

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

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; Özdiş, 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 pre-defined 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 co-operations, 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 (Heintzel, 2000).

Characteristics and Potential of Networks

The characteristics of networks can be described as follows (Heintzel, 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 (Heintzel, 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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