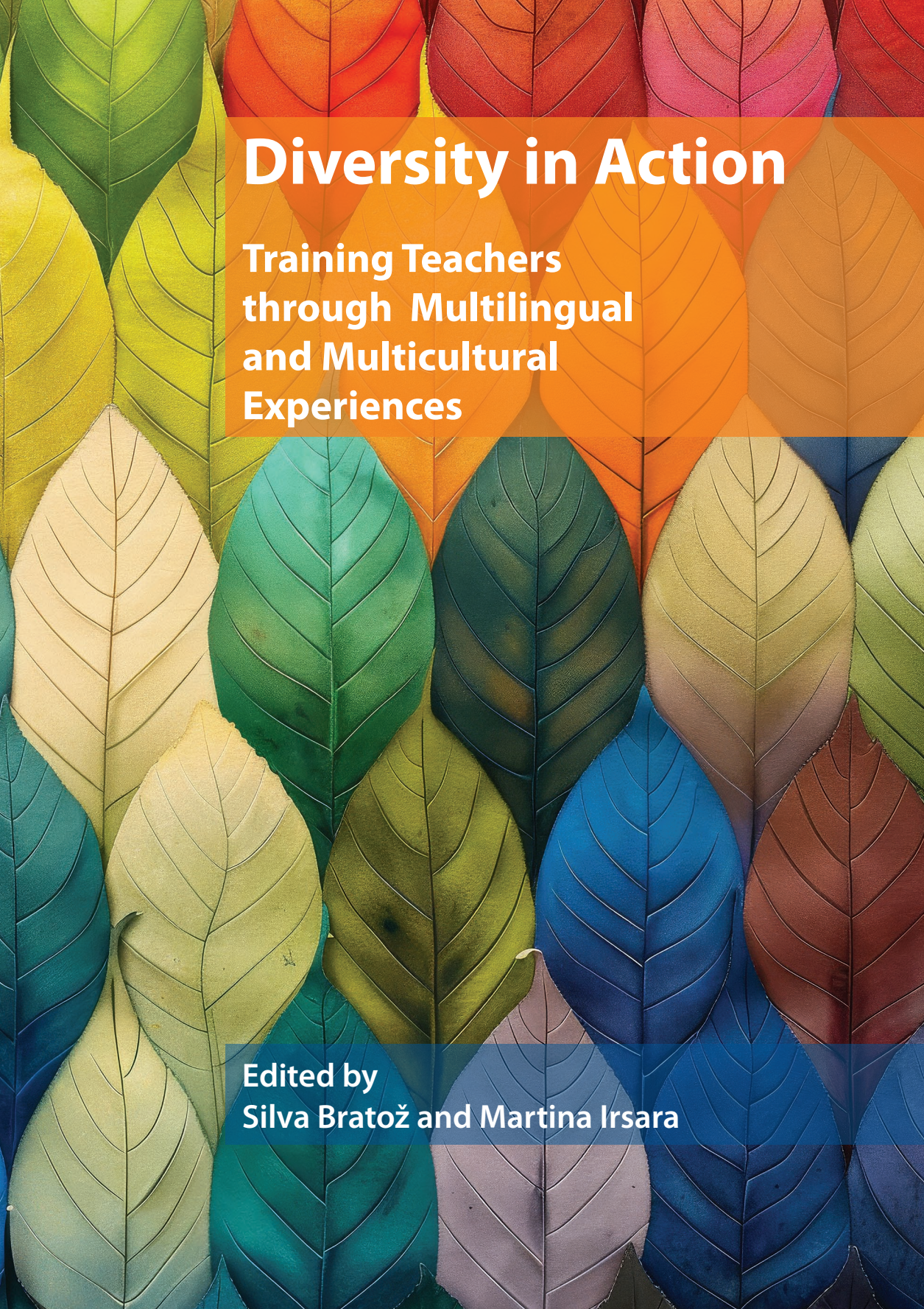
Diversity in Action
Training Teachers through Multilingual and Multicultural Experiences
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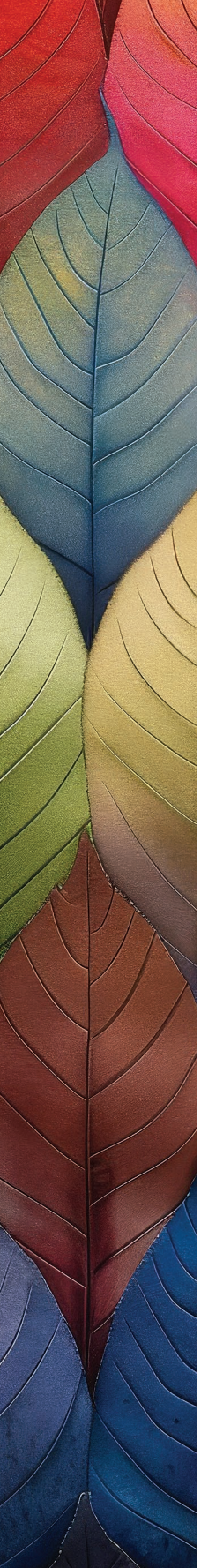

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Contents

Preface

In a world where linguistic and cultural diversity increasingly shapes our classrooms, the need to prepare educators to navigate and celebrate this richness has never been more urgent. *Diversity in Action: Training Teachers through Multilingual and Multicultural Experiences* responds to this need with a forward-looking and practice-informed exploration of language teaching for young learners in multilingual and multicultural contexts. This volume brings together a diverse group of scholars and practitioners to share local insights and collaborative research efforts, all with the shared aim of enhancing teacher education through experiential, participatory, and inclusive strategies. The five chapters that make up this book reflect a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of language acquisition and intercultural competence, offering hands-on approaches to fostering language and cultural awareness. Crucially, this book highlights the importance of inclusive policies and pedagogies that support plurilingualism as a societal asset rather than a challenge.

Ultimately, this volume is a testament to the power of education to connect worlds, bridge cultures, and empower learners and teachers to embrace diversity not just as a reality, but as a guiding principle. We hope it will inspire critical reflection, spark dialogue, and offer tools for meaningful action in teacher education across contexts.

Silva Bratož and Martina Irsara

Introduction: Diversity in Action – Challenges and New Perspectives

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Diversity in Action

The increasing diversity of European countries has been a major demographic and social trend in recent decades. This change can be attributed to various factors, including globalisation, immigration, and the movement of people within as well as across borders. In addition, autochthonous minorities have been part of Europe's social fabric for centuries and their distinct cultural, linguistic, and historical identities continue to shape the continent's diversity today.

Diversity, which can be broadly understood as the existence of difference and variation, is a broad concept that is widely recognised in a variety of fields and disciplines. While it is often seen as universally understood, diversity is context-dependent, meaning that it holds different meanings for different people and groups. The phenomenon of diversity has received considerable attention and has been defined in different ways over the past decades. There is disagreement about definitions of diversity, and debates surrounding its meaning and implications can be found in different sectors of society. Therefore, to truly understand diversity, it is essential to consider the specific context in which it occurs, such as education, which is the focus of this volume, entitled *Diversity in Action: Training Teachers through Multilingual and Multicultural Experiences.*

At its core, diversity is a social concept based on the idea that differences and variations can coexist in social and environmental spheres. However, diversity can be viewed in different ways – as a potential weakness or a source of strength, as a catalyst for conflict or solidarity, as a perceived threat or a source of inspiration. Without overlooking its inherent challenges, the contributions in this volume adopt a positive perspective on diversity, emphasising that embracing the diversity intrinsic to our complex, contemporary societies can lead to richer and more dynamic educational environments. In

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such settings, critical thinking is encouraged, creativity is nurtured, social intelligence is developed, and proficiency in multiple languages is celebrated. In essence, diversity transforms schools and preschools into vibrant, interactive, and growth-oriented communities that better equip learners to engage with and navigate the increasingly interconnected world around them.

The chapters in this volume explore linguistic and cultural diversity, as outlined in the second and third section of this introduction. They address the topic not only from a theoretical standpoint but also by examining its real-world manifestation in specific, practical contexts. The contributions shed light on concrete practices, behaviours, interactions, and competences that emerge when diverse languages and cultures intersect. Diversity is seen not only as being present, but as being in action – actively shaping the ways in which people learn, communicate, and grow together. Moreover, diversity in action is accompanied by ongoing reflection – before, during, and after the experiences described and analysed in this volume.

Linguistic Diversity

Linguistic diversity is an essential component of overall diversity and a key aspect of human development and experience. Language is not only a tool for communication, but also a fundamental element of human cognition, with language and mind being deeply interconnected. It serves as a powerful marker of identity and provides a window into the different ways in which people perceive and engage with the world. The broad concept of linguistic diversity covers a wide range of meanings: the large number of languages spoken worldwide, the coexistence of several languages within a given region or community, the use of different languages by individuals, and the variations in dialects, accents and linguistic idiosyncrasies within a single language. Linguistic diversity thus encompasses both multilingualism and plurilingualism. While multilingualism generally refers to the collective linguistic diversity within a society, plurilingualism typically focuses on an individual's ability to use several languages at different levels of proficiency (Council of Europe, 2001).

Plurilingualism is therefore concerned with an individual's whole linguistic repertoire, including all the linguistic varieties and languages, such as first language (L1), second language (L2), third language (L3), and further languages (Ln) in the individual's mind and the interrelationships between them. L1 is the abbreviation generally used to refer to the first language an individual learns at home as a child, although the term may also take the plural form L1s in the case of simultaneous bilinguals who grow up with two native

languages. An L2, or second language, is typically understood as a non-native language that is learned and used within a particular country or region. For example, South Tyrolean speakers of Austro-Bavarian dialects often consider Italian as their L2, since it is an official language of the province. An L3, or third language, is usually learned after two other languages. However, proficiency is not necessarily a determining factor, as proficiency is not always determined by the order of acquisition. Factors such as the amount of exposure to each language or their typological similarities can sometimes lead to a higher level of proficiency in the L3 than in the L2. English is taught as an L2 to speakers of other languages in an English-speaking environment, while it is often considered a foreign language (FL) in contexts where it is taught as a scheduled subject in a non-English-speaking environment. However, since an FL has often been understood as a non-native language learned and used in relation to a specific linguistic community located outside territorial boundaries, the term *English as an international language,* used as a lingua franca among people of different linguistic backgrounds within as well as outside and across territorial boundaries, provides a more accurate and up-to-date-description of the status of English.

Speakers who use several languages or linguistic varieties and demonstrate general communicative competence can be considered multicompetent if they also cultivate social sensitivity to the nuances of different linguistic situations. A multicompetent speaker is 'an individual with knowledge of an extended and integrated linguistic repertoire who is able to use the appropriate linguistic variety for the appropriate occasion' (Franceschini, 2011, p. 351). In addition to linguistic versatility, multicompetent speakers also have a heightened awareness of cultural diversity, which is the subject of the next section.

Cultural Diversity

Languages are closely interconnected with culture, which manifests itself in a variety of forms in different times and places and has been identified as one of the most multifaceted and complicated concepts to define (Williams, 1985; Eagleton, 2016). According to Eagleton (2016), culture can refer to '(1) a body of artistic and intellectual work; (2) a process of spiritual and intellectual development; (3) the values, customs, beliefs and symbolic practices by which men and women live; or (4) a whole way of life' (p. 1). Because of the multifaceted and evolving nature of the concept, any attempt to distil the dynamics or defining elements of cultural concepts into a brief definition will inevitably be selective and limited. However, given the frequency with which

the term *culture* is used, it seems important to continue to stimulate reflection and promote understanding of what people mean by it. Awareness of its various definitions and uses can encourage critical self-reflection and deepen understanding of how others interpret it. Overall, most contemporary scholars seem to adhere to a notion of culture that emphasises 'the dynamism, diversity, interconnectedness and permeability of human life approaches in the twenty-first century' (Delanoy, 2020, p. 29). Cultures can be viewed as 'shared and contested sets of signifying practices resulting from human interaction with the complex environments in which people live' (Delanoy, 2020, p. 30). Cultures are 'treated as multidimensional, open-ended and dynamic entities' (Delanoy, 2020, p. 30). They are no longer seen as stable and conventional ways of communicating and behaving within homogeneous language communities, but as the historical and subjective experiences of individuals in multilingual and multicultural societies (Kramsch, 2009; 2023). Contemporary societies are ideally characterised not only by the recognition and acceptance of cultural differences but also by the promotion of attitudes and mindsets that embrace and celebrate these differences. Cultural diversity is as essential to humanity as biodiversity is to the natural world, as a vital source of exchange, innovation, and creativity (UNESCO, 2002).

Individuals who navigate culturally diverse contexts with ease are often described as effective interculturalists, demonstrating high levels of *intercultural competence* (IC) and *intercultural communicative competence* (ICC), two concepts that are further explored in the next section.

Intercultural Communicative Competence

The concept of *intercultural competence* (IC) has been explained through numerous definitions proposed over the years to provide greater clarity. IC has been recognised as a complex construct, encompassing multiple dimensions and a range of abilities that are essential for interacting effectively and appropriately with people from different cultures. These multiple dimensions include 'self-knowledge, social interaction, and synergy creation' (Chen, 2022, p. 1). In a broad sense, the concept of IC emphasises the interplay between affective, cognitive, and behavioural aspects in intercultural interactions (Liu, 2012). Zhang and Zhou (2019, p. 32) adopt a tripartite conceptualisation, defining IC as

> the competence to function flexibly and comfortably in culturally different circumstances on the strength of one's knowledge and understanding of one's own culture and that of others (cognitive facet), at-

titude toward cultural learning and intercultural differences (affective facet), and skills for coping with different cultures effectively (behavioral facet).

Byram (2021) emphasises that five main factors are involved in IC: knowledge of self and others (*savoirs*), skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/fair*), critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*), and attitudes, such as curiosity and openness (*savoir être*). Language competences are further emphasised in Byram's (2021) model of *intercultural communicative competence* (ICC), where the different components of IC are interrelated, but also closely linked to language competences: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and discourse competence. Linguistic competence is the ability to produce and interpret language by applying the rules of a standard version of the language. Sociolinguistic competence involves assigning meaning to the language produced by any interlocutor, L1 speaker or not, understanding implicit meanings or negotiating explicit ones. Discourse competence is the ability to apply, explore, and negotiate strategies for creating or interpreting monologues or dialogues in an intercultural communication setting. Being aware of the context, the communicative intention, and the relationship between the communicators is central (Byram, 2021). While these three dimensions of competence have been used previously in language-based models, Byram (2021) refines them and incorporates them into his model, replacing the traditional native speaker model with the concept of the intercultural speaker – referring to individuals engaged in intercultural communication and interaction. Rather than pursuing the unrealistic goal of native speaker competence, learners should aim to become competent intercultural speakers in specific situations.

The prefix *inter* in *intercultural communication* has been criticised for implying that participants are positioned 'in-between' clearly defined cultures and languages. This has led to a challenge against the term *intercultural,* with the suggestion that the term *transcultural communication* might more accurately 'represent communicative practices in which cultural and linguistic boundaries are moved through and across and in the process transgressed, transcended and transformed' (Baker, 2022, p. 291). However, the term *intercultural* seems to remain dominant among educational theorists and practitioners, as it is closely linked to the concepts of mediation and interaction.

Teachers have a responsibility to equip learners with the skills, attitudes,

and knowledge necessary to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. As ICC is not an inherent outcome of language teaching, language teachers should include ICC as a key objective in their curriculum and consciously choose to teach languages for intercultural communication. The key to improving social interaction and learning about interculturality is through direct experience, which can be face-to-face or online (Gatti & Irsara, 2022; Irsara et al., 2023). However, Byram (2009) states that one only becomes intercultural when the experience is analysed and reflected upon, leading to subsequent action.

Practitioners and researchers are encouraged to promote ICC by designing experiential activities, using a variety of high-quality, authentic learning materials, and developing intercultural training programmes that address the various aspects of IC and ICC, while documenting the challenges and details of implementation. Promoting IC and ICC while analysing and documenting the rationale, details, and challenges of intercultural communication programmes and experiences was one of the key objectives of the DivA: Diversity in Action project, presented in the next section.

The Diversity in Action Project: DivA

Linguistic and cultural diversity is increasingly reflected in classrooms at all levels of education, from primary to tertiary. Teaching in today's multilingual and multicultural environments requires educators to possess specific skills and competences to manage and promote this diversity effectively. Although the concept of superdiversity in contemporary societies has become somewhat of a cliché in sociolinguistics and intercultural communication research, and while digital communication enables global connections, the skills needed to teach in heterogeneous classrooms are not inherent. They need to be developed through experience, ongoing reflection, and continuous refinement. It is essential to integrate issues related to linguistic and cultural diversity into pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes. Additionally, multilingual and multicultural approaches and materials should be actively researched, updated, and discussed. While general national cultural frameworks have traditionally played an important role in language teaching, for example in the teaching of English, it is now essential to move away from essentialist perspectives based on simplistic national language-culture correlations or native-speaker models of communication. Instead, fostering an understanding of multilingual and multicultural resources, while encouraging critical and inclusive approaches, is essential for contemporary education.

This is the general premise on which the inter-university project DivA: Diversity in Action was conceived. The project aimed to develop innovative online pedagogies, based on active, experiential learning and participatory methods which would give pre-service teachers the opportunity to engage in cross-border encounters, exposing them to linguistic and cultural diversity during their studies. It was clear that, rather than merely promoting or discussing diversity in teacher education, it was crucial to develop innovative teaching practices that facilitate the negotiation of complex academic content while drawing on participants' experiences with different languages and cultures.

One of the project's goals was to bring together teacher education professors, researchers, and practitioners for both in-person and online meetings at various partner institutions, where they could share and discuss knowledge and experiences in multilingual education. These gatherings also included visits to schools and cultural institutions.

A further key goal was to design and pilot a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) – an open-source, asynchronous professional development programme intended to help pre-service and in-service teachers effectively work in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms. During the MOOC pilot phase, students from partner universities collaborated both online and face-to-face, engaging in various topics related to languages and cultures, including multilingual teaching strategies, storytelling, and drama. To extend the project's impact, multiplier events were organised to disseminate its findings and experiences, reaching a broader audience that included pre-service and in-service teachers, school principals, researchers, practitioners, educational policymakers, as well as parents and other interested members of the public.

The institutions involved in the DivA project were the University of Primorska (Slovenia), the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano (Italy), the University of Pula (Croatia), the University College of Teacher Education of Vienna (Austria), and the University of Trento (Italy). These institutions share a common interest in developing approaches to teaching in linguistically and culturally diverse environments. Working in multilingual and multicultural environments, they recognise the need for teachers to have specific skills and competences to deal effectively with diversity in its broadest sense. This includes supporting efforts to combat stereotypes, promote understanding, foster tolerance, and encourage non-discrimination. The educational landscapes within the DivA project contexts are further explored in the next section.

DivA: Educational Systems

The educational landscapes of Italy, Austria, Slovenia, and Croatia form a fascinating mosaic at the crossroads of Germanic, Slavic, and Mediterranean cultures. Each system bears the imprint of its historical heritage while adapting to modern educational imperatives.

Structural Harmonies and Variations

What emerges from these four systems is a common commitment to structured progression through educational stages, although with notable variations in implementation. Austria's distinctive early streaming at ages 10 and 14 contrasts with Slovenia's and Italy's more integrated approach, where tracking begins later at age 15 and 16, respectively. Italy and Croatia have developed systems that seek to balance centralised oversight with regional autonomy.

Multilingual Heritage

Perhaps most striking is how these systems navigate their multilingual heritage. The region represents a remarkable linguistic confluence:

- In Italy, we find careful attention to German-speaking communities in South Tyrol and French-speaking communities in Val d'Aosta, alongside protection for Slovene minorities. The Italian system's accommodation of these linguistic rights reflects a sophisticated understanding of cultural preservation.
- Austria's educational framework recognises its historical role as the centre of a multilingual empire and maintains support for the education of Croatian, Slovene, and Hungarian minorities, particularly in Burgenland and Carinthia.
- Slovenia's system is particularly noteworthy for its constitutional protection of the educational rights of the Italian and Hungarian minorities, and for implementing a comprehensive three-model approach to minority language education. This reflects a deep understanding of language as both a practical tool and a carrier of cultural memory.
- Croatia's model is particularly sophisticated, offering three distinct approaches to minority language education serving its diverse communities, including Italian, Hungarian, Czech, and Serbian speakers. This tripartite system shows remarkable flexibility in accommodating different degrees of linguistic integration (European Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2023; Eurydice, n.d.; Hörner et al., 2015).

Common Threads and Distinctive Features

What unites these systems is a shared recognition of the role of education preserving and transmitting culture. Each country has developed mechanisms for

- the integration of minority languages and cultures,
- balanced approaches to vocational and academic education,
- the recognition of regional autonomy within national frameworks,
- and a commitment to early childhood education.

This variety of educational approaches suggests not just administrative structures but deeper cultural patterns – ways of thinking about identity, belonging, and the transmission of knowledge across generations. The systems reveal how each nation has chosen to address the fundamental question of cultural and linguistic preservation while preparing students for an increasingly interconnected world.

While these countries have different educational structures, they also face common challenges such as integrating technology and promoting equity in education. These common issues highlight the wider European context in which these systems operate and underline the need for continuous adaptation and reform to meet global educational standards. They maintain high educational standards while responding to different cultural, administrative,

Table 1 Overview

Aspect	Croatia	Slovenia	Austria	Italy
Governance	Centralised system led by the Ministry of Science and Education (MSE); Universities have autonomy.	Public service-based system with public-private partnerships; decentralised for basic education.	Shared governance between federation and provinces; kindergartens managed provincially.	Shared governance between Ministry of Education and regional authorities; schools enjoy significant autonomy in curricula design and management.
Early Childhood Education	Divided into three stages; preschool programme mandatory before primary school.	Legally guarantees a place from 11 months old; optional kindergarten curriculum.	Kindergarten mandatory for one year before primary school.	Divided into two stages: 0–3 years and 3–6 years, forming a non-compulsory system.

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Table 1 *Continued from the previous page*

Aspect	Croatia	Slovenia	Austria	Italy
Primary and Secondary Education	Single-structure compulsory education lasting eight years; non-compulsory upper secondary.	Nine-year single-structure basic education; vocational or general upper secondary pathways.	General compulsory schooling lasts nine years; early streaming at ages 10 and 14.	Compulsory education spans 10 years, covering primary, lower secondary, and the first two years of upper secondary education.
Higher Education	Universities and polytechnics offer degrees; state ensures equitable access through public funding.	Public universities dominate, with most students exempt from tuition fees.	Includes public universities, private institutions, and specialised colleges; robust vocational education pathways.	Tertiary institutions include universities, academies for fine arts and music, and higher technological institutes (ITS), with autonomy in admissions and curricula.
Inclusivity and Access	Special Educational Needs (SEN): All countries emphasise inclusion, with tailored programmes and support for SEN students integrated into mainstream or specialised institutions. Adult Education: Strong focus on lifelong learning, with Croatia and Slovenia offering diverse formal and informal adult education programmes.			
Unique Features	National *Matura* examination as a key pathway for higher education entry.	Multilingual approach in ethnically mixed areas with education in minority languages like Italian and Hungarian.	Strong emphasis on vocational education and early streaming at ages 10 and 14; comprehensive quality assurance systems established through legislative reforms.	High degree of institutional autonomy and innovative ITS Academies for advanced vocational training.

Notes Based on European Education and Culture Executive Agency (2023), Eurydice (n.d.), and Hörner et al. (2015).

and structural needs. Their systems reflect shared European values of inclusion, access, and quality assurance, adapted to their unique socio-political contexts.

