Introduction: Diversity in Action – Challenges and New Perspectives

Martina Irsara
Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Italy
martina.irsara@unibz.it

https://doi.org/10.26493/978-961-293-523-8.0

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

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

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.

Continued on the following page

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.

References and Further Reading

Baker, W. (2022). From intercultural to transcultural communication. *Language and Intercultural Communication, 22*(3), 280–293.

Byram, M. (2009). Afterword: Education, training and becoming critical. In A. Feng, M. Byram, & M. Fleming (Eds.), *Becoming interculturally competent through education and training* (pp. 211–213). Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M. (2021). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence: Revisited* (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters.

Chen, S. (2022). Facilitating the development of intercultural competence via virtual internationalization. *Frontiers in Communication, 7,* 894728.

Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.

Delanoy, W. (2020). What is culture? In G. Rings & S. Rasinger (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of intercultural communication* (pp. 17–34). Cambridge University Press.

Eagleton, T. (2016). *Culture.* Yale University Press.

European Education and Culture Executive Agency. (2023). *The structure of the European education systems 2023/2024: Schematic diagrams; Eurydice facts*

and figures. Publications Office of the European Union. https://www.dzs.cz/sites/default/files/2023-10/The_structure_of_the_European_education_systems_2023_24.pdf

Eurydice. (n.d.). *National education systems.* https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems

Franceschini, R. (2011). Multilingualism and multicompetence: A conceptual view. *The Modern Language Journal, 95*(3), 344–355.

Gatti, M. C., & Irsara, M. (2022). Teaching English across cultures: An innovative participatory approach to teacher education in reaction to pandemic lockdown restrictions. *Expressio: Rivista di Linguistica, Letteratura e Comunicazione, 6,* 151–175.

Hörner, W., Döbert, H., Reuter, L. R., von Kopp, B. (Eds.). (2015). *The education systems of Europe* (2nd ed.). Springer.

Irsara, M., Lazzeretti, C., & Gatti, M. C. (2023). Challenges and opportunities of globalised English language education: A case study of Trentino-South Tyrol. *Iperstoria: Journal of American and English Studies, 21,* 49–66.

Kramsch, C. (2009). *The multilingual subject.* Oxford University Press.

Kramsch, C. (2023). Re-imagining foreign language education in a post-COVID-19 world. In C. Lütge, T. Merse, & P. Rauschert (Eds.), *Global citizenship in foreign language education: Concepts, practices, connections* (pp. 15–40). Routledge.

Liu, S. (2012). Rethinking intercultural competence: Global and local nexus. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses, 7*(3), 269–275.

UNESCO. (2002). UNESCO universal declaration on cultural diversity. *Copyright Bulletin, 36*(1), 4–11.

Williams, R. (1985). *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society.* Oxford University Press.

Zhang, X., & Zhou, M. (2019). Interventions to promote learners' intercultural competence: A meta-analysis. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 71,* 31–47.