

At the HLW Rankweil, a vocational secondary school in the federal state of Vorarlberg, Austria, several plurilingual projects and bilingual instruction formats are being /have been implemented. In principle, all teachers and pupils can be involved. A key component is the Plurilingual Seminar that covers topics such as training for multilingual communication and the enhancement of language awareness.

Elisabeth Allgäuer-Hackl, Angelika Kessler, HLW Rankweil

Plurilingual and cross-language teaching formats at HLW Rankweil school in Austria

1. School system

Austria has a three-track school system. After attending a common Volksschule for four years (primary school, ages 6 to 10), pupils are divided based on their academic record and are assigned to a Gymnasium or a Mittelschule, where they complete the first stage of secondary education (secondary level I). After this stage, at the age of 14, pupils can choose to attend a general education secondary school or a vocational secondary school, both of which conclude with the Matura (school-leaving examination). Alternatively, they can attend a vocational Mittlere Schule or a polytechnic school, which includes an apprenticeship. Pupils who complete vocational training or an apprenticeship are eligible to take the vocational school-leaving examination, which is equivalent to the Matura.

The Matura exam offers pupils access to universities. However, most universities require candidates to take additional entry examinations.

More information on the Austrian school system is available at www.bmbf.gv.at.

2. Types of school, age groups and general conditions

HLW schools are vocational secondary schools that offer majors in economics, languages and tourism/hotel and catering. Pupils attend this type of school after they have completed secondary level I (five years) and have passed the Matura. Between the third and fourth years, pupils complete a mandatory placement in the tourism sector. Currently, these placements take place mainly in non-German-speaking countries.

This schooling provides pupils with a comprehensive level of general education that acts as a prerequisite for attending university as well as the skills and competencies needed to practice higher professions in all areas of industry, including administration, tourism and the social and healthcare system. For this reason, the HLW curriculum offers a wide range of general education, commercial and practical subjects.

With regard to the five-year HLW course, English and French are required subjects and Spanish and Italian are offered as compulsory elective subjects. In the third year, English is used as the teaching language for all business administration classes. French is used for selected physical education classes in the fourth year. The choice of language depends on the instructors, their training and timetable constraints. Chinese and Russian have been offered as optional courses.

Plurilingualism, in the sense of pupils practising the languages they learn at school, is present during pupils' practical training and placements, as well as in the form of projects and theme days sponsored by the school and the region. In the optional subject entitled Plurilingual Seminar, all languages are used, including heritage languages, and language awareness is an explicit part of the subject framework.

The Plurilingualism Curriculum (Krumm/Reich, 2011) offers a holistic approach to multilingualism at all levels of schooling and serves as the basis for general school practice. The curriculum was developed as a result of the Austrian Language Education Policy Profile (LEPP) process. Training courses offered by the Austrian Centre for Language Competence (ACLC) have promoted the dissemination and integration of the curriculum in general school practice.

3. Target group(s)

Depending on the project and courses on offer, the target group for plurilingual education can be a particular class or group, or even all pupils enrolled at HLW Rankweil. If all of the activities are taken together as a whole, the target group can also include teachers of all subjects.

4. Description and examples of teaching approaches

4.1 Objectives of plurilingual education activities

- The pupils develop an awareness of language(s) and language learning.
- They experience an appreciation of existing plurilingualism and diversity.
- They view plurilingualism as the basis for acquiring additional languages.
- They learn that the (foreign) languages on offer are linked and can benefit from an awareness of the similarities and differences between the languages.
- They have greater flexibility when communicating in several languages.
- They use their language skills in vocational situations and school-related projects.
- They expand their English and French skills through content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in selected subjects.

4.2. Multilingual teaching formats

4.2.1 CLIL instruction

In the area of business administration, English is used as the teaching language in all third-year classes,

In the fourth year, physical education classes are conducted in French. Teaching (one period per week) is based on CLIL concepts and on experience gained by a teacher during research for his or her Master's thesis. It is established that the exercise carried out in this class is extremely important for the brain and for learning. It is interesting for pupils to have the same content presented to them in a subject that they have experienced for over 12 years at school in a new language and format. This enhances their motivation. Pupil feedback is positive, especially with regard to the impact on their French language skills. Ninety per cent of the pupils reported that they would select this teaching format again if they had the opportunity to do so.