The analysis reveals different approaches to education in these Central European countries, with each system offering unique strengths and facing specific challenges.

The Subject Matter and Composition of This Volume

The volume *Diversity in Action: Training Teachers through Multilingual and Multicultural Experiences* explores current trends, challenges, and developments in educational settings for language learning and teaching to young learners in multilingual and multicultural contexts. Through five chapters, the book examines this broad field from a variety of perspectives, with a particular focus on local experiences and research conducted in collaboration between different institutions with the aim of developing innovative teaching and learning strategies. These strategies are based on the principles of active, participatory, and experiential learning and teaching.

The first chapter of the volume, written by Silva Bratož, Anja Pirih, Anita Sila, and Mojca Žefran, focuses on fostering linguistic and cultural awareness from an early age. Based on current definitions of multilingualism and plurilingualism, the authors stress the importance of communicative competence, which includes not only a person's knowledge of languages but also their ability to interact appropriately in different social contexts. They then explore key areas of language awareness that are essential for the development of metalinguistic awareness, which in turn supports the process of language learning and comprehension. Such awareness is nurtured through pluralistic approaches to language teaching, including the DivCon (Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Context) model, which the authors have developed and presented as a participatory, interactive, and multi-sensory approach that encourages children to appreciate linguistic and cultural diversity from a young age. Central to the model is the journey metaphor, where children simulate train journeys to various countries, immersing themselves in different languages, foods, songs, dances, and art. The journey metaphor is supported by five essential elements: engagement with linguistic diversity, engagement with cultural diversity, shifting from concrete to symbolic understanding, effective foreign language teaching techniques, and active child participation. Through structured activities within the DivCon model, children are immersed in diverse linguistic and cultural experiences that ultimately cultivate empathy and strengthen their connection to the global community.

Successful language teaching is based on an understanding of the processes involved in language acquisition and learning. Key insights into foreign language teaching and plurilingual education in multilingual contexts come from a basic knowledge of learners' L1 systems and an awareness of both positive and negative cross-linguistic transfer. These aspects are ad-

dressed by Marco Magnani, Federica Ricci Garotti, and Katharina Salzmann in the second chapter of this volume. The authors focus on transfer in early multilingual acquisition, introducing various typologies of transfer and providing examples of learners' productions. While transfer plays a crucial role in linguistic development, the authors caution against prematurely attributing deviations from the target language norm to the contrastive hypothesis alone, or interpreting errors as the result of negative transfer from previously acquired languages. Although languages influence each other, learners' development follows sequences similar to those observed in L1 acquisition. Although the pace of progression may differ, the order of the stages remains consistent. In the second chapter, the authors explain that learners typically transfer structures from their L1 when they are developmentally ready. Teachers should be aware that transfer is an important communicative strategy that can be actively promoted through specific teaching strategies and classroom discourse.

The sense of belonging to a wider community is also central to the third chapter of this book, authored by Martina Irsara, Valentina Gobbett Bamber, and Barbara Caprara. In this chapter, the authors explore Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and English language learning through picturebooks in multilingual settings. They argue that GCED can serve as a transformative approach to language teaching and learning, addressing global challenges while developing critical thinking and communication skills. The teaching of English as an international language needs to be continually reevaluated to align with evolving trends in language, language learning, and language use. For example, communication seems to be becoming more multimodal. A multimodal and experiential synergy is provided by picturebooks, where language, illustrations, and book design work together to create an engaging, integrated experience. The chapter emphasises the importance of carefully selecting picturebooks that promote learner engagement, comprehension, and language development. Once selected, teachers can bring picturebooks to life in the classroom through embodied, interactive reading methods that incorporate prosody, gestures, facial expressions, physical materials, and translanguaging strategies. The authors also suggest that story-based activities can be conducted with Montessori principles in mind, as stories can stimulate children's imaginations and encourage their inquisitive nature. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of an online transnational teacher education experience that incorporated storytelling within a GCED and English language learning framework.

Storytelling in a multilingual and multicultural context is also addressed in

the fourth chapter, authored by Kristina Riman and Lorena Lazarić, who focus on how process drama can create dynamic and inclusive educational environments that promote multilingualism and intercultural awareness. The authors begin by defining process drama as an educational approach in which learners and teachers engage in an embodied make-believe that can be linked to any topic or subject across the curriculum. While this form of drama in education originated in England in the 1970s, it remains relevant today because of several key characteristics that the authors explore in their chapter, emphasising the holistic nature of this approach. Process drama develops creativity, critical thinking, empathy, social skills, and communicative competencies. The authors offer practical suggestions for its application, stressing the importance of careful planning, thoughtful topic selection, clear objective setting, and learner preparation. Although process drama is an improvised form of drama that allows participants freedom in its execution, the authors emphasise that its success relies on structured preparation. Evaluation methods need to be integrated into the planning of process drama activities and can take a variety of forms in order for process drama to contribute to children's educational development. Finally, the authors acknowledge the challenges of process drama but argue that these difficulties can be minimised or resolved through proactive planning, foresight, and preparation. Ultimately, the benefits of process drama far outweigh the challenges.

In the fifth chapter, Natascha Jassmin Taslimi, Ursula Maurič, and Karin Steiner emphasise the importance of promoting multilingual literacy by highlighting migration-related plurilingualism as a key component. They argue that the development of multilingual literacy should be seen as an essential aspect of Austria's educational mission and advocate for a language policy that embraces a more inclusive vision of society. Recognising the diversity of society, the authors stress the need for linguistically and socioculturally sensitive approaches to learning in kindergartens and schools to enhance the learning process for all children. Given that learning processes are dynamic and constantly evolving, the authors argue that they are most effective when they enable learners to respond to changing circumstances. They illustrate this concept with the botanical metaphor of rhizomes – root networks that grow without a specific centre – suggesting that learning, like rhizomes, should be flexible and interconnected. While they are sceptical of traditional monolingual education programmes, they believe that learning communities can contribute to culturally sensitive, rhizomatic language learning. As a concrete example, they cite the voXmi educational network

(*voneinander und miteinander Sprachen lernen und erleben,* or 'learning and experiencing languages from and with each other'), where practitioners and academics work together to address educational challenges in an interdisciplinary way. VoXmi's educational programmes aim to develop good practice in the development of linguistic diversity and plurilingualism from different perspectives. Theories of individual language learning are considered as well as socio-political aspects and the relationship to GCED. Finally, the authors question the effectiveness of current language diagnostic procedures and stress the need for increased awareness and sensitivity to testing systems in multilingual contexts.

In conclusion, this volume emphasises the multifaceted nature of early plurilingual acquisition, highlighting the importance of cross-linguistic transfer as children develop, fostering their linguistic and cultural awareness, and promoting GCED in schools. It explores the use of picturebooks to teach English and global citizenship in multilingual settings, process drama to promote plurilingualism and multiculturalism, and transformative language learning strategies in diverse contexts. These approaches represent efforts to address the complex challenge of fostering multilingualism and intercultural competence in student teachers, as well as in young and very young learners.

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Developing Linguistic and Cultural Awareness at an Early Age

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Chapter Objectives

- Discussing the relevance of developing plurilingual competence at an early age
- Examining teaching methods and activities aimed at raising children's language awareness
- Exploring different approaches and initiatives for fostering children's appreciation of linguistic and cultural diversity
- Analysing the potential of the *DivCon model* for raising children's linguistic and cultural awareness in early childhood education (ECE)

Introduction

Language is a powerful tool that shapes how we understand the world and connect with others. In today's classrooms, where children often come from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, embracing this diversity is essential for creating inclusive and enriching learning environments. This chapter introduces some key ideas and strategies aimed primarily at fostering linguistic and cultural awareness in young and very young learners. We first discuss the concept of *plurilingualism,* which sees languages as interconnected resources rather than isolated systems. Next, the chapter highlights the importance of *language awareness* in preschool and primary school settings, focusing on activities and teaching methods that help young learners understand how language works and appreciate its variety. Fostering language awareness is also an important element of the *pluralistic approaches to language teaching,* which encourage students to engage with and appreciate multiple languages and cultures. An important aspect of pluralistic approaches is creating welcoming and supportive learning environments for

Bratož, S., & Irsara, M. (Eds.). (2025). *Diversity in action: Training teachers through multilingual and multicultural experiences.* University of Primorska Press.

children from diverse backgrounds, ensuring they feel included and valued in the classroom. This is also emphasised by the *DivCon model,* which will be presented in the fifth section. *DivCon* is an innovative framework designed to nurture children's linguistic and cultural awareness in a structured and engaging way. The model is based on a set of activities through which children are systematically exposed to different languages and cultures.

Plurilingual Competence

Multilingualism is often used as an umbrella term which encompasses any situation where multiple languages are used. However, it makes sense to distinguish between the use of different languages in a society or community and the way multiple languages are used by an individual. This is why the term *plurilingualism* was introduced, i.e. to emphasise the dynamic interplay of multiple languages within an individual. It views language as a resource and recognises that individuals can draw upon different languages and language varieties in flexible and creative ways. The focus is not on *knowing* multiple languages, but on how these languages interact and shape an individual's linguistic identity and communication strategies. In fact, the introduction of the concept of plurilingualism has shifted the perspective from understanding linguistic diversity in terms of the coexistence of different languages in a given society to the individual and the languages at his or her disposal. As highlighted in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 4):

> the plurilingual approach emphasises the fact that as an individual person's experience of language in its cultural contexts expands, from the language of the home to that of society at large and then to the languages of other peoples (whether learnt at school or college, or by direct experience), he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact.

In more practical terms, in order to communicate effectively with conversational partners, people might switch between languages or dialects, expressing themselves in one language while understanding the other. Alternatively, someone might use their knowledge of multiple languages to decode a text or spoken content in a previously unfamiliar language, such as by recognising shared international vocabulary in a new form. Even minimal language knowledge can be leveraged to assist successful communication by mediat-

ing between individuals who lack a common language. In situations without a mediator, people may still achieve some level of understanding by using their entire linguistic repertoire, experimenting with expressions across languages or dialects, relying on paralinguistic tools like gestures and facial expressions, or significantly simplifying their language use.

The scope of the plurilingual concept thus presupposes a communicative competence that encompasses the entire knowledge of and experience with languages as they interact and influence each other. Therefore, plurilingualism is above all a prerequisite for successful communication with people from other cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

An important aspect of plurilingual education is that it does not just focus on developing the linguistic resources and linguistic potential of learners but is also directly related to the acceptance of other people's languages and to a sense of curiosity about these languages (Beacco & Byram, 2007). In fact, developing positive attitudes or curiosity towards other languages and cultures should be a basic component of all language teaching. This also implies the inclusion of the learners' mother tongue or first language, which is not necessarily the language of instruction or the official language of the environment.

One way of making the plurilingual concept tangible is to create visual representations of language repertoires (e.g. language portraits and landscapes) which help us understand the complexity and diversity of one's linguistic abilities (Busch, 2021). Language repertoires are very personal and individualised, reflecting the unique linguistic experiences, backgrounds, and preferences of each person. They incorporate the languages, dialects, registers, and even non-verbal communication means that individuals use in their daily lives. Figure 1 presents an example of a language portrait created by a 6-year-old child from Slovenia.

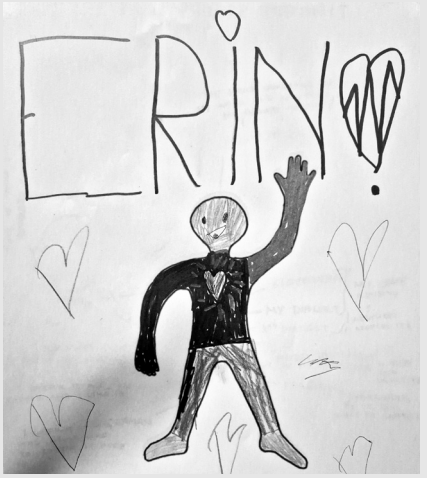

Figure 1 Language Portrait Created by a 6-year-old Child from Slovenia

Reflection Point

1. Create a visual representation of your own language repertoire. You can use the whole-body silhouette, as in Figure 1, or other templates, such as

trees, houses, etc. Another alternative is to create your own personal language landscape.
2. How does acknowledging students' plurilingual competence foster an inclusive learning environment?
3. Discuss the role of different languages or language varieties from your repertoire in your society. Are some languages in your repertoire undervalued or stigmatised?

Language Awareness

Language awareness (LA) refers to an individual's understanding of language as a system and their ability to reflect on language in different contexts. One key aspect of this is metalinguistic awareness, which involves focusing on language properties such as phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Metalinguistic awareness allows individuals to recognise and manipulate language structures, understand word meanings, and use language in various social contexts.

While research on LA in young learners is limited, studies suggest that early development of LA is beneficial, enhancing metalinguistic skills and cultural understanding. Children as young as 4–5 years old show awareness of their own language, express language preferences, and begin developing metalinguistic awareness. Between ages 5–8, children's metalinguistic abilities improve, and they begin understanding synonyms and the relationship between different languages. Young children also demonstrate significant phonological and semantic awareness, although they may face challenges in sentence segmentation and textual awareness. (Muñoz, 2014; Wagner, 2020).

Garrett and James (1993) talk about five LA domains: the cognitive, affective, social, power and performance domain. The cognitive domain focuses on the structure of language and the comparison between the learner's first and second language, promoting analytical skills to explore language patterns and their uses. The affective domain relates to attitudes and the emotional aspect of language awareness, with the aim of fostering curiosity, openness, and positive attitudes toward linguistic and cultural diversity. In the social domain, the focus is mainly on language as a tool for effective communication and interaction, and, more generally, on the ways how language operates in social contexts, including issues of identity, power, and community dynamics. The power domain is mainly thought of in terms of awareness that language can be a tool for manipulation, addressing issues like language hierarchies, marginalisation, and how certain languages or di-

Table 1 Language Awareness Domains and Examples of Activities

LA domains	Goal	Activity examples
Cognitive	Promoting understanding of how language works, focusing on patterns, structures, and functions.	Building phonological awareness by helping children recognise similar sounds by teaching rhyming words through songs or poems in the target language. For example, in Italian *gatto* (cat) and *matto* (crazy), in German *Haus* (house) and *Maus* (mouse).
Affective	Fostering positive attitudes and emotional responses toward language.	Sing traditional songs and rhymes in different languages and encourage children to dance traditional dances (for example, Italian Tarantella, Greek Sirtaki, Slovenian Polka, etc.).
Social	Help children understand how language reflects social identity and relationships.	Create pretend-play situations where students use language for a particular purpose, such as to greet, ask for help, etc. For example, a game in which children are given cards with flags of different countries and greet each other in the language spoken in that country.
Power	Raise awareness of how language use can reflect power dynamics and social hierarchies.	Read or act out a story where characters have different roles (e.g. a king, a farmer, and a child). Highlight how they speak differently based on their status.
Performance	Develop practical communication skills in multilingual or intercultural contexts.	Simulate interactions in different situations, such as buying ice cream from an ice cream vendor.

alects are privileged over others. The performance domain links language awareness directly to communicative competence in a given language. It focuses on the practical use of language, emphasising communication skills and the ability to navigate multilingual or intercultural settings effectively.

By engaging learners across these domains, educators can foster not only linguistic proficiency but also a deeper understanding of the social and cultural dimensions of language.

Reflection Point

1. How can we encourage children to explore language patterns, sounds, and structures in different languages?
2. How do we ensure that children from different linguistic backgrounds feel supported in learning the sounds of a new language?
3. Discuss additional activities which could be used to develop the five language awareness domains.

Pluralistic Approaches to Language Teaching

Over the past two decades, several initiatives have been launched to promote linguistic diversity in Europe. These efforts are now collectively known as 'pluralistic approaches to language teaching' – approaches which focus on fostering an appreciation of linguistic diversity and cultural understanding. These approaches recognise the value of all languages – home languages, dialects, sign languages, and regional languages – rather than concentrating solely on 'foreign' or 'second' languages (Candelier et al., 2010). This perspective is further supported by the *Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures (FREPA),* which offers descriptors and guidelines for developing plurilingual and intercultural competence. FREPA advocates for moving away from a monolingual and monocultural view in language education, encouraging educators to expose students to a range of languages and cultures, including their native languages, regional languages, and languages of migration.

One initiative stemming from this concept is the 'evlang' or *Language Awakening* approach, which aims to raise awareness of language diversity in the classroom and encourages students to see language as a system. The primary goal of this approach is not to teach specific languages, but to raise awareness of linguistic diversity and its significance in both personal and societal contexts (Darquennes, 2017). Several Language Awakening projects have emerged in Europe in the past two decades. For example, the Janua Linguarum initiative (Candelier, 2004) was designed to promote linguistic and cultural diversity among young learners in different European countries and foster the development of plurilingual and intercultural competencies in early education. The primary goal was to expose children to a variety of languages through activities involving interactive games, storytelling and songs, etc., fostering an appreciation for linguistic and cultural diversity from a young age.

A concept closely connected to language diversity with a strong focus on challenging monolingual ideologies is translanguaging (García & Otheguy, 2020). This pedagogical approach encourages learners to use their full range of language skills, including their home language(s), in the learning process. Translanguaging practices not only support fluency in individual languages but also promote the idea that learning languages is not just about acquiring a new foreign language, but about expanding one's overall linguistic and cultural knowledge. It views language diversity as a valuable resource, fosters the development of bilingual or multilingual identities, and seeks to disman-

tle language barriers and power imbalances by recognising and valuing all languages and their varieties (García & Wei, 2014).

In the next section, we will look closely at the pluralistic approach based on the *DivCon model* (Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Context), developed by Bratož and Sila (2022). The model is aimed at promoting linguistic and cultural awareness among preschool children (ages 4–6). It integrates six key aspects: the journey metaphor, exposure to linguistic diversity, exposure to cultural diversity, progression from concrete to symbolic thinking, effective second language teaching methods, and children's active participation. The model views the development of plurilingual competence as a journey where children experience languages and cultures through multi-sensory activities such as movement, singing, tasting, and artistic expression. By using the journey metaphor, the model creates a framework that encourages children to explore and generate ideas, fostering their awareness of diversity. A key focus is on children's active participation in these activities, which helps develop positive attitudes toward different languages and cultures. This immersive, participatory approach promotes linguistic awareness and an appreciation for diversity from an early age.

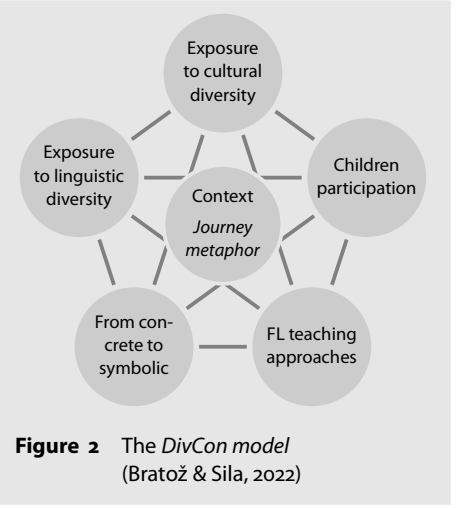

Figure 2 The *DivCon model* (Bratož & Sila, 2022)

The DivCon Model

The *Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Context (DivCon) model,* depicted in Figure 2, originated from piloting several activities aimed at fostering plurilingual and pluricultural competence in preschool children (ages 4–6). These activities were initially implemented in the *Languages Matter* project under the title 'Language Train,' which was developed as a teacher's guide (Bratož & Sila, 2022). As mentioned in the previous section, the model is built upon a framework that incorporates six key dimensions: the journey metaphor, exposure to linguistic diversity, exposure to cultural diversity, progression from concrete to symbolic understanding, effective foreign language teaching methods, and active participation by children.

The model has been piloted on several occasions. Bratož and Sila (2022)

analysed preschool children's responses to the various dimensions of the model. Čeh (2022) implemented the model in the first-grade primary school settings, examining children's reactions to activities designed around the model. Jolić Kozina et al. (2024) explored the model's potential for fostering language awareness among primary school children. Additionally, Žefran et al. (2025) assessed the model's effectiveness in preschool settings.

The Journey Metaphor

The *DivCon model* employs the metaphor of a journey to represent the development of plurilingual competence. This metaphor is pivotal as it offers children a conceptual framework to visualise their learning path, fostering an awareness of diversity. Through an imaginary train journey, children 'travel' to various countries, engaging with the languages and cultures they encounter using multisensory experiences such as movement, singing, tasting, and artistic expression. The experience is brought to life by having children move around the classroom following a makeshift engine (e.g., a cardboard train), accompanied by the 'Choo choo choo' song, which begins slowly and builds into a rapid rhythm, mimicking a train's departure. This simulation reinforces the journey metaphor, enriching children's exploration of linguistic and cultural diversity.

The journey metaphor is intricately embedded throughout the model, influencing songs, learning activities, and props such as passports, a stationmaster's whistle, and postcards. Teachers can also use items like a suitcase containing objects from different countries to deepen the connection between the metaphor and the learning process. The model is grounded in the principles of metaphorical thinking, recognising the significant role metaphors play in shaping perceptions of abstract concepts, including linguistic and cultural diversity. This aligns with the conceptual theory of metaphor (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), which posits that the metaphor of life as a journey is a fundamental aspect of human cognition, influencing how we experience learning and diversity.

The studies by Bratož and Sila (2022) and Jolić Kozina et al. (2024) have proven the journey metaphor to be a stimulating and effective contextual framework. Teachers involved in the study observed that children enthusiastically embraced the metaphor, actively participating in role-playing activities such as simulating a train journey and taking on roles like passengers, station master, and engine driver. Children also showed a strong interest in sharing personal experiences, such as trips abroad or visits to relatives, often highlighting specific attractions like a volcanic beach in Tenerife or a shop-

ping centre in a big city. The journey metaphor also inspired creativity, as children expanded on the concept with their own ideas. For example, one of the children insisted on checking the picture on the identity card and making sure it was the right one. They shared their experience with crossing the border and showing documents and were able to say where they come from.

Exposure to Linguistic Diversity

As children travel to different countries, they are introduced to various languages. While English serves as the common lingua franca, they also come to understand that English alone is not sufficient. The choice of English as a global language stems from its perceived neutrality in groups of children from diverse sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds. During their journey, children encounter linguistic diversity in multiple ways, beginning in their home country. At each stop, they engage with the local language by calling the railway station master, who is humorously 'oversleeping,' through the familiar tune of Frère Jacques sung in the language of the destination.

Children are typically acquainted with their own version of the song – such as *Mojster Jaka* in Slovenian, *Frey Juan* in Spanish, *Bruder Jakob* in German, or *Fra Martino* in Italian. Since they already know the melody, it becomes easier for them to adapt to and follow the song in a new language. The tune acts as a supportive framework, aiding them both phonetically and semantically. Beyond Frère Jacques, children are exposed to other songs and rhymes that include phrases relevant to the language and culture of the country they visit. For instance, in France, they listen to the song *I have a new fancy dress,* which concludes with the French phrase *Merci beaucoup!*

In addition to songs and rhymes, learners engage in a variety of activities designed to develop phonological awareness. For example, when meeting the railway station master, children sing *What's your name?* and compare the lengths of their names by clapping out syllables. The instructor explains that words with one or two syllables are short, while those with three or more are long. For a more challenging task, children may also segment words into individual sounds. Other name-related activities include distinguishing between similar initial or final sounds and identifying or creating rhymes. The teacher adjusts the complexity of these tasks based on each child's phonological development, progressing from manipulating whole words (e.g., combining *dog* and *house* into *doghouse*), to syllables (e.g., removing *li* from *lion* to form *on*), to onset-rime blending (e.g., combining /c/ and *at* to form *cat*), and finally to phoneme-level segmentation (e.g., blending /f/ + /i/ + /sh/ to form *fish*).

