sessions that involved professional reading and reflection on discussed topics. We called them *Visiting Harbours.* The work was supposed to take at least the same amount of hours (25). Teachers then organised their work in a Portfolio.

The analysed data for this paper, as described in table 2, include a questionnaire, answered before the starting of the programme, and three reflections (*Arriving Harbours*) written in sessions 7, 8 and 10, respectively.

3. PORTFOLIO AND PLURILINGUAL COMPETENCE: A WORKING PLATFORM …

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 representations on language teaching and learning before starting the education programme. This way, the tasks could accordingly be designed in order to work the concepts and produce some changes in teacher's thinking. We further recognise that the teaching culture is not only linked to the biography but also to the working context (Durand, Ria & Flavier, 2002), and thus a questionnaire was constructed and applied to all language teachers of the school, as we also want to understand the possibility of creating a collegial professional within this specific context, though these data is not going to be explored in this paper.

We will now meet the five teachers who are attending the education programme and then analyse how, in the questionnaire, they value the different languages in the curriculum and the integrated development of a plurilingual an intercultural competence using the portfolio as a pedagogical tool, before the programme started.

Focus will be set on three aspects: professional development, teaching practices and concepts on language, language learning and teaching.

3.1. MEETING THE TEACHERS

Table 3 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 less then 10 years of teaching. They teach German and English, except one who teaches English and French.

They all say they know 4 to 6 different languages, being the majority of them common among them. Though three of their families have experienced emigration, there is one who does not consider her family neither bilingual nor plurilingual. They all consider themselves plurilingual.

They share a common plurilingual basis. Knowing that plurilinguals, as a group think in more flexible and divergent ways than monolinguals, as a group, they innovate more, create more new knowledges and dreams (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002), this working platform is a good start for our intention of revealing clearer identities, intertwining personal biography with the professional development. Furthermore, as Ellis (2004) argues this "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).

Considering teachers' opinions on past teacher education programmes, though they underline the positive results in personal and professional domains, they have a clear perception 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 forgotten areas, such as teaching vocabulary, learning from the mistakes or how to make the classes more profitable,* Quest. Célia, Oct/Nov 04, (our translation).

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

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

> *I would ask teachers to state their thematic preferences so as to include them in future education programmes* Quest. Eugénia, Oct/Nov 04, (our translation).

Here, the school could have an important role of satisfying not only individual needs, but rather context-based needs. The school is both seen 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 profitable/worthy teaching and learning process,* Quest. Eugénia, Oct/Nov 04, (our translation).

According to the data, we can identify an empty space 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 programmes for professional development in general, we shall now look at their practices in what language education is concerned.

3.2. PORTFOLIO, LANGUAGES AND THE PLURILINGUAL COMPETENCE: TEACHER'S PERCEPTIONS

As far as teaching practices are concerned, this group of teachers does not identify neither what they know nor what they do best or worst, though they denote a clear and unanimous conscience 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,

> *In what my department is concerned, I would like that the several teachers teaching the same level would organize themselves in pedagogical teams so as to prepare lessons in a more complete way,* Quest. Isabel, Oct/Nov 04, (our translation).

Teachers state they need to vary, do different things, share work but can not identify neither positive nor 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 04, (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 logistic conditions and number of pupils in classes.

Their teaching practices focus on the traditional language teaching competences, according to a communicative approach, fostering an utilitarian use of language and bearing in mind the model of the native speaker. They value materials diversification; however there aren't any words about its results questioning. 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 04 (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 strongly believe that the concepts and representations of these teachers have to be worked and refreshed. That is why the programme starts with a reflection on the self as educator and goes on questioning the tacit knowledge so as to become conscious. It is important to mention that when asked about the changes they would like to introduce in the Portuguese curriculum, one of the five teachers doesn't answer, and the rest only refer 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 04 (our translation).

Along with the mother tongue - *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 04 - the English language is seen as an important asset, as it conveys power to its users. However, as Skutnabb-Kangas (2002) clearly argues as the number of people with proficiency in English increases, the power of this language will decrease. In this moment we think that our teachers do not see Plurilingualism as an advantage in the future.

The teachers recognise that learning a language involves the widening of personal horizons, the possibility of communicating and contacting with 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. It is important to mention that, in general, they neither acknowledge the importance of linguistic diversity nor seem to be aware of its relationship to bio-diversity (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002). As Hazel Henderson says, the "cultural DNA that can help us create sustainable economies in healthy ecosystems on this the only planet we have" (in Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002: 14).