Pupils receive a comment in their report cards about their participation in bilingual instruction.

4.2.2 The Plurilingual Seminar

At HLW Rankweil, the optional course, Plurilingual Seminar, has been offered for third-year and fourth-year pupils for around ten years. It comprises one period per week taken as a block course and includes the languages learned by young people in the school, as well as the languages pupils bring with them from home. These languages include the dialects spoken locally and also High German, as well as foreign languages studied at school (see above) and first languages other than German. The role played by the latter languages depends on the composition of the group.

The participating instructors team teach. If possible, they also work with language assistants. This means that the teaching must be planned, prepared, conducted and evaluated collaboratively.

As part of the Plurilingual Seminar, pupils experience the way instructors and assistants communicate in several languages, for example, not only in the languages in which they teach themselves. As a result, all of the participants learn to deal with things they are unsure about, questions, interference and transfer phenomena, and misunderstandings and successes in communication. This collaborative learning creates a new personal basis for instruction, since the teachers are also seen as learners and language users (Cook 2002).

The content of the plurilingual teaching course includes multilingual discussions about current topics, reports on experiences and job-related role plays. The goal of this multilingual interaction is for pupils to practise switching from one language to

another, for example, changing from one person to another or changing topics or roles, and to encourage them not to be afraid of interferences and to use learning transfer skills more consciously.

EuroCom approaches (e.g. Hufeisen/Marx 2014) are used to teach receptive skills in new languages. The Plurilingual Seminar also involves the comparison of linguistic structures, starting either from interference errors, EuroCom's seven sieves or new grammatical structures. A study of the development of metalinguistic or multilingual awareness showed that the Plurilingual Seminar positively influenced participants' metalinguistic awareness.

Multilingual instruction also means dealing with different linguistic inputs in order to become acquainted with contradictory perspectives and positions.

Language learning strategies are also discussed and analysed based on experiences, which broadens the repertoire of strategies. Feedback from former pupils has provided evidence that plurilingual instruction has a positive impact on life-long learning.

4.2.3 The mandatory placement abroad: an opportunity to use languages

The mandatory three-month placement in a tourism-related business takes place between the third and fourth school years. Many pupils take advantage of the opportunity to complete this placement through the European Union's Erasmus+ programme, which allows them to improve their language skills and get to know other countries at the same time. In recent years, cooperation arrangements have been established with more and more companies in the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Spain and Italy. This gives all pupils who wish to complete their placement in a non-German-speaking country the opportunity to do so. In recent years, around 95% of third-year pupils at HLW Rankweil took this opportunity, making the school of the largest subscribers to this Erasmus programme in Austria.

The language preparation for the placement is undertaken in language classes. The language-related challenges are especially great for pupils on placements in Spain and Italy because they have to be able to use the languages in restaurants and hotels after only one year of instruction.

4.3 Projects related to languages and plurilingualism

Projects related to plurilingualism are implemented depending on the topic and the possibilities and focuses of a school year. These projects can take place over several periods or can take the form of a 'project day' or 'project week'.

In terms of methodology and didactics, the objective is to create opportunities for pupils to use their practical skills in different subjects, in conjunction with communication through their different languages (learned at school) and to have multilingual and intercultural experiences. For some activities, different family languages are the focus and for others, the focus is the foreign languages taught at school. There are also further activities that focus on intercultural and practical job-related experiences.