Another key figure in the journey is *Chatty Betty,* a sock puppet with a name

that varies by language (e.g., *Ramona Chiacchierona* in Italian, *Marcelina Parlanchina* in Spanish, or *Jegulja Klepetulja* in Slovenian, meaning 'chatty eel'). Chatty Betty is a language expert with her own YouTube channel, where she explores topics like saying 'thank you' in various languages and highlighting similarities among related languages. Children also encounter different languages through songs and rhymes that feature language samples connected to the countries visited by the imaginary language train.

Studies by Bratož and Sila (2022), Jolić Kozina et al. (2024), and Žefran et al. (2025) have revealed that children respond to exposure to different languages with curiosity and creativity, noticing similarities and differences, expressing pride in their linguistic knowledge, and playfully mixing languages.

Exposure to Cultural Diversity

Exposure to cultural diversity naturally incorporates language learning. A key aspect of this exposure is providing children with opportunities to engage with cultural traits through various experiences such as food, music, dance, art, clothing, sports, storytelling, photos, and videos. Teachers can introduce cultural elements from different countries by focusing on specific topics, such as dance and music (Austria), sports (Slovenia), or food (Italy). The *DivCon model* operates as an open framework, using these topics as starting points for exploring different cultures and languages. This approach emphasises engaging children through music, movement, and the analysis of visuals like photos and videos.

As children 'travel' to different countries, they are introduced to various cultural features and practices, which naturally incorporate language exposure. A key aspect of exploring cultural diversity is providing children with opportunities to engage with cultural traits through diverse experiences such as food, music, dance, art, clothing, sports, storytelling, photos, and videos. For instance, an activity based on the rhyme 'Waltz and Polka' introduces children to Austrian culture by combining singing and dancing to the rhythms of the waltz and polka:

'Waltz and Polka'
Ein, zwei, drei,
Ein, zwei, drei.
Dance with me.
Ein, zwei, drei,
Ein, zwei, drei.
Dance with me.

And now Polka!
One and two,
two and two.
Polka, me and you.
One and two,
two and two.
Polka, me and you.

The model operates on an open framework, allowing exploration of cultural diversity through themes like sports (Slovenia), food (Italy), sea animals (Croatia), clothing (France), and transportation (United Kingdom). These topics serve as entry points to learning about cultures and languages through music, movement, and visual analysis.

Children learn that some cultural traits are universal, while others differ widely. Examples include:

- *Eating habits:* Children explore various ways of eating, such as enjoying continental or English breakfasts, eating traditional dishes (e.g. jota in Slovenia, pasta in Italy, Sacher cake in Vienna), using chopsticks (China), eating with hands (India), or with forks and spoons (Europe). They also learn cultural nuances, such as slurping noodles being polite in Japan but considered rude in Western countries.
- *Clothing:* Traditional attire like the sari (India), kilt (Scotland), kimono (Japan), hijab (Muslim cultures), and national costumes are introduced. They also discuss school uniforms, common in many schools around the world.
- *Customs and practices:* Children discover cultural greetings, such as cheek-kissing in Latin American, Romance, and Arab cultures, bowing in Japan, and celebrations of festivals and religious events like Pust (Slovenia), Zagreb Folk Fest (Croatia), Sanfermines (Spain), Easter, Pesach, Qurban Bayram, etc.
- *Languages:* They learn that some regions, like South Tyrol (German, Italian, Ladin), or countries, like Switzerland (German, Italian, French) have multiple official languages.
- *Sports:* Unique sports such as cross-country skiing (Norway), sumo (Japan), or caber toss (Scotland) are explored.
- *Transportation:* Children learn about modes of transport that vary by region, such as gondolas (Venice), suspension railways (Germany), Coco Taxis (Cuba), dog sleds (Alaska), and reindeer sleds (Lapland).

These cultural traits are best explored through collaborative projects and activities tailored to the children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds and the communities they live in. This culturally rich content encourages curiosity, active engagement, and participation, supporting social, emotional, and literacy development. Additionally, it allows teachers to create dynamic learning environments that foster child-initiated activities (Ahn & Kim, 2009).

The results of the piloting of the model showed that children embraced

cultural diversity and perceived it in a pleasurable and positive way. They were eager to contribute their ideas and experiences with different aspects of culture and were willing to try new things (Bratož & Sila, 2022).

Concrete to Symbolic Level

A key feature of the model is its emphasis on real-life situations and the inclusion of tangible items with symbolic significance. To simulate travel to foreign countries, children are provided with templates for identity cards and passports, which they complete with their own information and pictures. These items are used in sociodramatic play, where children assume various roles and establish their own rules. During the play, teachers engage as active participants, modelling language and play behaviours while offering visual aids such as items or pictures to support the activity.

As part of these activities, children expand their vocabulary by learning new words related to concepts like country, town, capital city, identity card, passport, anthem, flag, and president. Visual aids, including maps, videos, photographs, and concrete objects, help children grasp abstract concepts, while role-play teaches them how to use this knowledge practically.

The study by Žefran et al. (2025) revealed that the children demonstrated a clear grasp of abstract concepts like 'country' and 'language.' Almost all the children were able to accurately identify multiple countries and articulate the languages spoken in each, indicating a solid understanding of these complex ideas. During the interviews, the children explained that we need a passport to travel to other countries, and they talked about various things associated to different countries. However, in the study by Bratož and Sila (2022), the teachers also observed that only a few children were able to make more complex logical connections, such as between a famous person and the country or the country and its shape on the map (e.g. Italy and its boot shape). It is clear that at this developmental stage, children are still not fully able to absorb and comprehend certain abstract concepts. Nevertheless, the results of the study conducted by Jolić Kozina et al. (2024) showed that they eagerly shared their experiences with the countries they visited, often mentioning the words they learnt there.

Foreign Language Teaching Approaches

The model integrates a range of approaches and strategies that have proven effective in teaching young and very young learners. One key approach aligned with the model is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). CLIL combines methods and strategies to offer a dual-focused educational

experience, where an additional language is used to teach both content and language. It is described as 'the experience of learning non-language subjects through a foreign language' (Marsh, 2012) and has become widely adopted across Europe over the past three decades. In early education settings such as kindergartens and primary schools, CLIL naturally incorporates forms of early language learning (Marsh, 2012). The approach prioritises learning languages in realistic, natural contexts where the content takes precedence over language structure. The model provides opportunities to integrate language with various content areas such as creative arts, mathematics, social skills, and science.

Another effective strategy is Total Physical Response (TPR), particularly useful in the initial stages of language learning and the pre-literacy period. TPR emphasises listening comprehension through action-based learning, where students internalise language structures and phrases via physical commands. TPR is especially impactful when combined with other teaching strategies, as it highlights the benefits of using movement to enhance language acquisition. Research (Čok et al., 1999) indicates that pairing spoken words with physical actions strengthens language learning, as movement enriches the experience.

Physical play also supports cognitive, emotional, and social development while fostering positive attitudes toward language learning and self-esteem (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2009). Incorporating physical activities into language instruction provides meaningful contexts for language use, aligning with children's natural need for movement. This approach not only boosts attention spans but also facilitates verbal, visual, and kinaesthetic learning, making it highly compatible with young learners' developmental needs (Čok et al., 1999).

The importance of movement was emphasised also by the results of the model piloting. The teachers observed that the children responded more readily and enthusiastically to the activities which were based on movement and TPR (Bratož & Sila, 2022; Žefran et al., 2025).

Children Participation

A key aspect of the model is children's active participation, which is also reflected in the dimension of exposure to cultural diversity. As Rutar (2014) notes, participation is considered a fundamental element of an inclusive society, where it is important to recognise children and young people as active participants. This involvement must include all children, including the most vulnerable and those from diverse socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

When teachers listen to and engage with children's ideas, they are practising participatory pedagogies (Carey-Jenkins, 2018), which are teaching methods that support children's rights and agency in the classroom by encouraging them to express and act on their own ideas, perspectives, and knowledge. Shier (2001) emphasises the importance of listening to children's voices and supporting their views, including those of children who may not yet speak. These children can communicate through body language, non-verbal cues, pictures, or signs to express their thoughts.

For enhancing children's participation, we may follow the framework of developing participatory practices proposed by Kangas (2016), which consists of four core elements:

1. The starting point of developing children's participation is to create conditions and an environment which enables participation.
2. In the second core-element, teachers observe and gather information from children's skills and interests and learn to understand the child's perspective.
3. In the third core element, the teacher and children join in shared experiences. The teacher uses the information from children to support children to participate. This requires professional understanding of making interpretations and drawing conclusions from the information received from children.
4. In the last core-element, teachers adopt an interest in developing participatory activities in everyday life in the early childhood education settings.

The activities in this model are intentionally designed to promote children's participation and interaction with the teacher. For instance, teachers are encouraged to explore new destinations by train with the children, involving them in discussions about the journey and its different countries. Children and teachers collaboratively create new activities and develop new rhymes in various languages, with a particular focus on the additional languages the children bring to the group. As de Sousa (2019) points out, teachers can incorporate the children's home languages into the preschool environment, even if they do not speak them directly, as children can communicate through other means, such as visual aids or body language. Additionally, the internet provides many useful resources and tools that teachers can use to integrate languages into the classroom and interact with the children. Furthermore, an important connection with family members can be established

(Čotar Konrad, 2018), inviting them to participate in the learning process and share language samples, such as nursery rhymes or stories. By encouraging children's multilingual contributions, teachers create a learning environment where diversity is not just accepted but valued as a strength. Moreover, the teacher's role may evolve into that of a 'co-participant' in classroom activities, allowing for mutual feedback with children, thereby enriching the learning experience (de Sousa, 2019).

The results of all the piloting studies suggest a very high level of children participation. They were eager to show their knowledge of different languages, take part in discussions with the teacher and share their thoughts and experiences. The study by Jolić Kozina et al. (2024) showed that children's involvement depended strongly on whether they could participate actively in the choice of destinations, topics, and activities. However, Bratož and Sila (2022) also report that children's perceptions and their willingness to participate was still dependent on the teachers' guidance and support.

Reflection Point

1. Discuss some other ways in which the journey metaphor could be developed.
2. Discuss a new destination on the Language Train journey taking into account all six dimensions of the *DivCon model*.
3. Discuss other ways of encouraging children's active participation.

Conclusion

Developing linguistic and cultural awareness at an early age equips young learners with vital tools to navigate an increasingly interconnected world. Central to this effort is the concept of plurilingualism, which recognises languages as interconnected systems and highlights the dynamic interplay of multiple languages within individuals. This approach promotes not only linguistic skills but also cultural appreciation and respect for diversity. Language awareness, as discussed, fosters metalinguistic abilities and enhances learners' understanding of language as a social and cultural construct. By engaging with various domains of language awareness, such as cognitive, affective, and social aspects, educators can create enriching learning experiences that go beyond mere language acquisition.

Pluralistic approaches to language teaching further expand this perspective by emphasising the value of linguistic diversity and encouraging the inclusion of learners' native and heritage languages. The *DivCon model* exemplifies how structured, participatory, and multi-sensory activities can im-

merse children in diverse linguistic and cultural experiences. Through initiatives like Language Awakening and translanguaging, educators challenge monolingual ideologies and promote inclusive, equitable environments. The *DivCon* framework's journey metaphor provides a creative and exploratory approach, fostering curiosity and positive attitudes in children from a young age.

Ultimately, cultivating linguistic and cultural awareness not only enhances communication skills but also nurtures empathy and a deeper connection to the global community. These foundational efforts in early education have the potential to shape inclusive, culturally sensitive individuals who value diversity as a resource for personal and societal growth. By integrating these approaches, educators can contribute to a future where linguistic and cultural diversity are celebrated and harnessed for mutual understanding.

Key Takeaways

- Plurilingualism views languages as interconnected systems within an individual, enabling them to draw from their entire linguistic repertoire for communication and problem-solving.
- Early exposure to language awareness activities fosters metalinguistic skills and cultural understanding in children, enhancing their ability to reflect on language as a system.
- By recognising the value of linguistic diversity, pluralistic approaches foster intercultural competence and challenge monolingual ideologies.
- Innovative models like the *DivCon* framework engage young learners through multi-sensory, participatory activities that expose them to linguistic and cultural diversity.

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Transfer in Early Multilingual Acquisition

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Chapter Objectives

- Defining transfer and distinguishing between positive and negative instances of transfer
- Understanding the role of transfer in the acquisition process
- Discussing positive transfer as a fruitful strategy in the learning process
- Interpreting errors not necessarily as instances of negative transfer but as a creative strategy
- Suggesting possible ways of reacting to language transfer in the teaching process

Language Transfer: Old Misconceptions, New Definitions

Language learning is often surrounded by misconceptions, one of the most persistent being the belief that second or foreign language acquisition (L2, from now on) is entirely shaped by the learner's first language (L1, from now on). According to this view, structural similarities between the two languages should result in error-free learning, while structural differences would inevitably lead to mistakes. However, linguistic research has challenged this assumption, demonstrating that language transfer is a more complex phenomenon. In this chapter, we will explore how modern research has debunked this myth and how an understanding of both positive and negative transfer can provide valuable insights for plurilingual education.

Interpreting Transfer in Language Acquisition: Does the Contrastive Hypothesis Still Hold?

The following short dialogue took place between a four-year-old Italian girl (G) who was involved in a German language contact programme in a kindergarten in Trentino, a province in northern Italy, and the teacher (T):

Bratož, S., & Irsara, M. (Eds.). (2025). *Diversity in action: Training teachers through multilingual and multicultural experiences.* University of Primorska Press.

(1) T: *Was trinkst du gerade?* (What are you drinking?)
G: *Della Wasser.* (Della [some, in Italian] water.)
T: *Dein blaues Glas ist schön.* (Your blue glass is nice.)
G: *Ich nein cannuccia blau* (I no cannuccia [straw, in Italian] blue.)

Anyone reading this dialogue – particularly the last line – will notice that the girl's sentence follows the word order of her L1, Italian. Not only is the adjective *blau* not declined (unlike in the teacher's German sentence: *dein blaues Glas*), but it is also placed after the noun, as in Italian (*la cannuccia blu*). The negation is also structured according to Italian grammar: instead of the correct German negation *nicht* ('not'), the girl uses *nein* ('no') immediately after the subject, mirroring the Italian structure *io non ho la cannuccia blu* ('*I don't have the blue straw*'). Additionally, the verb is omitted entirely. The most immediate conclusion is that the child is acquiring the foreign language based on the structural principles of her first language. In other words, the new language appears to be embedded within the framework of her native Italian.

This is the basis of the contrastive hypothesis on L2 acquisition: from this perspective, the brain would be linguistically dominated by the first language already at an early age (four years old, in the example above), when children are still processing their L1.

Actually, there are other explanations for this phenomenon – perhaps less immediate, but more strongly supported by empirical data. The first hypothesis is that language development does not occur 'by contrast,' i.e. through the more or less spontaneous integration of the foreign or second language into the first language system, but that, on the contrary, the first language is neither the cause nor the origin of the first expressions in the foreign language. Instead, it can be assumed that the child, in this case, is already within a process of linguistic development that is subject to certain rules. The lexical transfer, under these conditions, of the word *straw* from the first language, denotes not only that the child lacks that lexical element in the foreign language, but also her intention to express a meaning with the linguistic resources available to her. While this is undoubtedly an instance of transfer, our focus should shift away from non-target-like structures and instead consider the child's intent and effort to express her thoughts in an authentic interaction with the teacher. The real question, then, is: what factors induce transfer?

We know that not all transfers are equal – some are positive, while others are negative. We speak of a negative transfer when structures from the L1 are carried over into L2 due to gaps in L2 knowledge, either consciously

or unconsciously. In this case, transfer is often referred to as interference. In the example above, the child uses L1 structures as a strategy to explore the new language system, much like in the L1 acquisition process. The child demonstrates an ability to navigate the new language, German; otherwise, she would not explicitly express the subject *ich,* as this is not required in her L1, Italian. This suggests that while she draws on her L1 when needed, she has already internalised a key syntactic feature – overt pronominal subject – where German (L2) differs from Italian (L1).

Which Factors Lead Speakers to Transfer?

No one denies that L1 transfer occurs in L2 learning. The crucial question is: what factors constrain transfer? Every learner, including children, discovers features of the L2 through the input they receive, process them based on the structures they already know, and store them as suitable for their L2 production. Unless they receive further input that contradicts their assumptions, learners tend to assume that the L2 functions like the L1 – a phenomenon known as 'transfer to somewhere' (Andersen, 1983).

The distinction between a communicative strategy and a learning strategy is subtle, as communication in the L2 can play a key role in acquisition. For this reason, the term *learner strategy* (McDonough, 1999) is often preferred over general learning strategies. Thus, the contrastive hypothesis cannot be regarded as absolutely true; rather, it serves as a starting point in the learning process. If supported by broad, rich, and authentic input, it corresponds to the initial stage of L2 acquisition. Once this stage is surpassed, acquisition proceeds in sequences similar to those of L1 acquisition, albeit with a time lag. According to Tracy (2008), this delay is approximately one year compared to the L1 acquisition phases.

From a strictly cognitive perspective, one can view this phase as a period in which the L2 is not yet fully integrated or automatised, in Edmondson's (1999) sense. In other words, the new language has not yet been processed or proceduralised (Andersen, 1983). At this stage, the learner can only access the L2 in a controlled manner. Since readiness for L2 use depends heavily on communicative situations, the learner's performance may vary. Over time, the learner may recognise the inadequacy of their own production if conditions permit. This type of transfer is therefore called *procedural* because it marks a specific stage in the acquisition process and represents a step toward proceduralisation – provided that communicative conditions allow for further development.

In this case, we observe a cognitive transfer, as the child has not yet fully

internalised the structures of the second language (L2). Frequently, the principles underlying this transfer stem from the idea that 'the initial state of L2 acquisition is the final state of L1 acquisition' (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996, p. 40). From this perspective, the phenomenon does not align with the contrastive hypothesis. Instead, it occurs at a stage when L1 acquisition has been completed – resulting in the automatisation and proceduralisation of L1 – but before the development of metalinguistic competence. According to Oerter (2000), this competence typically emerges around the ages of 7–8, meaning that younger children have not yet reached this stage.

Last but not least, there is also the possibility of a transfer that cannot be explained by reference to L1. Kellerman (1995) refers to this as 'transfer from nowhere:' transfer often occurs on the basis of the relative transparency or markedness of linguistic structures. For example, studies on Swedish learners acquiring German have shown unexpected transfer patterns. Although Swedish and German share the same verb-second word order, learners sometimes produce structures influenced by English, which follows a subject-verb-object order, as exemplified in (2):

(2) a. Swedish: *Idag äter jag glass.*
    b. German: *Heute esse ich ein Eis.*
    c. English: *Today eat I icecream.
    d. Learner's production: **Heute ich esse ein Eis.*
    e. Correct English: Today I eat icecream.

Whether this learner's production was directly influenced by English remains uncertain – this is one of the hypotheses in multilingual transfer research. However, what is certain is that the analogy between the target language (German) and the L1 (Swedish) does not necessarily lead to transfer, as the contrastive hypothesis would predict. This suggests that other explanatory factors are at play. Indeed, multiple typologies of transfer exist, and most indicate that children have already activated the acquisition process.

How Can We Facilitate L2 Learning Or Acquisition in Case of a Transfer?

How should a teacher respond to L1 transfer to support a child's interaction in L2? As we have seen, transfer reveals two key facts:

1. The child is motivated to produce output in L2 within a meaningful context – in our case, an authentic, real-time interaction with an adult who speaks a different language.
2. The child lacks certain elements of L2 necessary for full interaction.

From a pedagogical perspective, the teacher's primary focus lies on the first point. Rather than correcting the child or discouraging transfer, the teacher should ensure that the interaction continues. Maintaining engagement is crucial, as it fosters motivation and provides opportunities for further language exposure. This can be achieved through various strategies, such as:

- Prompting with a follow-up question: 'Oh, you don't have a blue straw? Do you like blue straws? Or do you prefer yellow ones?'
- Providing an observation: 'I have a red straw, but I don't have a blue glass.'
- Confirming with a response: 'No, you don't, indeed. You have a red straw.'

By responding in this way, the teacher sustains the dialogue initiated by the child, provides correct and meaningful L2 input, and supports the child's language processing. This interactive approach ensures that the child remains engaged, encouraged, and exposed to rich linguistic input, all of which are essential for successful L2 acquisition.

Reflection Point

1. Discuss transfer episodes that you have personally experienced or observed. How did they manifest, and what impact did they have on communication?
2. Do you occasionally experience interference from your first language when speaking a second language, or from the second language when using a third?
3. Observe and analyse common features of a foreign or second language that differ from children's L1 but are typically processed and incorporated by them in their language development.

All That Glitters Is Not Transfer

Assessing students' L2 output through the lens of L1 transfer is often tempting. Yet this can be a fairly controversial matter. Over around fifty years of research in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) it has become clear that, with regard to grammatical development, all learners undergo the same obligatory, cognitively-founded developmental stages, regardless of factors such as L1 background, L2 complexity, age of exposure to the L2, or learning environment. Following Processability Theory (Pienemann, 1998), such stages can be summarised as in (3) with reference to English L2 grammar.

(3) a. I play football
    b. I like cats/Mum working/Peter play tennis?

c. I have three black cats/Mum have worked/Do Peter play tennis?
d. Is mum home?/Can Peter sing?
e. Mum loves rice/Why are you laughing?
f. I suggest that she go home/I wonder why you are laughing

Nevertheless, while all learners follow this universal developmental sequence, their rate of progression and level of accuracy may vary. Who will learn English L2 more quickly? And who will achieve greater accuracy? The factors at play here are many and varied, and crucial among them is the proximity between L1 and L2. However, while such factors can accelerate learning or enhance accuracy, they do not alter the fundamental order of development.

Producing a deviant L2 form that resembles the L1 pattern is therefore not an automatic sign of transfer. For example, if an English student of L2 Italian, a null-subject language, formulates a question as in (4), using an unnecessary subject (*tu* 'you'), does this mean that they are straightforwardly translating their L1 English structure? Or are they simply going through an earlier universal developmental stage?

(4) *Cosa tu vuoi?* (What you want?)

While it may seem tempting to assume that the influence of the L1 is more significant in this case, extensive SLA research on the acquisition of pronominal subjects suggests otherwise. Even at advanced levels of proficiency, many learners tend to oversupply overt subjects in the target L2, regardless of the typological characteristics of the L1 (i.e. whether or not the L1 allows null subjects).

In this section, we will focus on a number of cases in which, contrary to what one may expect at first sight, transfer does not occur. On the one hand, we will show how typological proximity (i.e. the presence of similar, if not identical, structures between L1 and L2) does not automatically result in positive transfer, nor does it guarantee the immediate acquisition of the L2 structure. On the other hand, we will examine the reverse scenario, showing that typological distance (i.e. the presence of substantially different structures in the two languages) does not necessarily lead to negative transfer or hinder the learning process.

L1–L2 Proximity without Positive Transfer

Within the framework of Processability Theory, the Developmentally Moderated Transfer Hypothesis (Pienemann et al., 2005) predicts that:

- transfer from the L1 is only partial, meaning that the initial stage of L2 learning does not coincide with the final L1 stage;
- learners can transfer a structure from their L1 only when they are developmentally ready to produce it.

Håkansson et al. (2002) have proved this hypothesis by conducting a cross-sectional study on 20 Swedish L1 learners studying English L2 and focusing on the acquisition of the verb-second (V2) structure. As anticipated in the section 'Which factors lead speakers to transfer?,' this structure is present in both Swedish and German. In both languages, the fronting of adverbials for discourse and pragmatic reasons entails that the subject comes immediately after the verb, as illustrated in (5).