Emphasis is given to the fact that language learning involves the acquisition of the structure of the language and the vocabulary. The analysis of these teachers' answers makes us agree with Moreira:

> "Though culture teaching has constituted a generalised concern of educationalists for at least a decade, language teaching technicians have tended to continue to focus on the effective acquisition of the language (i.e. grammar rules and the four skills) as an end in itself, or as a first step towards 'cultural learning'. Moreover they have concentrated on an idealised state of native speaker competence, both linguistic and behavioural, which does not make sufficient use of inter-cultural and cross-cultural potential for reaching educational objectives" (Moreira, 1999: 172-173)

Learning languages is also assumed as an asset that motivates the learning of other languages. It is a process based on the socio-cultural competence and not on the development of an intercultural competence.

Focus of attention must change, learning objectives must change and that means we no longer strive for a "native-like" linguistic competence, rather a plurilingual and intercultural competence.

The teachers also mention the benefits of learning more than one foreign language, 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 reused, though still in a very narrow spectrum.

If we refer to the four dimensions of the plurilingual competence we can disclose some signs of the presence of dimensions B (linguistic and communicative repertoires management) and C (learning repertoires management), though not operational and mostly related to an utilitarian use of the foreign language. The teachers also mention dimension D, 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 could find in the questionnaire are the seeds we intend to water with the proposed education programme so as they can blossom according to the uniqueness of each teacher.

4. 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.

Other collected data, such as the transcript of the audio-recorded programme sessions, the constructed materials and all the process work included in the individual portfolios are going to be analysed.

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 consciousness in three mains aspects that are related to the discussed concepts, the processes of teaching and learning and also the need of reflecting on them. Individual reflection, group debate and collaborative work are recognised as instruments of professional questioning and development. As constraints emerge 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,

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 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 with 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 and the portfolio as a pedagogical tool for the learning of the English Language (cf. AH2, 2nd June).

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 to not only 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 2nd June, (our translation).

This group of teachers seems to understand portfolio on a three level scale:

1. pointing out the differences between something which is familiar and ELP, something still distant, belonging to other sphere of the educational context;

2. developing an integrated vision of the concept and stressing its main features – process-oriented, reflection on work done and certification of competencies;

3. an integrated vision which values all its features but integrating 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 can not assure that these ideas have really been absorbed and imprinted in their professional repertoire.

In what the plurilingual and intercultural competence is concerned, they all refer 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 find again three levels:

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, 2nd June (our translation).

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

Thinking of the near future, the next school year, the teachers are willing to put these ideas into practice.

Once again they refer they have become aware of the importance of the portfolio and of the plurilingual and intercultural competence, being the later a really new concept. The teachers recognize they have never worked this competence and express their wish in doing 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, 14th 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, summoning for the learning of one language any other languages.

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 don't 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 we have just started.

CONCLUSION

Considering the fact that we traditionally are a monolingual culture and that this may hinder the development of a plurilingual competence, this exploratory study seems to point a change in beliefs and a willingness to change classroom practices 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 something different but I am also prepared to the anguish of sometimes wanting and not being able* AH3 Eunice 14th June, (our translation);

and

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

Anyway, practice changes can not be taken for granted if there seems to have occurred a change in beliefs (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002) and as there is an increasing complexity of teaching work 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 our monitoring work to each of the teachers, as Clarke & Hollingsworth advise: "professional development programs 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: 962). In doing so we intend to explore the possibility of creating a collegial professional 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 a hard work ahead towards accepting the notion 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 can not forget that it is a long-term and demanding process, as one of the teachers reminds,

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

The Language Educator is thus a comprehension professional, a bridge builder between individuals, languages and cultures. He/she is the comprehension individual himself/herself (Larrosa & Skliar, 2001) who connects languages using the means at his disposal as, in this case, the portfolio.

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Tables

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

Table 1: Teacher education programme: 1st phase

Date	Instrument	Type of data	Treatment

Oct/Nov 2004	Questionnaire (Quest)	Factual / short answers	
19/05/05 (7th Ses.)	Arriving Port 1: Impressions… (AP1)	Written reflection	Content analysis
02/06/05 (8th Ses.)	Arriving Port 2: Clarifications…(AP2)	Written reflection	
14/06/05 (10th Ses.)	Arriving Port 3: Projections… (AP3)	Written reflection	

Table 2: Collected data for this paper

Teachers	Sex	Age	Family monolingual bilingual, plurilingual	Self monolingual bilingual, plurilingual	Service	Language taught at school	Language Reception & Production skills	Language 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 3: Teachers' Characterization