Examples:

- Pupils worked as waiting staff at the 2011 Alpine Skiing World Cup in Val d'Isère, France.
- Multilingual events in Switzerland and Italy.
- Exchange project with pupils from Kenya (2012).
- 2012 Europe Project Day which included a multilingual language café and events such as interviews with young Europeans from different countries, and information on and discussion about European programmes and activities.
- Cooperation with a primary school in which multilingualism is actively experienced (2014): pupils read to the children in their family languages and/or foreign languages, and put on simple plays for them. As a result, the children are given role models for their first or foreign languages.
- Pupils worked in catering, hotels, at information booths, etc. at the 2015 European Youth Olympic Festival.

4.4 Teacher cooperation

Projects such as those described above require cooperation and coordination on the part of teachers and teamwork among pupils. The Plurilingual Seminar described above is a good example of successful team teaching.

One project conducted by several language teachers involved the creation of a glossary of grammar terms used in all language subjects starting from the first grade. The goal was to raise the pupils' awareness of technical terms and the structures of languages, and for the glossary to serve as an aid for learning additional languages.

4.5 Integration and use of ECML projects

Several ECML projects and teaching materials can be used for the teaching formats described above (see www.ecml.at).

These include the following:

- ✓ PluriMobil
- ✓ CARAP-FREPA
- ✓ MARILLE
- ✓ Maledive
- ✓ Learning tertiary languages (Hufeisen & Neuner)

5. Conditions and prerequisites (colleagues; funding; logistics; infrastructure; cooperation with other schools and institutions)

Conducting projects and developing new teaching concepts requires scope for freedom. In many cases, interesting projects come about as a result of conversations that take place during free periods that teachers spend together or between colleagues who teach in the same class and work well together. In this era of curriculum development, new centralised final examinations and quality assurance measures that consume energy and time, the scope for this freedom and creativity is being significantly eroded.

Courses that analyse topics from a range of perspectives and points of view are vital for the development of new ideas. In the case of HLW Rankweil, these courses have included in-service training in the areas of school development, humanistic psychology and CLIL at the PH Feldkirch, as well as the Development, Advising and Support at Schools class.

6. Taking the project into the school mainstream through conversations with supervisors, subject-area colleagues, conference colleagues; and by integrating plurilingualism into the school curriculum

The Plurilingual Seminar and regular activities, projects and local and regional events, where the use of languages plays a role, grow interest and lead to discussion among colleagues about language competencies, language use and plurilingualism. Notably, increased cooperation among teachers can be observed not only as a result of government requirements for centralised or regional examination formats, but also as a result of interest in interdisciplinary projects and the preparation of placements in non-German speaking countries, etc.

Furthermore, pupils have demonstrated increased motivation with regard to languages and plurilingualism. That nearly 100% of pupils are interested in doing their work placement in a non-German-speaking country, in which plurilingual communication scenarios are part of everyday life, is evidence of this trend. Interest in international certificates has also increased sharply in recent years.

Bilingual instruction and the Plurilingual Seminar are documented in pupils' report cards for the respective school year. With regard to the Plurilingual Seminar, the award of an additional certificate reinforces the value of the course.

Bilingual learning opportunities are part of compulsory subjects (business administration and physical education) and, therefore, are more secure in the curriculum compared with the Plurilingual Seminar, which is a voluntary class dependent on registration numbers and/or available teaching hours.

Projects are dependent on actively involved teachers or teams. At HLW Rankweil, the established standards are high with regard to the implementation of projects on a wide range of topics. It can therefore be assumed that projects will remain part of the school curriculum.

7. Ideas that can be transferred to other schools

Many schools will conduct similar projects and use similar teaching formats, and will have their own experiences with them. Making these experiences sustainable requires an overall concept that has been jointly developed and is supported by everyone involved. This concept must define direction and objectives, and in so doing, facilitate objective decision-making.

8. Looking to the future: challenges, potential and sustainability

8.1 Promoting multi-competence

When teaching languages, in addition to teaching competencies in an individual language, plurilingual competencies should be included and valued. These plurilingual competencies include negotiating skills, translation skills, multilingual communication, code switching and the ability to adopt other perspectives. These are skills that are practised to some extent in the Plurilingual Seminar. The positive impact of this training on pupils' schoolwork could be magnified if language teaching embraced plurilingualism and was not purely monolingual. Of course, this change in focus would mean that the concepts of multi-competence would have to be engaged with more intensively.