(5)	a. Swedish	*Idar*	*dricker*	*Peter*	*mjölk*
	b. German	*Heute*	*trinkt*	*Peter*	*Milch*
		Today	drinks	Peter	milk

Given such structural similarity, it may seem reasonable to expect that all Swedish L1 learners who took part in the study can correctly produce the V2 structure in German L2. However, the findings showed the opposite: only 5 out of 20 learners provided positive evidence of this structure. Among the remaining 15 students, 6 never initiated their sentences with a time or place adverbial, and 9 produced the incorrect adjunct-subject-verb order.

Håkansson et al. (2002) argue that the V2 structure is a complex one, which is expected to emerge at Stage 4 (out of a total of 6 hypothesised stages) along the developmental sequence predicted by Processability Theory. For this reason, learners who are still at lower stages cannot produce this structure in German L2, even though the same structure exists in Swedish L1. In order to transfer that structure, learners must be developmentally ready to acquire it.

Along similar lines, Artoni and Magnani (2021) have looked at the acquisition of case in Russian L2 by adult learners divided into three groups based on their L1: (a) learners with L1 Italian, a language with no case marking on nouns; (b) learners from a non-Slavic L1 with a case system that is radically different from the Russian one (e.g. Azeri and Georgian); (c) learners from a Slavic L1 with a case system akin to the Russian one (e.g. Serbian, Slovak).

Following Processability Theory's developmental hierarchy, Artoni and Magnani (2021) hypothesise that learners will learn the opposition between nominative and accusative first only based on positional criteria, then also

based on functional criteria, regardless of word order constraints, as exemplified in (6).

(6) *Positional case marking:*
pre-verbal noun = nominative case
post-verbal noun = accusative case
Functional case marking:
subject (regardless of its position) = nominative case
object (regardless of its position) = accusative case

Results show that all learners across three groups, i.e. irrespectively of their L1 background, go through this implicational sequence. However, accuracy rates are lower for Italian L1 learners compared to those from an L1 that has case marking; and among the latter, learners from a Slavic L1 background perform better than others. This suggests that while the L1 does influence the L2 outcome, it does not alter the developmental sequence. In other words, learners from an L1 with case will not transfer this structure to the L2 unless they are developmentally ready to do so.

L1–L2 Distance without Negative Transfer

To conclude this section, we report on the results of a study by Kawaguchi (2002), who has investigated the acquisition of Japanese L2 syntax by two Australian adult learners tested longitudinally, i.e. at four subsequent times during their process of L2 learning.

From a syntactic point of view, English and Japanese are typologically different. Whereas the canonical word order in English is subject-verb-object (SVO), in Japanese it is subject-object-verb (SOV). Thus, if we assumed a full transfer hypothesis, as suggested by Schwartz and Sprouse (1996), we should expect both learners to initially overextend the English L1 pattern, and hence produce incorrect SVO sentences in Japanese L2. On the other hand, a cognitively founded framework such as Processability Theory would predict that canonical word order, regardless of the L2, is the least costly choice in terms of processing procedures, and hence it is assumed to emerge early in learners' interlanguage.

The results of Kawaguchi's (2002) study completely falsify the full transfer hypothesis and provide evidence in favour of the Processability Theory's hierarchy. In particular, Kawaguchi (2002) finds that none of the learners in her study ever produce verbs in a non-final position, even at initial stages of interlanguage. This is an important indicator that, when learners are cogni-

tively ready to produce a certain structure, the typological distance between L1 and L2 does not necessarily hinder the learning process.

All That Transfers Is Not Glitter

Of course, there are contexts in which transfer does occur, i.e. when learners are developmentally ready. In some cases, the outcome will be positive, in others, it will not. Concrete language material, abstract structures, and meanings can be transferred from one language to another. In the case of language material (sounds, words), we talk about matter borrowing, with abstract structures at the syntactic or prosodic level about pattern borrowing, and the transfer of meanings is usually referred to as semantic transfer (Riehl, 2014, p. 108).

However, as we will show, in some cases, what is transferred can be at a more abstract representational level rather than at the superficial realisation of the sentence. In other words, some instances of transfer may not be visible directly in learners' output, and it is the job of linguistic research to carefully analyse learners' productions.

L1–L2 Proximity with Positive Transfer

Positive transfer occurs at different linguistic levels, including grammar and lexicon. It is important to foster positive transfer both at the receptive and productive level. As regards reception, lexical similarities between Germanic, Romance or Slavic languages can facilitate comprehension. Words with the same roots that have a similar sound and (nearly) the same meaning are called cognates. They are the basis of intercomprehension between languages belonging to the same family, i.e. of the ability to understand a word's meaning relying on a similar word in a different language (Hufeisen & Marx, 2014).

For children with German as a first language, it will thus be easy to understand and acquire certain words in English L2 belonging to the semantic field of family members, colours and animals such as *brother* (Ger. *Bruder*), *green* (Ger. *grün*), *bear* (Ger. *Bär*), etc. Not all similarities can be detected at first sight, as spelling or pronunciation can differ (e.g. Engl. *cow* is spelt with <c> while Ger. *Kuh* is spelt with <k>). For this reason, it is important to draw pupils' attention to interlinguistic analogies, e.g. 'Listen, *cow* in English is almost like *Kuh* in German!'

Positive transfer in terms of communicative strategies can be found already in very small children. As Tracy (2008) shows, in bilingual children code-mixing, i.e. the use of two languages in the same utterance, can be related

to the fact that the two languages do not develop at the same speed. The language in which the child has reached a more advanced acquisition stage serves to compensate for a structural gap in the 'weaker' language. In this sense, in the German-English mixed utterance *Cleanst du dein teeth* ('Are you cleaning your teeth?;' Tracy, 2008, p. 114), the child relies on the language in which the morphological competence is more advanced, in this case German (verbal ending *-st* for the second person singular), producing a perfect bilingual utterance. Code-mixing thus becomes a powerful means of boosting the other language, a process known as bilingual bootstrapping. Similarly, in some cases children acquiring German as L2 transfer typical German morphemes to otherwise Italian lexemes, as in *ein *foglien, ein *gatten,* where the child attaches the German plural ending *-en* to the Italian word *foglie* (Ger. *Blätter* 'leaves') and *gatto* (Ger. *Katze* 'cat'). Despite the fact that the result is not correct in terms of accuracy, we have to acknowledge that the child already knows *some*thing about German grammar (Salzmann & Videsott, 2024).

Moreover, positive transfer also occurs at the syntactic level. Unlike late L2 acquisition in adolescents and adults, the errors found in simultaneous bilingual and early L2 acquisition are only to a limited extent caused by negative transfer (Grimm & Cristante, 2022, p. 14). As Haberzettl (2005) points out, in German L2 the V-final position in subordinate clauses (e.g. *weil ich krank bin,* literally 'because I ill am') is acquired faster by children with Turkish as L1 than by children with Russian as L1, since Turkish is characterised by SOV-structures in subordinate clauses while Russian is not. Nevertheless, the acquisitional advantage of the Turkish over the Russian children is only transitory and, as underlined above, positive transfer is possible only if the learners are developmentally ready in terms of acquisition stages.

Another striking example of positive transfer is the acquisition of the V2 principle in German, which in simultaneous bilingual children can even be accelerated. While some monolingual German children at a certain stage tend to mix the V2 rule in main clauses with the V-final rule in subordinate clauses, producing interrogative clauses with the V-final position (e.g. *was die Mama einkauft?** 'what the mummy buys' instead of *was kauft die Mama ein?* 'what does the mummy buy?;' Tracy, 2008, p. 95), as if it was a subordinate clause, in bilingual German-Italian children these structures do not occur, probably because of the positive influence of the Romance language, which does not present the V-final position in subordinate clauses (Müller et al., 2007, p. 131). Grotesquely, in this case it is the L1–L2 distance that leads to a positive outcome.

Reflection Point

1. Think of some lexical similarities between related languages (e.g. Slovenian/Croatian-Russian, German-English, Italian-Ladin) and imagine how you could transmit those similarities to your learners.
2. How do you react to instances of lexical transfer (code-mixing)? Why is it important for bi- and plurilingual speakers to be able to draw on their whole language repertoire?
3. Try to think of a grammatical phenomenon (e.g. cases, word order, articles) where in second or third language acquisition you could benefit from your L1.

L1-L2 Distance with Negative Transfer

Apart from negative transfer on the semantic level of single words (so-called false friends such as Ger. *Regal* ≠ It. *regalo,* since *Regal* means *scaffale,* i.e. 'shelf,' and *regalo Geschenk,* i.e. 'present'), interferences often occur at the phraseological level, i.e. when learners make mistakes in combining words. Here are some examples of negative transfer regarding idiomatic expressions and the use of prepositions produced by children growing up bilingually with German and Italian in South Tyrol, an officially bilingual region:

(7) Ger. *ich *habe kalt* (< It. *ho freddo*) instead of *mir ist kalt,* 'I'm cold'
(8) It. *ti *ho bene* (< Ger. *ich hab' dich lieb*) instead of *ti voglio bene,* 'I love you'
(9) Ger. *das *macht nicht weh* (< It. *non fa male*) instead of *das tut nicht weh,* 'it doesn't hurt'
(10) It. *Il mio compleanno è *all'8 gennaio* (< Ger. *Mein Geburtstag ist am 8. Januar*) instead of *Il mio compleanno è l'8 gennaio,* 'My birthday is on the 8th of January'

Moreover, certain instances of transfer are due to polysemy, i.e. the fact that a word has several meanings in one language, while it has only one meaning in the other. In this way it is possible to explain the following utterance produced by a four-year-old child growing up with Italian and German: while holding a flower to the mother's nose, the child says *hör'!* ('listen') instead of *riech*' ('smell'). This anomalous usage of the German verb *hören* ('to hear/listen') clearly can be traced back to the Italian perceptional verb *sentire,* which is polysemous, meaning to hear/listen, to taste, to feel and to smell. In all these cases the adult should repeat the correct form in the target language (e.g. *Genau, das TUT nicht weh.* 'Exactly, it doesn't hurt' or: *Ah, ich soll an der Blume RIECHEN.* 'Ah, I should smell the flower'), possibly stressing

the word the young learner lacked. In general, at pre-primary level implicit teaching should be favoured over explicit language instruction, which can gradually be introduced at primary school level.

The following example (11), in which a three-year-old child (CH) with Italian L1 and German L2 is looking at a picturebook about wolves, contains several instances of lexical and syntactic transfer. After imitating the wolf's howling, the girl asks in Italian why the wolf makes this noise and the adult (A) answers in German that this is because he is calling the other wolves. The child then asks in German why he does so, using the conjunction *weil* instead of the interrogative pronoun *warum,* probably because she transfers the semantics of the Italian *perché,* which both means 'why' and 'because,' to the German *weil,* which however cannot introduce a question. Moreover, she omits the obligatory subject pronoun in German (*er*), most probably due to the fact that Italian in this case does not foresee the pronoun. Nevertheless, it has to be underlined that the child, after starting the conversation in Italian, makes a huge effort to switch to the L2 German producing an utterance which, from the communicative point of view, is perfectly understandable. What is more, the utterance contains characteristics which could be considered typical of monolingual German children at that age as well, for instance the mixing of different conjunctions and the overgeneralisation of the plural form *Wolfe* instead of *Wölfe,* in which the ending *-e* for plural (e.g. *Tisch-Tische*) is erroneously applied to the noun *Wolf.* For this reason, not all utterances deviating from the norm should automatically be considered as instances of transfer, as they could also be natural acquisition steps, identical or at least similar to the first language acquisition process, especially in early second language acquisition (Tracy, 2008, p. 154). Finally, we should also have a look at the adult's utterances. While the child at first replies in Italian, the adult sticks to German and thus provides important linguistic input which the girl could re-use in her utterances (e.g. the verb *rufen,* the overt subject pronoun *er*).

(11) CH: *Lupo.* (Wolf. [in Italian])
A: *Was macht der Wolf?* (What does the wolf do?)
CH: *uuuuh*
Perché fa così il lupo? (Why does the wolf do so? [in Italian])
Perché fa questi versi? (Why does he make these noises? [in Italian])
A: *Weil er ruft.* (Because he calls.)
Er ruft die anderen Wölfe. (He calls the other wolves.)
CH: *Weil ruft anderen Wolfe?* (Why does he call the other wolves?)
A: *Weil er sie sucht.* (Because he is looking for them.)

As far as the transfer of syntactic structures is concerned, it is important to underline that in many cases we do not find instances of full transfer, but only a delay (i.e. a quantitative difference) in the acquisition of certain phenomena, as is the case of subject pronouns in Italian as 'weaker' L1 or L2. All bilingual children growing up with German and Italian sooner or later discover that Italian is a null-subject language and German not, but the frequency of overt subjects tends to be higher in bilingual children than in monolingual Italian children and adults (Müller et al., 2007, p. 171).

Finally, in bi- or plurilingual children at primary school age negative transfer often occurs in spelling, especially when they are alphabetised in only one language. Children with Italian L1 growing up in Germany who possess literacy only in the L2 German often transfer the spelling rules of German (e.g. [ʃ] spelt as <sch> and [v] as <w>) to their first language, e.g. *Il pesche die Luka e dschallo e werde* (= *Il pesce di Luca è giallo e verde;* Engl. 'Luca's fish is yellow and green') (Belke, 2003, p. 93).

For bilingual children with a heritage language spoken only or mainly at home, it would be of great importance to acquire the spelling rules of both languages, otherwise they risk to become literate only in the language of instruction.

In general, negative transfer and other deviations from the norm should be considered as necessary steps towards a higher language competence and not as errors to be condemned. In order to detect and avoid negative transfer, it is fundamental for teachers to have knowledge of the main characteristics of their learners' language systems and to offer, whenever possible, modules of integrated language teaching focusing on the similarities and differences between the languages involved.

Key Takeaways

- Transfer is an important part of linguistic development and does not hinder the language acquisition process.
- Transfer cannot be explained by the contrastive hypothesis alone, i.e. positive transfer in case of L1–L2 proximity can only occur when learners are developmentally ready. Conversely, L1–L2 distance does not necessarily lead to negative transfer.
- Lexical transfer is a fundamental communication strategy, with regard both to the reception of cognates and to bridging lexical gaps in production.
- It is possible to promote transfer through special strategies, such as stimulus questions and repetitions, and by drawing the children's attention to similarities (and differences) between languages.

Note

This contribution stems from the close collaboration among the three authors. For the concerns of the Italian academy, Federica Ricci Garotti takes responsibility for the section 'Language Transfer: Old Misconceptions, New Definitions,' Marco Magnani for the section 'All That Glitters Is Not Transfer,' and Katharina Salzmann for the section 'All That Transfers Is Not Glitter.'

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Global Citizenship Education and English Learning through Picturebooks in Multilingual Settings

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Chapter Objectives

- Discussing the role of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) in English Language Teaching (ELT) for Young Learners (YLs)
- Highlighting the value and importance of picturebooks as an effective tool in ELT for YLs
- Discussing the use of plurilingual strategies in ELT, fostering language development among YLs through multilingual approaches
- Exploring Montessori principles in the context of language education through the use of picturebooks
- Presenting and analysing a transnational experience in teacher education as a case study

Introduction

This chapter argues for Global Citizenship Education (GCED) as a transformative approach to language learning and teaching to respond more effectively to current and emerging global challenges in an era of unprecedented change. A combination of GCED and the teaching of English as an international language has the potential to enhance language skills and also promote a deeper understanding of global interconnectedness and awareness. By embedding GCED within the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum for Young Learners (YLs), educators can facilitate the development of learners' sense of belonging to a wider global community, encouraging learners to engage with different perspectives and to cultivate empathy, essential qualities for responsible global citizenship.

Bratož, S., & Irsara, M. (Eds.). (2025). *Diversity in action: Training teachers through multilingual and multicultural experiences.* University of Primorska Press.

An effective medium for achieving these educational goals is the inclusion of picturebooks in the ELT framework. Principled and well-informed choices of picturebooks, characterised by rich illustrations and compelling narratives, can act as a bridge between language acquisition and cultural exploration. They offer YLs the opportunity to engage with stories from various backgrounds, thereby facilitating discussions about global issues and developing critical thinking skills. In addition, the visual components of picturebooks significantly enhance comprehension, making them particularly valuable for YLs who are still in the process of language development.

The implementation of multilingual strategies in the ELT classroom further enriches the educational experience of YLs. By recognising and valuing pupils' diverse linguistic backgrounds, teachers not only enhance the acquisition of English language skills but also affirm students' identities and cultural heritages. A multilingual pedagogical approach is consistent with the principles of global citizenship by promoting respect for diversity and fostering a sense of solidarity within the classroom and beyond.

Following Montessori principles in the context of language education can encourage further pupil engagement. Montessori education emphasises hands-on, experiential learning, encouraging children to explore the world around them at their own pace. By using picturebooks as tools for discovery, educators can create rich, interactive learning experiences that foster curiosity about global issues. Montessori principles also emphasise the importance of fostering learner independence, which can empower YLs to take ownership of their learning and become proactive global citizens. However, Montessori's ideas need to be critically examined through a contemporary lens, recognising that her legacy has not been without its critics (Seichter, 2024). As a physician and biologist in the early 20th century, Montessori has been criticised for supporting eugenic and anthropological perspectives that offer limited space for diversity and inclusion. The challenge today is to thoughtfully adapt aspects of her educational approach while remaining attuned to the complex cultural and social dynamics that shape contemporary educational environments.

Addressing global issues in ELT for YLs, while recognising the importance of picturebooks, adopting multilingual strategies, and integrating Montessori principles, creates a holistic approach that not only enhances language skills but also fosters informed and caring global citizens who are prepared to engage with and contribute to an increasingly interconnected world. The following sections elaborate on these components, culminating in a discussion of a transnational teacher education experience in which pre-service teach-

ers collaborated online to develop ELT lesson plans that integrated picturebooks and global issues.

Global Citizenship Education in ELT to YLs

Definitions and Aims of GCED

Global citizenship is defined by UNESCO (2015) as 'a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity. It emphasizes political, economic, social and cultural interdependency and interconnectedness between the local, the national and the global' (p. 14). Torres summarises the concept of global citizenship by emphasising that it is characterised by 'an understanding of global interconnectedness and a commitment to the collective good' (UNESCO, 2014, p. 14; Zadra et al., 2024).

Although the values associated with global citizenship have been at the core of UNESCO's mission since its establishment in 1947, the term *Global Citizenship Education* (GCED) was coined in 2011 (UNESCO, 2024). In September 2012, the United Nations Secretary-General launched the *Global Education First Initiative,* which focuses on three key priorities: ensuring that every child has access to school, improving the quality of learning, and fostering global citizenship (United Nations, 2012).

While global citizenship encompasses a broad array of political, economic, and moral dimensions, the concepts of community and interconnectedness are consistently central to its definition. It is widely understood that global citizenship does not imply a legal status but rather signifies a sense of belonging to a larger global community and a recognition of shared humanity. However, this global perspective is not intended to diminish local identities or concerns. Instead, the local and global dimensions are deeply interconnected, influencing one another. Climate change serves as a prime example, illustrating how different regions are affected in unique ways, yet all share a common impact. Moreover, the personal and social dimensions are also interlinked. Emotional intelligence and self-awareness are essential life skills that foster empathy and conscientiousness. Recognising one's own emotions is crucial for understanding others. Personal well-being and growth enable individuals to relate more effectively to other people. Personal experiences and stories that are shared in class can help learners connect with social issues that extend beyond the local context, helping them to recognise a shared humanity. Finally, the present and future are intrinsically connected. Responsible citizenship requires individuals to act with an awareness of possible future consequences of their actions.

The ultimate goal of GCED is to empower individuals to become global

citizens who are agents of change and actively contribute to a sustainable world and the well-being of all its inhabitants. Inspiring learners to act responsibly for the common good is a key aim of CGCE. However, it could also be argued that fostering positive attitudes towards global issues should take precedence over action with younger learners, as encouraging optimism is more urgent at this stage of development. Today, children are not only witnesses to, but often experience various global challenges, including environmental degradation such as deforestation, landslides, and floods; rapid social change that often leads to tensions and instability; democratic crises that trigger conflict and war; growing economic inequalities; and digital phenomena that bring with them a range of problems such as addiction, cyberbullying, misinformation, privacy concerns, and more. Children are often aware of a wide range of global problems, and the weight of these issues can lead to anxiety, especially in more sensitive children. It can be argued that in today's world, hope and optimism are essential to nurture their natural curiosity and wonder, and to help them grow into adults with a confident, forward-looking mindset. When it comes to diversity, for example, it is not just about tolerating or respecting differences but about embracing and celebrating the positive aspects of diversity. People who appreciate and value diversity in its broadest sense are more likely to contribute actively to the well-being of a wider community.

Thinking and Learning

Thoughtful reflection is an essential skill for the recognition of common humanity and global interconnectedness. GCED aims to develop learners' understanding of complex and diverse global issues, where complexity and diversity are seen as enriching forces that provide opportunities for reflection and deeper learning. Successful or deeper learning means being able to move to higher levels of thinking. Although it could be argued that there is no clear hierarchy of thinking, the pioneering taxonomy proposed by Bloom and his associates in 1956 and its subsequent revisions encourage higher-order thinking in the classroom (Fisher, 2005). According to Bloom's cognitive taxonomy of educational objectives, lower levels of thinking involve *knowing, understanding* and *applying,* while higher levels involve *analysing, synthesising,* and *evaluating*. Rather than limiting teaching and learning to the application of rules and the recall of information, Bloom's taxonomy and later editions remind teachers to move to higher levels of metacognition by encouraging children to question, compare, contrast, examine, appraise, support, value, and investigate further. These higher-order cognitive practices

align well with the goals of GCED, which seeks to cultivate responsible and informed individuals.

Children's thinking, learning, and global citizenship skills can be developed through the teaching of specific subjects and the promotion of cross-curricular links. Interdisciplinarity is inherent in GCED, but the teaching of languages plays an important role, as language skills are essential to approach global issues from different perspectives and to promote international understanding (Lütge et al., 2023). The English language can be a window to the world, and a good example of how a language is not necessarily linked to a particular culture or community, but to the wider world with speakers of different accents and cultures.

The teaching of English as an international language needs to be constantly rethought in response to evolving trends in language, language learning, and language use. Communication seems to have become increasingly multimodal. Language is only one modality of making meaning, and learners need to learn to read or interpret texts of different kinds, including spoken, written, and visual. Pennycook (2018) emphasises that language learning does not just happen in our heads, arguing that it 'happens in and around a much wider set of semiotic assemblages including touch, smell, taste, things and places' (Pennycook, 2018, p. 131), and that we need to 'consider the social, spatial and embodied dimensions of language learning' (Pennycook, 2018, p. 131). Finally, ELT needs to be considered in the light of global developments. It can be argued that English as an international language cannot be taught without reference to global issues and that YLs of English need to be encouraged to see the bigger picture.

In practice, teachers can promote higher-order thinking and global citizenship through the use of effective questions and multimodal materials. The way teachers ask questions can have both immediate and lasting effects on children's learning. By asking questions that encourage reflection, analysis and enquiry, teachers encourage children to think critically – to take the time to look at situations from various perspectives. Finally, a story-based approach in ELT for YLs can go beyond improving children's understanding of English grammar and vocabulary and extend into cross-curricular areas, including multimodal communication and GCED. It has been shown that GCED is not confined to ELT at secondary level but can also be usefully integrated into foreign language learning at primary level, for example through the use of storytelling (Mastellotto, 2023; Koppel, 2025).

Stories and picturebooks can encourage children to reflect on their personal role within the community and relate their individual experiences to

the wider world. The value and role of picturebooks in ELT for YLs is discussed in the next section.

Reflection Point

1. How do you interpret GCED and what do you see as its key aims?
2. How can teachers of English promote critical thinking and global citizenship skills in children?

Picturebooks in ELT with YLs in Multilingual Settings

Definitions and Value of Picturebooks

A story-based approach has long been adopted in ELT, as it provides a variety of sensory and contextual opportunities to support language development, with oral storytelling and picturebooks playing complementary roles in teaching YLs. As regards the latter, the term adopted here is the compound *picturebook,* denoting a multimodal and experiential synergy comprising language, illustrations, and the book's design, as in the widely used definition: 'A picturebook is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historic document; and foremost, an experience [. . .]. As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page' (Bader, 1976, p. 1). Here, the 'drama of the turning page' alludes to how carers and teachers can bring picturebooks to life in thrilling read-alouds with pre-literate children and YLs, and to how, later, learners can enjoy picturebooks autonomously congruently with Montessori principles.

In multilingual contexts, teachers aiming to raise their YLs' awareness of global themes can adopt appropriate picturebooks to create teacher-mediated experiences of encounters with numerous cultures, global themes, and diversity in their local contexts.

Selection and Evaluation Criteria

Selecting appropriate picturebooks impacts learners' engagement, comprehension, and language development. For teachers engaged in GCED with YLs in multilingual contexts the selection process can be informed by criteria which broadly focus on: teachers' personal aesthetic responses; an appraisal of the picturebook as an aesthetic artefact that can promote personal and collective growth and agency; the fit between picturebook and learners' characteristics and needs; and any emergent linguistic affordances (Ghosn, 2013). In evaluating picturebooks with GCED themes, the aim is to balance lin-

guistic, cultural, and pedagogical considerations (such as mediated interaction affordances and *narrative quality*) with the educational synergies arising from a picturebook's text, illustration, and design.

As regards teachers' aesthetic responses, initially teachers can read picturebooks aloud in order to experience holistically the interanimation of language and images. The selection process is then best structured through a range of criteria (Ellis & Brewster, 2014, p. 19; Mourão, 2023, pp. 191–196; see also https://pepelt21.com). The text in picturebooks – lexis, sentence structure, and complexity – needs to be challenging but manageable for YLs when mediated by the teacher. Additionally, learners' comprehension and participation in read-alouds are fostered by language features such as repetition, rhyme, and recurring patterns. The illustrations should be engaging and support comprehension by both complementing the text and sometimes contradicting it: this encourages children's critical thinking and awareness of alternative viewpoints. As regards cultural relevance and authenticity in themes and settings, considerations include whether picturebooks promote inclusivity, global awareness, and cross-cultural appreciation, while avoiding clichés and inaccuracies. Additionally, picturebooks' potential for interaction and their narrative quality also matter. Those that lend themselves to teacher-mediated participation when read aloud – through questions, group repetitions, embodiment – help learners actively engage. Age-appropriate, emotionally resonant, thrilling or humorous stories with appealing characters can motivate learners to explore themes and language further. A last question relates to whether picturebooks, after read-alouds, offer springboards for further activities such as role-playing, storytelling, creative writing, drama, and project work to further explore themes.

Developing Teacher Talk: Read-Aloud and Oral Storytelling Competences and Stages

After the selection process, teachers of YLs can bring appropriate picturebooks to life in the classroom through *picturebook mediation*. The term is used by Ellis and Mourão (2021) to refer to the scaffolding or support teachers provide when sharing picturebooks with children. This involves combining various competences to plan and manage inclusive and engaging storytime sessions. This process includes selection and preparation before the reading session, the expressive techniques used during the reading, and the reflection that follows, with creative teacher talk playing a key role in making picturebooks more understandable and engaging for learners. Bland (2015, 2022) defines *creative teacher talk* as a form of child-directed com-

munication that incorporates various strategies to support learning. Such strategies are interactive as well as multimodal and embodied, congruently with Pennycook's (2018) view of language: they include prosodic features of teachers' voices (intonation, stress, tempo, volume, and rhythm), gestures/movement, facial expressions, and the use of realia (physical objects or materials). Teachers' interactional competences enable teachers to engage all learners in scaffolded conversations. In their turn, picturebooks and oral stories, through their multimodal and embodied elements (activated by teachers' vocal and gestural mediation), also scaffold learners' understanding, motivation and participation. This entails that sometimes taken-for-granted features such as teachers' voices, prosody, and presence are essential, as they contribute to promoting learners' comprehension, inclusion and engagement in pedagogical-cultural events. Teachers' creative teacher talk also appears crucial in multilingual approaches which aim to promote children's higher order thinking through the complex interweaving of story-based approaches and GCED.

While picturebooks have largely been our focus, oral storytelling can provide a complementary approach and potentially engender hopeful educational synergies in the GCED multilingual classroom and ELT. Selected authentic oral storytelling repertoires offer multifaceted and motivating scaffolding to both teachers and learners through their memorable – typically tripartite – structures, repetitions, themes, contexts, clearly defined characters, and the simple dialogues, language patterns, and rhymes often found in stories (Bland, 2015, 2022; Gobbett Bamber, 2024; Pinter, 2006). In both read-alouds and oral storytelling, teachers draw on multimodality to speak/interact in a varied, embodied and expressive manner, with multilayered expressive gestures, movements, and facial expressions, thus aiding learners' comprehension and participation.

Teachers can structure story-based activities through interlinked stages to optimally scaffold the learners' exploration of GCED themes in multilingual contexts. Ghosn (2013) suggests that teachers frame a story-based activity as a repeated cycle or 'journey' comprising four stages: the first, pre-story, introduces key themes and language; the second entails reading aloud while ensuring interaction with learners through embodiment and multimodality; the third, post-story, further explores themes through teacher questions, plenary and small-group activities; lastly, story themes and language are repeatedly explored and expanded. Read's (2008) nine steps further scaffold learners' engagement through progressing from introducing learners to the picturebook/story, to creating embodied and creative opportunities

for holistic engagement, with the ultimate goal of helping learners explore themes/language in-depth and make them their own. The nine steps suggest that teachers can 'arouse interest, attention and curiosity; make vocabulary memorable; engage with the story; facilitate initial comprehension; retell or act out; think from within the story; explore issues; transfer; internalise' (Read, 2008, pp. 7–9). The last four steps draw on teachers' questions and creative teacher talk to explore themes such as those linked with GCED while scaffolding the development of children's higher order thinking in multilingual classrooms.

Stories in Plurilingual and English Learning

Picturebook mediation and *creative teacher talk* can be effectively integrated with translanguaging strategies in multilingual teaching approaches. Schools serve as a microcosm of our increasingly multilingual society, which includes not only migrants who speak a range of languages but also speakers of minority languages, especially in border regions. The coexistence of these diverse languages in one area is often referred to as *multilingualism,* while an individual's developing competence in two or more languages is referred to as *plurilingualism* (Council of Europe, 2001). Classrooms frequently include plurilingual pupils, and disregarding their competences in multiple languages can be considered a form of exclusion. Multilingual classrooms should be recognised as the norm and learners' plurilingualism should be acknowledged and valued. Viewed through a GCED lens, plurilingual teaching and learning in the classroom appear not only congruent but natural and fundamental. Moreover, plurilingual learning provides multiple learning affordances for young learners and is congruent with principles of inclusion. In multilingual contexts, a variety of strategies are used to scaffold learner understanding, motivation, and active participation.

One effective strategy is *translanguaging,* a term introduced by Baker (2001) to translate a Welsh concept used in Wales, particularly by the educationalist Cen Williams in 1994. Translanguaging refers to the deliberate, planned, and systematic use of multiple languages for teaching and learning purposes. Scholars such as Wei (2018) and Kirsch (2024) have argued that these multilingual practices support both teachers and learners in problem solving and knowledge construction, making them a natural fit with constructivist pedagogies that view individuals as active meaning makers.

Monolingual English picturebooks can be used in a beginner class by adopting a translanguaging approach. Teachers often aim for reading sessions to be interactive and to develop higher-order thinking skills. In the early

stages of English language learning, children can benefit from teachers' use of reformulations, expansions, and comments in additional languages to support their understanding of the story. As young English learners may struggle to express thoughts, answer open-ended questions, or ask questions in the target language, the thoughtful integration of multiple languages can help foster critical thinking and deeper engagement with the story. Moreover, various types of multilingual picturebooks can be used in educational settings to promote linguistic diversity and foster more inclusive practices in ELT. For example, interlingual picturebooks combine a dominant language with occasional words or phrases in other languages, while bilingual picturebooks feature the entire text in two languages (see https://wordsandpictureslibrary.com). Additionally, teachers can include silent or wordless picturebooks to encourage YLs to engage in high-quality dialogue, thoughtfully using multiple languages to enhance their understanding and communication.

Finally, separate versions of picturebooks in different languages, but with identical illustrations, are sometimes used in schools. This practice is common in South-Tyrolean schools that implement an *Integrated Linguistic Education* framework in a subject called *Languages*. This subject is generally co-taught by three language teachers, each using a different language, with each language represented by a distinct colour: English is blue, German is red, Italian is yellow, and Ladin is green. Teachers employ various multilingual strategies to enhance learners' cross-linguistic awareness, activate metacognitive language learning strategies, and facilitate language switching. Rather than focusing on contrastive linguistic features that may pose challenges, the emphasis is on identifying cross-linguistic similarities to strengthen positive transfer. Picturebooks play a key role in supporting this approach (Irsara, 2023).

Reflection Point

1. How do you select picturebooks?
2. How do you prepare yourself as a teacher and how do you read picturebooks in class?
3. To what extend do you use plurilingual strategies in reading picturebooks to young learners and why?

Montessori Approaches in ELT and GCED Using Picturebooks

In this section, we aim to explore the educational potential at the multidisciplinary intersection of ELT, GCED, and the pedagogical use of picturebooks,

drawing on Maria Montessori's principles. While providing a comprehensive theoretical overview of all the themes within this intersection is beyond our scope, we will focus on some overarching educational principles.

Maria Montessori's educational approach, developed in the early 20th century and now embraced worldwide, is founded on an unwavering trust in the child's ability to self-educate when placed in a scientifically prepared learning environment enriched with sensory materials and active experiences. In this setting, children select the materials they work with and determine the pace of their activity. Free choice and independent work, facilitated by the repeated use of sensory materials and practical life experiences, are fundamental pillars of a Montessori school. Montessori did not aim to establish a rigid educational model, but rather, through lived experience and observed outcomes, to develop a framework for nurturing the growth of the human personality. What is often referred to as the *Montessori method* should be understood as an open and adaptable approach, a support for life that extends beyond the confines of traditional education (Cossentino, 2005; Montessori, 1982).

To fully grasp Montessori's operational choices, it is essential to recognise the fundamental differences between children and adults in terms of learning pace, rhythm, and methods. YLs must be empowered to build knowledge and skills within a prepared environment, using scientific materials that align with their inner needs. Schools should therefore address children's psychological needs by prioritising materials that promote active, hands-on exploration, guiding them towards abstraction through sensory experience and fostering a sense of responsibility within the group. This requires an indirect approach to teaching in which a scientifically structured environment, enriched with specific materials, facilitates educational processes through movement, direct experience, and freedom of choice, while respecting individual preferences about what, where, and how to learn. Such an educational environment encourages children to select tasks to focus on and engage with, either independently or collaboratively in small peer groups, allowing their natural tendencies to emerge. Observers can then observe how children navigate the space, interact with others, choose activities, and allocate the time needed to complete them (Caprara, 2020).

A Montessori-inspired environment allows the adult to focus on observing the class group while creating an educational setting defined by movement, freedom of choice, collaborative work, and self-directed learning objectives. In addition to the numerous Montessori materials designed to initiate specific learning paths and promote autonomy in practical activities, the learn-

ing environment should provide indirect stimuli for reflection, such as picturebooks, images, and unique objects to observe and stimulate curiosity. In Montessori schools, the environment is the true teacher, as it is through its careful preparation that the educator makes the educational plan explicit. Consequently, the materials prepared for the child play a crucial role: in the attention with which they are arranged, the scientific accuracy with which they are designed, the self-correction they encourage, and the concise, precise language the teacher uses when introducing them.

Building on this conceptual foundation, we will explore the second element intertwined with Montessori's approach to education: language teaching. Montessori's work does not explicitly refer to a multilingual perspective on learning, nor does it establish a specific path for foreign language teaching, despite her extensive years of living and working abroad. However, in her writings, Montessori offers numerous reflections on the study of language as a key element of the human and social dimension and provides a thorough scientific analysis. For Montessori, language is not merely an individual phenomenon but is deeply connected to the social dimension of the human being. It is through language that people can relate to and understand each other (Consalvo, 2020). In the context of foreign languages, Montessori educators follow the general principles of the method, such as a prepared environment, sensory and self-correcting materials, and the child's independent work, while applying them to the content of language teaching. For a more in-depth exploration of this complex topic, we refer the reader to the text in the bibliography specifically dedicated to the Montessori approach in multilingual contexts. Maria Montessori's personal experiences, such as her travels to promote her educational ideas across Europe, the United States, and India, exposed her to cultures, languages, and religions different from those in which she had grown up, and fostered a deep respect for the world in its diversity. This sensitivity inspired both her and her son Mario to develop a variety of tools, including impressionistic charts, narratives, specialised materials, and methods for exploring the complexity of the cosmos through its history of evolution and change. These tools combined a simple yet scientifically accurate language, providing sensory experiences and interdisciplinary pathways.

In the light of what we have discussed so far, it is clear how important the daily use of versatile tools such as picturebooks is, alongside the more traditional Montessori materials. In Montessori's view, books serve as a bridge between children and the world; they are used daily to gather information, explore topics in-depth, and seek answers. The teacher's role is to consciously select and organise books, ensuring a thoughtful alignment between the

children's needs and the activities, readings, and images offered. These images are designed to support the child's understanding and serve as valuable tools for forming mental images of phenomena described in words (Consalvo, 2022). Illustrations can convey even complex concepts by using the child's imagination to provide a visual synthesis of what has been described verbally.

The principles behind Montessori's approach focus on the active child, who learns through movement, especially with their hands, in a non-competitive environment where each child learns at their own pace and based on their interests. For this reason, it is crucial to name things in relation to real objects, providing direct experiences; to encourage observation of the surrounding world by providing accurate terminology and encouraging children to discover details; to recognise the role of the environment in the educational process by fostering autonomy and decision-making skills; and to emphasise the importance of attention to detail, such as arranging books and images at the child's height so that they can be admired and explored. To carefully select the 'materials' we work with, whether objects, books, images, or a combination of these, we should pay attention to the care given to the details, ensuring that they reflect the truth, and to the messages they convey, in order to foster a mindset of peace and equity within the educational context (Caprara, 2022).

Care and scientific research certainly guided Maria Montessori in the design, preparation, and selection of materials to initiate the learning processes of countless children around the world, from which we can draw inspiration to make conscious and deliberate choices. The core idea behind the intersection of the Montessori approach, multilingual contexts, and GCED through picturebooks is to engage children's imaginations with stories, images, and activities that highlight the beauty of the cosmos and the powerful forces of nature, thus fostering creative thinking grounded in reality. As Montessori (2007) wrote, it is often forgotten that imagination is an active search for truth. The mind is not a passive entity; it is a consuming flame, never at rest and always alive.

Case Study: A Transnational Experience in Teacher Education

Description and Rationale of the Transnational Experience

The principles and concepts discussed in the previous sections provided the theoretical foundation and informed the *Global Citizenship Education and Plurilingual Learning through Picturebooks* initial teacher education course taught in May 2024 as part of the Diversity in Action (DivA) project co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. This was an optional

10-hour course delivered in a hybrid format, in which Italian-speaking undergraduate students preparing to become kindergarten and primary school teachers participated both on-site at the faculty and in online collaborations with peers from Austria and Croatia, using Microsoft Teams.

Although students also met online outside of class hours, the course was primarily synchronous, with a blend of face-to-face and online supervision provided by academic professors and educators. The hybrid course enabled lecturer-mediated synchronous collaborations in small groups with participants from different countries and universities. Six sub-groups were created, with 4–6 students in each. The key educational objectives were for students to:

1. analyse the content and language of picturebooks from those listed and identify those that promote a GCED perspective for specific YLs,
2. select an appropriate picturebook, and design activities to foster global awareness and global competencies in YLs within the language classroom, and
3. collaborate with peers to develop effective read-aloud/storytelling techniques and language mediation strategies that enhance the accessibility of picturebooks and encourage learners' active participation in read-alouds and literacy-based activities.

A list of picturebooks was made available in the transnational teacher development course. The picturebooks were intended to supply variety for the course tasks: some address local/global issues explicitly, some recount true stories, while others embed GCED themes and values more implicitly. Course tasks included picturebook selection and read-aloud tasks, and formative assessment projects entailing the planning and presenting by each sub-group of a short story-based lesson plan for specific YLs. Course participants read aloud, evaluated (with lecturer mediation) and selected five picturebooks according to the criteria briefly described above. Two groups chose the same picturebook. Students selected picturebooks that can give rise to reflections on: emotional intelligence, friendship, care (*Wolf and Bear,* Rolfe, 2023); multifaceted aspects of humanity's relationship with and curiosity about the natural world (*This Moose Belongs To Me,* Jeffers, 2012; *Look Up!* Bryon, 2019). Students were also drawn to picturebooks that prominently featured important themes, such as the right to education for all as enacted vocation (*Malala's Magic Pencil,* Yousafzai, 2017), and child/family poverty (*It's a No Money Day,* Milner, 2019). The latter picturebook features a child narrating

a text in the first person; the child's naïve viewpoint is complemented, contradicted, and expanded by sensitive illustrations which reveal the mother's concerned care.

As part of their formative assessment projects, students in small transnational groups created pedagogical activities for specific YLs stemming from their chosen picturebooks. They structured such activities on the basis of the storytelling steps and stages outlined above. Through their choices, accompanying activities, and sensitive read-alouds in groups, all participating students fulfilled the core assessment criteria which called for active collaborative participation in transnational groups. Criteria which addressed crucial child-directed teacher talk competences were termed as in-progress because of the brevity of the course and its somewhat distancing online modalities. Happily, participants (particularly those in groups facing fewer technical challenges) demonstrated a clear understanding as well as enjoyment of their scaffolding valency. Those criteria included the ability to produce YL-appropriate teacher talk with a focus on cognitive, affective, embodied, interactive and linguistic strategies.

The teacher development experience arose through an awareness that transnational communities of learning can be transformative. Multilingual educational programmes – hospitable to GCED values – can foster equitable, peaceful, tolerant and environmentally sustainable futures, as advocated by UNESCO (2014).

Given its brevity, the course's overarching focus comprised multiple interlinked aims in terms of GCED, teacher values and interactive mediation competences which may bring read-alouds and related activities to life for YLs. Embodied multimodal competences and critical thinking are needed to communicate themes and values to learners with sincerity and presence. Arguably, such teacher education aims need to be coherently aligned as well as collaboratively enacted and experienced in safe and supportive environments. This appears especially important as teachers' ability to confidently offer appropriate cognitive, affective, embodied and linguistic scaffolding strongly impacts overall short- and long-term learner outcomes. Accordingly, the 'Head-Heart-Hands' embodied learning approach and ethos were chosen as an overarching framework for delivering the blended learning course (Gazibara, 2013).

Reflection Point

1. What do you think could be the main challenges when collaborating online with people from other countries?

2. What do you think could be the main benefits of collaborating online with people from other countries?
3. Which modalities would you opt for when collaborating with people from other countries?

Experience Evaluation and Implications for Teacher Education with a Focus on Global Citizenship

The short *Global Citizenship Education and Plurilingual Learning through Picturebooks* initial teacher education course is briefly evaluated here in the light of formal evaluations by those students participating in-person from the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano and of anectodal reports by students and lecturers alike. The formal evaluations were highly positive as regards all pre-established criteria relating to aspects of: the course, lectureship, students' interest, and infrastructure. To exemplify, as regards lectureship there was great appreciation of the lecturers' openness to questions and availability for explanations and clarifications – something which had been explicitly planned, congruently with the course values and aims.

Students also provided written open-ended comments. These included reflections on linguistic aspects: 'I really liked this course, and it improved my English skills;' 'The teaching and language was really good and comprehensible.' Anecdotally, students reported they enjoyed speaking English as an international language for authentic communication purposes, which was difficult but interesting. As regards reading picturebooks aloud, some written comments revealed a wish for more time for such activities during the brief course: 'I would have done more practice on the reading and the modality of reading.' In this regard, anecdotal reports from the course lecturers also indicate that participants very much enjoyed carrying out read-alouds in pairs and small groups in the synchronous hybrid settings provided. Additionally, as regards the online/hybrid course modalities, one student wrote: 'it would be nice to do the same activities in a three-day-intensive course in presence, with all the students from the different universities.'

One partial exception in the students' appreciation relates to initially challenging technical aspects of the transnational course. Although participants eventually managed to collaborate online, initially the Microsoft Teams platform led to connectivity and other issues for those students participating not as 'internal' (Free University of Bozen-Bolzano) Microsoft Teams users, but as 'guest' users, that is students from other universities. To exemplify, video and/or sound connections in Microsoft Teams meetings were at times unstable (with such issues compounded by individual students' issues with their

own equipment, such as laptop microphones) and required time to be optimised – time that was therefore not devoted to teacher education activities. As regards the sharing of documents produced as part of group-work, 'internal' Teams users were able to do this fast and efficiently through Teams; this was not possible for external or 'guest' users, leading to the less smooth use of alternative modalities.

The complexity of the educational aims underpinning the European DivA project arguably demand both research which may explore suitable approaches to teacher education and training in a variety of global contexts, and classroom-based research, likewise in differing instructional contexts. A lack of fine-grained research on how teachers deploy interactional strategies which may support read-aloud practices in the language classroom has been highlighted by Mourão (2023). Given the importance attributed to creative teacher talk and child-directed modified speech in ELT and in such multifaceted educational approaches with young language learners, future research can beneficially focus on longitudinally investigating manifold aspects of authentic classroom interactions, with specific regard to those entailing the adoption of picturebooks to support YLs' developing awareness of GCED themes and values in multilingual instructed contexts. Further areas arguably in need of investigation relate to teacher education and training programmes to prepare teachers for integrating GCED and holistic approaches in ELT and multilingual environments, as well as to the multifaceted roles of teacher educators. Children's responses to picturebook-related and/or GCED activities and tasks are a further area of interest. This is as YLs' reactions may vary, and sometimes be challenging or demonstrate an 'empathetic disconnect' (Valente, 2022, p. 261) – knee-jerk rejections of teacher-suggested themes perhaps caused by linguistic and/or cultural distance, perceived inaccuracies and stereotypes, or even by (intergenerational) traumas. Arguably, negative reactions need dealing with expertly and sympathetically rather than with reprobation. When teachers – sustained by teacher educators who are themselves adept at scaffolding others' development, by transformational story-based pedagogical activities, and by coherent programmes – can congruently voice and embody hope, enthusiasm, and inclusion, such efforts may powerfully affect children's mindsets and therefore actions. The power of story and children's literature lies in their being transformational.

Conclusions and Future Prospects

This chapter has explored issues pertaining to GCED with YLs, including the rationale for adopting picturebooks in language education, the reasons for

integrating GCED aims and values into plurilingual interventions through picturebooks, and the application of Montessori principles in the context of teaching language and GCED to children.