The inclusion of all languages mastered or used by pupils as a matter of course, encompassing first languages and the conscious use of transfer (from one language to another) is a teaching approach that needs to be further developed. An awareness of how to use all languages productively in the classroom is beneficial to the teaching of all subjects, not just languages.

8.2 Dealing with mistakes

Embracing plurilingual competency as a learning objective requires a different way of dealing with mistakes. This is because striving for plurilingualism means critically questioning the goal of native speaker competency in individual languages.

8.3 Future prospects

A clear focus of curriculum development is a greater emphasis on natural sciences and economic topics. As a result, the amount of English being taught is growing, with less weight being given to other languages.

A new addition to the school curriculum is a joint period for English and a second foreign language – in this case, French – in the fifth year. The goal is to reinforce cross-language working in the two languages. Therefore, promoting plurilingualism as defined by the new curriculum primarily relates to first and second foreign languages. The curriculum does not consider the teaching of plurilingualism to extend to competencies in different varieties of German, other languages brought to the school by pupils and other foreign languages acquired at school.

8.4. What parts of the whole-language policy are covered by activities at HLW Rankweil? Where is there potential for development and what are the challenges?

The activities described above with regard to individual subject and project teaching, successfully aid the acquisition of competencies in several languages. However, if we are to get any closer to the notion of a whole-language policy, we need an overall concept that does a better job of connecting all languages, and language and subject teaching. The objectives for individual language instruction are defined by GERS. However, plurilingual competencies, especially in a training format for economic professions, would have to be defined more precisely, and training goals would have to be put in place. By the same token, family languages (other than German) should be consistently promoted to reflect existing plurilingualism, different language varieties should be embraced, and the promotion of languages of education in all subjects should be included in the whole-language policy for the second stage of secondary education (secondary level II).

The fact that pupils at HLW Rankweil have numerous opportunities to use languages and further develop their skills is very positive. There are many individual projects and initiatives in all languages that achieve remarkable successes (e.g. at language competitions). This means that pupils can set individual objectives and earn international certificates relating to individual languages. Informally, they can acquire a much higher level of language competency than that defined in the curriculum or

which is required to achieve the centralised Matura. Pupils are experiencing plurilingual communication, although predominantly during placements, and at events such as the 2015 European Olympic Youth Festival, as well as informally, rather than in a school setting.

Summary

Developing a whole-language policy faces the following challenges:

- Establishing the link between language teaching in language classes and language teaching in general subject classes as a concept
- Realising the structured promotion of languages already spoken by pupils if they are not foreign languages already taught at school
- Integrating the content of the Plurilingual Seminar in compulsory courses, e.g. as preparation for Romance languages, work placement and the *Matura* examination
- Realising the structured promotion of German or other subjects for pupils who need to catch up (e.g. pupils who have transferred to the school)
- Expanding CLIL instruction (currently allocated very few hours) to a degree that would allow language competencies (in English and French) to be acquired in areas in which the language of education is used and in areas in which specialised language is used (freeing up time for additional languages).
- Creating courses for pupils who would like to continue developing their language skills following their placement and after they have reached the required competency level, and would like to obtain higher-level certificates.
- Discussing joint education concepts such as multicompetence, L2 users, etc. and topics that include error assessment, plurilingual competencies in practice, plurilingual teaching content and materials, etc.
- Dovetailing curriculum and school development, and reinforcing this change through training courses.

References:

- Cook, V. (ed.) (2002), *Portraits of the L2 User*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Hufeisen, B. & Marx, N. (2014). *EuroComGerm – Die sieben Siebe: Germanische Sprachen lesen lernen* (2nd edition). Aachen: Shaker Verlag.

Keywords: plurilingualism; whole-language policy; vocational secondary level II; CLIL; team teaching; language awareness; work placements in non-German-speaking countries