The chapter has emphasised that global citizenship relates to feeling connected to a larger global community and understanding the interconnectedness of local, national, and global issues. GCED is about caring for the common good and our shared humanity, while valuing local identities and all languages. English itself, as an international language, plays a key bridging role in promoting international awareness, transcending national borders and connecting diverse communities, potentially helping individuals become global citizens who contribute to a sustainable and peaceful world. GCED focuses on recognising global challenges such as climate change and inequality, while also promoting personal well-being. For children, the aim is to inspire optimism and curiosity, particularly in the face of global issues such as environmental degradation, conflict, and problems arising from digitalisation. Promoting positive attitudes and embracing diversity are essential for building a more inclusive and compassionate world. Thoughtful reflection is central to GCED: it encourages learners to engage with diversity as an enriching learning opportunity. Therefore, GCED invites learners to assess personal attitudes and local values within a broader context, fostering hope, respect, and critical thinking.

The integration of GCED in schools, and therefore also in (language) teacher initial education and continuing professional development, is congruent with the United Nation's 2030 Agenda and linked Sustainable Development Goals. In multilingual and English-as-an-international-language contexts, we seek to equip children with the skills to communicate and collaborate across cultures. Compelling narratives can create holistic development affordances to shape global futures; this is as narratives enable us to struggle and rejoice *in* the book or story, through characters rooted in their diverse worlds yet with their struggles and joys resonating in ours. Relevant mediating language teacher competences entailing multimodality and embodiment have been highlighted in this chapter, together with criteria for selecting picturebooks, and steps for structuring young learner-appropriate teaching units. Among other aspects, it has been emphasised that translanguaging practices can help learners appreciate stories and support their critical thinking, and are in line with principles of inclusion.

Furthermore, the chapter has argued that Montessori principles can be compatible with those underpinning GCED, supporting the use of picturebooks as affordances in learning environments and as imaginative treasure

troves in children's teacher-mediated, as well as increasingly independent and autonomous, 'active search for truth.'

Finally, a transnational experience in teacher education has been analysed, highlighting its potential implications for educational practice and directions for future research. GCED aims to help (future) citizens feel they belong in (g)local contexts and enable them to take responsible action. For such values to be effectively communicated, teachers and teacher educators arguably need to *embody* the values underpinning curricula and teaching materials through expanding creative teacher talk repertoires which entail noticing and responding appropriately to all children's developing needs.

The educational ideals and aims described in this chapter – teaching and learning to sustain awareness and change at individual, local, national and international levels – are both crucial and challenging. Hopefully, educators can bridge the gap from idealism to enactments in YL-congruent ways. We can thus relieve young children – who are often aware of daunting (g)local challenges not of their making – of anxiety through effectively communicating to children our lived values and optimism.

Through story-based approaches which draw on GCED, well-supported and prepared teachers can bring reflections and emotional connections as well as language to life with the aim of creating imaginative, inclusive and thought-provoking multilingual environments where all learners can thrive.

Key Takeaways

- In GCED with children, values, themes and aims need to be adapted to the characteristics and needs of specific YLs.
- When teaching languages to children, we can foster the development of critical thinking through adopting powerful educational synergies, such as picturebooks, which can best express both local and global lived experiences through teacher scaffolding.
- Stories and picturebooks, whether they address themes explicitly or indirectly, have the potential to be transformative.
- It is essential to approach the picturebook evaluation and selection process with attention and sensitivity.
- Story-based approaches can lend themselves to teacher-mediated pedagogical cycles leading YLs to an ever-deepening understanding of complex issues.

Note

Martina Irsara is the lead author and wrote the sections 'Introduction,' 'Global Citizenship Education in ELT to YLs,' and 'Stories in Plurilingual and English Learning,' Valentina Gobbett Bamber wrote the sections 'Definitions and Value

of Picturebooks,' 'Selection and Evaluation Criteria,' 'Developing Teacher Talk: Read-Aloud and Oral Storytelling Competences and Stages,' 'Case Study: A Transnational Experience in Teacher Education,' and 'Conclusions and Future Prospects,' and Barbara Caprara wrote the section 'Montessori Approaches in ELT and GCED Using Picturebooks.'

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Process Drama in Teaching Multilingualism and Multiculturalism

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Chapter Objectives

- Exploring how process drama, as an innovative educational approach, fosters plurilingual and intercultural competencies in children through active participation in imaginary situations, enhancing their understanding of linguistic and cultural diversity
- Identifying key elements of process drama that enable the integration of linguistic and cultural skills into the educational process
- Examining how process drama encourages empathy and critical thinking through the simulation of real and imagined multicultural situations
- Analysing concrete examples of process drama activities used for teaching multilingualism and multiculturalism in various educational contexts

Introduction

Process drama is as an innovative educational method which allows children to actively participate in complex, simulated situations, encouraging them to explore different perspectives and develop intercultural competencies. In the context of developing plurilingualism and multicultural awareness, process drama becomes a powerful tool for understanding the diversity of languages, cultures, and identities. Through this method, children not only learn about cultural and linguistic differences but also experience them first-hand, fostering empathy, tolerance, and collaboration skills in a globalised world. This chapter explores the application of process drama in creating dynamic and inclusive educational environments that promote multilingualism and intercultural sensitivity. Specifically, this chapter investigates the use of process drama in the context from early and preschool to primary education level. Process drama can be conducted in either the participants' first language or an additional language. In the latter case, learners may require

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more targeted linguistic support to participate effectively and meaningfully.

In educational settings, process drama can be used to develop linguistic and cultural competencies in children of various age groups. In primary schools, methods such as role-playing and imaginary journeys enable pupils to explore languages and cultures through play. In secondary schools and adult education programmes, activities such as simulated conferences or historical re-enactments provide opportunities for deeper exploration of complex linguistic and cultural topics.

Process Drama: An Overview

Process drama is an experiential and participatory educational approach that employs drama games and theatrical techniques to foster creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. It enables participants to construct meaning through simulated experiences in a safe and supportive environment (Bowell & Heap, 2017). Unlike traditional theatre, which emphasises performance for an audience, process drama is focused on the process of creation and exploration through interactive play. This allows participants, by taking on roles within an imagined dramatic world, to explore complex themes such as cooperation, human rights, or cultural diversity (Kao & O'Neill, 1998).

The approach emerged in the mid-20th century through the work of pioneers such as Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton, who integrated artistic, pedagogical, and social dimensions into a dynamic approach to learning (Bolton & Heathcote, 1999). Heathcote's 'teacher-in-role' technique enables educators to participate alongside children in dramatic scenarios, thereby reducing the traditional, authoritative approach to teaching (Taylor & Warner, 2006). Bolton's concept of 'dramatic tension' challenges participants to confront issues within the dramatic context, thus deepening their understanding of the themes.

In practice, participants actively engage in imagined scenarios that reflect real-world problems. For instance, children might collaboratively create a story about a fictional community resolving a conflict over resources, which allows them to explore themes such as equity, express emotions, and exchange diverse perspectives. Such activities concurrently develop empathy, communication skills, and teamwork. Reflection is a key part of the process, wherein participants analyse their experiences and connect them to real-life situations (Galazka & Baldwin, 2021).

Process drama shares fundamental elements with role-play, as both methods involve taking on roles and acting within imaginary scenarios. However, process drama extends role-play into a more complex and collaborative

framework (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). Whereas role-play is often structured and focused on specific skills – such as practising a foreign language in a simulated shop conversation – process drama allows participants to co-create a narrative without predefined outcomes. An example of this would be a scenario of an international conference on climate change, where participants' decisions shape the storyline (Bowell & Heap, 2017).

Within the broader system of process drama, role-play serves as a starting point or a foundational element. It provides a simpler form of dramatic engagement that is then expanded through collective creation, reflection, and the exploration of complex themes. It is this holistic combination of education and creativity that makes process drama a powerful tool for developing linguistic, cultural, historical, and social competencies, and it is effective in promoting intercultural and plurilingual skills (Galazka & Baldwin, 2021).

The Role of the Facilitator

The facilitator plays a key role in the successful implementation of process drama (Bowell & Heap, 2017). As the creator and guide of the imaginary dramatic world, the facilitator shapes the flow of activities, encourages participants to engage in creative expression and collaboration, and ensures the achievement of activity objectives (Galazka & Baldwin, 2021). This role requires specific skills and abilities that enable the facilitator to lead process drama in a dynamic, inclusive, and participant-centred manner (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). Ideally, the facilitator should possess the following skills:

1. *Creativity and flexibility.* The facilitator of process drama must be creative in designing activities and the imaginary world in which participants operate. The ability to improvise and adapt the course of activities based on participants' reactions and interests is crucial for maintaining their motivation. The facilitator should be prepared to respond to unpredictable situations and adjust the storyline to sustain engagement and dynamism.
2. *Communication skills.* Clear and effective communication is fundamental to the successful facilitation of process drama. The facilitator should clearly explain roles, rules, and objectives of the activities, using language that is appropriate for the participants' age and skill level. Additionally, active listening and understanding help the facilitator create a safe and supportive environment where participants feel free to express their ideas.
3. *Pedagogical competence.* The facilitator must understand the pedagog-

ical principles underlying process drama and know how to apply them in various educational contexts. This includes planning activities tailored to the age, interests, and needs of the participants and clearly defining learning objectives. Pedagogical sensitivity enables the facilitator to recognise potential challenges and provide support to participants throughout their learning process.

4. *Leadership and encouragement skills.* In process drama, the facilitator does not assume the role of a traditional instructor but acts as a guide who supports participants in creating and exploring the imaginary world. This requires the ability to direct activities without imposing solutions, leaving space for participants to engage in creative expression and decision-making. The facilitator should encourage collaboration, decision-making, and the exchange of ideas among participants.
5. *Empathy.* Process drama involves working with participants who may have varying levels of confidence, creativity, and experience. The facilitator must be empathetic and sensitive to participants' needs, creating a safe environment where everyone feels included and respected. Understanding participants' emotional reactions and providing support in challenging situations are essential for effective facilitation.
6. *Organisational skills.* The successful implementation of process drama requires thorough planning and organisation. The facilitator should design the structure of activities in advance, define roles, and prepare the necessary materials. Good organisation ensures a smooth flow of activities and allows the facilitator to focus on interaction with participants.
7. *Reflective skills.* After each activity, the facilitator should assess what worked well and what could be improved. Reflection on their approach and participants' reactions allows the facilitator to continuously enhance their ability to lead process drama. Additionally, reflecting with participants can provide valuable insights into their progress and experiences.

The facilitator of process drama plays a central role in ensuring the success of activities and achieving educational goals. A combination of creativity, communication, pedagogical skills, empathy, and organisational abilities enables the facilitator to create a safe, supportive, and inspiring environment for participants. Through careful guidance and encouragement, the facilitator helps participants develop linguistic, social, and cultural competencies and engage in a meaningful and dynamic learning process.

Application of Process Drama in Education

Process drama has found broad applications in educational contexts, ranging from primary education to adult learning. Its flexibility allows adaptation to various subjects and objectives. For instance, in language teaching, process drama helps children practise communication through simulations of real-life situations, such as shopping at a market, negotiating, or office conversations where learners can take on various roles and delve deeper into character without necessarily staying true to themselves. In history and social sciences, the method enables children to explore historical events or social issues through reconstructions and discussions in an imaginary context.

In early childhood and preschool education, process drama serves as a powerful tool to foster creativity, communication skills, and emotional development in children. Through structured role-playing games and interactive scenarios, children have the opportunity to explore imaginary worlds, develop imagination, and learn spontaneously about linguistic and cultural diversity.

In primary school, process drama is often used to encourage creativity and the development of social skills. Through activities, such as taking on the roles of characters from stories or creating imagined worlds, children learn to collaborate, listen to one another, and make collective decisions. In secondary schools and adult education programmes, process drama is frequently employed to develop specific competencies, such as teamwork, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness.

Reflection Point

1. How can process drama help develop social and communication skills among participants?
2. What are the advantages and challenges of the facilitator's role in process drama?
3. How does the element of imagination in process drama influence participants' creativity and engagement?
4. How can process drama be applied in various educational contexts, such as language learning or exploring historical events?

Process Drama and Role-Play in Learning for Multilingualism and Multiculturalism

Process drama and role-play are powerful pedagogical tools for fostering multilingualism and multiculturalism in education, enabling participants to actively engage with different languages and cultures through immersive,

experiential learning (Kao & O'Neill, 1998; Galazka & Baldwin, 2021). Unlike traditional language instruction, which often relies on rote memorisation and isolated skill practice, process drama uses role-play as a foundational element to create imagined scenarios. In these, children take on the roles of characters from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, thereby practising the use of multiple languages in authentic contexts (Bowell & Heap, 2017).

This approach is aligned with the concept of multicompetence, according to which plurilingual individuals draw on their entire linguistic repertoire to navigate complex interactions (Franceschini, 2011). Role-play encourages the flexible use of language to express ideas, negotiate meaning, and resolve conflicts within the dramatic framework, which is key to developing plurilingual competence as outlined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001).

In practice, participants can play the roles of delegates at a multicultural summit where, using multiple languages, they discuss global topics like climate change or migration. Such activities enable children to practise code-switching and explore cultural nuances, for instance, by simulating an international trade conference where they are faced with cultural differences in business practices (Galazka & Baldwin, 2021). The approach can also be adapted for younger learners. For example, children can take on the roles of toy makers and buyers at an international market. A child from Italy might use gestures and sounds to show how their spinning top works, while another from Germany might use a few familiar English words to trade it for their own toy. By combining simple words from different languages, gestures, and sounds, children naturally use their entire linguistic repertoire to communicate.

In addition to linguistic skills, process drama also develops intercultural competence, allowing children to move beyond surface-level knowledge of cultural diversity and develop empathy through embodied experiences. By simulating real-world multicultural encounters – for example, by playing members of a fictional community resolving a conflict between migrants and the local population – participants confront stereotypes and build an understanding of diverse worldviews (Drandić & Lazarić, 2020). Pioneers like Heathcote and Bolton emphasised the role of dramatic tension in such activities, which deepens cultural awareness by challenging participants to respond authentically to intercultural dilemmas (Bolton & Heathcote, 1999).

Through this integrated approach, children not only acquire linguistic skills but also cultivate a plurilingual identity, recognising how languages and cul-

tures intersect in personal and social contexts (Kramsch, 2009). Reflection, as an integral part of the process, further deepens learning as children analyse their experiences and connect them to real-life situations. Ultimately, this approach enables the development of global competencies such as adaptability and intercultural communication, preparing children for life and work in a globalised world where these skills are of key importance (Galazka & Baldwin, 2021).

Reflection Point

1. How can pedagogical approaches like process drama and role-play enrich the cognitive development and professional skills that multilingualism offers in a globalised society?
2. What are the advantages and challenges of using immersive scenarios for the genuine acquisition (and not just theoretical learning) of multicultural values in education?
3. In what way does the dramatic context in process drama serve as a platform where multilingualism and multiculturalism merge to build authentic intercultural sensitivity in children?
4. How can educational systems encourage the application of methods like process drama so that the preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity is transformed from a passive goal into an active, embodied experience for children?

Process Drama and the Development of Linguistic and Cultural Competencies

Integrating process drama into teaching allows educators to create dynamic and engaging environments where children learn language and explore cultural dimensions spontaneously. This method is not only effective but also motivating for children, as it gives them a sense of accomplishment and connection to what they are learning.

Development of Linguistic Competencies

Process drama provides children, including children of early and preschool age, with opportunities to use language in authentic, context-rich situations, fostering the development of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discursive competencies that enable the creation of meaning in real communication contexts (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). Through dramatic activities, children explore language as a tool for communication and collaboration, transcending traditional language learning focused on rules and memorisation (Galazka & Baldwin, 2021). For example, in a process drama scenario, children can act as ani-

mals in the forest organising a joint picnic, using simple phrases in different languages (Cro. *hvala,* Eng. *thank you,* or It. *grazie*) to express gratitude for sharing food, thereby practising basic vocabulary and language structures in a context that mimics real interactions. In another example, children can participate in a simulation of a *magic toy shop,* where they act as sellers and customers, using expressions like *Ovo je lopta* (Eng. *This is a ball*) in multiple languages (e.g., *ball* in English, *palla* in Italian) to describe the toys, developing sociolinguistic skills such as using polite phrases in different languages. Yet another example involves children acting as passengers on a *magic train* that travels through different countries, where they learn greetings like *Ciao* in Italian or *Tschüss* in German as they visit stations, getting acquainted with linguistic and cultural diversity through play. These activities enable children to become multicompetent speakers, capable of using their linguistic repertoire flexibly and appropriately according to the context, while simultaneously developing basic intercultural competencies (Council of Europe, 2001).

One of the key advantages of process drama is that children learn language as a means of communication and collaboration, spontaneously acquiring language structures and vocabulary through interactive dialogues and playful scenarios (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). For example, in a scenario where children act as friends building a *world park* together, they use words like *drvo* (Eng. *tree*) or *cvijet* (Eng. *flower*) in multiple languages while planning the park, naturally integrating linguistic diversity and learning about cultural symbols, such as the meaning of different plants in various cultures (Galazka & Baldwin, 2021). This unobtrusive approach to language learning through play reduces the fear of making mistakes, as children are preoccupied with the joy of storytelling and collaboration, which increases their confidence in linguistic production. Process drama, along with role-play, also encourages the understanding of cultural nuances, as children, through these activities – for example, by acting as inhabitants of a fictional village sharing stories about different holidays, such as Christmas or Eid – develop empathy and awareness of cultural diversity (Kramsch, 2009). Techniques like Heathcote's collaborative role-taking enable children to reflect on their experiences, for instance, by discussing how they felt while sharing 'their' toys at a marketplace, deepening their ability to connect language and culture (Bolton & Heathcote, 1999). Through this integrated approach, process drama and role-play make multilingualism and multiculturalism dynamic bridges that connect linguistic diversity with cultural understanding, preparing young learners for life in diverse, globalised communities (Galazka & Baldwin, 2021).

Development of Cultural Competencies

Process drama enables children of early and preschool age to explore and understand the cultural aspects of language, creating a safe environment in which they can get to know the norms, values, and customs of different cultures through playful, immersive activities that integrate language and culture as inseparable elements of communication (Kramsch, 2009). Unlike traditional methods that often separate language from culture, process drama uses role-play for children to embody different cultural perspectives, fostering empathy and intercultural sensitivity through active participation in imaginary worlds (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). For example, children can participate in a scenario where they act as members of an *international kindergarten* organising a joint birthday party, learning about different birthday celebration traditions – such as singing Cro. *Sretan rođendan,* Eng. *Happy birthday,* It. *Tanti auguri* or Ger. *Zum Geburtstag viel Glück* – while sharing stories about customs, such as blowing out candles or giving flowers in different cultures (Galazka & Baldwin, 2021).

In another example, children can play roles in a *magic village* where each family brings a traditional game from their culture, such as a Chinese dragon or a Mexican piñata, using simple phrases in multiple languages (e.g., Cro. *igra,* Eng. *game,* It. *gioco*) to describe the rules, thereby getting acquainted with the cultural values associated with play and community. A third example involves children acting as inhabitants of a *world zoo,* where each animal represents a different culture and shares a story about its home, such as a Japanese panda garden with bamboo or an African lion's savanna, learning words like *home* or *friend* in different languages and understanding cultural differences in the relationship with nature. A fourth example involves children participating in a *global puppet theatre,* where each puppet represents a character from another culture and tells a story about its favourite holiday, such as Diwali or Christmas, using simple expressions in multiple languages, through which children get to know cultural traditions through storytelling (Galazka & Baldwin, 2021).

Through these activities, process drama enables children to develop cultural competencies by embodying different perspectives, which deepens their ability to understand and respect different values and customs, key for life in a globalised world where intercultural communication is an everyday reality. For example, in a scenario where children act as friends creating a *world mosaic* together from symbols of different cultures, such as the heart for love in Western cultures or the lotus flower in Eastern traditions, they

learn how to express feelings in multiple languages, such as Cro. *volim* or Eng. *I love,* fostering empathy and awareness of cultural differences (Kramsch, 2009).

Reflection further enriches learning as children discuss their experiences, for example, by reflecting on how they felt while sharing stories about holidays in the global puppet theatre, thereby connecting cultural values with their own experiences (Galazka & Baldwin, 2021). This integrated approach makes process drama a powerful tool that not only develops cultural competencies but also prepares young learners for diverse, globalised communities, promoting adaptability, empathy, and a deep understanding of cultural diversity as a key element of contemporary education (Council of Europe, 2001).

Reflection Point

1. How can process drama encourage spontaneous language learning by contextualised situations and play?
2. In what ways does exploring cultural aspects through process drama contribute to the development of intercultural sensitivity among participants?
3. How does the integration of linguistic and cultural competencies in process drama impact children and their understanding of global perspectives?
4. What are practical ways to apply process drama in education to promote linguistic and cultural diversity?

Methodology and Pedagogical Strategies

Planning process drama activities requires careful design to ensure participants have a rich, interactive, and meaningful experience. This method involves several steps, from selecting an appropriate topic to defining objectives and preparing children for active participation. Well-planned activities maximise participant engagement and fulfil educational goals.

Steps in Planning Process Drama Activities

The following steps are focused on planning process drama activities that foster plurilingualism and multiculturalism, adapted to the developmental needs, interests, and curriculum of early and preschool age (3–6/7 years) and pupils in primary education (6/7–11/12 years).

The first step involves selecting a theme that is engaging and age-appropriate for the learners, focused on exploring linguistic and cultural diversity. For children of early and preschool age, themes should be simple and connected to their everyday experiences or imaginative worlds, such

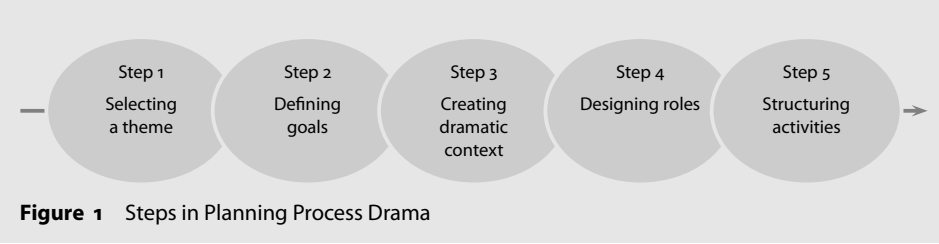

Figure 1 Steps in Planning Process Drama

as friendship, animals, or family celebrations, while for primary education pupils, themes can be linked to the curriculum, such as social issues, historical events, or literary works, encouraging more complex linguistic and cultural understanding. Themes should encourage the use of multiple languages and an introduction to cultural practices in a way that is understandable and appealing, such as through stories or joint projects that reflect diversity.

The second step is defining goals, which differ by age: for younger children, goals include developing basic language skills, such as learning greetings or the names of objects in multiple languages, and getting acquainted with simple cultural customs, while for primary education children, goals encompass more advanced language skills, such as communication strategies and more complex expressions, and a deeper understanding of cultural norms and critical thinking through problem-solving. These goals ensure that the activities are focused on linguistic, cultural, and social outcomes adapted to the developmental abilities of each age group.

The third step, creating the dramatic context, involves designing an imaginary world that integrates multilingual and multicultural elements, adapted to the participants' age. For younger children, the context should be simple and playful, with clear and familiar frameworks that encourage natural linguistic and cultural exchange, while for primary education pupils, the context can be more complex, linked to the curriculum, and focused on collaborative interactions that require decision-making and the exploration of cultural differences. The context should be appealing and flexible, allowing for the inclusion of multiple languages and cultures.

The fourth step involves designing roles that are age-appropriate and encourage the exploration of linguistic and cultural perspectives. For younger children, the roles are simple, such as characters from fairy tales or animals, while for older children, the roles can be more complex, such as characters from different social or cultural contexts, encouraging the use of more complex phrases and a deeper understanding of cultural norms.

The fifth step, structuring the activities, requires a balanced flow that in-

cludes an introduction to the dramatic world, plot development, and reflection, adapted to the learners' age. For younger children, the introduction can include a story, a song, or visual aids like pictures, while for primary education pupils, the introduction can involve a group discussion or a short video. Plot development includes short, playful episodes for younger children that encourage linguistic interaction and collaboration, and more complex episodes for older children that involve decision-making and problem-solving. Reflection is key for both groups: for younger children, it is conducted through simple discussions or creative tasks like drawing, while for older children, it includes structured discussions, written assignments, or creative activities like making posters, where learners connect their experience with linguistic and cultural learning.

Practical tools for teachers include picture cards with universal symbols and audio recordings with phrases or songs in multiple languages for younger children, and illustrations, videos, and prepared scripts with more advanced expressions for older children, along with interactive materials like cards with questions that encourage reflection. These steps make process drama a powerful tool for enhancing plurilingualism and multiculturalism, enabling teachers to easily integrate linguistic and cultural diversity into education, preparing children for adaptability and intercultural communication in diverse communities.

Examples of Process Drama Implementation

Example 1: Planning a Process Drama Activity for Children of Early and Preschool Age

Following the steps from the previous section, here is a concrete example of planning a process drama activity for children of early and preschool age (3–6/7 years). This activity, titled *World Friendship Day,* is focused on introducing multilingualism and multiculturalism through a playful exploration of greetings and friendship customs from different cultures. The activity is designed to be simple, engaging, and adapted to the children's developmental level, fostering spontaneous language acquisition and the development of empathy towards cultural diversity (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). The duration of the activity is 30–45 minutes, and it can be conducted in a group of 10–15 children with the help of a teacher or educator.

1. *Selecting a theme*. The theme *World Friendship Day* was chosen because it is close to children's experiences (friendship, play) and allows for the introduction of multiple languages and cultural elements in a playful

manner. The theme can be linked to children's songs or stories about friends, which encourages engagement and facilitates the integration of basic vocabulary in different languages (e.g., informal greetings like Cro. *Bok!,* Eng. *Hello!* or It. *Ciao!*), and getting acquainted with cultural norms of friendship, such as shaking hands or sharing toys. This theme is flexible and does not require a deep knowledge of cultures from the teacher, as it utilises universal motifs of friendship.

2. *Defining goals.* The goals are adapted to the children's age, focusing on developing basic language skills, such as learning simple greetings and phrases in multiple languages (e.g., Croatian, English, Italian), promoting intercultural awareness through getting acquainted with different friendship customs (e.g., sharing or greeting), and fostering social skills like collaboration and empathy through group play. These goals ensure that the activity is focused on the spontaneous acquisition of language and cultural elements, developing multicompetence in a safe environment.
3. *Creating the dramatic context.* The dramatic context is an imaginative *World Friendship Day* – a magic park where children from different 'countries' come to a party. The teacher sets the scene using simple props like paper flags or drawings, defining the time (e.g., a sunny day) and place (e.g., a magic park with 'gates' to enter different cultures). This context is clear and appealing, encouraging children to use language and explore cultural norms through play, with flexibility for adaptation according to the children's reactions.
4. *Designing roles.* The roles are simple and diverse, adapted to the children's age, such as a 'friend from Croatia' who shares toys, a 'friend from England' who teaches English greetings, or a 'friend from Italy' who learns the names of various forms of pasta. The roles are assigned according to the children's interests, with the teacher's support in modelling phrases (e.g., *Bok, prijatelju!, Ciao amico/a* or *Hello, friend!*), encouraging diverse interactions and collaboration.
5. *Structuring the activity.* The activity is structured in three phases for a balanced flow:
    - Introduction to the dramatic world (5–10 minutes): The teacher tells a short story about the magic park and assigns roles, using picture cards with illustrations and audio recordings with songs in different languages so that children can get acquainted with basic phrases and cultural elements.
    - Plot development (15–20 minutes): Through short, playful episodes,

children share 'friendship gifts' (e.g., drawings or toys), employing phrases in multiple languages and exploring cultural norms through collaboration, with the teacher's guidance to encourage exchange.

- Reflection (5–10 minutes): Through a group conversation or drawing, children reflect on what they have learned, e.g., how different languages and customs make friendship more interesting, deepening their understanding.

This activity is flexible and requires minimal materials (picture cards, songs, drawings), making it easily accessible for teachers and learners. It can be extended over multiple sessions for deeper acquisition.

Example 2: Planning a Process Drama Activity for Children in Primary Education

To illustrate the planning steps described previously, this section provides a concrete example of a process drama activity designed for children in primary education (6/7–11/12 years). This activity, titled *Global Story Museum,* is focused on introducing multilingualism and multiculturalism through the exploration of storytelling traditions from different cultures. The activity is designed to be engaging, linked to the curriculum (e.g., literature, social sciences), and adapted to the cognitive abilities of primary education pupils, fostering advanced language skills, intercultural awareness, and critical thinking (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). The duration of the activity is 45–60 minutes, and it can be conducted in a group of 15–20 children with the teacher's guidance.

1. *Selecting a theme*. The theme *Global Story Museum* was chosen because it is relevant to primary education, connected to curriculum content such as literature and social sciences, and allows for the exploration of multilingualism and multiculturalism through storytelling, which is appealing to children. The theme encourages learners to use more complex phrases in multiple languages (e.g., Croatian, English, Italian) and to get acquainted with the cultural significance of stories in different communities, such as folk tales or storytelling customs. This theme is flexible and does not require a deep knowledge of cultures from the teacher, as it relies on the universal practice of storytelling.
2. *Defining goals*. The goals are adapted to the childrens' age, focused on developing advanced language skills, such as using communication strategies and more complex expressions in multiple languages (e.g., phrases for describing a story or expressing feelings), promoting inter-

cultural awareness through the understanding of different storytelling traditions (e.g., oral stories or written fairy tales in European traditions), and fostering critical thinking and collaboration through group creation and discussion of stories. These goals ensure that the activity develops multicompetence and intercultural sensitivity in a context relevant to the learners.

3. *Creating the dramatic context.* The dramatic context is the *Global Story Museum* – a fictional museum where participants represent storytellers from different cultures who are sharing their stories at an exhibition. The teacher sets the scene using simple props like paper books, illustrations, or signs with the names of 'countries,' defining the time (e.g., the opening day of the exhibition) and place (e.g., a museum hall). This context is appealing and flexible, encouraging children to use multiple languages and explore cultural norms related to storytelling, with adaptations according to the group's knowledge level.
4. *Designing roles.* The roles are diverse and adapted to the childrens' age, such as a *storyteller from Croatia* who shares a folk tale, a *storyteller from Italy* who presents a fairy tale in Italian, or a *storyteller from Africa* who uses oral tradition. The roles are assigned according to the childrens' interests, with the teacher's support in modelling phrases (e.g., *This is my story* . . . in multiple languages), encouraging collaborative interactions and cultural exchange.
5. *Structuring the activity.* The activity is structured in three phases for a balanced flow:
    - Introduction to the dramatic world (10–15 minutes): The teacher introduces the context with a story about the museum exhibition and assigns roles, using visual aids like story illustrations or short videos about storytelling, and prepared scripts with phrases in multiple languages (e.g., Croatian, English, Italian) so that children can get acquainted with key expressions.
    - Plot development (20–30 minutes): Through episodes, children share their 'stories,' using phrases in multiple languages and discussing the cultural elements of storytelling (e.g., how stories are passed down in different cultures), with the teacher's guidance to encourage collaboration and creativity. For example, children can act as storytellers who create a new story together, combining elements from different cultures.
    - Reflection (10–15 minutes): Through a group discussion or a creative task, such as making a poster that displays their joint story, children

reflect on what they have learned about languages and cultures, answering questions like *How were the stories different?* or *What did you learn about another culture?*

This activity is flexible, uses minimal materials (illustrations, scripts, posters), and allows for extension over multiple sessions for deeper acquisition of language and cultural elements. Teachers can adapt the complexity of the language and discussions according to the childrens' level, making the activity accessible and effective.

Reflection Point

1. What strategies can ensure role-play activities build confidence and collaboration across diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds?
2. How can teachers use simple evaluation methods, like observation and reflection, to assess linguistic and cultural progress while providing meaningful feedback?

Common Challenges in Implementing Process Drama for Learning Multilingualism and Multiculturalism

The implementation of process drama for enhancing plurilingualism and multiculturalism brings significant advantages in developing language skills and intercultural sensitivity, but it also involves challenges that can affect the success of activities, especially when working with children of early and preschool age (3–6/7 years) and pupils in primary education (6/7–11/12 years) (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). These challenges, such as linguistic and cultural barriers and issues with children engagement, can be overcome with adapted strategies that encourage inclusivity, collaboration, and self-confidence, using accessible tools that do not require deep knowledge of cultural norms from the teacher (Kramsch, 2009). The following section discusses two key challenges – linguistic and cultural barriers, and lack of engagement – along with practical solutions adapted to the developmental needs and abilities of both age groups.

One of the primary challenges in process drama is linguistic and cultural barriers, which can cause insecurity in children, especially if they are unsure of their language abilities or have limited experience with cultural diversity. Younger children may feel insecure when faced with unfamiliar phrases in multiple languages, while older learners may experience anxiety due to more complex linguistic demands or fear of misunderstanding cultural norms, which can limit their participation (Kramsch, 2009). To overcome these barriers, teachers can use simple and clear language adapted to the learners'

level – basic phrases and greetings for younger children and more complex expressions for older children (e.g., dialogues or suggestions). Visual and non-verbal communication, such as picture cards with universal symbols for younger children or illustrations and videos for older children, reduces pressure on language skills and facilitates understanding (Galazka & Baldwin, 2021).

Introductory ice-breaker activities, such as short word-guessing games for younger children or group discussions about familiar cultural practices for older children, help create a safe and encouraging environment (Council of Europe, 2001). Preparing children for cultural differences can be done through simple stories or discussions on universal themes like friendship or sharing, thereby promoting intercultural sensitivity without the need for deep cultural knowledge. For example, a teacher can begin an activity with a game in which children learn greetings in multiple languages with the support of pictures, which reduces linguistic insecurity and introduces cultural diversity in a playful manner.

Another significant challenge is a lack of children's engagement, which can manifest as passive participation or task avoidance, especially among children who feel insecure or unmotivated (Bolton & Heathcote, 1999). Younger children may be shy due to unfamiliar roles, while older pupils may avoid participation due to fear of making mistakes or the complexity of tasks. To overcome this challenge, teachers can start with simple and fun tasks that reduce anxiety – for example, singing or imitation games for younger children and short, structured dialogues for older children (Galazka & Baldwin, 2021). A clear explanation of the activity's goals, emphasising the importance of each role, helps participants understand their contribution, whether it is a simple greeting in multiple languages or creating part of a story. Gradually increasing the complexity of roles and tasks, such as moving from basic phrases to more complex dialogues for older children, allows learners to build self-confidence (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). Creating a positive environment is key, where effort and creativity are rewarded, and mistakes are treated as part of learning. For example, a teacher can praise children's efforts in using new words or sharing ideas, thereby encouraging engagement. Techniques like Heathcote's collaborative role-taking encourage collaboration, while Bolton's approach to dramatic challenges introduces simple but engaging tasks that motivate children, such as creating a story together or solving a small dilemma in a group (Bolton & Heathcote, 1999). These strategies ensure that process drama is inclusive and motivating, allowing participants to feel safe and valued while developing plurilingual and multicultural com-

petencies, preparing them for adaptability in diverse communities (Kramsch, 2009; Franceschini, 2011).

Key Takeaways

- Process drama provides an innovative framework for simultaneously learning languages and developing intercultural sensitivity.
- Through dramatic activities, participants spontaneously acquire language and explore cultural norms, thereby developing empathy, critical thinking, and the ability to adapt to different contexts.
- The facilitator plays a key role in creating a safe and supportive environment, adapting activities to the needs of participants, and encouraging creativity and collaboration.
- Process drama activities, such as simulations of international events or cultural festivals, can be adapted to different age groups.
- Key challenges include language barriers, lack of engagement, and organisational complexity, while solutions focus on simplicity, clear objectives, the use of visual aids, and ensuring reflection after activities.

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Language Learning in the Context of Diversity: Transformative Approaches for a Complex Task in Kindergartens and Schools

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Chapter Objectives

- Understanding the role and importance of multilingual education in today's diverse and globalised societies
- Examining different aspects of language sensitive teaching
- Understanding how the rhizomatic learning approach applies to multilingual education
- Examining both, theory and practical examples of learning communities that support multilingual education

Introduction

Around the world, more children grow up speaking two or more languages, which brings a range of important benefits. Multilingualism not only strengthens cognitive skills such as working memory, concentration, and cognitive flexibility (Bialystok et al., 2012; Herzog-Punzenberger, 2023), but it also fosters cultural sensitivity, social inclusion, and a deeper appreciation of linguistic diversity. These multifaceted advantages highlight the importance of supporting educators – including both school teachers and pre-school teachers in expanding their skills and approaches to promote language education effectively. This support is crucial not only for classroom teaching but also for cultivating a language-friendly institutional culture that recognises

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and values all languages as vital cultural treasures. Such recognition benefits educational institutions, society at large, and contributes to peaceful and supportive coexistence both locally and globally. In this chapter, we illustrate this potential through the example of the voXmi educational network, which, since 2008, has been assisting schools and, since 2022, kindergartens in professionally working with multilingual learner groups and fostering environments where every language is welcomed and nurtured (Maurič, 2015).

At a time when nationalistic imaginaries of society are constantly growing, which, on the one hand, brings the critical reflection on the construction of ideas about one's own identity and belonging into focus and, on the other hand, often also means social exclusion and marginalisation based on group affiliation (Mylonas & Tudor, 2021), the concern to strengthen diversity is particularly challenging. More than ever, it is worth thinking about which approaches to learning theory enable social transformation and do justice to the diversity present in the classroom. We embark on a search for transformative approaches to teaching and learning in the context of language education and describe, among other things, the concept of rhizomatic learning, which states that instead of following a fixed curriculum designed by experts, learning happens through active participation and collaboration among learners themselves (Cormier, 2008). This approach values the contributions of everyone involved and encourages flexible construction of knowledge.

Linguistic Diversity and Society: What Are the Biggest Challenges?

In today's globalised world, migration has made societies more linguistically diverse than ever before. This diversity shapes social structures, cultural identities, and shared values in complex ways. Living together in such diverse societies involves many social, economic, and political factors, where different perspectives, histories, and interests meet. People and groups often have very different views on whether linguistic diversity is a chance to enrich society or a challenge to social cohesion. This contributes to the complexity of the subject area that makes language education in schools and kindergartens both important and challenging (Gouma & Döll, 2023).

For this very reason, language education needs holistic and interdisciplinary approaches that consider each learner's individual background. We need language policies that promote inclusion and support collaboration across all levels of education. This helps develop comprehensive linguistic literacy – a skill set that includes all the languages children bring with

them, including their family languages (Allgäuer-Hackl et al., 2018; Le Pichon-Vorstman et al., 2020).

Researchers and practitioners in Austria strongly support promoting multilingual literacy as a core part of education. Especially for children who grow up with multiple languages due to migration, it is important to focus on how their identity and personality connect to their languages. Encouraging and supporting multilingual learning helps these children use all their linguistic resources to understand and engage with school content (Dirim & Mecheril, 2018; Riehl & Blanco López, 2019). A monolingual education system limits these learners because it only allows them to use part of their language skills, putting them at a disadvantage (Gantefort & Maahs, 2020). Designing education for diverse classrooms means first recognising the different realities and unequal starting points children have. It also means responding to their individual learning needs and understanding that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. To make language learning fair and effective in diverse settings, we need many perspectives and teamwork across disciplines. Only then can educators create transformative educational approaches that embrace linguistic diversity and make multilingual literacy accessible to all, treating multiple languages as a natural part of everyday life.

Equal Opportunities

When existing linguistic diversity is marginalised, research shows that it often contributes to educational inequality. According to the principle of meritocracy, every learner should have equal opportunities to succeed in education based on their abilities and efforts, regardless of their background (Becker & Hadjar, 2009). This means that factors like family socio-economic status or linguistic and cultural identity should not affect a child's success in school. However, large international studies on school performance – such as IGLU, PISA, DESI, and TIMSS – reveal that a learner's background strongly predicts their educational success in many countries (Göbel & Buchwald, 2017). These findings show that education systems often fail to compensate for differences in learners' starting points (Stojanov, 2008). Children from disadvantaged or immigrant backgrounds are most affected by this inequality. Different academic fields explain these causes in various ways (Gaus, 2019). In Austria, the importance of early language education as a way to reduce educational inequality has only recently gained wider recognition. Language support in early childhood education is now seen as key to promoting educational fairness. However, public debates often oversimplify this complex issue. Blaschitz (2024) stresses the need to invest in high-quality language

development for young learners, including hiring more staff in kindergartens and primary schools.

A major shift is underway – from isolated German language support programmes to language-sensitive teaching integrated into everyday activities. This approach builds on children's natural language learning processes and values their family languages as part of their development (Hachfeld & Wieduwilt, 2020). Despite this progress, language support is still often seen as compensating for a lack of German language skills in plurilingual children. Home languages are frequently ignored or even viewed as obstacles in school (Krumm, 2020; Gogolin, 2005; Hu, 2003). Misunderstandings about how languages are learned, the importance of first languages for acquiring additional ones, and the emotional value of these languages for migrant children contribute to this problem (Fürstenau & Gomolla, 2011; Oppenrieder & Thurmair, 2003). When children sense that their first languages are undervalued, it can harm their motivation and learning (Göbel & Schmelter, 2016; Gogolin, 1994). This feeling of devaluation is reinforced because schools often prioritise *prestige* languages like French, English, or Spanish – languages that carry social status but are rarely the first languages of many learners (Gogolin et al., 2004).

In many educational settings, multilingualism is framed within the concept of *German as a second language (L2),* which is clearly distinguished from a learner's first language (L1) when it is not German. This approach assumes a strict sequence – L1, then L2 – and treats languages as separate entities used one at a time. Such clear separation can be useful for tasks like language assessment because it simplifies how language skills are measured and described. However, this view overlooks the true complexity of multilingual individuals' language use. Research shows that multilingual learners draw on their entire linguistic repertoire simultaneously in many learning situations. For example, they often switch between languages within a single conversation or even a sentence – a practice known as code-switching. Importantly, this switching is not just a spontaneous reaction but can be an unconscious habit or a deliberate, creative way to express meaning and style (Bailey, 2012; Özdil, 2009; Dirim et al., 2022; Cook, 2008).

To better support multilingual learners, educators need to critically reflect on traditional language categories like *L1* and *L2*. These technical terms shape how we think about language learning and influence practices such as language support programmes and diagnostic testing. Challenging and updating these constructs can help avoid misunderstandings and improve teaching approaches (Wildemann et al., 2018).

Beyond theoretical challenges, there is also a practical, emotional dimension for educators. Teachers often face conflicting expectations about language use and cultural diversity in their classrooms. This can create personal stress as they continually reflect on and sometimes question their own teaching beliefs and practices (Gouma & Döll, 2023). Recognising and addressing these challenges is essential for fostering a supportive environment for both educators and multilingual learners.

German Language Competence As a Criterion for School Readiness

In kindergartens and schools, the diagnosis of the language skills of multilingual children and adolescents has become particularly questionable in recent years and has become relevant for many educational decisions that need to be discussed. This is because it is dominated by an understanding of language competence that, in the light of current linguistic findings and concepts, can be described as reductionist and therefore needs to be addressed. The current orientation of most diagnostic procedures is either one-sidedly oriented towards German language skills or, if multilingualism is taken into account, towards the addition of individual language skills. The fluid multilingualism actually experienced in everyday life does not play a sufficient role either in the construction or in the application of language diagnostic procedures – even though the measurement of language competence, especially of multilingual people, is taken for granted. Thus, on many levels, the false impression is created that language skills can be easily operationalised and accurately measured (Chondrogianni, n.d.). However, Settinieri and Jeuk (2019) note that language acquisition depends on the age of acquisition and numerous other factors and can therefore vary greatly from person to person. The complex interplay of biological, cognitive and socio-affective factors makes it almost impossible to model standard progressions and represents a fundamental problem for language diagnosis (Settinieri & Jeuk, 2019). Problems that arise from this can be illustrated using the example of the Austrian school system, where, since 2018, knowledge of German has been a criterion for school readiness. With the help of nationwide standardised tests (MIKA-D – Measuring Instrument for Competence Analysis German according to SCHUG § 4 para. 2a, see https://www.jusline.at/gesetz/schug), the language competence in German is assessed at school enrolment for first-year pupils and pupils who have recently arrived in the country.

The aim of MIKA-D is to determine whether pupils have acquired sufficient knowledge of German as the language of instruction to be able to follow lessons and to record important indicators of language competence

in German (Institut des Bundes für Qualitätssicherung im österreichischen Schulwesen, n.d.). Among other things, experts criticise the use of children's knowledge of German as a criterion for school readiness without considering their other language skills, which leads to discrimination against children with a first language other than German when they start school. In view of the complexity of multilingual language acquisition, especially in childhood, the criteria used in this crucial test for transition are inadequate and overlook significant linguistic potential (Netzwerk SprachenRechte, 2019). The Netzwerk SprachenRechte (Language Rights Network) is an interdisciplinary association of educators and researchers in Austria who, with reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1966) and the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (1996), advocate the fundamental right of every person to the protection and promotion of their linguistic identity (UNESCO, 1996; United Nations, n.d).

Ehlich (2005) also criticises the overly high expectations placed on language diagnostic procedures: particularly with regard to language, many prerequisites that are indispensable in test theory are difficult to meet given the current state of knowledge. At the same time, the expectations placed on tests and their predictive power are considerable. The hope that far-reaching and reliable conclusions can be drawn from a small number of indicators is widespread both in the scientific community and among the public (Ehlich, 2005).

Bilingualism Takes Time

According to Reich (2009), attending kindergarten does not guarantee that multilingual children will be able to enter monolingual schools without problems. It is true that the children show considerable achievements and after about two years of attending kindergarten can act in the L2 in the same way and at the same level as in their family language. However, from the school's point of view, these achievements are not satisfactory, as the average level of German acquired does not meet the monolingual standards of German-speaking schools (Reich, 2009).

Learning an L2 – just like acquiring a first language or languages – is a process and does not end with the last year of primary school. Under favourable conditions, children need four to six years before they are able to use German as an L2 in its educational form, with its grammatical subtleties, diverse structures and differentiated vocabulary, in accordance with the requirements of primary school (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2021).

Also, a language can only be learned if there are sufficient opportunities to

come into contact with it. The key factors here are time as well as the scope and quality of linguistic interactions (Charlotte Bühler Institut, 2021):

- Sufficient contact time with the language to be learned is an essential prerequisite for sustainable acquisition. Children who have early, regular, and sufficient opportunities to hear and speak this language show clearer progress in the acquisition of language skills. Frequent contact with monolingual German-speaking children and/or a longer period of attendance at an elementary educational institution of more than two years favours later German language performance at school.
- Quality of language contact: Not only the amount of time, but also the nature of the language offered determines the course of L2 acquisition.

It is crucial to address the fundamental challenges discussed above by raising awareness among educators and encouraging them to be critical of these practices, as the introduction of new language-sensitive approaches in educational institutions is still hesitant and uncertain. The following section looks at different methods and approaches which support the multilingual turn.

Reflection Point

1. What are the opportunities and challenges of linguistic diversity and multilingualism in your own social environment?
2. How does the Austrian linguistic context described in this chapter compare to that of other countries?
3. What do you think are important elements of comprehensive language literacy for all learners?

Transformative Teaching and Learning Approaches

Transformation takes place in learning processes when individuals have experiences that change not only their way of thinking but also their entire relationship to the world, to others and to themselves (Koller, 2012). In the context of language education, for example, this means gaining new perspectives on the potential of learners' entire linguistic repertoire. Existing mindsets about how language learning works in multilingual classes and the role of language education as a whole are critically reconsidered. And finally, it means that teaching must change visibly. In this context, Landwehr (2021) speaks of two levels of teaching that need to be critically reflected upon in order to enable transformation: In the *deep structure of teaching,* subjective ideas and theories become effective in ways that educators are often unaware of and

cannot directly observe. However, these ideas have a direct impact on the *surface structure of teaching*. This includes, for example, the social setting in the classroom, the chosen methods and didactic approaches and, in general, the way in which the institutional framework provided by the school or kindergarten is used by the educator (Landwehr, 2021). Against this background, the following methods and approaches are seen as an opportunity also to reflect on one's own subjective convictions about how learners can be well supported in their learning and what role one's own view of learners and confidence in their learning ability plays in this.

Five Building Blocks of Comprehensive Language Education

The model of Five Building Blocks of Comprehensive Language Education (Allgäuer-Hackl et al., 2018) was developed by a team of authors on behalf of the Vorarlberg provincial government to take account of the complexity and individuality of language acquisition. The model provides an orientation framework for the implementation of consistent, cross-educational institution support for language development. It underscores that all children have the capacity for language development, but their starting conditions differ due to social and experiential factors. Effective support for language acquisition therefore means addressing the various areas that become relevant in a comprehensive concept of language literacy. This is seen as essential for educational equity.

These differences can stem from diverse linguistic backgrounds, cultural experiences, socioeconomic status, and the educational opportunities previously available to them. Understanding and addressing these varied starting points is essential to creating equitable educational environments where all children can thrive. One fundamental principle of the model is the recognition and appreciation of diversity. This means that educators must develop a deep awareness of the social, cultural, and linguistic diversity that learners bring into the classroom. Rather than viewing differences as obstacles, the model encourages teachers to see them as valuable resources that enrich the learning environment. This diversity awareness helps educators tailor their teaching strategies to meet the specific needs of each learner, ensuring that language education is responsive and inclusive. Closely linked to this is the principle of multilingual or plurilingual awareness. The model emphasises the importance of recognising and valuing all the languages a learner speaks or is exposed to, rather than focusing solely on the dominant language of instruction. This approach not only validates learners' linguistic identities but also leverages their entire language repertoire as a foundation

for further language development. By fostering an environment where multiple languages coexist and are actively integrated into teaching and learning, the model promotes a more holistic and empowering language education. Another key principle involves building on learners' prior knowledge and world experiences. The model stresses that language learning is not isolated from other forms of knowledge; rather, it is deeply connected to what learners already know about the world. By linking new language content to familiar concepts and experiences, educators can facilitate deeper understanding and engagement. This approach also supports learners' self-confidence and motivation, as it acknowledges and values the knowledge they bring from their own lives.

The Five Building Blocks of Comprehensive Language Education are:

1. *Inner images and concepts*. Supporting children in developing mental concepts and inner images through multisensory experiences, which form the foundation for language acquisition and abstract thinking.
2. *Multilingualism*. Recognising and valuing the diverse linguistic backgrounds of children and promoting the development of all their languages.
3. *German language*. Focusing on the development of German language skills as the language of instruction and education in Austria, while acknowledging the importance of home languages.
4. *Language awareness and language learning awareness*. Encouraging reflection on language itself and the process of language learning, fostering metalinguistic skills.
5. *Dealing with diversity*. Embracing the variety of life experiences and backgrounds children bring and using this diversity as a resource in education.

The model also highlights the importance of metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness. This principle encourages both teachers and learners to reflect consciously on the processes involved in learning languages. By developing an understanding of how languages work and how language learning occurs, learners can become more strategic and effective in managing their own learning. Teachers, in turn, can design activities and interventions that foster this reflective capacity, helping learners to navigate the complexities of acquiring multiple languages.

Finally, the principle of educational equity underpins the entire model. By addressing the diverse needs of learners and recognising the challenges they

face with the language(s) of schooling, the model aims to reduce disparities in educational outcomes. It advocates for a comprehensive approach that integrates linguistic, cognitive, and social dimensions of language learning, ensuring that all children have fair access to quality education regardless of their backgrounds.

Together, these principles form a dynamic and interconnected framework that guides educators in creating supportive, inclusive, and effective language learning environments. The model's emphasis on diversity, multilingualism, prior knowledge, reflective learning, and equity offers a robust foundation for fostering language literacy in a way that respects and builds upon the rich linguistic and cultural resources that learners bring with them. Ultimately, the model advocates for a holistic, inclusive approach to language education that values all languages, supports cognitive and emotional development, and strengthens children's ability to participate fully in society (Allgäuer-Hackl et al., 2018).

Approaches to Language Sensitive Learning and Teaching

In diverse classrooms, linguistically and socio-culturally sensitive learning approaches play a vital role in recognising and valuing the unique backgrounds of all learners. These approaches help support every child's learning process in a positive and inclusive way.

A key responsibility of initial teacher education, as well as ongoing professional development, is to prepare teachers to understand the needs of a diverse learner population. Teachers need to be equipped with strategies to adopt a strengths-based perspective on children's language learning and to support their linguistic development effectively (Carnevale & Wojnesitz, 2014). Some of the key aspects of language-sensitive learning and teaching are the following:

- *Identify and remove linguistic barriers.* Regularly examine daily educational activities to spot potential language challenges. Plan and organise lessons using scaffolding techniques that ensure all children can follow and engage, regardless of their language background.
- *Use the full linguistic repertoire.* Actively incorporate children's first and family languages as tools for understanding and learning, starting as early as nursery school. Research shows that allowing children to initially use their home language before transitioning to the language of instruction (e.g., English) improves learning outcomes, especially in areas like scientific literacy (Webb, 2009).

- *Provide adequate scaffolding.* Support children with the right amount of guidance and assistance during active learning and knowledge acquisition to help them successfully navigate learning tasks.
- *Reinforce new language tools.* Consistently follow up on new vocabulary and concepts using tools such as vocabulary books, term maps, mind maps, or visual aids like pennant chains to deepen understanding.
- *Encourage reflection and transfer.* Conclude learning activities with reflection exercises that help learners consolidate their knowledge and apply it in different contexts (Carnevale & Kelemen, 2025).

Language-Sensitive Methodologies: From Language Trees to Language Rhizomes

Understanding learners' language potential and personal educational journeys requires expanding our view of learning itself. In diverse classrooms, multiple perspectives and theories are essential to explain and support language learning effectively. To illustrate the complexity of children's language acquisition, the language tree model (Wendtlandt, 2017) has traditionally been used as a metaphor. In this model, the crown of the tree represents four key areas of language development: articulation, vocabulary, grammar, and communication. These abilities, however, can only flourish if the necessary precursor skills, symbolised by the roots, are well established. When these foundational skills are in place, children are more likely to experience language enjoyment and motivation, which, together with other contributing factors, lead to robust language comprehension – represented by the trunk of the tree. The model also emphasises the critical role of the environment in supporting language growth. The sun symbolises the warmth, love, and acceptance provided by the family, while the watering can stand for rich language stimuli and opportunities from the broader environment. Finally, the soil reflects the wider learning context, underscoring its significant influence on the overall development of language (Wendtlandt, 2017). Another language-sensitive approach is the rhizomatic model which draws from the botanical metaphor of a rhizome – a root system that spreads horizontally and non-hierarchically, with no clear beginning or end. Like a rhizome, learning can branch out in multiple directions depending on the interests and needs of the learners.

To capture the complex, often non-linear nature of learning, the rhizomatic learning (RL) metaphor offers a fresh perspective. Inspired by the botanical rhizome – a root system that spreads horizontally and unpredictably – this model better reflects how language learning happens in real life.

Table 1 Principles of RL

RL Principles	Characteristics
Fluidity	Learning adapts to changing circumstances, allowing learners to explore and respond flexibly.
Community as curriculum	The learning experience is shaped by the community rather than predetermined goals.
No fixed beginning or end	Learning is continuous, non-linear, and nomadic, without a strict start or finish.
Autopoiesis	New connections and relationships emerge naturally, creating unique, evolving knowledge networks.

Notes Adapted from Cormier (2012).

Cormier (2012) describes RL as a dynamic process where each learner brings their unique context and needs. It challenges traditional education by proposing that learning is driven by the interests and experiences of the learners, who co-construct knowledge within a community. There is no fixed path or endpoint; instead, learning adapts and grows in response to context, questions, and participation. The educator acts as a facilitator, supporting exploration rather than delivering predetermined content, making rhizomatic learning especially suited to complex, real-world issues that resist simple answers.

This expanded view encourages educators to embrace complexity and learner diversity, fostering more responsive, collaborative, and meaningful language learning experiences. In short, RL is messy and boundaryless, and it does not fit into the current structures of formal education. It fundamentally challenges traditional ways of thinking by redefining the role of the teacher, breaking down conventional measurement frameworks, and encouraging learners to adopt a mindset of open-ended and creative inquiry (AdvanceHE, n.d.).

Promoting rhizomatic learning in kindergartens and primary schools requires a flexible, open, and community-centred approach. This method values the complexity of learning and encourages learners to take an active role in shaping their educational journey. The following aspects of RL are of particular importance for implementation in practice (Cormier, 2008):

1. Acknowledge complexity
    - View learning as multi-layered and interconnected
    - Encourage learners to explore different topics and make connections

2. Community-centred approach
   - Networks and connections: Creating a learning community where knowledge is shared and collaboratively developed
   - Learners as co-creators: Viewing learners as active creators of the learning process
3. Flexible curriculum
   - No rigid curricula: Avoid fixed 'curricula' and allow the curriculum to develop organically
   - Adaptability: Be open to change and unexpected shifts in direction
4. Encourage exploration
   - Open resources: Provide a variety of materials (books, videos, articles, etc.)
   - Self-directed learning: Encourage learners to follow their own interests
5. Evaluation and reflection
   - Process over product: Focus on the learning process, not just predefined outcomes
   - Self-assessment and reflection: Learners should reflect on their progress
6. Encourage autonomy
   - Learner responsibility: Allow learners to make decisions about their learning journey
   - Metacognitive skills: Support the development of self-regulatory skills

Learning communities play a crucial role in tackling complex challenges in education, such as implementing whole language approaches in kindergartens and schools. Traditional programmes based on standardised, monolingual education no longer adequately address the needs of increasingly linguistically diverse learner populations. At the same time, research on multilingualism often lags behind educational practice, lacking evaluated concepts and clear guidance on how to effectively apply whole language education within school systems.

Reflection Point

1. Reflect on the concept of rhizomatic learning using an example where a learning input has led you personally down a completely new path of knowledge.

2. What does this concept of learning mean for the organisation of your pedagogical practice? What does it mean for the learning programmes you want to offer?
3. Where do you see the potential of learning communities, especially for language learning?
4. What experiences have you already had with learning communities?

The voXmi Educational Network As a Model for Effective Learning Communities

A model of a learning community which promotes language-friendly educational environments is the voXmi network. Its name is derived from a German acronym which can be translated into English as 'learning and experiencing languages from and with one another.'

One particular focus is on the conscious and versatile use of digital media for this purpose. The educational network voXmi was initially founded in 2008/09 as an Austria-wide school network in order to contribute to a culture of peace and social cohesion in a society characterised by linguistic diversity and multilingualism through the appreciation and integration of all languages of children, families and educators (Maurič, 2015). In 2024, voXmi received the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize for its contribution to peace in a multilingual world (UNESCO, 2024).

The network pays particular attention to the requirement that educational institutions work hand in hand, especially in important transition phases, such as the transition from kindergarten to primary school, because institutional education (and language learning) begins in kindergarten and therefore the view of different systems and cooperation between them is of fundamental importance. This is why the 2022 school network was opened up to institutions of pre-school education and thus expanded into an educational network.

As already mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, complex social and political developments in super-diverse migration societies mean that educators often have to deal with difficult situations and even irresolvable dilemmas on a daily basis. This is where working in a network and learning from and with each other becomes particularly valuable. And this is where the importance of multi-perspectivity becomes evident. Educational networks bundle competences and resources to jointly achieve goals that individual educational institutions or educators would be unable to achieve on their own. While they are generally organised in a more binding manner than cooperations, the autonomy of the partners is still guaranteed. The focus is on

identifying solutions to complex problems, facilitating the transfer of knowledge and skills and using synergies to do so (Heintel, 2000).

Characteristics and Potential of Networks

The characteristics of networks can be described as follows (Heintel, 2000; Boos et al., 2000):

- The focus and purpose of the network is learning in the broadest sense. The object of the exchange relationship is the expertise or specialist knowledge of the individual, but also the search, questioning and discussion of common challenges.
- Cooperation and the exchange of experience form the core.
- Trust is a constituent variable for this.
- Continuity must also be present to a minimum extent to achieve results.

Educational networks are especially relevant because they emerge during times of uncertainty and radical change, when traditional hierarchical institutions are often too slow or unable to address urgent problems effectively. These networks fulfill individuals' deep desire for communicative equality and autonomy, providing a space where everyone's voice can be heard. They also respond to the increasing need for social bonding and support, especially in an era marked by extreme individualisation. By their very nature, educational networks are non-hierarchical and democratic in both structure and orientation, fostering an environment of social connection and mutual support. They offer diverse learning opportunities across all levels, from individual learners to administrative bodies, recognising that collective learning is essential in navigating the complexities of super-diverse societies.

Furthermore, these networks enable participants to support one another in problem-solving and encourage the co-creation and sharing of knowledge. They also address the ongoing need for professional development while strengthening social connections among members, making them vital for both personal and communal growth in education (Heintel, 2000; Boos et al., 2000).

Networks for Language Education

Cooperation and networking are key areas of action for comprehensive language education at both institutional and inter-institutional levels. For example, cooperation between educational partners can benefit multilingual

Table 2 voXmi: Cooperation and Quality Assurance in the Network

Selection and motivation of the participants	• Whole-institution approach (the community decides on participation) • Good practice is shared, promoted and celebrated • A community of like-minded people that strengthens each other
Professionalisation	• Regular network meetings (regional and national) • Peer learning and peer advice • eLectures on the annual themes • National and international conferences • Presentation and discussion of good practice on site (with the pedagogical team) • Supported school development by external experts • Promoting multilingual literacy to (future) teachers at pre-school and school level – different perspectives on language learning are considered • ongoing research and publications on voXmi
Institutional framework conditions	• Regional coordinators at university colleges of teacher education • coordinators designated by the management in the kindergarten or school
Infrastructure	• Development teams for multilingual education at the site • voXmi website – information about the network and activities, platform for disseminating good practice • Corporate identity/logo – various templates for schools and kindergartens
Professional management and evaluation	• voXmi (2023) – includes the voXmi checklist as a basis for the institution's self-evaluation process • Certification ceremonies – transformation processes initiated and driven by voXmi become visible

Notes Adapted from voXmi website (https://www.voxmi.at).

children, in particular at vulnerable stages of transition by providing good, consistent support for their entire language repertoire. However, cross-institutional cooperation between specialist agencies and educational institutions is also of central importance for successful transfer in the area of education and language policy strategies and new reform projects (Le Pichon-Vorstman et al., 2020).

Establishing language education networks is a particular challenge because educational institutions such as schools and kindergartens follow a logic of action that has grown historically and locally and needs to be developed further. Identifying these and creating something new from the exchange and cooperation with other institutions can be challenging. However, it is precisely here that we can see how the image of the tree that has grown and is anchored in its roots and that of rhizomatic, chaotic learning (see section 'Approaches to Language Sensitive Learning and Teaching') can

support each other in pointing out the limits of the respective approaches and expanding the ideas of learning in the context of diversity.

To enable the transformation of language education, educational institutions are faced with the challenge of finding strategies that suit their situation under the respective conditions. Learning impulses from the exchange of experiences with others in the network and the joint reflection of current findings from research can serve as orientation for their development process. The central task, however, is to translate these concepts and impulses for their own situation, or 'to recontextualise them' (Fend, 2006).

The voXmi educational network takes an interdisciplinary approach to developing concepts and pedagogical practice relating to linguistic diversity and multilingualism. In addition to linguistic aspects of language literacy, socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-psychological issues are also considered. An important measure in this regard is the formulation of common annual themes that unite all voXmi institutions, regardless of the individual goals they have set themselves to shape a language friendly institutional culture. These themes encompass cooperation with parents, the links between multilingual didactics and inclusive education, links to human and children's rights, peace and democracy education and others. These are key transdisciplinary challenges that are of particular concern to kindergartens and schools. Therefore, it seems important to contribute through voXmi to develop good practice and exchange ideas. In a whole-institution approach, voXmi covers aspects of teaching development, staff development and organisational development (Maurič, 2015).

Reflection Point

1. Do you already have experience of learning in networks? What do you see as a benefit of this form of collaboration for yourself as an educator?
2. How does an educational network like voXmi expand the possibilities of learning communities?
3. What potential does such a network have to transform teaching and learning for comprehensive language education?
4. Discuss the potential of developing a similar network in your own environment.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have shown that complex processes like language acquisition in multilingual settings require a shift in how we perceive support services and the theories behind them. To explain this, we introduced the concept of rhizomatic learning. To enable a transformation in language educa-

tion, we presented a holistic approach using the Five Building Blocks model, which considers the complexity of language acquisition. We also argued that language education is a social process that particularly benefits from community learning and networked learning. Learning together in an educational network enriches the experiences of both children and educators and benefits society.

The voXmi educational network uses an interdisciplinary approach to develop best practices for linguistic diversity and multilingualism from various perspectives. It integrates theories of individual language learning and collaboratively develops concepts related to linguistic diversity and multilingualism within the network.

The main goal is to design comprehensive language education that reflects an inclusive and diverse society. Children who feel welcomed with their linguistic diversity are more motivated to learn. As a result, they are more likely to achieve higher educational qualifications, participate in democratic processes, and communicate effectively in a globalised world. Children also learn to see things from different perspectives and develop empathy. Interaction among children who speak different languages promotes intercultural competence and understanding of other cultures.

Ultimately, addressing the challenges of linguistic diversity requires a holistic, networked approach that combines fair policies, innovative teaching methods, and community involvement. This creates inclusive environments where all children can thrive both linguistically and academically. Such an integrated approach not only preserves linguistic heritage but also enriches society by fostering multilingual skills, which are essential in today's globalised world.

Key Takeaways

- *Critical perspective.* Examine beliefs about language learning from multiple disciplines to better address educational inequity in multilingual settings. Be aware that common language assessments may be based on problematic assumptions.
- *Inclusive language learning.* Shift from a monolingual approach to one that values both school and family languages, fostering true linguistic literacy.
- *Complexity of language acquisition.* Recognise that each child's language development is unique. Use diverse theories (like the language tree and rhizomatic learning) to better understand and support students.
- *Collaboration is essential.* Work together in educational networks (e.g. voXmi) to share knowledge and promote effective language education in schools and kindergartens.

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Reviews

The volume *Diversity in Action: Training Teachers through Multilingual and Multicultural Experiences* edited by Silva Bratož and Martina Irsara provides valuable insights into the promotion of multilingualism and diversity across various educational settings.

The six research-oriented chapters offer a clear overview of scientific approaches to multiliteracy, (linguistic) diversity in its transformative dynamics, processability in second language acquisition, metalinguistic awareness, and global citizenship education. The scientific analysis of these topics – examining their respective manifestations in interaction, concrete practices and cultural intersections – further enhances the volume's relevance.

In addition to the theoretical introduction, the authors present innovative strategies derived from their research in Italian, Austrian, Slovenian and Croatian kindergartens and primary schools. The theoretical foundation lies in applied linguistics, with a focus on social, cultural, multimodal and contrastive approaches to language learning and teaching. Combined with the reflective nature of the chapters, this interplay between research and theory makes the volume a thought-provoking academic resource.

One of the clear strengths of this volume is its dual theoretical-practical scientific approach. Rather that offering evidence-based best practices, it outlines evolving systems of knowledge that have been built up evolutionarily through research-practice partnerships between researchers and teaching teams. In doing so, the volume aptly addresses the economized (multilingual) environment in the European Union and also the antinomic structure of practices.

The target audience includes students, researchers, pre- and in-service teachers, and educational policymakers seeking to reflect on various aspects of multilingualism – such as translanguaging, (linguistic) diversity, intercultural communication, and multiliteracy. The volume thus serves as a comprehensive study guide as well as a highly informative reference work for both researchers and practitioners in the field of foreign language teaching and learning.

Marjan Asgari

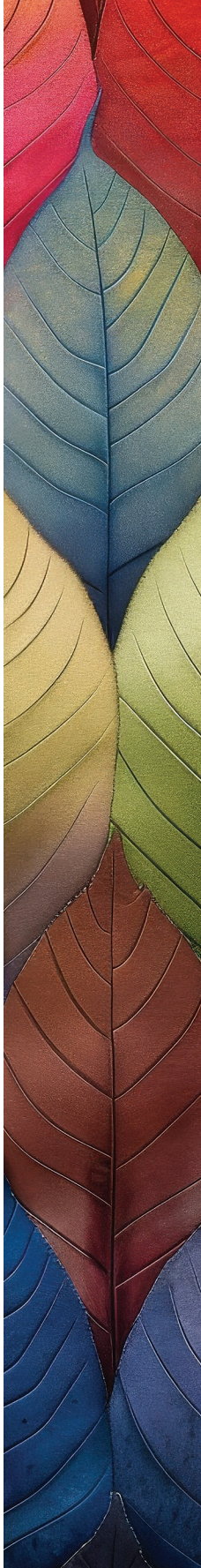
Diversity in Action presents a timely and highly relevant contribution to the field of multilingual and multicultural education, particularly in teacher training. As societies become increasingly diverse due to globalization and migration, educators are facing new challenges and opportunities in the classroom. This volume effectively addresses those realities by exploring not just the theory behind diversity in education, but also by illustrating concrete, practical methods for embracing and leveraging linguistic and cultural pluralism in schools. Its relevance lies in its clear alignment with current educational goals: fostering inclusivity, enhancing intercultural competence, and preparing students for a globalized world.

Structurally, the book is well-organized, with most of the chapters clearly laid out through objectives, content, and 'key takeaways.' This pedagogical approach enhances its usability as a study or reference book, especially for students and educators. The inclusion of reflection prompts encourages deeper engagement with the material, making it more than just a passive reading experience. Each chapter can stand on its own, yet contributes meaningfully to the overarching theme of diversity in action, covering a broad range of topics from early language awareness to process drama and global citizenship education. The text strikes a balance between theoretical depth and accessibility, making complex ideas approachable through examples and case studies.

The practical benefits of this book are significant. It offers applicable strategies for teachers and teacher educators aiming to cultivate multilingual and culturally responsive classrooms. Concepts like plurilingualism, linguistic transfer, and process drama are explained with clarity and tied to actionable insights. This makes the book an invaluable tool for both current and future educators who are seeking effective ways to integrate diversity meaningfully into their teaching practices.

The primary target group is students in teacher education programs, but its usefulness extends to practicing teachers, education researchers, and curriculum developers. It supports a shift toward a more reflective and socially engaged teaching practice, grounded in linguistic awareness and intercultural empathy. By illustrating both challenges and solutions, and highlighting the positive potential of diversity, the book makes a compelling case for its central thesis: that diversity, when embraced and thoughtfully managed, transforms learning environments into more dynamic, inclusive, and globally relevant spaces.

Florentine Paudel



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